Beyond the Strike Kitchen:
Housewives and Domestic Politics, 1936-1973

BY

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DISSERTATION
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This dissertation is dedicated to my father, 

While we never got the chance to trek this long and arduous journey together, 
I felt you at my side each and every day.

I realize now that I began this dissertation for you. 
It is the dissertation you never completed.

I love you.
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This dissertation is a direct result of collective action. And, as with all collective action, it required an enormous amount of support—emotional, financial, logistical, archival, and spiritual. Thank you to everyone who pitched in over the years to make this happen.

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Named for both of my grandmothers – my Babci, Emily (Mildred) Pacosa Twarog and my Nana, Esther Alfonso LaBarbera – I feel a certain commitment to live up to all of your expectations. I see this dissertation as a step in the right direction. I am honored to carry on your names, legacies, and traditions in both old and new ways.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Agricultural Adjustment Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>American Federation of Labor</td>
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<td>AFLWA</td>
<td>American Federation of Labor Women’s Auxiliaries</td>
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<td>ALUA</td>
<td>Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan</td>
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<td>CIO</td>
<td>Congress of Industrial Organizations</td>
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<td>CCH</td>
<td>Consumer Clearing House</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDRL</td>
<td>Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLP</td>
<td>For Lower Prices</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Coordinating Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPA</td>
<td>Office of Price Administration</td>
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<td>NARA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>National Association of Manufacturers</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCDUERA</td>
<td>National Committee to Defeat the Unequal Rights Amendment</td>
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<tr>
<td>NMU</td>
<td>National Maritime Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWP</td>
<td>National Woman’s Party</td>
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<td>RG</td>
<td>Record Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAW</td>
<td>United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>UE</td>
<td>United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America</td>
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SUMMARY

The broad sweep of this project is a study of how domestic politics evolved to influence policy and act as a conduit for working-class women to increase their political participation as housewives. Critical to this process is to understand the relationship between working-class housewives and institutions, specifically women’s labor union auxiliaries. Housewives have often been interpreted as a conservative group that allowed the traditional family model to go unchallenged. This dissertation pokes holes at this characterization as we see working-class housewives defend the rights of wage-earning women, challenge the notion and construction of equality from an economic standpoint, and demand full access to a "good" life for white and African American workers. By tracing their steps from the home to the factory into the broader community and eventually national politics, this dissertation reveals a hidden history of working-class housewives who used a strategy of domestic politics in the public sphere to participate in the democratic process.

An examination of CIO auxiliaries such as the UAW Women’s Auxiliary and the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries allows us to rethink key topics in labor and women’s history such as consumption (cost of living campaign and the evolution of the American standard of living), political participation through legislative campaigns, and coalition building on a local and national level. Each of these issues points to an understanding of the political and economic priorities of working-class families during this period and the role of housewives in developing their organizing strategies within the labor movement. Furthermore, I examine their relationships within the mostly male labor movement leadership as well as their work with national organizations and government agencies such
as the Office of Price Administration. In doing so, I deepen the organizational studies of the CIO, and more specifically the UAW, in that it turns our attention to the role that working-class housewives played in the development of these two organizations. But, ultimately, the dissertation as a whole offers new perspectives into the histories of labor, women, and citizenship using themes of domesticity in the twentieth century.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation started as an attempt to uncover the hidden history and influence of labor union auxiliaries. While it does tell part of this much-needed story, it has really become a study of domestic politics; a study of how working-class housewives found a voice of their own in the midst of the mass wave of industrial organizing and militancy during the New Deal. While industrial workers staged sit-ins, the strike kitchens fed more than sandwiches and coffee. It fed the hunger of working-class housewives for economic equality as they sought ways to use their “domestic expertise” in their communities. Auxiliaries created a space that helped housewives to craft leadership skills that funneled this expertise into the public sphere. During union organizing drives, cost of living campaigns, and legislative battles, auxiliary members built a movement of housewives that spoke with a unified voice as they sought economic and political equality for working-class families beyond the bargaining table.

In her study of “social disunity” in the World War II shipyards, sociologist Katherine Archibald characterized the pre-war period as a moment in time during which citizens had "...the tools to defeat these evils...at hand: an activist liberal state, a revivified trade union movement, an ethic of pluralism and diversity, and the American ideals of equality and democracy..."¹ This is the context in which the women’s labor union auxiliaries of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) developed and nurtured the political life of working-class housewives who were able to take these "tools" and make a claim for more

¹ Katherine Archibald, Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), x.
complete political citizenship. This moment in time was unlike any other for working-class housewives, in that they had institutional access to organized labor as well as agencies within the New Deal government as a collective body in a way that neighborhood upheavals—such as the 1902 kosher meat boycott decades earlier—evaded them.

The broad sweep of this project is a study of how domestic politics evolved to influence policy and act as a conduit for working-class women to increase their political participation as housewives. Critical to this process is to understand the relationship between working-class housewives and institutions, specifically women’s labor union auxiliaries. This dissertation takes us through the rise and decline of the CIO auxiliary movement as working-class housewives jostled to find their place in the newly energized labor movement, then on to the legislative battles they waged in response to the hopes of the New Deal, and to their role as the "manager" of the family who sought to protect their families while simultaneously demanding equality for women and African Americans.

Housewives have often been interpreted as a conservative group that allowed the traditional family model to go unchallenged. This dissertation pokes holes at this characterization as we see working-class housewives defend the rights of wage-earning women, challenge the notion and construction of equality from an economic standpoint, and demand full access to a "good" life for white and African American workers. By tracing their steps from the home to the factory into the broader community and eventually national politics, I have uncovered a hidden history of working-class housewives who used a strategy of domestic politics in the public sphere to claim a political citizenship beyond the voting booth.
An examination of CIO auxiliaries such as the UAW Women’s Auxiliary and the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries allows us to rethink key topics in labor and women’s history such as consumption (cost of living campaign and the evolution of the American standard of living), political participation through legislative campaigns such as the push to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, and coalition building on a local and national level. Each of these issues points to an understanding of the political and economic priorities of working-class families during this period and the role of housewives in developing their organizing strategies within the labor movement. In an attempt to “de-ghettoize” these women, I examine their relationships within the mostly male labor movement leadership as well as their work with national organizations and government agencies such as the Office of Price Administration. In doing so, I deepen the organizational studies of the CIO, and more specifically the UAW, in that it turns our attention to the role that working-class housewives played in the development of these two organizations.

But, ultimately, the dissertation as a whole offers new perspectives into the histories of labor, women, and citizenship using themes of domesticity in the twentieth century. Writing on the labor upheavals of the 1930s, journalist Mary Heaton Vorse “recognizes that the new unionism of the 1930s ‘[d]id not stop at the formal lodge meeting. It [saw] the union as a way of life which [involved] the entire community.’” As historian Elizabeth Faue notes, this vision of the labor movement placed the family at the center rather than the


\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\] Mary Heaton Vorse, Labor’s New Millions (New York: Modern Age Books, 1938), 234.
workplace. And this was not just an “extension of domesticity to the political realm,” it was the “emergence of class politics in the urban sphere of social production.” Thus, domestic politics is not simply the feminine version of labor activism nor is it “auxiliary or complimentary to the masculine solidarity of labor.” It is a distinctive form of activism that recognizes the inextricable links between labor, community, home, and the market in the twentieth century. Further, it relies on the collective action of women who both challenge and embrace the social and economic order. “A sense of community that emerges from shared routines binds women to one another within their class and within their neighborhoods.” Understanding this female “consciousness” has driven this dissertation and informed my argument that the domestic politics of working-class housewives in labor union auxiliaries simultaneously embraced their socially ascribed roles as mothers and wives while demanding equality for the working-class community as a whole. And, in doing so, working-class housewives’ access to their rights as citizens has “waxed and waned over time.”

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5 Ibid., 10.


Citizenship History

While labor and gender define the contours of the historical actors in this dissertation, the history of citizenship, in particular political citizenship, functions as the broader framework of this project. This dissertation wrestles with two central questions in political history. First, what did the relationship between working-class housewives and the government look like during the New Deal “...in a context where suspicion of a powerful state has been the overriding theme of American political culture”? And, second, what is historically unique about “the mechanisms of democratic participation” that these housewives used to claim their political citizenship? These questions are key to my dissertation as I look at the rhetoric and actions of working-class housewives as they attempted to organize nationally, influence legislation, and demand regulation to correct the disparities between the cost of living and wages.

These two questions offer the opportunity to consider historical interpretations of political citizenship, the defining characteristics of citizenship, and how individuals seek to claim citizenship. Existing largely in the periphery, working-class housewives are rarely studied in this context. Recently, historians have begun to make critical links between consumption and citizenship offering examples of political activity by housewives. Even

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this work, however, rarely focuses on working-class housewives and the connections between labor, gender, and citizenship. Inherent in this study is the belief that notions of citizenship in American cannot be reduced to "a coherent theoretical doctrine, but are instead the historical products of founding and refounding an American nation."\textsuperscript{10}

My understanding of citizenship is influence by many scholars, but in large part the work of Theda Skocpol, Meg Jacobs, and Emilie Stoltzfus has stood out time and again as I have crafted this understanding.\textsuperscript{11} As the foundation, I follow the trajectory for comprehending women's relationship to the state and other organizations that Skocpol lays out in her landmark book, \textit{Protecting Soldiers and Mothers}. Skocpol argues that we need to compare various women's organizations to one another, and to organizations of unionized male workers and male professionals, as well as analyze the interplay between U.S. political institutions and variously structured social movements and political


coalitions. She goes on to argue, "Female gender identities... can be sources of social solidarity, organization, and moral purpose." Furthermore, as I developed my understanding of the ways in which working-class women used domestic politics, I turned to Skocpol's use of Paula Baker's theory of the “domestication” of American politics as Baker examines the ways in which working-class women extend domestic values into civic and national life.

More recently, historians have begun to focus more attention on working-class housewives. Emilie Stoltzfus' study of childcare after the Second World War, for example, "examines the way in which enduring gendered obligations of citizenship affected the possibilities for expanded social rights..." She argues that women during this period engaged in “dissident citizenship” in order to make their demands heard. Stoltzfus' women parallel the auxiliary members in that they are largely wage-earning wives and mothers who bring the private sphere into the public and demand accountability by the government. Stoltzfus' work, like a handful of others, begins the difficult task of understanding what drove working-class women to demand political citizenship, what tactics they used, and what they accomplished.


13 Ibid., 37.


15 Stoltzfus, *Citizen, Mother, Worker: Debating Public Responsibility for Child Care after the Second World War*, 1.

16 Ibid., 10.
Yet, while historians such as Stoltzfus are focusing more and more on the use of
domestic politics in the public sphere, much of the new scholarship focuses on motherhood
specifically rather than the housewife as a historical agent of change. For example, Rebecca
Jo Plant’s recent book *Mom: The Transformation of Mother in Modern America* “traces the
repudiation of moral motherhood and the rise of a new maternal ideal that both reflected
and facilitated white, middle-class women’s gradual incorporation into the political and
economic order as individuals rather than as wives and mothers.”\(^{17}\) This examination of
citizenship and the “decline of social motherhood” is of course a critical component to
gendered citizenship as Linda Kerber so famously articulated in her analysis of “republican
motherhood.”\(^{18}\) But, this narrow focus on motherhood minimizes the larger connection of
the home as both a site of work and political citizenship, and the bridges that housewives
built between the home, the community, and the workplace. Despite this narrowness, Plant
and I share a common goal as we seek to broaden the historiography of second-wave
feminism.\(^{19}\)


\(^{18}\) Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*.

Moving outside of the home, Meg Jacobs’ study of the influence of consumer issues, or “pocketbook politics,” on modern government also pushes beyond previous studies of economic citizenship. In particular, Jacobs’ study of how consumption began to overtake production as the “foundation of American civic identity” is critical to this dissertation. As “buyers of the nation,” working-class as well as middle-class housewives are at the center of this transformation. Thus, the American identity was within reach of housewives. Yet, their lack of connection to institutional power both before and after the passage of the nineteenth amendment created a barrier to accessing this citizenship. This dissertation adds to the relatively new scholarship that identifies movements that have challenged this barrier to citizenship.


**Labor History**

Since the birth of New Labor History in the 1970s, historians broadened their scope to include many groups that were traditionally excluded from the labor history narrative. Yet, as Ava Baron has argued, gender remains “ghettoized” within the field. Recently historians, such as Dorothy Sue Cobble, Dennis Deslippe, Dana Frank, and Nancy Gabin, have sought to bring women’s contributions and experiences into the labor history narrative. With this project I seek to build on this work as well as challenge its limits.

Establishing the legitimacy of working-class housewives’ contribution to the growth of the labor movement in the mid-twentieth century is the fundamental purpose of this dissertation. Labor historians traditionally focus on the point of production as the historical


starting point for analysis. For example, labor historians such as David Montgomery and James Barrett have provided us with studies of industrial production that breath life into the working-class experience. Yet their work rarely departs from the shop floor and the experiences of predominantly male workers. Similarly, Nancy Gabin and Ruth Milkman turn our attention to the working lives of women, but again they remain wedded to a productionist narrative that places labor history on the shop floor. In fact, Milkman goes so far as to argue that auxiliaries did not fundamentally challenge the ideology of women’s place. “Although their activities were sometimes unconventional, the auxiliaries did not challenge the ideology of women’s place.” Labor historians have constructed a master narrative that restricts our definition of the agents of change as well as the periodization.

When historians consider the influence of consumption within the context of labor struggle, however, we are introduced to new sets of historical actors as well as additional


28 Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*, 37.
sites of resistance beyond the shop floor. A focus on gender and working-class housewives shifts the labor history narrative to include topics such as consumerism, standard of living, and wages as “sites” of labor history. By incorporating consumer experiences into the labor history narrative, we are able to embrace what Lizabeth Cohen calls “a more complex, contingent conception of how ‘acts of consumption have objective effects on the structures of power.’” This expansion, thus, overlaps with the literature of citizenship. As historians develop a more sophisticated understanding of how consumption fueled the American identity, a “new appreciation...of the broad significance of exchange and consumption to power relations...” emerges. In the case of this dissertation, a study of cost of living and consumption politics provides a gateway to better understand women’s political participation as working-class, non-wage earners as well as the wives of union and non-union wage-earning men.


31 Deutsch, Building a Housewife’s Paradise, 9.
Women’s History

If labor historians have only recently begun to explore gender, women’s historians have only recently begun to consider class. With the exception of historian Dorothy Sue Cobble’s labor feminists, historians have largely ignored the political lives of working-class housewives.32 Indeed, when housewives are studied at all, the focus has been on the experiences of middle-class women. In her book *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945-1965*, for example, Sylvie Murray offers a picture of political activism among housewives that is both refreshing yet frustrating in its limited commentary on class.33 The primary reasons for this absence seem to be two-fold. First, gender historians interested in labor history have sought to counter the notion that wives functioned as a conservative force within the family and by extension in the workplace and labor unions. Indeed, this assumption that working-class housewives constituted a conservative force has resulted in a lack of scholarly attention paid to the role housewives played in building the labor movement.34 Second, the relatively small number of primary

32 Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*.


slo sources makes it inherently difficult to document their contributions. This dissertation begins to rectify this neglect by combining organizational and governmental archives that reveal the activities of working-class housewives.

In addition to building on existing history texts, this dissertation expands the recent discussion of “labor feminism.” While women’s historians have challenged the limitations of labor history and its production-centered framework, the role of working-class housewives has remained peripheral to this task for two reasons. First, historians have often turned their attention to women workers in an attempt to offset their absence in much of labor history. This focus on wage-earning women, while important, inherently reinforces a focus on production as well as sidelines housewives. And, second, a reliance on organizational primary sources that emphasize middle-class women generates a historiography of middle-class housewives. The trajectory of women’s history has moved


35 Cobble, The Other Women’s Movement; Dennis Deslippe, “Rights, Not Roses”
from an emphasis on middle-class women to exploring the lives of working-class women.\textsuperscript{36} Alice Kessler-Harris, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Lizabeth Cohen, and Nancy Gabin have all sought to incorporate working-class women into the women’s history narrative; however, their work focuses on wage-earning women with an occasional nod to housewives.\textsuperscript{37} By writing a narrative centered on women’s auxiliaries, I hope to avoid these two pitfalls. This will ultimately allow me to link labor and women’s history through the claims working-class housewives made in the public sphere.

And, finally, this project challenges our understanding of separate spheres in the twentieth century. Following in the footsteps yet again of Linda Kerber, this dissertation essentially “deconstructs” the trope of the separate spheres.\textsuperscript{38} In large part, I have been influenced by the works of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, whose studies of gender in Great Britain offer new perspectives on domesticity, as they insist on a complexity that has been absent in the study of class and gender. Their work rewrites history so that “proper


recognition [is] given to the ways in which gender, as a key axis to power in society, produces a crucial understanding of how any society is structured and organized."  

And, as I look specifically at gender and class in this dissertation, Nancy Hewitt's argument that women act collectively not because of an innate bond or sisterhood, but because of "particular social and material circumstances" is especially critical. Working-class housewives sought alliances to shore up their economic and political interests—not because they were women, or, even housewives.

The historical agents of this narrative are white working-class housewives. While Melinda Chatervault's study of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters demonstrates African American working-class women were involved in the auxiliary movement, my emphasis on the UAW Women's Auxiliary and the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries as well as my focus on food protests in certain communities provides a narrative of the experiences of white working-class housewives. Throughout the dissertation, I include references and information about the activism of African American women and their partnerships that were made by some auxiliaries, but the primary source materials that I collected, along with studies of photographs of events, has led me to conclude that, by and large, white women constituted the bulk of the membership of the UAW Women's Auxiliary and the leadership of the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries.

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39 Leonore Davidoff, Worlds Between; Catherine Hall, White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (New York: Routledge Press, 1992).


And, even among the white working-class women in this study, there is a significant amount of anonymity. Despite their local leadership, the only remains of their involvement are in correspondence, or references in newsletter or newspaper articles. But their life stories are virtually impossible to tell; either they left no archive of papers or their given names are unknown since they became the feminized version of their husbands’ name. In some cases I was lucky enough to find details about the lives of specific women, such as Catherine Gelles and Faye Stephenson—women who began working at a young age and left the paid workforce once they married. Both women dedicated themselves to building the auxiliary movement through the UAW and the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries.

While most of the auxiliary leadership was working-class, some auxiliary leaders came from middle-class backgrounds. Eleanor Fowler, for example, came to the auxiliary movement through the American Newspaper Guild, of which her husband was a member. As the daughter of Helen Thompson Woolley, a student of John Dewey and the first woman to receive a doctorate from the University of Chicago, Fowler’s pedigree and Ivy League education, in addition to her early political work in the 1930s with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, prepared her for lobbying on Capitol Hill and coalition building in Washington, D.C. Fowler’s regular column in the CIO News was critical to keeping working-class women informed and well-versed on germane political issues.

Despite the class differences, it was their roles as housewives that set them apart. By using their housewife identity in the public sphere, their campaigns and rhetoric focused on the centrality of domesticity in building political influence among women in the United States. This becomes even more evident in the final chapter of the dissertation as the next (and last) generation of housewives takes up cost of living campaigns between 1969 and
1973. Yet, these housewives are decidedly less urban and working-class than the auxiliary women. Suburban and middle-class, they continue to engage in domestic politics driven by some of the same issues as a generation earlier.

This dissertation is broken down into five chapters that span most of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the New Deal period. Chapter Two introduces the theme of domestic politics through a study of food protests and consumer activism during the early twentieth century. The key argument is that this period reflects a lack of organizational structure that limited access to full citizenship despite repeated protests in the streets to demand lower prices. This chapter also introduces major themes that reoccur throughout the dissertation, such as the American standard of living and the shift from a producerist society to a consumer-based society.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five come together to offer a new narrative of labor union auxiliaries. While there have been a variety of articles and one monograph published on the topic, the role of the labor union auxiliaries in the home and the community has been largely absent from the history of the American working-class. In Chapter Three, I explore the anatomy of CIO auxiliaries as a way to understand how auxiliaries functioned as a conduit to political citizenship for working-class housewives. By focusing on the work of two organizations—the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, the largest CIO auxiliary, and the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, the national federation of CIO auxiliaries—this chapter illustrates how the CIO auxiliaries built a movement that flourished during the late 1930s and 1940s with the help of the New Deal state and the demands of World War II.

Chapters Four and Five offer a closer look at the programmatic work of the auxiliary movement. In Chapter Four, I revisit consumer activism by extending cost of living protests
into the New Deal era. By tracing their journey from the home into the community, and eventually onto the national political stage, we gain a more complex understanding of working-class housewives in the 1940s. Their membership in labor union auxiliaries reveals that working-class housewives searched for avenues that would make the demands of families heard by the shapers of the New Deal state. Long seen as a conservative and traditionalist group, their actions dismantle this characterization. Working-class housewives involved in auxiliaries defended the rights of wage-earning women, challenged the notion and construction of equality from an economic standpoint, and demanded full access to a “good” life for working-class families—white and African American alike. And, with Chapter Five, I look at the ways auxiliaries continued to build coalitions as they fought the National Women’s Party’s campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. This chapter gives voice to the class-consciousness of the post-WWII battle against the ERA. Too often, the historical narrative of this moment focuses on the gender aspect of the fight, essentializing the debate to issues of difference versus equality, feminism versus family-focused traditionalism. And while these were significant features of the debate, there was another dimension to the campaign to do away with the National Woman’s Party’s (NWP) persistent crusade to alter the constitution. Many working-class women saw the NWP’s

campaign as a class struggle that pitted them against privileged, pro-business, leisure-class women.

And, finally, Chapter Six functions as a bookend to Chapter One. It returns to the meat boycott as a strategy to curb the imbalance between the high cost of living and stagnating wages. The primary source base differs from the rest of the dissertation in that I rely almost exclusively on the newspaper coverage of the little-known 1969 and 1973 meat boycotts. I also conducted a series of oral history interviews with some of the key leaders of these boycotts. With no knowledge of earlier meat boycotts, suburban working- and middle-class housewives turned to this strategy in the 1960s and into the early 1970s. I argue that this instinct to engage in political protest is evidence of the power of domestic politics despite generation and class differences. Yet, the decline of the activist state, coupled with the rise of the women’s and civil rights movements, diminished the authority of domestic politics in the public sphere. And, by the end of the 1970s, domesticity has been coopted by growing antifeminist, conservative crusaders such as Phyllis Schlafly.

The ark of this dissertation allows us to witness the rise and fall of domestic politics throughout the twentieth century. Using labor union auxiliaries as a historical framework, this dissertation explores the evolution of the housewife as a politically engaged citizen who relied on an agenda of domestic politics to address issues of political and economic equality. By giving agency to housewives, this dissertation pushes us to rethink issues of class and gender. Throughout much of the twentieth century, housewives sought to build local and national coalitions that allowed them to engage in progressive politics and bridge the home to the broader community. From the 1902 kosher meat boycotts until the 1970s,
each generation of women witnessed an economic upheaval that in turn prompted them to respond by demanding political and economic equality. In the first decades of the twentieth century, immigrant women rallied against the high cost of living in their neighborhoods demanding economic justice in the marketplace. By the 1930s, Popular Front organizations and the CIO helped to create institutional support for housewives to become even more politically active reaching beyond their communities and onto the national stage as they sought regulations to limit the disparities between corporate profits and the family economy. CIO auxiliaries such as the UAW Women’s Auxiliary believed that they could build a movement of housewives that was the most progressive organization in the world.43 And, for a brief moment in time, they did.

Yet by the 1970s, the priorities shifted in both the public and private spheres. The government made a full retreat from its New Deal past. In his 1978 State of the Union Address President Carter said, “Government cannot eliminate poverty or provide a bountiful economy or reduce inflation or save our cities...”44 Organized labor succeeded in creating a middle-class through working-class jobs, but their success came at a cost. Their “rigidity” and inability to build alliances beyond their comfort zone – primarily white, male, industrial workers pushed women and people of color out of the club.45 And, the growing Christian right welcomed the housewife as a model citizen and as a contrast to the women


calling for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Thus, the bridge between the public and private spheres collapsed under the weight of the rising tide of the conservative movement in the 1970s.
CHAPTER II
THE “MEATLESS SUMMER OF 1935”:
THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF CONSUMER ACTIVISM

“It dawned on me,” she said, “my husband being a union man, why couldn’t we housewives have an organization similar, a homemaker’s union?”

On the morning of July 29, 1935, a front page headline in the Detroit Free Press read:

“Meatless Day Follows Strike in Hamtramck; Spinach No Substitute for ‘Golabki’ Say Hungry Men” Two days earlier, Polish working-class housewives in the industrial Detroit suburb of Hamtramck called on community members to boycott meat. Over the course of the past year, declared picketing housewives, the cost of meat had increased fifty percent while employment levels had dropped. They demanded an immediate twenty percent reduction in the price of meat. The increased cost of meat was not only a financial burden on families but was also an attack on their class identity. For Hamtramck’s Polish working-class families, meat consumption represented financial security not available in the old country. In America, eating meat on a daily basis became a right, not a luxury. And, like other Eastern European immigrants, Hamtramck’s working-class Polish intended to challenge anyone who stood in their way.


This chapter explores the relationship between housewives and political participation in the early twentieth century. Through a study of food protests, specifically the 1935 meat boycott, I extend the reach of the industrial shop floor to include the home as source of domestic politics. An examination of this activism allows a deeper understanding of the ways in which housewives used domestic politics to protest in the public sphere and, in turn, improve the private sphere. Relying on a strategy of class solidarity, housewives used consumer protests to strengthen their families’ standard of living as well as bridge the established barriers between domesticity and industry. Yet, despite the organizing efforts of these women, this period reflects a lack of organizational structure that limited their success. Thus, this chapter lays the framework for the rest of the dissertation, in which I argue that the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) not only provided new opportunities for industrial wage earners; it also created an environment ripe for political engagement as predominantly white housewives joined women’s labor union auxiliaries to build a movement that emphasized both class and gender.

In this chapter, I examine how housewives engaged in grassroots consumer protests in defense of the family economy prior to the founding of the CIO. Employing a direct action method of organizing, this bottom-up activism is in contrast to middle-class consumer activism that relied on organizations such as the National Consumers’ League and the American Federation of Labor’s Union Label Trades Department to influence shopping practices, and advised middle- and upper-class consumers to purchase union-made products and to patronize retail outlets. Embracing a middle-class agenda, the American Federation of Labor’s Union Label Trades Department, for example, encouraged consumers
nationally to buy goods that were marked with the union label, and mounted campaigns in cities with high union density to promote union goods. While both sets of consumer activists “understood the market basket and the pay envelope were two sides of the same cost-of-living coin,” I argue that the grassroots approach and direct-action tactics of housewives helped to politicize them and establish a militancy among women off the shop floor. By studying working-class consumer activism, we witness moments in time when housewives succeeded in narrowing the divide between the public and private spheres that is typically found in studies of wage-earning women.

The food protests that erupted over the first three decades of the twentieth century denounced the unregulated cost of living and sought structural remedies to the attack on the American standard of living. By the turn of the twentieth century, an economy centered on producerism had given way to a consumer-based system. And, for wage earners, individually as well as collectively, their attention turned away from the desire to control their labor to economic demands that would allow them the ability to consume. Thus,

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workers demanded a “living wage” represented by an eight-hour day, government sanctioned minimum wages, and the union label that would provide them with the fundamentals of life, such as housing, food, and clothing, as well as access to the increasingly robust marketplace that shimmered with goods that were quickly becoming the standard. The rhetoric emanating from the AFL was focused on workers achieving greater access to the marketplace through a living wage. Calling on leaders of industry to pay a living wage, the AFL and progressive public intellectuals such as Henry Demarest Lloyd married the argument for a living wage to citizenship by invoking the language of the U.S. Constitution. In an 1893 AFL pamphlet, Lloyd declared that workers “have burned the new words of the living wage into the bill of rights...born equal, with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.” As historian Meg Jacobs notes, the desire for higher wages was a “politicizing force.” It was this force that drove housewives to regulate the price of goods in order for them to better spend their husbands’ wages, for the American public increasingly viewed consumption as an obligation of citizenship.

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Essential to this dissertation is defining and understanding what the American standard of living meant to working-class communities. For many immigrants in the early twentieth century, the United States was imagined as “a land of plenty,” or in the words of the Jewish immigrants who led many of the early food protests, the *goldene medinah*.¹¹ This imagined community of plenty drove immigrants hungering for opportunity and security to American cities and mining communities at the turn of the twentieth century; and African Americans travelled northward from the American south in search of an escape from grinding poverty and racism, hoping that the industrial progress in northern cities would provide them a livelihood that was unattainable in the south.¹² The pull for migrants was the promise of economic stability represented by a living wage that could enable shelter, a table filled with food, and the possibility of more.

But for many working-class families, the ability to provide their families with the basics—shelter, food, and jobs—proved challenging in the land of plenty. Hunger represented a collective misery for Eastern and Southern European immigrants as well as for migrating African Americans. With food carts loaded down with fruits and vegetables,


butchers' windows filled with fresh meat, and the scent of freshly baked bread wafting from the neighborhood bakery, the American city promised an end to hunger for many. As historian Hasia Diner notes, “the distribution and consumption of food has been historically determined by age, gender, and class, and its unequal allocations highlight internal group differences.” While the foods varied among each group of migrants, meat became the barometer of success in all the communities. No other food became more representative of class difference than meat. As one boycotter put it, “In the old home I never had enough meat...Now fat meat was mine for the asking.” And, as such, meat boycotts represent another aspect of working-class struggle in American history; a struggle that, by and large, has been left out of the labor history narrative. For, as historian Harvey Levenstein puts it, “…economics were of greater importance in influencing workers’ diets than those of the middle class.”

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13 For a detailed narrative of the relationship between food and migration see: Diner, *Hungering for America.*

14 Ibid.


16 Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics,* 44.

17 While there are some exceptions to the exclusion of consumer protest from the labor history narrative, the vast majority of labor history focuses on either organizational histories or the experiences of workers on the shop floor. For examples of consumer protests as part of labor history see: Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Dana Frank, "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests," *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985).

In a marketplace flush with goods and increased purchasing power, consumers began to develop principles of fairness. While the new consumer culture may have redirected the focus of some workers away from the shop floor, it also opened the door to a space that was distinctly gendered. The rise of consumer culture placed working- and middle-class women firmly in the role of the family manager.\(^1^9\) As such, women embraced their identity as “buyers of the nation” and became negotiators within the marketplace, serving a “powerful mediating role.”\(^2^0\) Women as consumers demanded, as historian Alice Kessler-Harris notes, “…a crucial measure of fairness.”\(^2^1\)

Within the private sphere, women’s family manager role was further emphasized by consumer patterns in which male consumption served individual desires, such as socializing at the local bar with coworkers, while female consumption served familial needs. “Understanding the complex dynamics of marriage and individual aspirations in the American working-class,” argues historian Susan Porter Benson, “is an important first step in developing an understanding of consumption…”\(^2^2\) Although both men and women behaved as consumers prior to and during the Depression, the market intentionally

\(^{19}\) For more on the role of the family manager see: Martha May, "The "Good Managers": Married Working Class Women and Family Budget Studies. 1895-1915," Labor History (1984); Louise Tilly and Joan Wallach Scott, Women, Work, and Family (New York: Methuen, 1987).

\(^{20}\) Eve Stone, "A Year Has Gone by’ in Union Auxiliary Women Advance, January 1938," ALUA, Lillian Sherwood Papers, Box 1, Folder 17 - Union Auxiliary Women Advance.


appealed to women as the nation’s consumers. Therefore these gender attributes applied
to consumption by market as well as popular perceptions created an environment in which
housewives “...used the language of consumerism to claim economic and political rights.”
And, as historian Tracey Deutsch’s study of grocery stores illustrates, disparate groups
“...embraced the possibilities of harnessing consumption to bring about broader social
change.”

This chapter also adds another dimension to the literature on women and the private sphere. Historian Nancy Cott argues, “Not until they saw themselves classed by sex would women join to protest their sexual fate.” This is not a study of working-class women struggling to find sexual liberation. Nor is it an attempt to reframe these women as early feminists. Instead, it opens our eyes to working-class movements that originated from the private sphere and radiated outward into the public. In essence, many housewives, like young women workers of the early twentieth century industrial sweatshops, banded together as women to address issues of class injustice. For the women protesting the cost of food, it meant direct action in the streets. For some AFL auxiliary members, it meant


24 Deutsch, Building a Housewife’s Paradise, 115.


urging their fellow wives and communities to purchase union-made goods as a measure of job security for their husbands. By understanding women’s roles as the family manager and the struggle to sustain the family economy, we can begin to understand the significance of food protests, “Buy Union” campaigns, and attempts to establish a movement of housewives. Furthermore, we begin to see the ways in which housewives revisit these tactics time and again to push both the state and the labor movement to be accountable for working-class families’ basic needs that became known as the American standard of living.

Historians have given some attention to the demands of working-class housewives to build a moral economy.27 Yet the historical narrative of food protests remains set apart rather than integrated into the historical narrative of the Progressive Era. Consumer boycotts, such as meat boycotts in the urban North, were “grassroots initiatives”—in essence, direct action similar to wildcat strikes rooted in urban enclaves rather than the shop floor. Consumer organizing coordinated by institutions such as Florence Kelley’s National Consumer League and the AFL’s Union Label office relied on “experts” that drove “ethical consumption” on the part of consumers with an emphasis on middle-class purchasing.28 By contrast, the more militant grassroots campaigns of the meat boycotts typically turned to direct action organizing such as picketing, house visits, and, on occasion, more militant methods to discourage the purchase and consumption of meat during a


boycott. Whereas, many working-class women focused on building power from the bottom up, middle-class reformers and AFL auxiliary members pushed for a consumer movement that shaped how people consumed. These two different approaches mirror the nature of Progressive Era politics during which working- and middle-class women engaged with the marketplace on a variety of levels. This chapter offers the chance to look more closely at the change over time of food protests as they shifted from neighborhood concerns to larger issues of national concern over the high cost of living.

Between 1902 and 1935, working- and middle-class housewives intentionally left the “proper” sphere of the home to engage in political action in the public arena by protesting the high cost of living typically represented by high meat prices. And, in turn, they used the marketplace as a public space that they “appropriated...for their own ends.” Using the home as a political space is certainly not new to the twentieth century; it can be traced back to the American Revolution. Yet, this period witnessed a series of

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29 Ibid., 162-3.
30 My understanding of political identity and action by housewives is based in part on Susan Zaeske’s study of women’s participation in the abolition of slavery. Zaeske argues that women transformed their political identities through the act of petitioning, an action which took them out of their “proper” sphere and into the public sphere. See: Bohstedt, The Politics of Provisions; Coles, ”The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots”; Offen, ”Defining Feminism”; Thompson, ”The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”. For material on meat boycotts, see: Glickman, Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America, 162-3.
great upheavals in neighborhood protest that created opportunities for working-class housewives to be viewed in the public sphere as citizens and active agents in the formation of an American class-consciousness. As earlier works have demonstrated, consumer organizing by working-class housewives developed class networks that were, in the words of historian Anne Firor Scott, “far more likely to be reinforced than feelings of sisterhood.”

“...as strong as any labor union”

The 1902 kosher meat boycott illustrates the cooptation of public space to meet a private need. Jewish immigrant women called for a boycott of kosher meat in New York City's Lower East Side and demanded that women stop shopping at the neighborhood kosher butcher shops until prices were lowered. Their outrage was directed at local merchants. Residents of the Lower East Side consumed on average 600,000 pounds of kosher beef a week that they purchased locally from the over 1,000 kosher butchers in the neighborhood. However, housewives were growing increasingly angry over the


monopoly behavior of the butchers setting “exorbitant” prices in a community that was reliant on kosher products. On May 16, 1902, housewives organized a community meeting with upwards of 6,000 women in attendance, while protests in the streets successfully shut down every butcher on the Lower East Side and elsewhere in the city.\footnote{The protests escalated quickly as the women, directing their fury at the butchers, took the meat and “...[threw] it into the gutters, and stamped upon [it]. Water, kerosene oil, and according to some of the butchers, carbolic acid was poured upon the meat by the maddened women...”\footnote{Five hundred police officers were dispatched to quell the “mob.” The \textit{New York Times} reported that “...patrol wagons filled with howling, screaming women, bareheaded, and carrying, in some instances, two children in their arms.” The news reports went on to describe children separated from their mothers screaming “Mama! Mama!”}} The \textit{New York Times} reported that “...patrol wagons filled with howling, screaming women, bareheaded, and carrying, in some instances, two children in their arms.” The news reports went on to describe children separated from their mothers screaming “Mama! Mama!” The

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newspaper’s detailed descriptions of the “riots” as well as their categorization of the city residents as a “foreign-born population” contrast with later meat boycotts in that the link between gender and consumption was outweighed by the perception that the Lower East Side was an island unto itself of unruly immigrants. One union leader commented that the reports of violence by Jewish women “were greatly exaggerated.”

The street protests soon relented as the protesters and butchers alike took a day off for the Sabbath. Following the day of rest, organizers met to develop a strategic campaign to permanently reduce the cost of kosher meat. On May 19, three days after the explosive neighborhood clashed with the police, the housewives established the Ladies’ Anti-Beef Trust Association. Electing a leadership and an auxiliary committee, the Association began to reach out to Jewish communities throughout New York City such as Harlem, Brooklyn, and Long Island City “...to work among the meat consumers in favor of the boycott cause.” They also appealed to benevolent organization and labor unions to support their “...plan to establish co-operative stores, unless the price of meat is reduced by the butchers.” The Association committed to purchase meat from outside of New York where “the trust [had] no control.” Armed with an organization and a strategy, the housewives won respect from sympathetic organizations. The Central Federated Union agreed to help the group and Joseph Barondess of the Cloakmakers Union noted that “[t]he women on the east side had no organization or leaders, but they formed an organization of their own as strong as any labor union.”

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38 Ibid.

In fact, the Jewish housewives viewed themselves and their actions as complementary to the labor movement. As historian Paula Hyman points out, the women referred to themselves as “strikers” and those who continued to purchase meat as “scabs.”40 Unlike the coverage by the New York Times, the Jewish press, such as the Forward and Yiddishes Tageblat, included the voices of the women. Calling on other housewives, the organizers asked them to “join the great women’s war.”41 The housewives were not able to sustain the Association or the mobilization of thousands of neighborhood women. Yet, the legacy of the 1902 boycott can be seen in subsequent cost-of-living boycotts, such as the New York City 1917 cost-of-living protests; and, as this chapter illustrates, the “meatless summer of 1935.”42

Using meat as an indicator of the stability of the family economy, protests such as the 1902 boycott reflect a demand for a certain level of well being that, in the eyes of many who engaged in food protests, should be guaranteed by their husbands’ ability to earn a living wage. For the leaders of the Ladies’ Anti-Beef Trust Association, neighborhood based co-operatives would help to regulate the price of meat, therein helping to advance the possibility of immigrant families to attain the American standard of living.43 This strategy reflected a desire to resolve the issue within the boundaries of the community. The


41 Yiddishes Tageblat, May 18, 1902.

42 Frank, "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food".

Association did not pursue a political campaign that reached into the city and state government nor make direct demands on the state.

This localization of protest evolved over the next three decades. In January 1910, workers across the country went vegetarian. Cleveland’s Central Labor Council called on their members to boycott meat as a protest against the Meat Trust. Within weeks of the call, newspapers reported “strike[s] against the eating of meat” throughout the Midwest, Baltimore, and New York. Calling on the five million residents of Ohio, Senator Williams, asked them to “join the ranks of the vegetarians” when he proposed a statewide boycott on “meat of all kinds” until Easter Sunday. In Baltimore, Maryland Cardinal Gibbons bemoaned the high cost of foodstuffs. While T.M. Sullivan, president of National Association of Retail Grocers “charged the big trusts”—the oil trust, packing house combine, sugar trust, and flour trust—for high cost of meat while addressing the Colorado Merchants’ association [sic] in Fort Collins, Colorado. And, in Missouri and New York, the attorney generals demanded inquiries into the monopolies on essential items that were required for citizens to maintain an American standard of living, claiming that they would take “drastic action.”

Seven years later, during the 1917 New York cost-of-living protests, Jewish housewives acted against the rising expense of essential foodstuffs such as chicken, fish, and vegetables. Working-class housewives in the New York Socialist Party began to organize extensive boycotts against the food industry in opposition to the lack of food relief

44 n.a., "Untitled," Chicago Tribune, January 18, 1910.

programs. As historian Dana Frank’s study of the 1917 protests reveals, the boycott was used by working-class housewives as a means to “forc[e] members of their neighborhood community to publicly demonstrate their observance of the collective ban. The protesting women primarily concentrated their violence and crowd persuasion on convincing peddlers, butchers, and grocers not to sell the boycotted foods.” However, the women also recognized that institutional change required focused attention on strategic locations of power outside of their working-class ethnic enclaves. For example, during a neighborhood rally, Socialist speaker Bella Zilberman, invigorated by the energy of the angry crowd, asked how many of the listeners would march to the Waldorf-Astoria where Governor Whitman was rumored to be visiting. Over a thousand women and children rushed the front entrance of the Waldorf-Astoria crying, “Yah! Yah! You ride in comfort while we walk and starve.”

**Building a Moral Economy**

Over time, housewives began to use their role as consumers to push the boundaries of the public sphere by holding the state responsible for the well-being of its citizens as part of what Michael Katz refers to as the codifying of “...our collective obligations toward one another [as well as defining] the terms of membership in the national community.”

While Progressive Era maternalists were pursuing an agenda that would, as Seth Koven and Sonya Michel put it, “transform motherhood from women’s primary private

46 Frank, "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food", 272.

responsibility into public policy," I argue that food protests broaden the scope of women’s domestic responsibilities to be more inclusive of both the family and the economy.48 Housewives were politicizing the obligation of feeding their family on limited incomes as they organized food protests that demanded the public’s attention as well as that of the state. Protesting the high cost of living turned the task of balancing the household budget into a public issue.

These early decades were also marked by a radicalism and militancy fueled by immigrant labor organizing. In 1919, four million workers, a full one-fifth of the nation’s workforce, went on strike.49 As World War One came to a close, the Justice Department began an aggressive campaign of repression against left wing organizations. During the first red scare, it was often women who took up the political organizing reins when Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer’s men rounded up their husbands, fathers, and lovers. In her study of Italian women’s resistance, historian Jennifer Guglielmo writes that the Justice Department later discovered that “...as soon as the raids began, bundles of radical pamphlets and newspapers turned up in the hands of women, who took responsibility for hiding and distributing the material.”50 Throughout the 1920s, corporations mounted vigorous campaigns to squash workers’ attempts to organize by implementing scientific management processes, establishing corporate welfare programs, and, in some industries,


50 Ibid., 202-203.
creating company towns. Yet, despite the low levels of formal union membership, workers continued to strike. In 1926, tens of thousands of textile workers in Patterson, New Jersey, went out on strike, with immigrant women physically placing themselves at the front on the picket line.51

The 1920s also witnessed a shift in the consumer culture. For the working class, access to consumer culture was more extensive than ever before.52 And, among policy makers and corporate leaders, the discussion of the living wage evolved. Historian Thomas Stapleford’s study of the Consumer Price Index demonstrates that there was bipartisan support for “...tying higher wages to economic prosperity and the growth of mass markets...”53 In fact, the chairman of General Electric’s board of directors, Owen D. Young, insisted that workers needed “not merely a living wage, but a higher ‘cultural wage’ appropriate to American aspirations (and American production).”54 But the crash of the stock market sent the explosive consumer market into a tailspin, and the working class into even more dire straits.

With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the widespread poverty caused by the Great Depression, housewives began to demand the state recognize its obligation to regulate the costs and hold producers accountable to consumer needs. “We are going to keep fighting until we knock out these politicians,” declared Mary Zuk, a Detroit area

51 Ibid.

52 Cohen, Making a New Deal


54 Ibid.
housewife and the leader of “the meatless summer of 1935.” “Working people don’t want to eat bones. We want President Roosevelt to give us a country like the Constitution provides.”55 Just as Henry Demarest Lloyd and the AFL invoked the Constitution in 1893, Zuk demanded access to all of its promises. Housewives used their gender identities as “sources of social solidarity, organization, and moral purpose.”56 In essence, women’s family roles did not “dampen militancy or weaken their identity as workers,” rather “family ties may in fact be crucial in generating working-class solidarities.”57 Building on the Progressive Era food protest culture, the largely unknown story of the Great Depression’s “meatless summer of 1935” provides an example of the maturation of domestic politics.58

Located north of Detroit’s heavily Polish 9th Ward and geographically surrounded by the city of Detroit, Hamtramck began to absorb Detroit’s growing Polish population during the first two decades of the twentieth century. During the “meatless” summer of 1935, Hamtramck was a tightknit Polish immigrant community, “an ethnic enclave in the heart of


58 While the boycott does appear in some literature, it has not received the same attention as other meat boycotts such as the 1902 kosher meat boycott and the 1947 boycotts that were in reaction to the spike in prices after price controls were lifted. See: Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States.
Detroit’s East Side.”⁵⁹ As migration from Eastern Europe, including Poland’s poorest and most rural region, Galicia, continued to flood American urban centers like Detroit, Dodge opened an automobile plant in Hamtramck in 1910. The promise of new industrial jobs at the Dodge plant increased the flow of migration to Detroit as Poles migrated from Eastern Europe as well as mining communities in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

This chapter focuses largely on Detroit’s Polish population for two reasons. First, it’s an excellent example of an established immigrant community that used ethnic and religious networks to build a grassroots base of support for the cost-of-living campaigns. Second, by the late 1930s, Detroit was home to some of the most wildly successful working-class victories in the auto industry. While the remainder of the dissertation does not return to any one specific ethnic community, the narrative of domestic politics returns to Detroit as the epicenter of organized housewives, through the UAW Women’s Auxiliary.

On the eve of the 1935 meat boycotts, the social and economic fabrics of immigrant working-class families were tattered. The traditional family economy structure had crumbled as male breadwinners withstood prolonged unemployment while their wives and older children were offered low-wage service jobs. In 1928, the Detroit Survey of Advertising showed that although fifty percent of the men were then receiving salaries of over $5,000 a year, no woman was being paid more than $3,500.⁶⁰ During the Great Depression, then, it was not uncommon for wives and children to displace husbands as the primary breadwinner, given their diminished market value. In 1934, the national


⁶⁰ Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940.
unemployment rate hovered around twenty-two percent. Working-class families reliant on
the manufacturing sector took a particularly hard hit. For example, workers manufacturing
durable goods such as automobiles saw their incomes drop from an annual income of
$1,556 in 1934 to $1,264 in 1935. By 1936, thirty-eight percent of family incomes would
drop to less than $1,000 per year.

Wage earning and consumption reflected this Depression-era shift in the family
economy. By the summer of 1935, traditional familial roles were in turmoil along with the
national economy; unprecedented unemployment levels, rising food costs, and the anemic
condition of both public aid and private social service agencies, ethnic associations and
banks created an environment ripe for reaction.

Meanwhile, between June 1933 and June 1935, the cost of meat jumped fifty-four
percent.\(^6\) According to the Literary Digest, the Department of Labor reported a “slight drop
in retail food prices but a continued rise in the cost of meat...”\(^6\) On August 16, 1935,
Chicago Tribune reporter Frank Ridgway wrote in his article “Prices of Beef and Pork High,
Lamb a Bargain,”

Extra change will be needed in the pocketbooks of meat buyers for homes, hotels,
restaurants, and clubs when they go shopping today and tomorrow in Chicago and
surrounding suburbs. Warning came from the stockyards yesterday that consumers
may expect beef, pork, and lamb to go even higher during the next few
weeks...Several cents a pound have been tacked onto the retail price tags of pork
loins compared with last...Practically all of the main cuts of beef, including steaks
and roasts, will be found higher today and tomorrow than they were a week ago...

\(^6\) n.a., Newsweek, August 17, 1935.

\(^6\) n.a., Literary Digest, August 10, 1935.
Ridgway went on to report that prices for low grades of flour and eggs had also risen, but
“...head lettuce, eating apples, cantaloupes, and roasting ears are the chief items on the
green grocers’ counters that have been marked down in price since last week.” In
industrial cities such as Chicago and Detroit, the cost of beef rose steadily, more than
doubling by 1935 to thirty-four cents up from a low of nine cents. Pork prices were even
higher than beef prices. In 1934, ham sliced per pound cost 36.6 cents in Chicago and by
1935 it had increased to forty-six cents per pound. Meat prices also rose in other urban
centers such as New York, Atlanta, Denver, and Los Angeles.64

In Detroit, the Polish enclaves that were so firmly entrenched in tradition just
decades before were slowly opening to reveal serious class rifts. Over 2,500 businesses in
the Detroit area were owned and operated by Polish immigrants.65 Not unlike other
immigrant groups, Detroit’s Polish community organized extensive community networks
through mutual aid societies, the Catholic Church, and an increased interest in local politics.
With Poland’s independence secured, Polish immigrants in the United States turned inward
and began focusing on local concerns. Historian John J. Bukowczyk argues that within the
Polish enclave, clear class distinctions evolved. “Polonia’s better educated, small-propertied
elite stepped to the fore and organized an assortment of ethnic self-help activities to


buttress their own economic position and brace the interests of the Polish settlements...”66
Like the kosher butchers of the Lower East Side, it was this “small-propertied elite”
community that housewives challenged during the 1935 meat boycotts. Under the
leadership of Mary Zuk, a Hamtramck housewife, the boycotters took their outrage beyond
their neighborhood straight to Washington, D.C. Ethnic (and, in some cases, racial)
identities began to melt away into class solidarity as the boycott spread to working- and
middle-class communities throughout the Detroit region.

“Why does the government pay farmers not to raise little pigs?”67

Called the “generalissimo” of the 1935 meat boycott by the media, Mary Zuk was
among the wave of internal migrants who sought industrial jobs in the auto industry.68 In
1905, Mary (Stanceus) Zuk was born and raised in poverty in the small company mining
town of Neffs, Ohio, on the border of West Virginia.69 After her father died in a mining
accident in 1915, Zuk was forced to migrate to Detroit with her sister.70 Lying about her age,

66 John J. Bukowczyk, And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-
Americans, Minorities in Modern America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987),
45.

67 n.a., "5 Housewives' Meat Protest Routs Wallace," Chicago Tribune, August 20,
1935.

68 n.a., "Quiet Prevails in Meat Strike," Detroit Free Press, August 8, 1935.

69 Belmont County Probate Court, Ohio, "Certified Copy of Birth Record of Mary
Stanzeus, 1905," ALUA, Don Binkowski Papers, Box 2, Folder Zuk.

70 Neffs, Ohio, is on the border of West Virginia dominated by the M.A. Hanna
Company. Zuk’s father most likely died in the March 30, 1915, Hanna Coal Company
disaster that took the lives of twenty-three miners. In 1940, the Hanna Coal Company was
again in the news when seventy-two men died in the Willow Grove mine disaster.
she secured a job at the local Dodge plant at fourteen to help support her family. By seventeen, Mary met her future husband, Stanley Zuk. Stanley migrated from rural Poland in 1912 and worked at the Battle Creek auto plant. After returning to Poland to live for three years, Stanley returned and married Mary on August 26, 1922. By the time of the 1935 meat boycott, Stanley Zuk was an unemployed industrial worker, Mary had left the Dodge plant to stay home with their two young children, and the Zuks, like almost half of Hamtramck's 11,000 families, depended on government relief for their income.71 With no activist background, Zuk attributed her convictions during and after the meat boycott to the grinding poverty she witnessed and experienced in her life. “The misery of my childhood, the struggles I had in later life to raise a family in Hamtramck as a worker in the Dodge plant all left their mark on me," Zuk told The Voice of the People newspaper. According to the interview, she did not think joining the meat boycott was anything “unusual,” but Zuk noted, “I knew that if I wanted to protect my children I had to protect the children of my neighbors and fellow citizens.”72

In June, the Communist Party called on all of Hamtramck's housewives to boycott meat. Calling themselves the Provisional Women's Committee Against the High Cost of Living, the housewives—both Communist Party members and nonmembers—decided to distribute a leaflet door-to-door to ask people how they felt about the price of meat and to

71 According to historian Thaddeus Radzilowski, Poles were the poorest and least skilled ethnic group in Detroit. And by 1930, joblessness and poverty was rampant in the Polish community. Not since the severe Depression of 1893 had Detroit's Polish population suffered such economic hardship. Radzilowski, "Polish Americans in Detroit Politics", 54.

72 n.a., "Price of Meat Cut; Zuk Led Fight of People in the Voice of the People, 1936," ALUA, Don Binkowski Papers, Box 2, Folder Zuk.
“explain the purpose of the [planned mass] meeting.”73 On July 19, 1935, four hundred of Hamtramck’s Polish working-class housewives, accompanied by a few husbands, met at the Polish Falcon’s Hall to discuss the increased cost of meat and other domestic goods such as milk and heating fuel.74 They did not adopt the decision to strike immediately; instead, the group decided to send letters to President Roosevelt and Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace “...demanding action to reduce the cost of living.”75 They also presented Mayor Lewandowski and the Common Council of Hamtramck with a resolution stating their intent to strike if the cost of meat was not reduced. Mary Zuk was elected chairman of the Provisional Women’s Committee Against the High Cost of Living, which was soon renamed the Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living.76 As they planned for the boycott, the Committee organized for another mass meeting. In anticipation of a meat boycott, the housewives appealed to local butchers to lower the prices of meat or they would strike.

73 Section 8 Section Organizer, District 7, “How the Meat Strike Started in Hamtramck,” Party Organizer Vol, 8, No. 9, 1935, 1935,” ALUA, Don Binkowski Papers, Box 2, Folder Zuk, Mary.

74 In 1935, Hamtramck’s population was approximately 50,000 people. See: Kowalski, Hamtramck: The Driven City.

75 Section Organizer, “How the Meat Strike Started in Hamtramck,” Party Organizer Vol, 8, No. 9, 1935”.

76 There are many small inconsistencies in the name of the Hamtramck meat boycott organization. According to independent historian Don Binkowski, who has access to Mary Zuk’s recently opened papers, the Hamtramck organization was called the Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living. Meanwhile, the Detroit Free Press referred to Zuk’s organization as the Women’s Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living; whereas, historian Georg Schrode called the Hamtramck organization the Action Committee Against the High Cost of Living. For the purposes of this paper, I will follow Binkowski’s lead and refer to the Hamtramck group as the Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living. For the remainder of the chapter, I will refer to Zuk’s group as the Committee.
Their demands were met with silence and inaction. Twelve hundred women met at Hamtramck's Copernicus High School and called for a strike. 77 They, like the generation before them, decided to strike all the neighborhood butchers and to call on shoppers to boycott meat. 78 It was planned for the next day.

On July 27, 1935, Hamtramck's housewives began boycotting meat en masse. In less than one week, they had shut down two hundred butcher shops and the boycott was spreading throughout Detroit and into the neighboring suburbs. More than two hundred women poured into Hamtramck's main shopping district along Joseph Campau Avenue and prevented shoppers from entering butcher shops. Most of the larger meat markets, including the three branches of Frank Jaworski's, the sausage manufacturer, closed early with few sales. According to the Detroit Free Press,

About 100 of the 200 women picketers finally called it a day at 8:30 pm. Cheering about the success of their buying march, the women formed a parade and marched up and down Joseph Campau Avenue between Caniff and Carpenter Avenues. 79

The front page of the Detroit Free Press reported on the eve of the strike,

"Hamtramck families will go without the traditional Polish sausage and sparerib dinners Sunday as a result of a meat strike..." 80 The 1935 meat boycotts were not just about Sunday

77 Section Organizer, "How the Meat Strike Started in Hamtramck," Party Organizer Vol, 8, No. 9, 1935".


80 The number of striking housewives is up for debate. According to the Communist Party's Party Organizer 75% of the city's population engaged in the strike. However, the Detroit Free Press set the number much lower at 200. The number certainly was exceeded 200 as all sources report a closure of at least 200 butcher shops which would require the
dinner; in an effort to achieve an American standard of living, housewives were defending their family economy.

The decision to picket on Saturdays was strategic for two reasons, according to a striker interviewed by the *Detroit Free Press*. First, it was the busiest shopping day of the week, ensuring that most consumers would hear their demands and that their pickets would have the largest economic impact possible. And, second, employed men would not be going to work the following day, since Sunday was their one day off a week, and would be able to “get along without meat.” But, the boycott lasted more than one weekend. The housewives were resolved to “get along without meat” as long as the butchers refused to lower their prices. “[A]s long as [we] have milk, fruit and vegetables,” Zuk commented, housewives would continue their boycott.\(^81\)

The boycotters focused their energy on three demands to reduce the high cost of living. Like the 1902 boycotters, they sought a reduction in the cost of meat, demanding a significant cut of twenty percent. However, unlike the 1902 kosher meat boycott demands, these boycotters did not attempt to establish control over the selling of the meat through the establishment of a cooperative market system. Instead, the Hamtramck boycotters turned their attention to political leaders in Washington, D.C., demanding an “immediate investigation” into the pricing schemes of the meat packers as well as the “prosecution of

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\(^{81}\) n.a., "Women Close Meat Markets in Hamtramck".

the Packers [sic] for profiteering.”83 The legislative campaign, and subsequent delegation to Washington, D.C., directed at U.S. Representative Dingell and Secretary of Agriculture Wallace, was in stark contrast to the local emphasis of the earlier boycotts.

The “fiery” energy of Zuk kept much of the media focus on Hamtramck, but it was not the only city mounting a serious assault on the high price of meat.84 In the Detroit area alone, housewives throughout the city and into the suburbs were beginning to join the momentum. For example, on the city’s Westside, Catherine Mudra, a Polish housewife, organized the Women’s Committee Against the High Cost of Living to begin picketing in butchers on the Westside. Mudra and Zuk spent the better part of the strike coordinating actions throughout the city and participating in strategic delegations to meat packers as well as to Washington, D.C. Detroit’s other ethnic enclaves and the African American community also organized picket lines in front of their butcher shops. Jewish and German housewives formed organizations such as the Action Committee of the Twelfth Street Section and the Neighborhood Action Committee Against the High Cost of Living. And, African American women involved in the Housewives’ League Against the High Cost of Living also participated in the boycott.85 In addition to support from area housewives, the meat boycott was receiving community support from political, labor, and social

83 Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living, "Statement of the Delegation, 1935," ALUA, Don Binkowski Papers, Box 2, Folder Zuk, Mary.

84 H.C. Garrison, "Hamtramck Councilwoman a Fiery Friend of Worker," The Detroit News, April 9, 1936.

organizations as well. By the middle of August, the Detroit Federation of Labor had endorsed the boycott and was offering support to the campaign.

The boycott also permeated the suburbs of Detroit. Lincoln Park’s Downriver Housewives League received the most attention by the media. Lincoln Park, a suburb located south west of Hamtramck, was similar to Hamtramck in that it was a community economically dependent on the expansive River Rouge Ford plant for jobs and income. Yet unlike Hamtramck, Lincoln Park was home to a substantial native-born population. Myrtle Hoagland, the chair of the Downriver Housewives League, was a native-born housewife who joined in the protest against the high meat prices. However, she believed that picketing and marching was not the most effective route. “I do not believe it is necessary to picket,” Hoagland told the New York Times. “In fact, I think picketing is bad psychology and reacts against the object of the strike. Tell the average American not to do something and that is the very thing he wants to do.”86 Hoagland organized approximately one hundred Lincoln Park housewives to set up tables outside of butcher shops and gather pledges from shoppers stating that they would boycott meat until the prices had been reduced by twenty percent. Although their demand of a twenty percent reduction was similar to the Polish and other ethnic housewives demands, that was about the only similarity. The Detroit Free Press played on this tension, pitting Hoagland and Zuk against one another. This would be particularly important as Zuk was repeatedly branded a “Communist Menace” responsible for “...shops [that] face ruin from militant women” ; while Hoagland implied that housewives are sometimes to blame for a struggling family budget. “...[H]igh wages earned

by organized labor," said Hoagland at a boycott rally, "are lost by unorganized housewives."\(^{87}\)

The involvement of the Communist Party in the Detroit area boycotts and elsewhere is indisputable. With active boycotts in Cleveland, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Patterson, New Jersey, the Communist Party was calling for a nationwide campaign to curb the high cost of living including rent, gas, and sales tax. *The Working Woman*, a monthly magazine for "working women, farm women and working-class housewives" published by the Community Party, printed a call for women to make the current "...Action Committees against the high price of meat permanent Action Committees against the high cost of living."\(^{88}\) But, this influence was not unusual, especially in industrial epicenters such as Detroit, which was home to a vast array of political parties committed to organizing the working class.\(^{89}\) During the many times that the media and public officials accused

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boycotters of Communist Party involvement, boycott spokeswomen and delegation
members Zuk and Mudra consistently responded, “There may be some Communists among
us. There are also a lot of Republicans and Democrats, too. We do not ask the politics of
those who join the strike. All we want is to get prices down where we can feed our
families.”  

The influence of left politics in Detroit was nothing new. In fact, as historian Shelton
Stromquist argues, Detroit, Toledo, Ohio, and Cleveland, Ohio, patterned a “reform triangle”
dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. With the election of progressive mayors,
these three industrial cities were critical to the “emergence of [a] new urban politics...”
embodied in a “municipal socialism” that promoted programs directly beneficial to the
working class through improved city services, union wages for city workers, and consumer
protections such as food inspections. The legacy of Hazen Pingree, Detroit’s mayor in the
last years of the nineteenth century, lasted far into the twentieth century. As a result,
Detroit was a progressive urban center in which industrial organizing flourished. Detroit’s
legacy of strong working-class communities built on a vibrant social and religious tradition


90 n.a., "Meat Prices Boosted Again, Despite Housewives' Strike," Detroit Free Press,
August 9, 1935.

91 Offering a transnational focus of municipal politics, Stromquist argues that
historians have by and large failed to “take seriously the realm of municipal politics” and
bypasses the framing of the city as a political space. Shelton Stromquist, "Claiming Political
Space: Workers, Municipal Socialism, and the Reconstruction of Local Democracy in
Transnational Perspective," in Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in

92 Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics (Westport,
Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Stromquist, "Claiming Political Space".
largely determined by ethnic and racial divisions played a significant role in the growth of domestic politics such as the meat boycotts. While churches and synagogues were integral to the weekly lives of many Detroiter[s], social clubs also defined clear communities of empowerment. Ethnic associations and clubs created networks that benefited both communities and individuals as families established themselves in Detroit and made a home there. For example, two of the most popular meeting places for boycott organizing were Dom Polski (Polish House) on Detroit’s Westside and Hamtramck’s International Workers Home, a building that housed many of the area left-wing ethnic organizations.

Furthermore, the “meatless summer of 1935” did not happen in a vacuum. Work stoppages slowly increased throughout the 1930s, hitting a peak in 1937. Lying to rest what historian David Montgomery refers to as a “silent and opaque resistance,” the working-class let loose their rage by the late 1930s. Between 1932 and 1935, work stoppages more than doubled, with the number of workers growing from a mere 324,000 in 1932 to 1,120,000 in 1935. The meat boycott was an extension of these strikes; as industrial workers made demands on the shop floor, their wives were in the streets calling for “the right to live.” And, like the 1902 housewives, many of the 1935 housewives also

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referred to the boycott as a “strike.” This further illustrates the influence of the industrial shop floor on the domestic politics of housewives during this time. The use of labor-style tactics to organize meat boycotts would persist into the 1970s.\(^6\)

A week into the boycott, Zuk and her fellow housewives approached the Hamtramck City Council to request the use of the Hamtramck Stadium for a mass meeting. The City Council denied the request and passed resolutions asking the owners of the Stadium to go on record objecting to the picketing that had occurred the previous Saturday. Outraged, Zuk and others marched across the street to Mayor Lewandowski’s office to demand access to the stadium. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, Mayor Lewandowski told the women, “You are only causing a loss to the local merchants. Why don’t you picket the packinghouses and stop them from selling to the merchants? Last Saturday, you caused Hamtramck merchants to lose $65,000”\(^7\) The City Council’s collusion with Hamtramck’s mayor demonstrated the resistance that Hamtramck’s established, middle-class Polish community felt toward the rising tide of militant activism among the Polish working class.

The tactics of the meat boycotters were quickly escalating. Denied access to a public meeting space, protesters headed over to a Detroit meatpacking plant in an organized rally to demand the twenty percent reduction of meat. “The militant housewives ran into difficulties,” reported the *Detroit Free Press*. “When they attempted to pour kerosene over

\(^6\) The use of labor tactics was common during the 1969 meat boycott in Levittown, Long Island. In fact, Mickey DeLorenzo, the local leader of the boycott, looked to her father-in-law, a UAW organizer, for training and advice throughout the boycott. According to an interview with DeLorenzo, his advice on picket line “dos and don’ts” was critical and she carried the number of his lawyer in her back pocket at all times. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

the meats of a wholesale packer and as a result three of them, in addition to a man, were arrested [and] charged with disturbing the peace." 98 Throughout August 1935, the police arrested many housewives during rallies, picketing, and more militant direct actions such as the kerosene incident. Most of the arrested housewives were found guilty by the court and received probation.99

The staying power of these housewives sets the 1935 boycott apart from earlier ones. The organization of the boycotters was largely responsible for it continuing well into August—while earlier boycotts mimicked wildcat strikes, the 1935 boycott was sustained by organizational support as well as a strategic organizing plan. As the boycott progressed, the various neighborhoods, ethnic, and racial organizations formed the Central Action Committee Against the High Cost of Living to act as the Detroit area coordinating body. The Central Action Committee was "composed of more than five hundred people elected at twenty five mass meetings in fifteen sections of Detroit, Hamtramck, and the vicinity."100 Each of the five hundred Central Action Committee members acted as block captains that


99 Ibid. Interestingly, Patrona Jakstys, a Polish housewife, was fined $35 that she paid. With a present day equivalent equal to $556, it is a curious decision. There is no way to definitively confirm who paid the fine. But, given the involvement of both the Communist Party and the backing of many labor unions as well as the local Federation, perhaps Jakstys received some financial support. During Zuk’s successful run for Hamtramack City Council, she was able to raise $547.90 (approximately $8,700 in 2011) through donations from a variety of ethnic organizations, labor unions, fundraisers, and individuals. Perhaps fundraising of this kind used to offset any potential legal fees incurred from the protests.

coordinated meetings each evening at 6 o’clock to discuss “practical steps.”\textsuperscript{101} After this initial meeting, the women would spread out to designated areas and host open-air meetings that would gather two hundred to four hundred people.

The Committees also distributed a two-page Strike Bulletin that buttoners sold for a cent a piece. In addition to the hawked copies, the Bulletin was published in special editions of the \textit{Trybuna Robotnicza} (Polish Workers paper).\textsuperscript{102} The Strike Bulletin functioned to provide updates, but it was also used to shore up talking points among the boycotters. In the \textit{Party Organizer} accounting of the boycott, the unnamed author published the stock reply that buttoners were encouraged to give the media in response to accusations that the boycotts were “Communist led.”; the talking points are published almost verbatim by both Zuk and Mudra in the \textit{Detroit Free Press}’ coverage. While it is impossible to know who was and was not a member of the Communist Party, their contribution to organizational coordination is evident and noteworthy.\textsuperscript{103}

As the boycott grew more widespread, seven thousand people gathered in Perrien Park in the heart of Detroit’s Westside Polish community to elect a delegation to bring their demands to Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{104} Mary Zuk along with four button leaders— Catherine

\textsuperscript{101} n.a., "Meat Strike Group to Send Delegation to Washington"; Section Organizer, "How the Meat Strike Started in Hamtramck," \textit{Party Organizer} Vol, 8, No. 9, 1935".

\textsuperscript{102} Section Organizer, "How the Meat Strike Started in Hamtramck," \textit{Party Organizer} Vol, 8, No. 9, 1935".

\textsuperscript{103} Mary Zuk continually denied membership in the Communist Party. Independent Don Binkowski believes that Zuk was not a member of the Party. In a letter he penned to her son, Robert G. Varto in 1997, Binkowski concludes that Zuk had a “mutual parting of the ways” with the Party after they failed to support her re-election run for City Council.

\textsuperscript{104} Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living, "Statement of the Delegation".
Mudra, Elizabeth Moss, Pearl Alterman, and Irene Thompson, an African American woman—were elected as members of the delegation. In addition to the Washington, D.C., delegation, a separate delegation headed to Chicago to challenge the meat packers in their own backyard: Chicago’s Packingtown.

The Washington, D.C., delegation garnered significant media attention. On August 20, 1935, the Detroit Free Press published their first photo of Mary Zuk, pictured handing a petition to Calvin Hoover, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) consumers’ council. The headline read, “Wallace Beats Hasty Retreat Before Irate Detroit Women.” Other newspaper such as the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune also reported on the delegation’s trip to the nation’s capitol. The delegation then met with Secretary Wallace. Zuk confronted Wallace about the AAA’s policy to pay farmers to destroy livestock and the resulting inflated meat costs:

“Is the government going to see that meat prices are reduced 20 percent?” Mrs. Mary Zuk, leader of the delegation, demanded of Wallace.

“Under drought [sic] conditions it is impossible to guarantee future meat prices,” Secretary Wallace replied.

“Why does the government pay farmers not to raise little pigs?” Mrs. Zuk countered.

105 Ibid; Dillard, Faith in the City.

106 This was not the first delegation to head to Washington, D.C. In June 1935, a group of Chicago activists led by Rose Saffern and accompanied by Rose Nelson of New York, the Secretary of the United Council of Working Class Women, traveled to Washington, D.C., to demand a reduction in meat prices. Both of these women were actively involved in the Communist Party's organizing attempts to build support for a nationwide meat boycott.


107 Ibid.
Secretary Wallace made a quick retreat to his office after his confrontation with the delegation.

For the housewives, the AAA was at the root of high meat prices. According to the petition they delivered, they believed that government policies such as the forced destruction of livestock; the new processing tax which was “gobbled up by the bankers, loaners, and mortgage holders”; and the “refusal to aid the farmers during the drought, compelling them to sell their cattle for practically nothing,” needed to be stopped. Under such government policies, the boycotters believed that the Big Three packers were reaping the benefits as they translated into continually increasing profits. They demanded an immediate investigation of the packers and the “prosecution of the Packers for profiteering.”

Upon delivering their petition to the AAA’s Hoover and a failed attempt to meet with Roosevelt, the delegation also met with U.S. Representative Dingell who, earlier in August, had submitted a House Resolution at the urging of the Committee for Action Against the High Cost of Living that requested an investigation into “spread between the prices paid to the Producer for hogs, cattle, and sheep and the prices paid by retailers and consumers for meat and meat products.” Initially, Representative Dingell’s resolution went nowhere. While it sparked some colorful debate on the Congressional floor, the resolution failed to win appropriations to fund the investigation. In a September 1935 letter to Zuk, Otis B. Johnson, Secretary of the Federal Trade Commission, reported that “the appropriation bill


109 Ibid.
providing money for this inquiry failed to pass,” and he went on to argue that an inquiry into the high prices of meat in Hamtramck was unjustified given the spike in prices nationally and would fail to uncover the “principle causes” of the increase. However, by the fall, the federal government did begin an investigation “behind closed doors.” Züks was upset about the lack of transparency in the process and questioned the intentions of the investigation. “Shouldn’t we demand that this investigation be held in the open, so that everybody could see and listen to it?” Züks cautioned. “In my thinking, the federal investigation should not be carried out in order that a few officials had an opportunity to kill time somehow.”

As the meat boycott came to a close, Mary Züks did not fade into obscurity like so many housewives that preceded her. In fact, Züks was cast into the public sphere full force when she and other housewives formed the Women’s League to Fight High Prices. In a speech on Polish radio, she compared their efforts to two Polish American war heroes. “Same as [Tadeusz] Kosciusko and [Casimir] Pulaski, who were declared heroes because they fought for freedom of this country, so we, the women, should be remembered for our efforts to free ourselves of shackles imposed by profiteering trusts.” Embracing an ideology of domestic politics, Züks invoked women’s responsibilities as mothers and wives

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11 Mary Züks, “Radio Speech, Translated from Polish,” ALUA, Don Binkowski Papers, Box 2, Folder Züks correspondence.

12 Both Kosciusko and Pulaski were Polish American Revolutionary War heroes who are held in high esteem throughout Polonia. In Illinois, public school students are given the day off from school for Pulaski Day and many local government agencies and libraries close for the day. Ibid.
in her appeal to women to join the Women’s League. “Women! You, who carry on your
shoulders [the] heavy duty of bringing up your children and managing your households,
you, who must work very hard for living, rise to action, support the work of our League
against High Prices...”113 Zuk soon channeled this energy into a successful run for
Hamtramck City Council.

With a broad base of support from organized labor, farmers, the Communist Party,
and a variety of ethnic organizations, Zuk was the first woman elected to the Hamtramck
City Council. Hamtramck’s mayor, with whom Zuk butted heads with throughout the
boycott, fiercely opposed her campaign; the local newspapers such as the New Deal and the
Citizen also repeatedly redbaited her. But, the massive summer mobilization against the
high price of meat that dovetailed into a broader campaign against the overall high cost of
living created an environment ripe for her candidacy. During her tenure, Zuk allied with
Federation of Labor, the UAW, and the state’s Farm Labor party as she helped support the
mass sit-down strikes that permeated the industrial triangle between 1936 and 1937 and
continued to address the high cost of living. Zuk failed, however, to win re-election in 1938.

A number of factors contributed to Zuk’s failed re-election campaign. Two years
after the meat boycott, Zuk’s divorce from her husband Stanley Zuk was widely reported in
the Detroit newspapers as well as the local Hamtramck papers that had opposed her first
run for City Council. According to the newspaper accounts, Zuk demanded full custody of
their two children as well as alimony from her husband. In court, she testified that Zuk beat
her “...every weekend of their 15 year marriage.” When the judge estimated that she would

113 Ibid.
have endured seven hundred beatings, Zuk responded, “It was more than that.” Stanley challenged the divorce, claiming that Zuk was having an affair with a local organizer from the American Federation of Labor and that her earnings from her position on the City Council, as well as additional income from her seat on the Wayne County Board of Supervisors and organizing for the UAW, totaled $3,500 annually while he only earned $45 a week. Stanley’s claims that Mary earned such a high salary were invariably inflated; in 1937, a federal employee working in the executive capacity earned $1,183 annually, while someone working in the insurance and real estate field was earning on average $1,632 a year. The newspapers that once vilified Mary as a “Communist menace” also helped Stanley create a public image of his former wife that was far removed from the struggling mother of the 1935 meat boycotts. The Citizen, for example, published a photograph of a well-groomed Mary Zuk wearing a dress hat, jewelry, and a fur coat. Ultimately, the court granted Mary full custody as well as alimony from Stanley, but the damage was done. In a deeply religious Catholic community, the impact of a divorce regardless of the causes would certainly undermine the support of some 1936 voters. In fact, the Detroit News

\[114\] n.a., "Beaten Weekly," The Detroit News, May 23, 1937; n.a., "Spouse Failed to Support Her She Testifies," The Citizen, September 17, 1937.

\[115\] n.a., "Zuk Demands Recount; $5 Alimony, Says Judge," The Detroit News, May 23, 1937.


\[117\] n.a., "Spouse Failed to Support Her She Testifies".
commented, "...the menfolk of Hamtramck are convinced that if ever there is another woman elected to the council, it will not be Mrs. Zuk."\textsuperscript{118}

Mary Zuk, on the other hand, “dismissed the divorce as a negligible factor in her defeat...”\textsuperscript{119} Zuk believed that her re-election bid was weakened by the “defection of the city’s Communists from her cause.”\textsuperscript{120} The likelihood that there was any one cause is small. Zuk’s gender along with accusations by the media and her husband that she left the welfare rolls for “a position of comparative affluence” certainly contributed to her loss. After 1938, Zuk’s political influence and power faded, though this did not keep the U.S. House of Representatives’ Special Committee on Un-American Activities from listing her as a Communist during their investigation of Communist influences in industrial Michigan. Noting that she was working in one of Hamtramck’s city departments, William Odell Nowell, a former “labor spy” for the Ford Motor Company who also engaged in undercover work for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, testified, “She is still there and is still an active Communist.”\textsuperscript{121}

The local focus of early twentieth century protests such as the 1902 kosher meat boycott do not diminish their historical significance, but it does set them apart from the

\textsuperscript{118} n.a., "Zuk Demands Recount; $5 Alimony, Says Judge".

\textsuperscript{119} Lou Tendler, "Voters Rebel at a "High Hat"," The Detroit News n.d.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

1935 meat boycotts. The motivations of the 1935 meat boycott housewives did not end with a twenty percent reduction in the cost of meat. To many of the Detroit housewives, the boycott represented a chance to more fully insert themselves into the political process, as made evident by the delegations to Chicago and Washington, D.C., as well as Zuk's successful bid for City Council. The depression of the 1930s, writes historian Elizabeth Ewen, “...rekindled the importance of family and community connections. This revitalized political and cultural radicalism posed alternatives to the individualism of the consumer society.”122 Juxtaposing the aggressive picketing and mass demonstrations of working-class housewives and the “reawakening” of the labor movement, the radicalization of protest was a product of the merger of the domestic and industrial spheres creating an opportunity for housewives to use domestic politics as a wedge into the public sphere. The politicization of women’s networks, the reawakening of the labor movement, and the increased cost of meat—a food that was not simply nourishment but symbolic of class identity—combined to create an atmosphere of intense militant sentiment. In the context of the 1935 meat boycotts, Temma Kaplan’s political theory of “female consciousness” is essential to understanding the social and cultural motivations of the housewives. Kaplan argues that through female consciousness “...social cohesion rises above individual rights and quality of life over access to institutional power.”123 By organizing a collective protest against the individual act of purchasing, working-class housewives such as Mary Zuk were placing “social cohesion” over their individual right to consume.

122 Ewen, Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars, 268.

Hamtramck’s working-class housewives realized that meat as a consumer good could be used as a weapon for a political cause. By controlling the resources that were close at hand—the marketplace and the home—housewives were able to alter the traditional trajectory of everyday life. Their strategic campaign, albeit a short-lived moment in historical memory, took advantage of the tools typically reserved for traditional labor organizing campaigns. With the use of these tools, working-class housewives were able to engage in a domestic politics that melted away the strict lines between public and private, shop floor and the home. It was this domestic politics model that working-class housewives embraced as they flocked to labor union auxiliaries affiliated with the CIO.
CHAPTER III

“WE HAVE JUST BEGUN THE FIGHT”:
DOMESTIC POLITICS ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE CIO AUXILIARY MOVEMENT

“The union is entering into every aspect of life, the home and the union are being fused.”
Mary Heaton Vorse

“We acknowledge our responsibility to speak for all women in the homes of American workers... Ours is the responsibility – ours is the opportunity.”
Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries

After the 1935 meat boycotts, Detroit’s working-class was still fuming over the high cost of living, and the emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) provided the chance to end the inequities of industrial Detroit. The history of the CIO is well documented, but the story of the community that supported that organizing is less well known.3 As a study of “the most ignored women within the labor movement,” this chapter uncovers the story behind the organization of the Big Three auto giants, as housewives led...

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1 Mary Heaton Vorse, "Untitled, 1937," ALUA, Mary Heaton Vorse Collection, Box 109, Folder Flint Sit-Down Strike.


a movement that put domestic politics on the front lines between organized labor and the auto industry. 4

Housewives were drawn to the labor movement regardless of their status as wage earners or housewives. With cost-of-living protests still simmering in neighborhoods, Detroit’s housewives were not new to community involvement. In fact, the 1935 meat boycotts, along with subsequent mobilization against the high cost of milk, created opportunities for communities that were once divided by ethnic and racial divisions to protect their family economy and support access to the American standard of living. While some historians argue that it was not until after World War II that ethnic identity in Detroit diminished as the younger generations embraced their ties to the United States in the aftermath of war rather than their ethnic communities, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary archival materials reveal very little reference to ethnic identity as a community marker. 5 In this case, ethnic identity seems to have largely given way to working-class identity in Detroit. For example, in an open letter to the 1938 UAW Auxiliary membership, Gladys Harmer, president of Oshawa Auxiliary No. 27, pointed out that it was “a new era for women in politics...it is clear today that there is taking place an awakening of women of the working class.” 6 And, while the city was still strictly segregated, working-class housewives

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rallied as a group based on class struggle as their husbands engaged in sit-ins and called on their wives to help support organizing drives. With mothers and fathers likely members of ethnic and religious associations, membership in an auxiliary was another opportunity to join an organization that would enable working-class communities to build fellowship and empower themselves both within the workplace as well as in their communities.

One less frequently cited example of this interethnic class solidarity was 1937 sit-down strike of female cigar workers in Detroit’s Poletown. Abandoned by the American Federation of Labor, over two thousand women occupied five of the largest cigar plants in Detroit’s Polish neighborhood with the support of the United Auto Workers (UAW) for thirty-one days. With sweatshop-like working conditions and piecework pay, jobs in the cigar plants were hard on the women’s bodies and provided on average a measly thirteen dollars a week, compared to $15.63 a week earned on average by women in industrial jobs. Occupying the plant took its toll on the families. “Some of the women had small children and they had to breastfeed them,” recalled Helen Piwkowski, a hand wrapper in one of the plants. “Either the grandmother or the father would bring the child in the evening.” On March 20, 1937, the police began evicting the women, plant by plant. At the Bernard Schwartz Cigar Company, seventy-five women occupied the plant in “defiance of a court injunction.” As the police tried to enter the plant, “the women pelted police with

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wooden blocks, snow balls and other weapons until they were propelled, screaming and kicking, to patrol wagons.”\textsuperscript{10} Over the course of these raids, police used clubs, threw gas, and wrestled the strikers as they arrested them. According to the news reports, “most of the disorder was outside the factory, as strike sympathizers pelted the police with small objects.”\textsuperscript{11}

Within days of the police crackdowns on the cigar workers, autoworkers were outraged to hear that some of the women were “...beaten so badly that they were taken to the hospital.”\textsuperscript{12} Seeking support from the mayor, the union requested a permit for a public rally in support of the women. Mayor Couzens initially refused, but relented when the UAW continued planning for the rally. Between 100,000 and 250,000 people met in Cadillac Square to protest the violent police evictions of the strikers. According to the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, the “crowd jammed [a] two-block square stopping traffic.”\textsuperscript{13} This is the climate in which the wives, mothers, and sisters of autoworkers began to organize and develop “a national program that [met] their needs and embrace[d] their interests as women and as part of the labor movement.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Catherine Gelles, "Speech: Labor School, Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, n.d.,” ALUA, Catherine Gelles - Series II, Box 2, Folder 14 - Speeches.

\textsuperscript{13} n.a., "Crowd of 100,000 Masses in Detroit to Back Sit-Down Strikers,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 24, 1937.

\textsuperscript{14} Cobble, \textit{The Other Women's Movement; Congress of Women's Auxiliaries, Proceedings: First Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries of the CIO".}
This chapter explores the organizational evolution of the CIO auxiliary movement by focusing on the CIO’s largest auxiliary, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary as well as the work of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA), the national federation of CIO auxiliaries. In doing so, this chapter illustrates how the CIO auxiliaries built a movement that relied on the political involvement of local housewives as they developed a domestic politics that placed the home at the center of the community. (Figure 1) This picture demonstrates the Auxiliary’s confidence in the power of working-class housewives to build a bridge between the union and the community.

Figure 1. "Woman -- Her "Place" And Her Problems"15

Seeking to “reach into every woman’s home,” the early leadership of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary crafted an auxiliary program that was shaped by the demands of both

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15 From "Woman -- Her "Place" And Her Problems," *Women’s Auxiliary News*, September 1945 in ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, *Women’s Auxiliary News, 1940-51*, Box 3N-D-6, Folder 1945, v.5.
the shop floor as well as the community.\textsuperscript{16} As a result, auxiliary activities ranged from the traditional work of strike support such as setting up and staffing strike kitchens, running day cares, and walking the picket line to community-based work such as launching cost-of-living campaigns, building coalitions with other organizations, and developing and training a network of auxiliary women who were seen as leaders in their communities. In an effort to build an organization that reached beyond the safety of the AFL auxiliaries’ union label campaigns, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary’s National Coordinating Committee believed that their role was to not only “help” the union, but also “...carry on an independent role on matters which concern our homes and families....”\textsuperscript{17} In order to develop leaders, the Auxiliary placed significant emphasis on education and organized leadership trainings. During one training, the instructor urged leaders to “[o]rganize independent auxiliary programs” as a way to give the local auxiliary “...the prestige of an independent organized group.” The Auxiliary leadership believed that an “independent” identity would help them to build the organization during “accelerated union activities.”\textsuperscript{18}

This chapter is broken down into two sections. In the first section, I explore the origins of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary. In addition to understanding the organizational structure of the CIO auxiliary movement, this section also discusses the rise of domestic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Eve Stone, ”'A Year Has Gone by' in Union Auxiliary Women Advance, January 1938,” ALUA, Lillian Sherwood Papers, Box 1, Folder 17 - Union Auxiliary Women Advance.
\item \textsuperscript{17} UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, ”Minutes: National Coordinating Committee, January 6, 1941,” ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Folder UAW 62n, National Coordinating Committee Minutes, 51 Sproat St., Detroit, MI.
\item \textsuperscript{18} CIO Council of Auxiliaries, ”Planning an Auxiliary Program, January 14, 1941,” ALUA, Catherine Gelles Collection Series I, Box 1, Folder 1 - Announcements, 1945-1970; Catherine Gelles, ”Letter to Ruth M. Gladow, August 20, 1956,” ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 7, Folder 21.
\end{itemize}
politics within the labor movement, offering evidence that the UAW Women’s Auxiliary sought to play a role in organized labor that went beyond strike support on the picket lines and in the strike kitchens. This expanded role offered a space for housewives to use their unpaid labor expertise of the home to influence campaigns in their communities. In the second section, I examine the maturation of the auxiliary movement, as the organization became a national leader in the CIO auxiliary movement. With a certain degree of autonomy, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary transformed into a community organization branching out beyond union halls to develop a political program that worked closely with other CIO auxiliaries, the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, and national organizations such as the Consumer Clearing House, the National Women’s Trade Union League, and the National Council of Negro Women, to name a few.

**Strike Kitchens and the Rise of Domestic Politics**

In 1936, Catherine “Babe” Gelles’ husband went on strike at Detroit’s Bohn Aluminum plant. Along with four hundred and fifty other workers, he occupied the plant for twenty-eight days. Gelles, a former Bohn worker, was not sold on the idea of a strike. “Maybe it was for selfish reasons,” she recalled years later. “But having worked at Bohn’s I knew there were quite a few good-looking women working there and I wondered if they would be sitting down, too.”19 Noticing her reservations, Gelles’ brother suggested that she head over to the union hall to voice her concerns. Walter Reuther, then a local union president who ultimately would lead the UAW into its heyday, explained to Gelles and the

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other weary wives why their husbands were striking.\textsuperscript{20} By the end of the meeting, Gelles “was thoroughly sold on the union.”\textsuperscript{21} When Reuther asked for volunteers to set up a strike kitchen, Gelles jumped at the opportunity. “…I rolled up my sleeves and worked all during the strike.”\textsuperscript{22} It was during this wave of sit-downs between 1936 and 1937 that the UAW Women’s Auxiliary was permanently established.

Born in St. Joseph, Missouri, and raised in Colorado, Gelles moved to Detroit with her family when her father, a cattleman, got a job with a packinghouse. After arriving in Detroit, Gelles got a job at Bohn Aluminum and Brass Company. “The wages were low, we worked long hours, and the working conditions were not too good.”\textsuperscript{23} Within a year, Gelles met her husband, married, and left the plant. The Bohn strike was not Gelles’ first experience with labor unrest. As a child, Gelles took part in a 1919 streetcar strike where she “…helped to stop the cars so the older girls could throw rotten eggs at scabs.”\textsuperscript{24} But, it was working in the Bohn plant and her early involvement with the UAW Women’s Auxiliary that propelled her into a life with the union.

The auto industry sit-downs were not transformative just for the workers, but for the wives as well. As workers on the shop floor started to organize their workplaces, housewives were encouraged by the UAW leadership to help with the “domestic” aspects of


\textsuperscript{21} Skeels, "Oral History Interview of Catherine Gelles".

\textsuperscript{22} ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Cobble, \textit{The Other Women’s Movement}, 25; Catherine Gelles, ALUA, Vertical File - Gelles, Catherine.
the sit-downs such as setting up strike kitchens, appealing to local merchants to donate food (this was called the “chiseling committee”), childcare, and organizing reluctant wives to get on the program. The chiseling committee’s outreach to local merchants was often responsible for at least half of the food served to the strikers. The committee got its name from the wife of a striker. When Dorothy Kraus, the wife of Henry Kraus, a UAW organizer in the Polish community, asked her how she succeeded in getting a local baker “to furnish the strikers a dozen loaves a day for free,” the woman coyly replied, “I just chiseled it out of him.”

While earlier unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor also had auxiliaries, they were less militant and organized that the CIO auxiliaries. There were, of course, exceptions to this such as the wives of the Oshkosh, Wisconsin, woodworkers who held pouches filled with eggs, sand, and pepper in one hand and clubs in the other to chase the strikebreakers away from the mill. But, overall, the AFL auxiliaries tended to remain set apart from the union. And, in the eyes of new auxiliary activists such as Gelles, the AFL auxiliaries were “...not a part of the Union, but were mostly for social purposes...the


Auxiliary movement [was] a recent one...[and was] an important connection with the growth of the CIO.”

With a new era of union militancy, housewives were encouraged to establish auxiliaries to support new organizing as well as to participate on the picket line. And, for some CIO auxiliaries such as the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, this new era invited auxiliaries to reach beyond the strike kitchen and into the broader political and social communities.

Shortly after the Bohn sit-down, on December 30, 1936, workers in the Fisher Body Plant at General Motors struck. The sit-down lasted for forty-four days in the dead of winter. As with other strikes, the wives, along with some of the women workers, were asked to leave the plant in order to avoid fueling bad press about men and women spending nights together inside the plant. Frustrated by their second-class role as well as recognizing the unique social role women played, the women workers, along with the wives of the male workers, organized the first UAW Women’s Auxiliary. The Auxiliary set up a strike kitchen, a childcare center, and a first-aid station. Yet, women such as Genora (Johnson) Dollinger, later named “the Joan of Arc of Labor” by the French press, wanted to move beyond the traditional roles of care giving.

Born into a prominent Methodist family in Flint, Michigan, Dollinger rebelled at a young age. Reacting to the class upheaval of her industrial hometown, Dollinger joined the Young People’s Socialist League and attended meetings of the militant Socialist organization the League of Industrial Democracy. By the time she was sixteen, Dollinger was an avowed Socialist who believed in the philosophies of Leon Trotsky. And, after losing a coin toss, Dollinger took off to Ohio to elope with her high school boyfriend Kermit

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27 Gelles, "Speech: Labor School, Port Hope, Ontario, Canada".
Johnson. After returning to Flint the same night, Dollinger went back to her house while Kermit went to his. They kept their marriage a secret for weeks until Kermit let it slip one night at dinner. Dollinger’s father was furious with his daughter for marrying a working-class kid without his permission, but he eventually relented and gave his blessing. Within a year, Dollinger was pregnant and had dropped out of high school; meanwhile, her husband was working as a general laborer.28 Her married life was as far from the comforts of her upper-middle-class life as she could get. She threw herself into Socialist politics with even more gusto.

Dollinger established the Emergency Brigade, a military-style flying squad to aid the picketers. Using the strike kitchens and childcare center as recruiting centers, Brigade members built a network of women willing to put themselves between the workers and the Pinkerton strike-breakers. Dollinger did not sugarcoat the violent reality of Brigade participation. In an Auxiliary meeting, she called on women to join the Brigade: “It can’t be somebody who’s weak of heart. You can’t go hysterical if your sister beside you drops down in a pool of blood.” Dollinger recalled that Brigade members “…didn’t pressure anyone to join. We made it very difficult.” Yet, after years of grinding poverty and a labor movement largely uninterested in organizing industrial worker, women were ready to embrace militant action. During the meeting, an elderly women in her seventies stood up and said, “You can’t keep me out. My sons work in that factory. My husband worked in that factory before he died and I have grandsons in there.” After a lengthy speech, she signed up for the

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28 Genora Dollinger eventually divorced Kermit and married Sol Dollinger, whom she had met in New York City and worked as an organizer. Carlton Jackson, Child of the Sit-Downs: The Revolutionary Life of Genora Dollinger (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008).
Brigade along with dozens of other women.\textsuperscript{29} Within two weeks of the call for women to join the Brigades, more than four hundred women had signed up. It was not for the faint of heart. For Dollinger and other Brigade members, the picket line was the front lines of battle, and they were “the women’s battalion.” She demanded that women “be prepared to stand in front of men if shooting broke out.” \textsuperscript{30} Armed with rolling pins, brooms, mops, and later clubs, the women took their duties seriously.

The Emergency Brigade functioned as a twenty-four-hour crisis response corps. And the women dressed the part. Brigade members embraced their militant identity by wearing military-style uniforms including berets and developing a color-coding system to identify the Brigade’s affiliation. For example, Flint Brigade members wore red; Detroit, green; Lansing, blue; and Pontiac, orange.\textsuperscript{31} In addition to uniforms, many women began carrying concealed weapons such as wooden clubs “...with handles carved to fit a woman’s grip.”\textsuperscript{32} The Brigades became the face of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary movement in the late 1930s. With their pictures on the front page of the \textit{New York Times} and other newspapers beyond Michigan, the Brigades helped the auxiliaries to establish a militancy and relevance that exceeded any previous auxiliary movement.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textsuperscript{30} Jackson, \textit{Child of the Sit-Downs: The Revolutionary Life of Genora Dollinger}. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{31} Skeels, "Oral History Interview of Catherine Gelles".

\textsuperscript{32} Johnson, \textit{Striking Flint: Genora (Johnson) Dollinger Remembers the 1936-37 General Motors Sit-Down Strike}, 17.

\end{flushright}
The impact of their participation in the Brigade was transformative for many women. According to one member involved in the Flint sit-down, “[a] new type of women was born in the strike...Women who only yesterday were horrified at unionism, who felt inferior to the task of organizing, speaking, leading, have, as if overnight, become the spearhead in the battle of unionism.”

The motivation for many women was to support their husbands and families. However, their involvement also developed a confidence among working-class women that was channeled into the growing organization. So, while the impetus in the beginning was to “protect our husbands,” the growth of the organization after the wave of sit-downs revealed a motivation that was as much personal as it was political. While the Brigades were critical during moments of crises such as the sit-downs, it was the day to day work of the local auxiliaries that proved to have staying power and resilience as the UAW pushed to organize the auto industry’s Big Three.

“an organization that is here to stay”

A study of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary (Auxiliary) organizational structure reveals just how effective local auxiliaries were at using domestic politics as a pathway to political participation. In this section, I look at the development of an internal leadership structure that set the Auxiliary apart from earlier AFL auxiliaries as well as the continual struggle of the Auxiliary leadership to define and defend the parameters of membership. A thorough

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35 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Meeting Minutes: National Coordinating Committee, January 6, 1941," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliary, Folder UAW 62n National Coordinating Committee Minutes.
understanding of these two areas of early organizational development helps to recognize how the Auxiliary was a model for building a national movement of housewives during the 1940s, an organization that Laura Davidovich, a member of the Auxiliary’s International Coordinating Committee (ICC), called “...the most progressive, best informed women[sic] organization in the world.”

The first two years of the Auxiliary proved to be rather contentious as different factions vied for control of the newly born organization. Hints of dissent and tension began to surface among the women that were reflected in the UAW leadership itself. In the midst of the organizing drives, one Auxiliary member revealed some of the tensions when she anonymously published a lengthy call to unity between the Auxiliary and Brigade members. Dedicating several paragraphs to the “Relations of Auxiliary to the Brigade,” the author argued that it would be “a serious mistake to attempt to solve such a [leadership] problem by dissolving the Brigade or by turning the Brigade into a committee of the Auxiliary.” Rather than dissolving the Brigade or harnessing its independence, the author argued that the Brigades served a specific service with a membership that stood “...ready to respond to and fulfill their obligations in case of emergencies.” Further, she argued that the Brigades ought to maintain a small amount of autonomy in selecting their own captains, but ultimately must be accountable to the broader Auxiliary and Union policies. She concluded that “[i]f this relationship is maintained, we are bound to avoid any difficulty whatsoever in


the future...”38 Yet, five months later, the Detroit News published a short article on dissent in the UAW. The article reported that a group of “members of the Women’s Auxiliary of the West Side local,” who represented primarily Ford workers, gathered at the office of UAW President Homer Martin to protest the recent appointment of Eve Stone as the first national director of the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries. While the Auxiliary members declined to comment, the article noted that Stone was the wife of George Miles, “one of the leaders of the Communist Party Opposition, an organization which opposes most of the theory of communism and objects to the communist methods in labor organizations.”39

Martin’s appointment of Stone to the top post of the Auxiliary was reflective of his own leadership within the International. As a staunch anti-Communist, Martin’s “right-wing Progressive Caucus” dominated the Executive Committee at this time. Favoring “a policy of accommodation” with General Motors, Martin found support through an alliance with the Lovestonites, followers of Jay Lovestone’s Communist Party Opposition (CPO), as he attempted to kick out any radical forces within the UAW.40 As the wife of George Miles, a leader in the CPO, Stone’s appointment was clearly a political move in an attempt to keep the leadership of the Auxiliary under the control of the Martin and out of the hands of women more sympathetic to the Popular Front groups. In this context, the delegation of the West Side local, which was led by Walter Reuther, was clearly a fight about the future leadership of the UAW as a whole.

38 Ibid.

39 n.a., "Martin Hears Dissentients " Detroit News, October 8, 1937.

40 For more details on Homer Martin’s tenure as UAW President and his Progressive Caucus, see: Lichtenstein, Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit, 104-131.; Kraus, Heroes of Unwritten Story: The UAW, 1934-39, 308.
Eve Stone’s tenure at the helm of the Auxiliary was short-lived and ineffective. At the Cleveland Women’s Auxiliary Conference held in March 1939, Faye Stephenson, chairman of the National Coordinating Committee noted, “...we had very little to speak of in the way of a Women’s Organization.” Yet, by 1940, sixty-nine “functioning chartered auxiliaries” were organized, mostly in the Midwest. And, Stephenson added, “[t]his also proves that after ridding our Organization of the disruptive element, we have not only increased in numbers, but we have increased the political and economic consciousness of the women in the Auxiliary movement.” Just as the Communist Party was active in the cost-of-living campaigns, their presence in the founding of the UAW was also critical. The attitudes of many of the auxiliary leaders echoed the sentiments of Mary Zuk and Catherine Mudra. In the documentary With Babies and Banners, auxiliary members recalled that it would have been impossible to organize without the support of the Socialist and Communist Parties given their widespread involvement in organizing rank and file autoworkers.

Faye Stephenson became involved with the UAW Women’s Auxiliary during the 1936 Fisher Body strike in Cleveland. And, like Catherine Gelles, her pedigree as a labor activist reached back into childhood. In 1908, at the age of thirteen, Stephenson left school to work in a cigar factory. During the Great Depression, she worked with “Relief Agencies

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41 Faye Stephenson, “A Year of Progress, 1939-1940” in the Women's Auxiliary News, March 1940, " ALUA, Women's Department - Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1940 v. 1.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

for the unemployed” and led a delegation to Washington, D.C., for unemployment insurance.\textsuperscript{45} As a forty-year-old mother of three, Stephenson helped organize UAW Women’s Auxiliary No. 35 during the Fisher Body strike. She also played a leading role in the 1939 film \textit{United Action: Story of the GM Tool and Die Strike}. Because of her leadership in Cleveland, Stephenson was elected to the UAW Women’s Auxiliary’s International Coordinating Council.

The auxiliary movement provided the infrastructure that earlier organizing by housewives lacked. Their affiliation with a labor union offered the chance for housewives to access a ready-made pool of members through the wives, daughters, and girlfriends of male union members; contributed financial stability through direct financial support and in-kind donations; and helped to establish a more direct link between the home and the shop floor. Central to the CIO auxiliary movement was the principle that the home belonged in the center of the labor movement, not on the periphery. In order to educate housewives, the CIO auxiliaries published pamphlets that called on women to link their home life to the labor movement. In the pamphlet, “Are You a One Armed Batter?” the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries appealed to wives to organize their husbands about the important balance between home and the workplace. “But what do you think of a union man who pays his dues, goes to meetings, organizes new members, but doesn’t organize his wife into the union auxiliary?”\textsuperscript{46} Another pamphlet, “For Women Only?” drew attention to the belief that problems on the shop floor impact the whole family. “We must understand the problems of


\textsuperscript{46} Congess of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Are You a One Arm Batter?," (ALUA, Catherine Gelles Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder #22 - Printed Material: 1944).
our men in the shop, because their problems are our problems, too.” 47 During the war, the CWA wanted husbands to understand that wives were in the fight, too. Wives are not “...at the movies. She isn’t playing cards,” argued the pamphlet “Union Wives, United for Victory.” “She in the union hall, right beside you....” 48 Other education pamphlets, such as “Build a Better Life” and “Let’s Get Organized,” focused auxiliary members on how to build a strong organization and develop leadership. 49 These educational materials helped organize auxiliary members and drew connections between their household struggles and the struggles of their husbands in the shop.

At the 1937 UAW Annual Convention, the UAW General Executive Board issued a charter for the Women’s Auxiliary. The charter outlined the relationship between the International Union and the Auxiliary, but offered no guidelines as to how the internal, day-to-day operations of the Auxiliary should function. The priority for the International Union was that the Auxiliary “be subordinate to and comply with all requirements of the constitution, by-laws or other laws of the International Union...” 50 The International also allotted five delegate seats for the Auxiliary at UAW conventions that were allowed “a voice

47 Ladies’ Auxiliary Committee, "For Women Only?,” (ALUA, Catherine Gelles Papers, Series I, Box 1, Folder 22: n.d.).


but no vote.”51 And, finally, the International appointed an Executive Board member who functioned as the liaison between the International leadership and the Auxiliary leadership as well as dedicated financial support to cover the costs of organizing and staffing Auxiliary activities. The UAW Constitution referred to this position as the National Director for the Women’s Auxiliary.52 Yet, unlike the AFL auxiliaries, this position was in title only. The Auxiliary quickly established a national structure with elected leaders that clearly directed the agenda. And, in fact, the National Director often failed to appear at leadership meetings.53 However, the chartered auxiliaries were given the autonomy to elect their own leadership, develop a national structure to promote organizing and program work, and organize their own conventions that were typically held in conjunction with the UAW conventions.

By 1940, the priority for the Auxiliary leadership was to launch a viable internal organizational structure. Stephenson called on Auxiliary locals to “[s]end in ideas of what you think would be the best...structure.”54 She went on to remind the locals that the

51 Ibid., 255.

52 Ibid.

53 Throughout the UAW Women’s Auxiliary International Coordinating Committee (ICC) meeting minutes there are frequent references to the absence of the National Director at the meetings. And, in some instances when the Auxiliary leadership needed clarification so as not to contradict the UAW’s by-laws they were require to postpone decisions so that they could contact the director. For example, in 1943, Carl Swanson was the National Director and the ICC meeting minutes during that year refer to his absence and seem to imply a frustration. See: UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, ”Minutes: International Coordinating Committee, June 1943,” ALUA, UAW Women's Auxiliaries, Box 1, Folder 1-2, Hotel Commodore-Perry.

54 Stephenson, ”'A Year of Progress, 1939-1940' in the Women’s Auxiliary News, March 1940".
leadership “...can only be as effective as the cooperation that they receive from each Local Auxiliary...”55 Ultimately it was the National Coordinating Committee (NCC), which by 1942 became the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) as Canadian local auxiliaries were chartered, that oversaw the running of the CIO’s largest women’s auxiliary.56 In 1940, Faye Stephenson was elected president of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary and presided over the quarterly ICC meetings. The ICC meetings were held throughout the Midwest, with usually five to six auxiliary members elected to represent local auxiliaries in a national capacity. The NCC served several purposes. First, the committee determined the organizational program. Second, local auxiliaries submitted reports of their activities to help the leadership gauge membership involvement but also to educate other locals about one another. And, finally, the ICC provided resolutions to local auxiliary conflicts or questions about by-laws. This would prove to be particularly important as the UAW International sought to define the parameters of membership.

The Auxiliary leadership communicated with the local auxiliaries primarily through their monthly newsletter, the Women’s Auxiliary News. Throughout the 1940s, they used the Women’s Auxiliary News to disseminate information about programming and priorities. While there was not a designated editor to the News, the newsletter published articles by both the elected leadership as well as pages of reports from auxiliaries around the country. They also printed recipes, social announcements, advice, and legislative reports from both the UAW and the CIO. The newsletter was so popular that many local auxiliaries kept “standing orders place for copies” and the leadership was thrilled to see the newsletter

55 Ibid.
56 Throughout the remainder of the chapter, when I refer to the ICC, I am referring to both the NCC prior to the 1942 name change and the ICC.
function as “an educator and organizer.” In the early years, many of the articles encouraged women to see themselves as political players. “WE ARE DETERMINED TO ORGANIZE and to exercise our concerted strength as CONSUMERS, as CITIZENS and as a SECTION OF LABOR...” The articles also pushed auxiliary members to organize other women to join the auxiliary movement. “There are many homemakers who may not be feeling so joyful about the Union...Is it that they are not intelligent?” asked Helen Goldman, the NCC Secretary. “Absolutely Not. It takes a process of education. Are homemakers, with all their responsibilities, too busy to leave their homes for a couple of evenings a month? Again No!...Just as our union has issues to face in building and strengthening the UAW-CIO, the Auxiliaries have issues on which to build...”

Increasing their membership numbers was an important focus of the Auxiliary. The vision for the Auxiliary leadership was to have membership numbers that matched those of the UAW. While there numbers would never reach beyond 150,000 compared with the

57 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Meeting Minutes: National Coordinating Committee, January 6, 1941".

58 National Coordinating Committee, "CIO Auxiliary Program, Women’s Auxiliary News, April 1940," ALUA, Women’s Department -Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1940, Volume 1. Emphasis in the original.

59 Helen Goldman, "How Can We Interest Her, April 1940," ALUA, Women’s Department -Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1940, Volume 1. Emphasis in the original.

60 In a 1942 radio address, Catherine Gelles commented that for every one of the 1.5 million UAW members there should be an auxiliary member. “A million and a half militant women joined solidly in the ranks of the more than a million and a half Union members...” See: Catherine Gelles, "15 Minute Radio Address, Station Wjbk, n.d.," ALUA, Catherine Gelles Papers - Series II, Box 2, Folder 9 - Radio Broadcast.
over one and half million UAW members, they were by far the largest CIO auxiliary in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{61} But the issue of membership was not so black and white.

Within the UAW, the issue of membership was a persistent thorn in the side of the leadership. It also was one of the most contentious issues between the auxiliary leadership and the UAW International Executive Board. Just as the CIO auxiliaries were gaining a national reputation as an organization with leadership and networks that linked the labor movement with the community, the impact of World War II was a significant blow on the membership base. As the overall number of female workers increased during the war, industrial unions such as the UAW saw a significant rise in the number of women workers. In the auto industry, the number of female workers rose from 28,300 in October 1941 to 203,000 in November 1943, and by 1945 women comprised twenty-eight percent of the UAW’s membership of one million workers.\textsuperscript{62} Among CIO auxiliaries, the spike in women workers meant a decrease in auxiliary membership and participation. And, for the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, the membership decline was particularly powerful. This decline had as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} There are no complete membership lists remaining from the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries. However, the leadership made claims of membership numbers throughout the 1940s. For example, during her testimony before the Senate Banking and Currency Committee, Gelles noted that she represented the interests of 150,000 auxiliary members. See: Catherine Gelles, "Testimony Given to the Senate Banking and Currency Committee on Price Control June 7, 1945," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 6, Folder #8 - Testimony, C. Gelles before Senate Banking Cmte.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Walsh, Margaret, “Gender and the Automobile in the United States,” http://www.autolife.umd.edu/Gender/Walsh/G_Overview5.htm, accessed on April 8, 2011. It is interesting to note, however, that just prior to the war as the U.S. economy recovered from the 1938 recession, women in the auto industry were struggling to recover their jobs through seniority. As historian Nancy Gabin’s research illustrates, the auto industry with little resistance by the UAW was opting to hire less skilled male workers over experienced women workers. For more in this see, Nancy Gabin, \textit{Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); ibid.
\end{itemize}
much to do with the war as it did with the UAW International’s membership policies for local auxiliaries.

According to the UAW International by-laws, female union members were prohibited from maintaining dual membership in their local auxiliary and their local union shop.\textsuperscript{63} And, as more women joined the UAW as union members, the International chose to strictly enforce the policy, thereby forcing auxiliary members to abandon their auxiliary membership once they began their new wartime production jobs. As a result, local auxiliaries began to hemorrhage members due to the UAW Executive Board’s refusal to allow female union members to maintain membership in both the local union and the auxiliary. In her annual report, International Coordinating Committee (ICC) member Josephine Duffy provided a detailed accounting of the Detroit auxiliaries’ activities. However, she concluded that “[i]t is getting increasingly hard to organize Auxiliaries in Detroit, as more and more women are going into the shops to work and with housework, children to care for, union work, etc., they just have no time for the Auxiliaries.”\textsuperscript{64}

This strict interpretation of the International by-laws was not accepted without some resistance by the Auxiliary leadership. At the December 1942 meeting of the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries’ International Coordinating Committee (ICC), a local auxiliary leader raised the issue of dual membership. Requesting an interpretation of the UAW Constitution, one auxiliary member inquired as to “whether or not a woman may belong to both a local

\textsuperscript{63} Emil Mazey, "Letter from Mazey to Catherine Gelles, 1951," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 7, Folder 21.

\textsuperscript{64} UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "International Coordinating Committee - Fifth Annual Officers Report 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries Collection, Box 1-3, Buffalo, New York, p. 7.
union and an Auxiliary.”\textsuperscript{65} The response from Catherine Gelles, an ICC member and now the Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, pointed to the need to tread carefully and defer to the male leadership of the UAW Executive Board. Gelles motioned that Carl Swanson, the National Director of the Auxiliary appointed by the UAW Executive Board, “bring this subject to the attention of the International Executive Board for an interpretation.” Yet, Gelles also requested that Swanson be sure to note “the fact that many of our Auxiliary members will belong to Local Unions due to the replacement of women in war jobs.”\textsuperscript{66} With the International by-laws trumping the logical arguments of local auxiliary leaders, the issue of dual membership persisted.

Outside of Detroit, UAW auxiliaries sidestepped the UAW by-laws. For example, in Los Angeles, eighty percent of the auxiliary membership at the three of the largest locals—Chrysler, General Motors, and Ford—entered the industry to work. According to ICC member Louise Bennett’s annual report, despite their new jobs and union membership, the women remained active in their auxiliary work. However, Bennett commented, she doubted whether or not the level of involvement could be maintained. As a report by the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA), the national federation of CIO auxiliaries, noted, the Los Angeles area members “...live in widely scattered area[s], covering several counties, driving many miles to work and making transportation a problem.” Between the demands of work and wartime rationing, it became “impossible” for the women to attend the general membership meetings that were tied to the workplace. In their first annual report, the CWA

\textsuperscript{65} UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, ”Minutes: International Coordinating Committee - Hotel Roberts, Muncie, In, December 1942,” ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 1, Folder 1-1.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
reported that the war was drawing many active auxiliary members into “...positions of leadership in their neighborhoods.” And, while prior to the war this was not a problem, “...gas and tire rations, fear of air raid alarms, and other factors connected with the war, women have been either unable or reluctant to take part in meetings held at a distance from their homes.” 67 Within the UAW, Bennett urged the ICC to allow the women to organize along geography rather than workplace arguing “....we could provide for Auxiliary work on more of a community basis.” 68

In addition to the issue of dual membership, geography—neighborhood versus workplace—was also an issue for auxiliary members. From the start, the membership framework permitted women whose husbands, brothers, and fathers worked in a UAW shop to join an auxiliary. Thus, women joined the auxiliary that was affiliated with their husband’s local. However, if the UAW local did not have an affiliate auxiliary or the husband’s workplace was outside of the neighborhood, many wives chose to join an auxiliary that was convenient to them either based on proximity to their home or because they already were friendly with members of the auxiliary. In 1941, the UAW Executive Board put an end to unregulated membership. At the Constitutional Convention, the Executive Board changed the parameters of membership to read:

“Where there is no Auxiliary to the Local Union of which sponsor is a member, she shall be eligible to join any Auxiliary until such time as the Local of which her

67 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Officers’ Report to the Second Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries-CIO, 1942," NARA II, RG 188, Box 41, Women’s Auxiliary Conference CIO.

68 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "International Coordinating Committee - Fifth Annual Officers Report ". 
sponsor is a member has an organized Auxiliary, at such time she shall take a transfer to said Auxiliary.”  

This by-laws change “deeply concerned” the Auxiliary leadership; -primarily, they were concerned that it would result in a decline in membership. In a collective statement sent to UAW President R.J. Thomas, auxiliary leaders urged Thomas not to change the by-laws at the upcoming Convention stating that:

“A great many of the Women who have joined Auxiliaries outside of their Locals because of the proximity or congeniality have made very good Auxiliary workers, if we force them to leave the Auxiliary of their choice now after years of work and friendly relations, we are almost certain to lose them permanently.”

Despite their protestations, they were also quick to mention that they would “cooperate whole heartedly with whatever interpretation” the Executive Board made, but did encourage them to consider a grandfather clause that would exempt current members from transferring their membership. This letter was an early indication that, while the UAW appreciated the efforts of wives in the strike kitchen and on the picket lines, they failed to understand the place of housewives within the broader labor movement.

“no longer politically mute”

The efficacy and community power of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary was evident during the 1941 Ford organizing campaign. After the 1937 attacks of UAW leafleters by

69 UAW Women’s Auxiliary Presidents, "Letter to Uaw President R.J. Thomas, September 25, 1941," ALUA, Walter Reuther Papers, Box 5, Folder 3.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.
Ford’s Service Department at the Rouge, the UAW pulled back from organizing Ford Motor Company. But with collective bargaining contracts at GM and Chrysler, the UAW returned their attention to “the citadel of the open shop.”72 As long as Ford remained non-union, the UAW’s ability to build a strong and lasting labor presence in the auto industry was at risk. After the UAW won recognition at Ford, the Auxiliary leadership reflected that their role in the campaign would also become legendary. When “[t]he story of the drive...is written,” one report noted, it “...will bear us out.”73 Yet, the glamour and sizzle of the Emergency Brigades bravado during the 1936-37 sit-downs overshadowed the contributions of working-class housewives to the Ford campaign. And, furthermore, labor historians proceeded to write this history with barely a whisper of the contributions made by housewives.74

The 1941 Ford organizing campaign is illustrative of the way in which the UAW Women’s Auxiliary succeeded in using domestic politics to link the private and public spheres. On the one hand, the Auxiliary existed to serve the needs of the union during organizing campaigns and strikes; on the other hand, the Auxiliary believed that they were also the organization that could foster a community-labor coalition. This was the essence of

72 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Ford Organizing History, January 1941," ALUA, Catherine Gelles, Series I, Box 1, Folder 20 - Ford Organizing, History, and Reports.

73 Ibid.

domestic politics among labor union auxiliaries that led working-class housewives to access political citizenship that eluded them during the early cost-of-living protests. The Auxiliary’s strategic plan embodied the overall vision of the leadership. While acting as a support organization for the UAW organizers, the Auxiliary’s campaign was a full-on assault within the community. Auxiliary members provided first aid on the picket line while feeding over 40,000 sandwiches and two tons of coffee to picketers; organized a march of 5,000 women led by the Women’s Drum and Bugle Corps through town; and launched a media campaign that included a radio skit that mimicked a house visit.  

It was the house visit that most demonstrated the way in which domestic politics functioned as an avenue to increased political participation. On January 21, 1941, at a meeting of the Detroit auxiliaries and fifty Ford workers’ wives, the Women’s Auxiliary Ford Organizing Committee was established. With representatives from each of the Detroit auxiliaries and four Ford workers’ wives, the committee launched a comprehensive campaign to “explain from a woman’s point to view” how they enjoyed a higher standard of living since their husbands were UAW members. Critical to the campaign was persuading wives that their husbands should join and appeal to the women still “suspicious” about the union.

The visiting committee was charged with the responsibility to visit Ford workers’ homes and meet over coffee to discuss the benefits of joining the UAW to the wives. Using

75 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Ford Organizing History".

76 Ibid.

77 n.a., "Ford Hour—Radio Transcript, March 20, 1941," ALUA, Catherine Gelles, Series I, Box 1, Folder 20—Ford Organizing, History, and Reports.
the slogan "Every Auxiliary member get a Ford member!" the Organizing Committee held a competition among the auxiliaries to see which local could sign up the most workers for the union. At the end, the winning auxiliary was presented with a banner in recognition of their efforts in organizing Ford. The Auxiliary as well as the UAW as a whole placed an emphasis on reaching out to African American workers and their families. During the visiting campaign, the leadership asked auxiliaries to pay “special attention...[to] Negro women” and urged them to join the Auxiliary. The UAW leadership also poured resources into organizing African American Ford workers. Working together, the UAW Negro Activities program and the Women’s Auxiliary No. 233 distributed 50,000 copies of Negro Ford Facts at the gates of the Rouge as well as in African American neighborhoods.

For the UAW, the success of the Ford organizing campaign was critical to the future of organized labor in the auto industry and the financial well-being of Ford workers and their families. But, for Auxiliary members, the success of the campaign was about more than financial security for their families. The Ford campaign transformed Detroit’s working-class housewives as they realized that “...it is no longer necessary or feasible for one sex to fight alone.” The rejuvenated labor movement under the CIO was providing the space for working-class housewives to battle for class and gender equality. Reflecting on

78 Catherine Gelles, "Ford Drive Now/Women's Auxiliary News, February 1941," ALUA, UAW Women's Department, Women's Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1941, v. 2; ibid.

79 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Ford Organizing History."

80 Walter Hardin, "Negro Organization at Ford, n.d.,” ALUA, Catherine Gelles, Series I, Box 1, Folder 20 - Ford Organizing, History, and Reports. For more on the history of the UAW and the African American community see: Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW.
the legacy of women’s struggles for justice, the Auxiliary leadership commented that women’s auxiliaries “...have been playing the same vital role that women have always played in fighting against injustice.” However, unlike the women before them, “they are no longer politically mute.”

“WE ARE NOW GROWN UP”

“...Women’s Auxiliaries are not only organizing for strike kitchens but it is an organization that is here to stay.”

On the eve of World War II, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary leadership viewed their organization as a “distinct and individual group” within the UAW. They sought to keep local auxiliaries from becoming “introverted” and encouraged them to develop relationships outside of the UAW with local community and political organizations such as parent-teacher groups, churches, and the League of Women Voters. As the auxiliary movement expanded across the nation, the Auxiliary transformed itself from an internal UAW group to a community organization that developed an identity distinct from the International. While the Auxiliary continued to contribute to organizing the UAW and

81 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Ford Organizing History".

82 UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "Third National Conference, Women’s Auxiliaries, UAW-CIO, August 1941," ALUA, UAW Women's Auxiliaries, Box -, Folder - Annual Conference, Buffalo, NY.

83 UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "Minutes: National Coordinating Committee".

84 Catherine Gelles, "Untitled, n.d.," ALUA, Catherine Gelles Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

85 UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "Some of Our Gripes, n.d." ALUA, Gelles, Box 1, Folder 2.
supporting job actions, the Auxiliary leadership also turned to campaigns such as driving down the cost of living and supporting legislation that would improve the lives of the working-class including wage-earning women and African Americans.

As housewives used auxiliaries to gain a foothold within the labor movement they simultaneously distinguished themselves nationally. The Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA) was critical to building a national movement. Officially launched in 1941, the CWA sought to “unite all wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of CIO members into a strong and courageous organization, regardless of nationality, race, creed, age, religious or political belief.”

Yet CWA leaders hoped to build a movement that transcended union membership to include the working-class as a whole. In her opening remarks at the founding convention, Faye Stephenson, now the president of the CWA, called on auxiliary members to build a movement that encompassed “all the women in workers’ homes.”

Stephenson along with her fellow auxiliary leaders envisioned an organization that followed in the “glorious tradition of the women’s movement” by organizing and exercising their “concerted strength as consumers, as citizens, and as a section of labor.” The CWA very consciously sought to claim a seat for housewives in the vast network of New Deal era women’s organizations. Furthermore, the CWA fervently tracked a political course for housewives that positioned them as a critical constituency and “major spokesmen for the

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86 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "By-Laws of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries of the CIO, 1944," ALUA, UAW Research Papers, Box 32, Folder 20 - Women’s Auxiliaries.

87 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Proceedings: First Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries of the CIO", p. 3.

88 Ibid., 7, 11.
wives of organized workers and for the interests of the American housewives” in the Roosevelt administration.\textsuperscript{89}

The entry of the U.S. into World War II created an opportunity for auxiliaries to demonstrate their maturity as community organizations. With networks based in both the workplace as well as neighborhoods, auxiliaries were ideal organizations to help raise awareness about wartime programs. One early example of their ability to reach into the homes of working-class families across the nation was “Beat Hitler Week.” For one week in February 1942, CIO auxiliaries hosted community meetings, arranged for radio spots, and fundraised in an effort to draw attention to “the meaning of and the purpose” the war.\textsuperscript{90} Within the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, Detroit and Los Angeles proved to be the most successful with both auxiliaries conducting open houses and organizing “special events for every day of the week.”\textsuperscript{91} They organized educational programs about nutrition and rationing, helped to raise money through a “Buy a Defense Stamp” day, and organized delegations of auxiliary members to lobby local government and elected officials to offer defense training courses for women. In Detroit, Catherine Gelles opened the week with a broadcast on WJBK, a local Detroit radio station that provided space for the voice of the working-class on the radio dial in more than fourteen different languages.\textsuperscript{92} The “Beat

\textsuperscript{89} Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Officers’ Report to the Second Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries-CIO”.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "CIO Women on Alert, 1942," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, \textit{Women’s Auxiliary News}, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1942, v. 3.

\textsuperscript{92} H.F. Reves, "Detroit Air Profile Covers Wwj and Three 250-Watters; Pioneering Is Traditional," \textit{The Billboard}, September 1, 1945.
Hitler Week” campaign blended a clear message about the importance of the war and democracy with an opportunity for working-class women to engage in a variety of public events. Auxiliary leaders recognized that the war created an opportunity for women to “...become increasingly important in the economic and political life of [the] country...”

Programmatically, the CWA called on housewives to “assume part of the historic task which confronted labor;” namely, mobilization for war while developing a “Victory program” that sought to mobilize women to safeguard their standard of living. With offices in Washington, D.C., and a network of state and city councils across the country, the CWA effectively professionalized the women’s auxiliaries by functioning as a legislative lobbying group as well as the national coordinating organization for auxiliaries. In their first year, the CWA rallied support for a legislative program that included a tax bill, price control and rationing, childcare and school lunch funds, the abolition of the poll tax, and protection for the rights of labor. The CWA put together an education campaign that relied heavily on correspondence with local auxiliaries and individuals through the Washington News Letter, a monthly newsletter; What’s Cooking in Washington, a legislative bulletin, and, perhaps most effectively, a regular monthly CWA column, “Women in War,” published in individual union newspapers and the CIO News.

The driving force behind Stephenson’s vision to build a movement that encompassed all housewives was the CWA’s Secretary Treasurer, Eleanor Fowler. Based in

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93 Faye Stephenson, "Untitled in Women’s Auxiliary News, March 1941," ALUA, Catharine Gelles, Series II, Box 2, Folder - 6, Printed Material, 1941.

94 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, ”Officers’ Report to the Second Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries-CIO”. p1

95 Ibid.
Washington, D.C., and elected at the 1941 convention along with Stephenson, Eleanor Fowler came out of the National Newspaper Guild’s Women’s Auxiliary. Married to C.W. Fowler, a journalist who wrote for the CIO News and later became the editor of the FTA News, the newspaper for the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union of America (FTA), Fowler was not a “typical” auxiliary housewife. In fact, her pedigree reads more like a middle-class reformer such as Florence Kelley. Educated at Bryn Mawr, the London School of Economics, and the Sorbonne, Fowler certainly could not be categorized as a working-class housewife in the same way that Catherine Gelles or Faye Stephenson were. However, Fowler used her education to trumpet the needs of working-class housewives through her weekly column, “Women in War,” in the CIO News.96 During the war, Fowler’s column gave her a national platform and she quickly became one of the most nationally recognized auxiliary leaders among the membership as well as with political allies. Her essays turned women’s attention away from the details of housekeeping and cooking and instead focused on critical social issues for working families during the war. With titles such as “Indiana Women in Political Drive,” “Women’s Stake in Reconversion,” “Negro Women Finding Freedom in PAC Work,” and “Childcare to Keep Women on War Jobs,” the CWA effectively educated a large swath of working-class housewives by providing substantive political articles that both informed and functioned as national calls to action.

96 The CIO News was edited by Len De Caux, a labor journalist, who was a member of the Communist Party and among the more radical voices in the CIO. De Caux’s wife, Caroline Abrams De Caux, also took a leadership role in the CWA. Fowler and De Caux seemed to share many of the responsibilities of building partnerships with other organizations during the 1940s. They were also good friends with the Fowlers. This will be explored more in Chapter Four.
Fowler’s education and location made her an ideal candidate to lobby on behalf of the auxiliaries. As one of the six paid auxiliary staff nationally, the CWA paid Fowler four hundred and fifty dollars between November 1941 and October 1943 to cover the cost of her childcare in the form of a “maid for...[her] children.”97 During the time she lived in Washington, D.C., as a young wife and mother, Fowler employed an African American housekeeper who helped care for her children.98 In a 1943 letter to Mary Anderson, Director of the Women’s Bureau, Fowler’s dependence on her maid as a childcare provider is evident. Blaming her slow reply to an earlier letter sent by Anderson, Fowler apologized for “not acknowledging” the letter by writing that “[m]y family has all had the flu and my housekeeper has left so that I have to stay home with the children.”99 Unable to avoid the burden of the double-shift, Fowler depended on her salary paid by the CWA to work effectively as CWA’s Secretary-Treasurer. And, she was no slouch. Fowler was a woman about town as she testified on Capitol Hill butting heads with the likes of Alice Paul of the National Woman’s Party, represented the interests of the working-class housewives through coalition politics in groups like Caroline Ware’s Consumer Clearinghouse, attending conventions of other CIO auxiliaries, and publishing her weekly CIO News column.

As most organizations, especially women’s organizations, were staffed through volunteer efforts, Fowler’s salary stands out. But, she was not the only paid auxiliary organizer in the 1940s. Nationally there were six paid staff—three full-time and three part-

97 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Financial Statement, November 20, 1941 – October 31, 1942, 1942," NARA II, RG 188, Box 41, Women’s Auxiliary Conference CIO.

98 Emily E. LaBarbera Twarog, by Jane Morse, Personal Email, in Possession of the Author.

time. As the largest and most successful auxiliary, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary paid Catharine Gelles as the Secretary-Treasurer; District 3 of the United Electrical Workers also paid a full-time staffer; and, in Los Angeles, the auxiliaries combined resources to employ a regional Los Angeles Auxiliary organizer. Both the American Newspaper Guild and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers’ Auxiliaries paid an organizer to work part-time and the CWA employed Eleanor Fowler, the Secretary-Treasurer, on a part-time basis.\(^\text{100}\) While six paid organizers was a far cry from the fully staffed labor unions, the auxiliaries clearly benefited from their position within the labor movement. Yet, despite the advantage of the paid organizers, the movement’s ability to undertake any programming is a testament to the commitment of local auxiliary members on the ground. It also reinforced the weight of the CWA’s concerns over the decision by some auxiliary members to pour their energy into their neighborhood organizations rather than maintain involvement in their auxiliary. Without an army of volunteers, the ability to build a national movement of housewives would fade.

It would be a mistake at this point to overlook the potential influence of the Communist Party in the CIO auxiliary movement. Just as in the case of the UAW, the Communist and Socialist parties both played roles in helping to build the auxiliary movement. And, as the next chapter will demonstrate, local auxiliaries relied on the neighborhood networks of the Communist Party to organize cost-of-living protests. All five of the auxiliaries, excluding the Los Angeles coalition, that employed an organizer were purged from the CIO during McCarthy era, and activated an internal purge of Communist

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\(^{100}\) Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Officers’ Report to the Second Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries-CIO".
allied staff and organizers, or left the CIO altogether.101 Among some of the most radical CIO unions, there was clearly awareness among the union leadership that domestic politics was critical to building a strong labor movement and voice among the working-class.

While Fowler’s status as an educated, seemingly middle-class woman indicates that the auxiliary movement was not wholly a movement of working-class housewives representing themselves on the local and national level, the majority of the auxiliary leadership remained under the control of working-class women such as Stephenson and Gelles. Faye Stephenson, the CWA president, ascended from the ranks of Cleveland’s UAW auxiliaries. In 1943, Catherine Gelles, a Detroit auxiliary leader, took on a new national role when appointed director of the national childcare program for all CIO auxiliaries.102 Additionally, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary was frequently the only other individual auxiliary that held a seat at the table of national coalition meetings. While the CWA and the AFWAL would often attend national strategy meetings with allied women’s organizations, it was less common for individual auxiliaries to attend. A close examination of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary reveals the evolution of the CIO auxiliaries’ identity as both a traditional support organization for organized labor as well as a community resource for working-class housewives throughout the nation. By working in close partnership with the CIO, the


102 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "International Coordinating Committee - Fifth Annual Officers Report".
CWA, and other women’s organizations, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary fostered a model for working-class women’s participation in political movements.
CHAPTER IV

FROM CONSUMER PROTEST TO CONSUMER ACTIVISM:
WORKING-CLASS HOUSEWIVES AND COALITION POLITICS DURING WORLD WAR II

One of the problems now confronting us...is the soaring cost of living...We housewives, who are the buyers of the Nation, are closer to this problem than anyone else. We can do no greater service for our Union than to make surveys and keep out Union informed on Prices and Rents [sic].¹

In January 1941, the Women’s Auxiliary News reported their first victorious battle of against the high cost of rent. The Detroit area Auxiliaries’ Council appealed to the Detroit Common Council and demanded the aldermen begin a thorough study of Detroit housing. The Auxiliaries’ Council representatives pointed out to the aldermen that Briggs and Chrysler, two Detroit manufacturers, were benefiting from government aid by renting new defense plants at a dollar a year into which the government was putting $20,000,000. One of the Auxiliary members told the Detroit Common Council,

Not one dollar of that twenty million will go to housing the new employees in those plants. We believe in national defense, but we also believe that national defense should begin with the defense of a decent standard of living for workers and their families.²

For the decade leading up to and through World War II, working-class housewives used their membership in labor union auxiliaries to build a consumerist popular front that helped them gain legitimacy as a movement that went beyond their labor union affiliation. Consumer activism established working-class housewives as a bloc with political influence

¹ Helen Goldman, "Secretary's Report to International Coordinating Committee, April 17, 1941," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliary Collection, Folder UAW 62n.

² n.a., "Women Oppose Rent Increases in Women’s Auxiliary News, January 1941, 1941," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department - Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1941 v. 2.
on a local and national level. This chapter examines their influence as they cultivated relationships with the state through agencies such as the Office of Price Administration (OPA) and built coalitional alliances beyond the labor movement with groups such as the Consumer Clearinghouse, a New Deal coalition of organizations representing the working-class, women, African Americans, and others that came together to combat the high cost of living. By tracing their journey from the home, into the community, and eventually onto the national political stage, we gain a more complex understanding of the political participation of housewives in the 1940s. Long seen as a conservative and traditionalist group, their actions dismantle this characterization.\(^3\) Working-class housewives involved in auxiliaries devoted significant energy to challenging the high cost of living and demanded full access to the American standard of living for working-class families—white and African American alike—by emphasizing the connection between their role as the family manager and the wages earned by their husbands.

In 1942, Helen Goldman, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary Secretary, sent a memo to President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressing frustration over the rising cost of living.

Goldman wrote, "The rapid increases in living costs of the past few months have made it increasingly difficult for us to stretch our husbands' pay checks to meet the minimum needs of our families." Goldman was not alone, of course. The United States' increased involvement in World War II drove prices up at an alarming rate while union paychecks stagnated or decreased because of wartime wage freezes. Grassroots organizations responded by developing a consumerist popular front. During the 1940s, consumer activism became an integral part of many organizational platforms. This chapter tells the story of how working-class housewives became both sought after by government agencies, such as the Office of Price Administration, as well as influential leaders within the consumer movement through their participation in the Consumer Clearing House (CCH). While their status as political players was relatively brief in the 1940s, this moment in time offers yet another window into women's political participation.

The use of consumer protest to force change has a long tradition among women in the U.S. Prior to the late 1930s, consumer protests resulted in temporary price reductions, short-lived community organizations, a flurry of news coverage, and, in a handful of cases, limited access to the halls of power. By the 1930s, neighborhoods were boiling over with

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4 Flora Y. Hatcher, "Memorandum to Miss. Ruth W. Ayers, July 16, 1942," NARA II, RG188 (OPA), Box D-6 (Women), Folder - Correspondence of Flora Y. Hatcher, July 1941-December 1942

anger at the high cost of meat, milk, and heating oil. For example, in 1935, housewives across the country joined forces with Popular Front organization to boycott meat as they called on meat packers to lower their prices and the government to hold the producers accountable. As the Detroit area housewives joined with Popular Front organizations to boycott meat in 1935, meat boycotts erupted in other major cities such as Chicago and New York City. Yet, despite an array of neighborhood victories, women did not gain any significant institutional power. The combination of the rise of a more militant working-class supported by the CIO and the entry of the United States into World War II created an environment ripe for a collective working-class women’s voice.6

A study of labor union auxiliaries during this time reveals a shift in the relationship between working-class housewives and the use of consumer protest. While this is not the first time working-class housewives used consumer concerns to demand an impact on their standard of living and to stabilize the family economy, it marks a moment in time when these demands evolved from protests to coordinated activism that levied some measure of political influence. In his recent study of consumer activism in the United States, historian Lawrence Glickman argues that Americans have historically understood consumption in political terms and that “...purchasing goods...is a fundamentally social act, with far-reaching consequences.”7 In response to his argument, historian Susan Levine pushes back

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6 For other examples of this argument see: Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Storrs, "Left-Feminism, the Consumer Movement, and Red Scare Politics in the United States, 1935-1960".

7 Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America*, 3; ibid.
and interrogates Glickman’s use of the term “politics” asking what is the difference between activism and politics. And, to take it a step further, Levine asks, “...at what point do consumers become activists and at what point does consumer activism become political?”

This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, seeks to answer this question for specific moments in time. For working-class housewives in the 1940s, consumer protests paved the way to a grassroots, bottom-up activism.

Using the language of domestic politics, auxiliary members sought and received a response from the state as well as allies concerned about sustaining the American standard of living. The CIO auxiliaries’ relationships with the OPA and the CCH helped working-class housewives to gain access to the halls of power. Established during World War II to curb high prices, the OPA was not only the most popular government agency that enjoyed widespread support among labor unions and consumers, but it was also the largest. Assigned “to restrain inflation and preserve mass purchasing power,” the OPA was the second-largest government agency (after the U.S. Post Office) with paid and voluntary staff that numbered over 250,000 and more than twice as many economists as the U.S. Treasury Department. During the war, the OPA was a persistent presence in consumers’ lives as they relied on ration stamps and price lists to consume most of their day-to-day goods. Perhaps, most importantly, the OPA’s reliance on consumers established an army of housewives that were schooled in the details on wartime consumer issues.

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9 Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 179. According to the OPA, by 1945, for every paid OPA employee there was three volunteer community members (29.9%) staffing 5,578 war price and rationing boards across the country. These volunteers were disproportionately made up of housewives. See: Office of Price Administration, *The Story of Wartime Rationing* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O.: Office of Price Administration, February 1945), 21.
Business leaders saw the OPA as a direct threat to a laissez-faire economy and feared market regulations would outlive the war. As the war came to a close, conservatives began to mount an assault on the OPA. Consumer activists anticipated the backlash and formed the Consumer Clearing House (CCH). Organized in 1943 by Caroline Ware, a New Deal activist and historian, and Donald Montgomery, a former New Deal staffer and legal counsel for the UAW, the CCH was founded as an activist coalition with a mission to influence policy at the OPA and focus attention on price control by raising the profile of issues such as: grades and standards, school lunches, food stamp plan proposals, and other matters directly related to stabilization.\(^{10}\) The driving force behind the CCH was Caroline Ware. A New Dealer married to a fellow New Deal economist Gardner Means, Ware was a well-educated woman of privilege born into a family of socially conscious Unitarians. Growing up in Brookline, Massachusetts, Ware attributed her class-consciousness to her childhood observations of the class divisions between the “top of the hill”—professional and business Protestants—and the “bottom of the hill”—Irish Catholic blue-collar workers.\(^{11}\) Educated at Vassar, Ware trained as a historian and applied her craft in all of the organizing and education work she did for the rest of her long life. By World War II, Ware was a seasoned activist and published historian. Her leadership at the CCH was a natural fit as she moved among working- and middle-class communities with ease and functioned as the tie that brought many of these organizations together.


\(^{11}\) Pauli Murray, Caroline F. Ware, and Anne Firor Scott, *Pauli Murray & Caroline Ware: Forty Years of Letters in Black and White*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1.
The period between the rise of the CIO and the conservative backlash of the post-WWII period empowered working-class women to assert their needs and make clear their desire for a state that involved itself in the day-to-day economics of American families. In 1938, Persia Campbell of the Consumers’ National Federation (CNF) noted that Washington, D.C., was “an ‘open sesame’...I never have the least difficulty in making appointments in or out of the government.”\textsuperscript{12} It was this sense of connection to the New Deal democrats and their institutional backing that combined to create a confidence in the public sphere. Using a language of domestic politics to buttress their position, labor union auxiliaries sought to build a movement of housewives.

During World War II, housewives gained increased popularity among government staffers as the Roosevelt administration sought to keep the cost of living under control as the US’ involvement in the war increased. With the launch of the 1941 Home Front Pledge Campaign, the Roosevelt administration urged consumers to see themselves as the “greatest contribution to Victory.”\textsuperscript{13} The campaign was imagined as a community effort through which consumers would have “a simple, direct effort...to ‘hold the line’ against the rising cost of living and to assure a fair share of food for everyone through rationing.”\textsuperscript{14} The government sought to harness the buying power of housewives and turn the “less glamorous service [of] home making, meal making, penny saving...” into an essential


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 4.
contribution to the power of a nation. The time could not have been more advantageous for working-class housewives who saw the OPA’s outreach as an opportunity to link domestic politics through their roles as wives, mothers, and consumers and the labor movement as well as to deepen their political participation. The Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries and their affiliates took this task seriously. The reliance of the OPA on community involvement along with the legacy of working-class housewives’ consumer boycotts created a mutually beneficial relationship between state and the community with housewives as the critical link. This interdependency empowered working-class housewives to fully embrace an active role in their community while simultaneously building the labor movement. As historian Meg Jacobs argues, the “synergy of state and society resulted in what supporters hoped, and opponents feared, was a natural evolution of New Deal statecraft.”

From their founding, CIO auxiliaries used consumer issues to defend a standard of living that they believed was a direct result of labor’s growing power. For example, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary recognized the unique position local auxiliaries held in defining and defending their standard of living. In her speech “What Price Milk?” Hester LaDuke, a UAW Auxiliary board member from Flint, Michigan, called on the UAW housewives to educate themselves about the complexities of consumerism and advertising. “The American standard of living. What is it?” LaDuke asked the audience. “Educators have defined it, economists have analyzed it, liberals have said we must have it, but it has remained for labor to go out and fight to get it...Food. The cost of living. There are so many phases of this,

15 Jacobs, Pocketbook Politics.

16 Ibid., 180.
that we must study each one in its own place to be able to thoroughly recognize this problem.”

Similarly, Estelle Cody, a local auxiliary leader in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, called on housewives to engage with “…the educational advantages offered…” by auxiliary membership to become “better citizens.”

With the support of the CIO Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA), a national federation of auxiliaries, working-class housewives in communities across the country parlayed their commitment to organizing the unorganized into a campaign to improve “the living standards, the health, and the morale of the people of the Nation.” In Albany, New York, the CIO Ladies’ Auxiliaries expressed support for “taxing those who can pay” by shoring up support for New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman’s 1940 budget proposals. Mary Santo, a Transit Worker Union auxiliary member and New York director of CIO Ladies’ Auxiliaries, testified at the state budget hearings claiming that the progress of the CIO was “daily…threatened and attacked by the rising cost of food and clothing, and through all sorts of legislative propositions made by so-called ‘taxpayers’ and their financial backers to

17 Hester LaDuke, "What Price Milk?, 1938," ALUA, Lillian Sherwood Collection, Box 1, Folder 17.

18 Estelle Cody, "Why You Should Join an Auxiliary, March 1942," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3D-N-7(6), Folder 1942, v. 3.


20 Herbert H. Lehman was New York’s first Jewish governor, and succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt when he was elected president in 1932. A dedicated New Deal liberal, Lehman garnered support from both the Democratic Party as well as the American Labor Party. In 1949, he ran and won the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Senator Robert Wagner who left the Senate due to ill health. Robert P. Ingalls, Herbert H. Lehman and New York’s Little New Deal (New York: New York University Press, 1975).
further burden the average consumer.”\textsuperscript{21} Santos went on to state that CIO women’s auxiliaries would “organize” against all “encroachments” on working-class incomes. Similarly, in West Virginia, local CIO auxiliary members gathered for two days to discuss the expansion of a program that would support “…National Defense [sic] through improved living standards” and pledged “100 percent cooperation” to Governor [Matthew M.] Neely’s State Anti-Profiteering Committee.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., a delegation of UAW Women’s Auxiliary members kicked off a national campaign opposing wage control legislation by lobbying legislators on Capitol Hill. “We are convinced...that much of the argument for wage control is an attempt to delay and defeat the establishment of price and rent control legislation,” declared the delegation that spoke on behalf of 10,000 women.

By 1941, tensions between the state and labor were rising. Among working-class housewives, the primary issue was the rising cost of living including foodstuffs, rent, and access to affordable childcare. With the support of the CIO, auxiliary members focused their attention on the state both locally and nationally by demanding regulation and intervention to keep the cost of living inline with wages. Working-class housewives used their experience, knowledge, and identity as consumers and household managers to pressure the government to prioritize the needs of the American people over the machinations of the free market and the demands of business leaders. Auxiliary members couched their opposition to wartime policies such as the Little Steel Formula and no-strike agreement by


\textsuperscript{22} n.a., "W. Va. CIO Auxiliaries Hold Confab," \textit{CIO News}, September 15, 1941.
calling on Congress to allow them "to do the important job of strengthening the human defenses" by providing affordable food and shelter.\textsuperscript{23} And, for a brief window of time, working-class housewives experienced increased access to the state through their relationship with the Office of Price Administration, a wartime agency whose success depended on the volunteer efforts of an army of housewives. And, while this was certainly not the first time in American history that women's protests impacted the cost of living, it is notable for the influence that women had directly on the state and policy.

With growing frustration over the highly political nature of BLS statistics, the CIO established their own research division during World War II. In doing so, the CIO was able to provide statistical frameworks separate from the BLS numbers that offered a more complete picture of the domestic economy of the working class. In a joint study, the AFL and CIO argued that the cost of living had jumped by more than 40 percent between 1941 and 1944.\textsuperscript{24} Blaming the rise on the inadequacies of the Little Steel formula, CIO unions sought stricter cost-of-living regulations to offset their weakening wages in the face of increasing food and housing costs. In the \textit{CIO News}, C.W. Fowler, a labor journalist and husband of the CWA's Eleanor Fowler, argued that the Bureau of Labor Statistics offered an inaccurate assessment of the cost of living between 1941 and 1944.\textsuperscript{25} By not including a

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\textsuperscript{24} C.W. Fowler, "Brother, Can You Spare $1.74 For $1's Worth of Groceries?" \textit{CIO News}, January 31, 1944.

\textsuperscript{25} C. W. Fowler spent his life as a labor journalist. He wrote for the \textit{CIO News} and was on staff with the UE. More notably for this work, he was married to Eleanor Fowler, the
\end{small}
broad enough spectrum of goods, the BLS’ claim that the cost of living increased only 23.4 percent was viewed as a slap in the face of the working class, which was experiencing far greater increases in the cost of food and housing. Fowler pointed out that the BLS “resolutely refuses to survey rent costs in boarding houses, trailers, rooming houses, etc.—despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of workers are living in such places.”26 Phillip Murray announced to the CIO executive board, “If I am compelled to take my choice between [the BLS] and some steel worker’s wife...my inclinations will naturally run to the facts presented to me by the housewife.”27 The dispute between labor and the BLS ultimately forced FDR to appoint a special committee to resolve the questionable statistics.28 Battles such as these turned labor’s attention away from the shop floor and toward the marketplace, thereby reinforcing the relevance and power of the women’s auxiliaries in the labor movement as well as the political arena.

Secretary-Treasurer of the CWA and frequent writer for the CIO News as well. During the 1940s, Eleanor Fowler based much of her work out of Washington, D.C., and functioned as the voice and representative of the CWA with coalition partners and on Capitol Hill. See Chapter Three for more biographical details.


28 Jacobs, Pocketbook Politics, 211.
**Housewives as Housewives**

The OPA pursued auxiliaries like a bee to honey. On November 5, 1942, Flora Y. Hatcher, who started her policy career in the Office of Price Administration, sent a memo to Dr. J. Paul Leonard, the director of the Consumer Division in the Office of Price Administration (OPA). The Consumer Division functioned as a critical governmental hub that mapped the usefulness of key organizations to OPA and sought to establish working relationships with women’s and African American organizations as well as labor unions. One organization in particular struck Hatcher as an essential group with which to build an alliance. With the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA), Hatcher wrote, there are “...[e]ndless possibilities...it seems urgent to work with this group as soon as possible, - otherwise we will lose ground already gained.”

With the expansion of the OPA under the jurisdiction of Leon Henderson, OPA sought to build vast grassroots networks through alliances with housewives. With a powerful budget the size of the Social Security Board’s and a staff of over a quarter million including a volunteer army consisting largely of housewives, the OPA was a massive governmental organization that “touched the daily lives of ordinary citizens more than...any other agency.” Unlike any government agency before or after it, the OPA embraced participatory democracy producing, as historian Landon Storrs argues, “a model of a powerful interventionist state that was as alarming to the Right as it was inspiring to the Left.”

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29 Flora Y. Hatcher, "Memorandum to Dr. J. Paul Leonard, November 5, 1942," NARA II, RG188 (OPA), Box D-6 (Women), Folder Correspondence of Flora Y. Hatcher, July 1941-December 1942.

organization or combination of organizations represents all of the women who must be mobilized for this job," the CWA was a formidable organization with a vast network with the potential to reach into the homes of CIO members.\textsuperscript{31} With war production open full throttle, CIO membership soared. Despite the loss of 600,000 coal miners when the United Mine Workers of America pulled out of the federation, CIO membership reached 3.9 million by 1944. And, in unions with strong, well-organized auxiliaries, membership increased up to almost eight times the pre-war numbers. For example, the UE leapt from just under 50,000 in 1939 to 432,000; the Mine, Mill, and Smelters jumped from 30,000 to 98,000; and the UAW, of course, went from 165,000 to over 1 million.\textsuperscript{32} Hatcher’s sense of urgency was not overstated. With labor union density at a national high, OPA’s program could potentially be welcomed into as many homes through alliances with both CIO and AFL labor union auxiliaries.\textsuperscript{33}

The OPA actively sought the early support of the CIO auxiliary members. Attending the first CWA convention, Helen Gregory, a field representative for the Consumer Division of the OPA, used the language of the labor movement when she emphasized that a higher

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\textsuperscript{31} Julia Katz, "Memorandum on Participation of Housewives in the Enforcement of Price Ceilings and Rationing Regulations, July 1942," NARA II, RG188 (OPA), Box D-6 (Women), Folder Correspondence of Flora Y. Hatcher, July 1941-December 1942


\textsuperscript{33} In her memo to Dr. Leonard, Hatcher was unsure of the usefulness of AFWAL, the AFL’s auxiliary organization. And while AFWAL’s militancy and organizational skills were pale in comparison to the CWA, they did encourage their membership to focus on consumer issues. And occasionally attended consumer coalition meetings such as the Consumer Clearing House meetings.
\end{footnotes}
cost of living was “a wage cut for you.”34 Gregory went on to encourage the CWA to support the OPA as they established “experimental consumer information centers” nationally and asked for their “wholehearted cooperation.” 35 At the same conference, over 100 delegates representing 100,000 CWA members mapped out a program for the coming year placing the “protest of [the] rising cost of living” as one of the “most important tasks.” They also amended the “consumer pledge,” which “commit[ed] the housewife to buy carefully, to take care of the things she has and to waste nothing,” to conclude with an anti-profiteeing commitment: “I will cooperate with all other consumers to guard against profiteering.”36 Just as Mary Zuk and the housewives of the “meatless summer of 1935” attacked the profits generated by high meat prices, auxiliary members also sought to regulate the profits businesses were earning while families struggled to meet their basic needs.

By 1942, the CWA was encouraging their membership to work with government agencies such as OPA in an effort to regulate the cost of living and to preserve the value of their husbands’ union wages. In fact, early in the year, the CWA spearheaded a national campaign to urge Leon Henderson, the director of the OPA, to establish a ceiling on prices. With “tens of thousands of letters demanding price ceilings and rationing from all parts of the country” flooding the OPA offices, the national pressure forced Roosevelt to announce a seven point anti-inflationary program and the OPA to announce the General Maximum


35 n.a., "Women’s Place in Labor’s Fight Discussed by Auxiliaries".

36 n.a., "CIO Women Map Program to Aid Defense, Democracy," CIO News, December 1, 1941 December 1, 1941.
Price Regulation (GMPR). The GMPR froze prices of “all commodities and services not specifically excluded or covered by another regulation office” at the maximum price recorded in March 1942. With price controls in place, auxiliary leaders believed that it was their responsibility to both “improve government regulations” and administer the regulations. Thus, the time for collaboration could not have been more opportune for either the CWA or OPA.

Before her departure from the CWA to work as a burner in a Baltimore shipyard, Julia Katz, the national director of the CWA, argued that a successful consumer campaign “requires organizations of housewives as housewives.” In a two-page memo to Flora Hatcher, Katz wrote: “We are...convinced that the best way to guarantee that the millions of American housewives on whose support the whole price control program depends, will not act against price control, is to organize them to work for price control.” With housewives at the helm, Katz offered a three-point plan she believed would lead to OPA’s success in communities across the country. The CWA strategy included: educational groups that mobilized community support, a network of liaisons that linked consumers and merchants that would essentially function as a rank and file grievance committee defraying the “unnecessary burden from the local rationing boards,” and, finally, as community morale

37 Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Officers’ Report to the Second Annual Conference of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries-CIO, 1942," NARA II, RG 188, Box 41, Women’s Auxiliary Conference CIO.

38 Ibid.

39 Katz, "Memorandum on Participation of Housewives in the Enforcement of Price Ceilings and Rationing Regulations".

40 Ibid.
builders who would host forums on household management.\textsuperscript{41}

While there was clearly a mutual benefit for both the CWA and their affiliates along with the OPA, in the early years the OPA seemed to be overwhelmed by the extent of these possibilities. Hatcher expressed frustration over the lack of attention paid to building relationships with women’s organizations such as the AAUW and the CWA within the OPA’s Women’s Activities Branch. In a memo to Ruth Ayers, who was charged with setting up the Branch, Hatcher offered four pages of detailed comments about policy. In particular, Hatcher was concerned about systems of communication on both national and local levels. Hatcher noted that a letter arrived from the CWA “urging OPA to set prices at retail level.” And while the letter was sent in advance of the announcement regarding the General Maximum Price Regulation policy, it was several weeks after the “price control program was underway” before the letter was answered by the staff. For Hatcher this was a critical oversight as she believed that the Women’s Activities Branch staff did not “recognize [the letter’s] importance,” thus undermining a critical relationship between the OPA and a national women’s organization.\textsuperscript{42}

Despite the CWA’s belief that auxiliaries should partner with the OPA, the CWA leadership grew frustrated with the slow, bureaucratic pace of price control enforcement. With the passage of the 1942 Emergency Price Control Act, the CWA called on their member organizations to pressure OPA Director Leon Henderson to ration scare goods,

\textsuperscript{41} ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Flora Y. Hatcher, ”Memorandum to Miss. Ruth Ayers, June 6, 1942,” NARA II, RG188 (OPA), Box D-6 (Women), Folder - Correspondence of Flora Y. Hatcher, July 1941-December 1942
regulate prices, and set price ceilings on all goods where “profiteering” persists.\textsuperscript{43} The CWA used their \textit{Washington New Letter}, a publication distributed to member auxiliaries and used to keep CIO auxiliaries informed of calls to action as well as activities around the country, to urge auxiliary members to write to Henderson. “URGE HIM TO EXTEND RATIONING TO ALL SCARCE GOODS. URGE HIM TO MOBILIZE HOUSEWIVES TO HELP ENFORCE PRICE CEILINGS.”\textsuperscript{44} In order to pressure Henderson and the OPA, the CWA leadership suggested a variety of strategies such as: insisting on labor and community representation on rationing boards; establishing community committees to watch and monitor local price violations, and a national petition campaign meant to rally the attention of working-class housewives and to pressure Henderson to build a network between the OPA and the community.\textsuperscript{45} In New York, auxiliary members attended a price control demonstration at Madison Square Park. Aggravated with the OPA, the Greater New York Council of CIO Auxiliaries commented in their newsletter that a “mighty demonstration of housewives would impress the government and get results. Let’s plan for it.”\textsuperscript{46}

By 1943, the OPA finally launched a volunteer price-checker system, much to the relief of many auxiliaries. In the March 1943 issue of the \textit{UAW’s Women’s Auxiliary News},

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  \item \textsuperscript{43} Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Ration for Victory, n.d.," NARA II, RG 188 (OPA), Box 41, Folder - Women’s Auxiliaries.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Washington News Letter, 1942," monthly publication, NARA II, RG 188, Box 41, Women’s Auxiliaries, Washington, D.C. Emphasis in the orginal.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "Ration for Victory".
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Greater N.Y. Council of CIO Women’s Auxiliaries, "The Auxiliary Woman, 1942," newsletter, NARA II, RG 188, Box 41, Women’s Auxiliaries.
\end{itemize}
the auxiliary called for members to volunteer as price checkers. "At long last the Office of Price Administration has announced that it will start a system of volunteer price checkers, and has called on labor to help set it up."\textsuperscript{47} Dorothy Keene, the president of the UAW Women's Auxiliary, "urged each and every member of the UAW-CIO Women's Auxiliary to volunteer and work for what we believe in and have fought for."\textsuperscript{48} The CWA appealed to patriotic duty and demanded that "[t]he housewife in every union household must be enlisted."\textsuperscript{49} These calls to arms were not unusual; the World War II rhetoric was pervasive in neighborhoods throughout the country. But, what is notable about the OPA appeal to housewives and the nationwide mobilization of CIO auxiliaries was the prospect that working-class women had found a link to the state through domestic politics that had evaded them during the decades before the war. And, in turn, the OPA was persistent in their desire to work with them.

To facilitate their outreach, the OPA established branches to reach out to the broader community including organized labor, middle-class women, and consumers. For auxiliary members, there was overlap between the three branches, as they were engaged in activities that touched on issues of both class and gender. This crossover is further evidence of the CIO auxiliaries' ability to use domestic politics to bridge organizations. The local OPA councils functioned to “carry out regulations” and “administer price control and

\textsuperscript{47} Women’s Auxiliary News, "OPA Calls for Volunteers to Serve as Price Checkers, March 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department - Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1943, v.4.

\textsuperscript{48} Dorothy Keene, "Do Your Part, March 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department - Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1943, v.4.

\textsuperscript{49} UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "'Stop!! Auxiliaries Mobilize to Fight High Prices' in Women’s Auxiliary News, May 1943 May 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department - Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1943, v.4.
rationing on the local level,” and were not “empowered to act on matters of national policy.” They were, in essence, the ground troops who interacted with the community, but held little authority or decision-making powers. However, the OPA staffers did express willingness to communicate recommendations and concerns from the local communities. The OPA’s Labor Advisory Committee was under the guidance of Donald Montgomery, a New Deal staffer who left the Department of Agriculture to work with the UAW and was a strong ally to the CIO auxiliaries and worked closely with the CWA’s Eleanor Fowler on cost of living concerns. For example, in Philadelphia, OPA staff met with representative from labor unions, auxiliaries, and the Communist Party. Claiming to represent 27,000 community members, the organizations pushed the OPA on price controls and wanting an explanation for the growing disparity between wages and the cost of living. Community delegates to the OPA’s Labor Advisory Council argued that wage freezes and price controls needed to be “consistent.” They pointed out that the Little Steel formula had limited wage increases to fifteen percent while prices has risen “far more” than fifteen percent. In Pittsburgh, OPA staff met with forty labor representatives who expressed similar concerns about the imbalance between wages and the cost of living. Beatrice Seimeincic, a delegate of the United Foundry Workers, “declared that wives patronized black markets because of insistence from husbands who, working at strenuous jobs, require more meat than is

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50 Office of Price Administration, "Report of Meeting with Labor Delegation, April 26, 1943," NARA, RG188 (Office of Price Administration), Box 78, Folder Philadelphia LAC (2) - Correspondence with OPA Office.

51 Given the active role the Communist Party took in mobilizing neighborhoods throughout the 1930s to fight the high cost of living, there presence at the table was not particularly surprising. See Chapter One for more details. However, by the end of the war, the Communist Party was no longer an active participant in coalitional efforts such as the CCH.
provided under the rationing program.”\textsuperscript{52} With limited staff, the OPA needed organizations such as the auxiliaries to educate consumers to avoid black market goods. Auxiliaries took their campaign against the black market seriously cautioning housewives that a “flourishing black market helps Hitler because it brings food shortages and high prices.”\textsuperscript{53} The ability of the auxiliaries to act as the organizing and education arm of the OPA was appealing to both groups.

The efforts of the OPA to recruit community volunteers opened up opportunities for many Americans previously excluded from the functioning of the state to now act as enforcers of state policy. This appealed to working-class housewives in particular because they had come to believe that there was “such a thing as a fair price.”\textsuperscript{54} The OPA as an institution broke down barriers as the department relied heavily on individuals and organizations to gather and disseminate information. For example, In Altoona, Pennsylvania, the CIO had only two locals by 1944. But, according to John T. Burke, the OPA Regional Labor Advisor, the women’s auxiliaries included “...some exceptionally good workers...” who were responsible for “...doing a fair job of educating the rank and file to the merits of the OPA.”\textsuperscript{55} And, in San Francisco, the regional Labor Advisory Committee

\textsuperscript{52} Pittsburgh Labor Advisory Council, "Pittsburgh District Labor Meeting, September 24, 1943," NARA, RG188 (Office of Price Administration), Box 78, Folder Pittsburgh LAC (2) - Correspondence with OPA Office.

\textsuperscript{53} UAW Women’s Auxiliary, "Stop!! Auxiliaries Mobilize to Fight High Prices’ in Women’s Auxiliary News, May 1943 ".


\textsuperscript{55} John T. Burke, "Letter to Mr. Cleon O. Swayzee, April 10, 1944," NARA II, RG (OPA) - need to find the full citation.
distributed a booklet for housewives titled, "You Signed a Pledge...Are You Paying Too Much?" The eleven-page booklet offered an illustrated outline of how community ceiling price lists function, what market-basket prices are, and how to enforce price regulation in the marketplace. The overall message of the booklet centered on the responsibility and obligation of the consumer (represented in the booklet as white well-dressed women) to monitor and enforce the OPA’s ceiling prices.

Within these pages we have put in rhyme, for you to see,
The ceiling price that has been set on each commodity.

But each price listed ‘tho today will be exactly right.
May change to meet conditions that bob up just overnight.

Changes, however, will be few so don’t put this book away –
Shop wisely – know the proper price set by the OPA.  

Knowing the proper price, however, was not always so easy for the consuming housewife. In Los Angeles, seven auxiliary women from the CIO Women’s Auxiliary Council brought seven packages of hamburger to the their local OPA office to get clarification on the relationship between the price and quality of the hamburger, a staple item in most working-class homes. With many places selling lesser quality hamburger that was “pale” and high in “beef fat” at prices above the ceiling price, the auxiliary members who were well-educated on the finer details of OPA pricing policy asked questions such as: “What is

56 San Francisco District Office of Price Administration, "You Signed a Pledge...Not to Pay More Than Top Ceiling Prices...Are You Paying Too Much?, February 1944," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 33, Folder - Consumer Materials, Nat. Defense Advis. Commission, Consumer Advisory Committee, Illustrative Material.
hamburger?"; “Don’t you have regulation regarding fat content?”; “How many points [per pound]?”; “How can a housewife tell about fat content?” In response to this last question, the women were met with an astounding answer. “...if you think it has too much fat, you should buy at least ¾ lb.—get a receipt—and take the meat unopened to the Laboratory in City Hall for chemical analysis. If hamburger is found to have more than 28% fat report this to your Local Rationing Board and the OPA will act on it.”

Apparently the fat regulations in ground meat varied between the city regulations and the OPA regulations often contradicting one another. This issue was as much about price controls as it was about the patriotic duty of Americans to salvage fat. As the Greater New York Council of CIO Women’s Auxiliaries reminded their members, “...your can of waste fat can blow up a Jap...” But, it was also about empowering consuming housewives—middle- and working-class alike—to act as “experts” on quality and price controls. By allowing housewives to make “test purchases” as evidence, housewives were given a new authority in the marketplace as “uniquely qualified advocates.”

The OPA's many councils created yet another wartime path to fuller political participation for working-class housewives, but their potential as long-term organizations that could influence policy change was limited. While auxiliaries continued to call on their membership to support the efforts of the OPA for both patriotic as well as economic reasons, CIO auxiliaries also recognized that once the war came to a close, the OPA and

57 Women’s Auxiliary News, "Hamburger Hits the Headlines, July 1943," ALUA, UAW Women's Department, Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1943, v. 4.

58 Greater N.Y. Council of CIO Women’s Auxiliaries, "The Auxiliary Woman, September 1942," NARA II, RG 188 (OPA), Box 41, Folder - Women’s Auxiliaries.

price controls would be under attack and working-class families would possibly face another spike in the cost of living. In an effort to influence consumer policies, the CWA and the UAW Women’s Auxiliary along with the CIO Cost of Living Committee joined a coalition of organizations that believed they could generate a unified national voice to help regulate the cost of living.

**Building Alliances in a Cold Climate**

With reconversion on the horizon, auxiliary leaders anticipated an attack on price controls and a spike in the cost of living. And, with several years of consumer activism behind them, organizations like the UAW Women’s Auxiliary and the CWA were not interested in throwing in the towel. Instead, they joined a coalition of working- and middle-class organizations to help establish the Consumer Clearing House. With Eleanor Fowler as their representative at the table, the CWA along with the UAW Women’s Auxiliary took an active role in the organization alongside middle-class groups, labor unions, organizations representing women, African Americans, farmers, and parents to name a few. While the CCH was made up of a large network of organizations, there was a core group that met monthly between 1943 and 1947. Other labor groups such as the CIO and the American Federation of Labor Women’s Auxiliaries joined the CWA at the CCH meeting. In addition to labor support, the American Association of University Women represented by Caroline Ware, the League of Women Voters, the Consumers’ Union, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Federation of Settlements, the National Farmers’ Union, and the National Education Association were the most active member organizations. While they were not always at the meetings, a variety of organizations representing African Americans
were also involved such as the National Council of Negro Women and the National Congress of Colored Parent Teacher Associations.\textsuperscript{60}

The CCH functioned as a coalition of organizations concerned about cost of living issues. While not a well-funded group (at the September 15, 1944, meeting, the minutes reflected a balance of $7.20 in the treasury) the strength of the CCH was an opportunity to bring a diverse collection of like-minded organizations together to influence governmental policy. And, while the CCH sought recognition from Capitol Hill as a unified national consumer voice, it did not attempt to speak on behalf of the member organizations. This was clear from the discussion of letterhead at a December 1944 meeting during which it was decided to have letterhead with the CCH name on it for the purpose of requesting information and inviting speakers but not for publicity purposes. This work would be left to the individual organizations or groups of organizations.\textsuperscript{61}

Between 1941 and 1947, the CCH held regular meetings to strategize about ways to regulate the cost of living and keeping it in line with wages. During the war, the CCH focused on cost-of-living issues relevant to the war effort such as rationing and labeling.

\textsuperscript{60} A study of the existing CCH meeting minutes shows a fairly diverse coalition of organizations that united over the issue of cost of living. Between 1943-1945, the minutes reflect monthly meetings with about a quarter of their at least thirty-five member organizations attending. By 1947, attendance was significantly reduced. A substantial number of the meeting minutes are housed at the FDR Library in the Caroline Ware papers. For an example of some of the meeting minutes, see: Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes, 1943," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 19, Folder - Consumer Materials, Consumer Clearinghouse, 1943; Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes, February 12, 1945," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 19, Folder - Consumer Materials, Consumer Clearinghouse, 1945; Consumer Clearing House, "Consumer Clearing House Constitution, May 21, 1943," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 19, Folder - Consumer Materials, Consumer Clearinghouse, 1945.

\textsuperscript{61} Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes, December 18, 1944," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 19, Folder - Consumer Materials, Consumer Clearinghouse, 1945.
However, even before the war ended, the CCH anticipated a fight on Capitol Hill to maintain price controls once the war ended. Thus, two of the top issues for the CCH were preserving the OPA and rent control. As the coalition members drove the agenda, these were the issues that resonated with communities across the country. And, the CCH sought to expand their national reach beyond the beltway. The CCH discussed “stimulating the development of local consumer clearing houses composed of branches of the national organizations…”62

The CWA’s Eleanor Fowler joined with Gerson Levi of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and Jeanetta Brown of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) to work on this project. Within a couple of months, the subcommittee headed by Fowler returned to the CCH and offered a report that strongly encouraged the building of local networks. They proposed several cities that they believed would benefit from building up local CCH committees: Washington, D.C., Baltimore, New Orleans, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles. In addition to organizing new local groups, the CCH felt that there should be outreach to existing local consumer groups in cities such as: New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago. However, they pointed out that this type of work would put “an additional work burden” on the national officers of the organizations and suggested that a CCH organizer be hired to organize these local groups. Given the low account balance of the CCH as of late 1944, the CCH decided to hold off on taking “aggressive steps toward formation of local groups” until they had resolved the issues of financing.63

Despite CCH’s inability to form local CCH coalitions, they poured their energy into preserving the OPA as the war came to a close. Using slogans such as “Price Control or

62 Ibid.

63 Consumer Clearing House, ”Meeting Minutes“. 
Panic” and the “OPA must be defended,” the CCH coordinated nationwide local support for a price-control week as they worked with the bipartisan Congressional Committee for the Protection of the Consumer to renew price controls.64 For one week in May 1944, more than two hundred organizations representing the “…AFL, CIO, Railroad Brotherhoods, consumers, women’s auxiliaries, farmers, white collar, religious, veterans and businessmen,” focused local attention on the importance of maintaining price controls which were due to expire in June 1944.65 In hundreds of cities, individuals sent urgent messages to their Congressional representatives asking for price control extensions. Mrs. Richard King, the wife of a steelworker, testified before the Senate Banking and Currency Committee showing copies of her grocery receipts to the committee as evidence that the Bureau of Labor Statistics were out of touch with the reality of working-class families. The joint AFL-CIO cost-of-living study revealed that it took one dollar and forty-three cents in 1944 to buy what one-dollar would have bought in 1941.66 The United Steelworkers of America’s (USWA) also conducted a study that showed the average steelworker family was not “making ends meet. They're running in the red 79 cents each week.”67 And, to further illustrate the continued increase in the cost of living, Eleanor Fowler conducted her own study of the cost of fourteen of the most common food and household items between 1941 and 1944. Using her personal receipts from the Rochdale Stores, cooperative grocers that flourished during the 1930s and 1940s based on the Rochdale principles, which

64 Jacobs, Pocketbook Politics, 211.


67 Ibid.
emphasized “active consumer ownership” through democratic management and a belief that the consumers were “the true owners” of the stores.\textsuperscript{68} In her study, Fowler found massive increases for foods such as potatoes, apples, grapefruit, and carrots as well as household items such as scouring powder and toilet tissue. The price increases “...ranged from 8 to 171 percent, with six of 14 foods or household necessities above the 132 percent mark!”\textsuperscript{69}

The cross-coalitional support for the OPA was reminiscent of the 1935 meat boycotts. Price controls were widely accepted and embraced by Americans, from the beginning of the war until 1946, almost seventy-five percent of Americans approved of price controls. As historian Meg Jacobs notes, “some thought OPA was tinged with a protofeminist culture that was socially progressive and even liberal on racial matters.”\textsuperscript{70}

For example, one group who was active in the 1935 meat boycott mobilized their neighborhood to renew the OPA. The Brownville Consumer Council was led by Clara (Lemlich) Shavelson, the legendary young garment worker, who called on New York's garment workers to strike in 1909. Shavelson chose the “traditional” path by marrying and moving out of the overcrowded Lower East Side to Brownsville, a longtime Jewish ghetto.


\textsuperscript{69} n.a., "Memo to BLS - Paste Statistics in Your Hat".

\textsuperscript{70} Jacobs, \textit{Pocketbook Politics}, 212.
Moving her attention away from the shop floor and into the neighborhood, Shavelson committed her life to organizing working-class housewives. According to a Shavelson’s friend Rae Appel, Shavelson believed that housewives “shouldn’t feel that they have to stay in the kitchen and cook...that picketing for the staff of life is just as important [as] picket lines in the needle trades.” While Mary Zuk did not re-emerge during this time, the involvement of the Brownsville Consumer Council as well as the auxiliaries demonstrates the influence of domestic politics on the political participation of women who saw fighting the cost of living as integral to post-war reconversion and protecting their husband’s wages.

In addition to coordinating community based Congressional pressure, the CCH also sought to use their organizational clout to anticipate and influence policy changes. During one CCH meeting, the group decided to both organize a delegation to meet with OPA’s director Chester Bowles as well as meet with the former OPA director Leon Henderson to get “the inside story on reconversion plans...in the offing.” Headed up by the National Consumers’ League’s Florence Wyckoff, the delegation planned to call on Bowles “...to urge him to take an aggressive line and demand a strengthened act.” By 1944, Wyckoff was a veteran organizer. Like Fowler and Ware, Wyckoff was born into a liberal California family.

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72 Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes, February 14, 1944," FDRL, Caroline F. Ware Papers, Box 19, Folder - Consumer Materials, Consumer Clearinghouse, 1944.

73 ibid.
Educated at the University of California Berkley, she was politicized by the 1934 San Francisco General Strike and joined San Francisco’s YWCA Industrial Committee. Eventually, Wyckoff left San Francisco for Washington, D.C., where in the mid-1930s she worked part-time for Food for Freedom, and by 1944 was active in the National Consumers’ League.74

The beginning of the end for New Deal liberalism was marked by the battle over the OPA and the retention of price controls. In 1946, the National Association of Manufacturers, alongside other business interests, launched a massive media campaign to undermine price controls. And, even during the war, the influence of business was substantial. As Florence Wyckoff recalled, consumers, labor, and women were each represented by three separate OPA councils while business found favor in over seventy different OPA councils.75 With the war over, opposition to price controls was mounting from trade associations, the farm bloc, and merchants. The public's embrace of the OPA and price controls soon began to dwindle. The OPA was hailed as anti-American. Senator Robert Taft attacked Bowles, the “hero of housewives,” and the OPA. “What you are doing is organizing consumers against business...it is absolutely un-American and contrary to law and contrary to the Constitution...”76

As union members walked out on strike in massive numbers to gain wage increases, working-class housewives continued to pursue a domestic politics agenda that married the

74 Randall Jarrell, "Florence Richardson Wyckoff: Fifty Years of Grassroots Social Activism," University of California Santa Cruz Regional Oral History Collection.

75 Ibid.

fight at the collective bargaining table for higher wages with the continued support of the state through price controls. With price controls on the verge of extinction, a delegation of “irate citizens...descended on Washington to voice their protest against lifting of Price Controls.”77 The Women’s Auxiliary News reported that the UAW Women’s Auxiliary was the largest contingent and “militant.” Along the way to Washington, D.C., the auxiliary members “...voiced their protests over a loud speaker from every town and hamlet...”78 Yet, despite pressure from consumers, the OPA and price controls were eliminated by September 1947.

Within days of the OPA’s shutdown, prices shot upward. From June 15 to July 15, “the cost of living went up 5.5 percent, the single highest one-month jump ever recorded by the BLS.”79 Meat, of course, immediately jumped five cents in one week, and by September, the cost of meat had doubled from thirty-five cents to seventy cents a pound.80 And, as in years previous, consumers would not stand for high meat prices. "There's no difference," Josephine Lerner of New York City angrily wrote Truman on 25 June, "between the man with a mask on his face and a gun in his hand, and the man who, as happened today, wanted to sell me a pound of hamburger for $1.20 [before the war a pound of hamburger had cost less than twenty cents]. When I protested, he said that he couldn't stay in business unless he charged such a price. He said that the meat packers were waiting for the OPA's funeral and then they

77 Women’s Auxiliary News, "Untitled," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1946 v. 7, July 1946.

78 Ibid.

79 Jacobs, Pocketbook Politics, 226.

80 Ibid; Women’s Auxiliary News, "Something to Get Excited About - Prices Skyrockets, September 1947," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1947 v. 5.
would do it legally and I couldn't even raise my voice... What's the little guy going to do then?"  

Despite wartime rationing, the consumption of meat had actually increased among Americans from 127 pounds to 150 pounds per capita during the 1940s. And, “thanks to larger incomes and the equity of rationing, the poorest third of the population increased their protein consumption by nearly seventeen percent.”  

After years of effective price controls, working-class housewives had no interest in returning to uncontrolled pricing. In 1946, working-class housewives mounted another meat boycott with the backing of organized labor, consumer groups, and an American public that was largely in favor of price controls. But the boycott lacked the assertiveness and confidence of the 1935 boycott. In the *Women’s Auxiliary News*, the Detroit area auxiliaries reported that they were “seriously alarmed by the lifting of price controls.” But they did not commit to an all out boycott of meat. Instead, they promised “to buy as little as possible of consumer goods until price control is restored...”  

Meanwhile, the NAM continued their campaign against price controls spending three million dollars to defeat the OPA. The closed butcher shops and media campaign denouncing price control began to chip away at the 82 percent of Americans that supported price controls in 1946. This turned the tables on the OPA and

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83 UAW Women’s Auxiliary, *Women’s Auxiliary News, August 1946,* ALUA, UAW Women’s Department, *Women’s Auxiliary News*, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1946 v. 7.

consumers began to regard the OPA as “ineffectual” and “no longer able to control inflation.”

Despite the incremental collapse of the OPA, the CCH continued to believe that price controls were critical to a post-war economy.

Another area of concern in the post-war economy was rent control. The CCH believed that rent control would likely “absorb the major energies” of consumer groups, yet they wanted to center on issue of “authority” rather than “maintaining existing prices.” This focus on authority illustrates the desire of the CCH and their allied organizations to remain integral to decision-making bodies such as the OPA. The decision to focus on rent was smart. With the expiration of numerous price control policies and the persistent shortage of housing already, the threat of increased cost of housing loomed for the working-class.

The primary concern for the CCH was the ability of the working-class to fight increased rents. During the war, the consumers gained access to localized boards run by the community in partnership with the government to fight cost-of-living abuses. However, by 1947, price controls were virtually eliminated and the World War II community boards that were peppered throughout neighborhoods across the country were dismantled.

And, sure enough, in early 1947, the CCH was mounting a campaign against the Federal Housing and Rent Act (H.R. Bill 3203). The bill attacked the final remnants of price controls—those that covered housing; it would, among other things, end OPA rent

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86 The Federal Housing and Rent Act of 1947 was passed, but was not enacted until the following year. President Truman, who opposed the bill initially, signed it stating in a special message to Congress, “It is clear, insofar as the Congress is concerned, it is this bill or no rent control at all. I have chosen the lesser of two evils.” Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress Upon Signing the Housing and Rent Act, June 30, 1947," Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Public Papers of the Presidents - Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953 (online - accessed June 20, 2011).
control immediately and force evicted tenants to use the court system to sue their landlords. This created an imbalance between renters and landlords tantamount to making eviction an unchallengeable offense. The CCH knew that “poor tenants can’t go to court, rich tenants won’t bother...”87 Concerned about the feasibility of working-class families to find the resources to sue their landlords, the CCH focused not on price freezes, but instead they planned to “…emphasize [the] continuance of the authority to control rents. This authority,” the CCH believed “[was] necessary to prevent wholesale evictions...”88 The CCH wanted working-class renters to have access to retribution when faced with rent hikes. It was the ability to build a campaign around empowerment for working-class renters in coalition with other like-minded organizations that characterized the cost of living activism among the CIO auxiliaries and set them apart from earlier protests by working-class housewives.

The CCH and their allies challenged the bill on Capitol Hill. In his testimony before the Senate Banking and Currency Subcommittee, Donald Montgomery argued on behalf of the UAW that Congress “misjudged the housing situation” when they passed the act. Continuing the CIO’s ongoing critique of data by Bureau of Labor Statistics, Montgomery urged the Senate to use data compiled by the Bureau of the Census arguing that the difference between the Census rent report and the BLS rent report for the period between 1940-1947 was the difference between “…the facts of life and a theory of relativity,”


88 Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes".
respectively.\textsuperscript{89} For example, Montgomery pointed to the different results generated by the Census and BLS using different methodology, in Norfolk, Virginia, and Portland, Oregon, “...the Census reports increases of more than 70% while BLS reports 7%. Here in Washington, D.C., BLS brought us the comforting thought that there was no increase to speak of, but the Census finds actually that tenants are paying 22% more rent in April 1947 than they were paying in April 1940.”\textsuperscript{90}

In addition to lobbying Congress with the CCH, auxiliaries also focused on rent control in their communities. And, this local pressure appeared to have some impact. According to material compiled by the CIO National Housing Committee, the governing bodies of hundreds of towns and cities voted to extend rent control during this period.\textsuperscript{91} While Fowler worked the circuit in Washington, Catherine Gelles, the Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, joined forces with the Greater Detroit Consumers Council and was swiftly appointed “temporary secretary.” The Detroit area strategy was a grassroots, door-to-door campaign “mobilizing all community groups into tenant leagues, organized on a block to block basis, both city-wide and on a State and National level, to fight for the maintenance of rent control and also to resist any rise in rent and to fight

\textsuperscript{89} David Montgomery, "Testimony on Extension of Rent Control, Senate Banking and Currency Subcommittee, 1948," ALUA, Donald Montgomery Papers, Box 51, Folder 6 - Rent Control 1948.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} CIO National Housing Committee, "Cities and Towns Whose Governing Bodies Have Voted to Extend Rent Control, 1951," resource list, ALUA, Donald Montgomery Papers, Box 51, Folder 11 - Rent Control Legislation, 1950, Washington, D.C.
evictions.”92 The International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries pledged renewed support by officially committing resources and programmatic focus to consumers and rent control. In particular, the leadership “...urged our Auxiliaries to work with all worthy groups in the community...to protect the dollar and cent purchasing power and to fight unjust price gouging.”93

With price controls gone, CCH member organizations sought ways to maintain long-term ties and influence within the government. This indicated a commitment to institutionalizing their involvement and agenda on a national scope rather than reacting in a piecemeal way on a local level. For example, at the January 1947 of the CCH, groups including the CWA discussed the importance of supporting consumer-oriented agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, Federal Trade Commission, Federal Communications Commission, Anti-Trust Division, and standards work of the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture. It was agreed that CCH would draft a description of services to consumers about the services that these federal agencies offered as all as maintain regular contact with the key leaders in the agencies. The CCH noted that “any organizations which...establish[s] or maintain[s] close contact with any of these agencies is asked [sic] to inform the Consumer Clearing House Chairman in order to serve as a lookout for the group.”94

92 Catherine Gelles, "Quarterly Report of Secretary-Treasurer’s Activities, November 1946-February 1947 - ICC Minutes, UAW-CIO Women's Auxiliaries, February 24-25, 1947, " ALUA, UAW Women's Auxiliaries, Box 1, Folder 1-7, ICC Minutes, 1942-49.

93 UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "International Coordinating Committee Meeting Minutes, February 24-25, 1947, " ALUA, UAW Women's Auxiliaries, Box 1, Folder 1-7, ICC Minutes, 1942-49.

94 Consumer Clearing House, "Meeting Minutes".
With the dismantling of the OPA, working-class housewives lost a key government ally. This loss ultimately undermined the political influence that auxiliaries had acquired from the founding of the CIO and through the war. As conservatives sought to tie the hands of many New Dealers by systematically expiring price control legislation and pushing through the Taft-Hartley Act which severely undermined the power of organized labor by outlawing closed shops, strictly regulating strikes, and placing restrictions on organizing, the auxiliaries were not immune to these attacks. While most auxiliaries remained steadfast in their commitment to preserving and fighting for governmental influence in controlling the cost of living, some auxiliaries appeared defeated by the upheaval at the OPA. Not surprisingly, this split mimicked the persistent political and racial divisions with the national auxiliary movement. Clara Bradley, the president of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen in Ohio, an auxiliary of all-white railroad workers union affiliated with the AFL with a legacy of conservatism and exclusion, rejected OPA information for her organization claiming that “...I hardly feel with the unsettled conditions at present and the O.P.A. offices closing, that the circulars mentioned should be sent.”

Yet, during the same period, Verna E. Bell, National President of the National Women’s Auxiliary of the United Transport Service Employees of America, an African American union affiliated with the CIO, sought to reassure Chester Bowles at the OPA that her auxiliary intended to offer “...the same support you received in the past...in the fight to

combat inflationary pressures and maintain price control...” Bell concluded her letter with the hope that “…all those who so faithfully served your office...be just as determined in the unsettled future…”

While, ultimately, the story of price controls during and immediately after World War II is one of decline, a look at the story through the organizing efforts of working-class housewives provides an answer to Levine’s question at the beginning of this chapter. During this period, CIO auxiliaries partnered with the OPA and the CCH to, in the words of Catherine Gelles, defend themselves “when the enemies of labor are plotting to destroy the Union.” Auxiliary members viewed themselves as the “double experts, for we know both the impact of the removal of price controls on us as trade unionists and the impact on us as consumers.” The perception of themselves as “experts” along with the belief that the state was obligated to ensure an American standard of living pushed working-class housewives to organize their communities and members to become political activists using an agenda of domestic politics. And, with the interest of the OPA and the opportunities to build alliances through the CCH, working-class housewives were able to institutionalize domestic politics. This process was inherently political. Not only did auxiliary members see themselves as political, but the state also did. For this moment in time, domestic politics was front and center. Yet, in an atmosphere that was growing increasingly colder to policies perceived to be “communist” dealt a harsh blow to the future of political

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97 Gelles, "Quarterly Report of Secretary-Treasurer’s Activities, November 1946-February 1947 - ICC Minutes, UAW-CIO Women’s Auxiliaries, February 24-25, 1947”.

participation at this level. And, as the next chapter will discuss, the cold climate was not
only freezing out price controls. But, debates about gender equity failed to find a unified
voice among women, within the labor movement, and on Capitol Hill.
CHAPTER V

“A GOLDEN APPLE FILLED WITH ACID”: WORKING-CLASS OPPOSITION TO THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

On September 28, 1944, a group of auxiliary leaders from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) joined with a coalition of predominantly middle-class women’s organizations in Washington, D.C., to build a “special organization” with the sole purpose of destroying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).¹ Out of this gathering the National Committee to Defeat the Unequal Rights Amendment (NCDUERA) was established. This group, while short-lived, played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for future gender equality legislation. Representatives from the women’s auxiliaries of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and the National Maritime Union (NMU) as well as the two auxiliary federation the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA) and the American Federation of Women’s Auxiliaries League (AFWAL) attended the meeting.² In addition to auxiliary representation, the United Cannery Workers, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, the United Federal Workers of America, the United Office and Professional Workers, and the CIO also endorsed the formation of the NCDUERA. Out of the twenty-five endorsing organizations, thirteen represented the interests of organized labor.

¹ National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment, "Press Release, December 1, 1944," ALUA, UAW Research, Box 11, Folder 14 - ERA.

² While the railroad federations was not listed in the original press release announcing the formation of the NCDUERA, a handful of women’s auxiliaries affiliated with the railroad industry also participated in legislative lobbying related to the ERA as well as cost-of-living issues.
The meeting was a veritable who’s who of women leaders including Mary Anderson, Director of the Women’s Bureau, Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, and Rose Schneiderman, Women’s Trade Union League. Dorothy McAllister, a leader in the Democratic National Committee, was swiftly elected chair of the newly formed group. The inaugural meeting of the NCDUERA focused on two issues: developing a plan of action and deciding who should be recruited to join the group. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins “...stressed the fact that our presentation must be ‘factual, persuasive, reasonable; bulwarked by a picture of growing support of real working women and real family women.’” Furthermore, the assembled women agreed on a platform that directly opposed the ERA while emphasizing “the positive action of introducing legislation in the states which have the worse discrimination against women.” It was this focus on “family women” that created the foundation for the auxiliaries’ platform against the ERA and their direct assault on the National Women’s Party (NWP), which the labor union auxiliaries considered the “ladies [sic] auxiliary of the National Association of Manufacturers.”

A notable absence at the table was the representation of African American women. During the meeting, Elisabeth Christman, a leader in the National Women’s Trade Union League, was asked whether “any Negro women had been invited to attend.” In her

3 National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment, "Meeting Minutes, September 28, 1944," ALUA, R.J. Thomas Papers, Box 25, Folder 12.

4 ibid.

5 n.a., "Phoney "Equal Rights" Amendment Raises Ugly Head Again, March 1944," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department/Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder - 1944 v.5.

6 National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment, "Meeting Minutes, September 28, 1944," ALUA, R.J. Thomas Papers, Box 25, Folder 12.
response, Christman offered a detailed summary of the outreach to both the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) as well as Alpha Kappa Phi. Ultimately the NCNW opposed the ERA, yet there was more reluctance among groups such as Alpha Kappa Phi. Christman reported that Thomasina Johnson, an Alpha Kappa Phi officer, was “...definitely for the Amendment, because as a school teacher, she was discriminated against because she was married...However...in the end she said that she [Johnson] had not realized all of the implications before and would like to have our material.” 7 In the end, the newly formed NCDUERA agreed to continue outreach to African American women and “disillusion the negro women about what the Amendment will do for them.” 8

The narrative of the 1940s Equal Rights Amendment campaign is surprisingly devoid of class. The inclusion of organized labor at the NCDUERA table was not unusual as many of the organizations worked together on other legislative campaigns. Yet, the story of the women’s auxiliaries’ involvement in the legislative battle over women’s equality in the post-war period is virtually silent. 9 By minimizing labor’s involvement in the coalition, historians reflect a tendency to marginalize the place of class in the debate over the ERA while relying on gender as their central category of analysis. This post-World War II legislative head to head between the working-class and the leisure class sheds light on women’s claims for equality and political participation. Thus, this chapter looks to fill this

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

lacuna, thereby offering a more complex look at what drove so many women to oppose an amendment that was seemingly in their best interest.

During World War II, gender equality re-emerged as critical issue for both working- and middle-class women. As more women entered the workforce and even more moved from unpaid household labor to paid industrial labor, issues of childcare, seniority, and job retention gained importance. With large numbers of married women entering the defense industry and subsequently joining unions, policy makers, union leaders, and businessmen were forced to consider the role of women outside of the home.¹⁰ Not since the suffrage movement had women’s equality exhibited such a public face. Given this climate, the National Woman’s Party (NWP) refreshed its campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.¹¹

Conceived by Alice Paul, the dynamic and oftentimes one-dimensional leader of the National Woman’s Party, the Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed in 1920 after women won the right to vote. The amendment was straightforward enough: “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its

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¹⁰ “In 1945 36 percent of the female population fourteen years of age and older worked compared to 22 percent in 1940. Married women accounted for this change, outnumbering single women in the labor force for the first time in American history...The aircraft industry employed 310,000 women; 200,000 women worked in the automobile industry; wartime industries created positions for 374,000 female electrical workers...Three million women joined unions during WWII, more than three times the number unionized in 1940.” Quoted from Kathleen A. Laughlin, Women’s Work and Public Policy: A History of the Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 1945-1970 (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 2000).

¹¹ By World War II, the ERA had been introduced in every session of Congress since 1923. The vibrancy of the NWP’s ERA campaign waned until 1941 when Alice Paul returned from Europe where she established the World Woman’s Party headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
jurisdiction.” However, this simple statement provoked a firestorm of debate between the well-heeled middle- and upper-class National Woman’s Party membership and the members of the Progressive Era coalitions that fought for protective legislation. They feared that the simple sentence, promoted vigorously by Paul, would undo decades of struggle that improved the daily lives of women and children, and they were not willing to take the risk. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a radical union organizer, called the ERA “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”12 Paul’s dogged refusal to look at the issue from the perspective of the working-class fueled an antagonism that would persist into the 1970s.13

This chapter gives voice to the class-consciousness of the post-World War II battle against the ERA. Too often, the historical narrative of this moment focuses on the gender aspect of the fight—essentializing the debate to issues of difference versus equality, feminism versus family-focused traditionalism. And while these are significant features of the debate, there was another dimension to the campaign to do away with the National Woman’s Party’s (NWP) persistent crusade to alter the constitution. Many working-class women saw the NWP’s campaign as a class struggle that pitted them against privileged, pro-business, leisure-class women. By exploring the rhetoric and strategies used by labor union auxiliaries to mobilize their base and the broader labor movement, this chapter contributes to a discussion of the interconnectedness of gender and class in the ERA debate.

12 Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, ”Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing, February 29, 1944,” New Masses.

NCDUERA’s member organizations were not new to mounting national campaigns. Many of these groups, branded the “Women’s Bureau coalition” by historian Cynthia Harrison, led the fights to win protective legislation for women and children that they believed was now threatened by the proposed ERA. In fact, the legacy of the animosity between the NWP and these groups reaches back to the 1920s. Historian Jan Dolittle Wilson points out that “much of the success of women’s social reform efforts during the 1920s stemmed from the tradition of separate female institutions, the strength and efficiency of women’s grassroots networks, the surviving progressive impulse in Congress and society, and the ease with which class oriented goals were defined in gendered terms.”14

This activism rooted in both class and gender was antithetical to the NWP’s singular focus on the passage of the ERA. In particular, Wilson emphasizes the alliance built between the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the NWP. The compatibility of the language between the NWP’s opposition to the protective legislation and the NAM’s language is striking. In a speech at the 1926 Women’s Industrial Conference held in Washington, D.C., John Edgerton, president of the NAM, used language that echoed the position of the NWP’s opposition to protective legislation in their efforts to pass the ERA.15 The legacy of the relationship between the NWP and the NAM, as well as the NWP’s historical antagonism toward labor legislation, reveals a tension between the two competing ideologies. The NWP focused on the rights of women as individuals exclusively

14 Wilson, The Women’s Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-1930, 51.

15 Ibid.
while women's auxiliaries tied equality to the rights of the working-class and the family. These differing ideological perspectives made collaboration virtually impossible.

Calling on their base of working-class housewives, auxiliary leaders in the CIO and the AFL joined with middle-class women's organizations in a nearly decade long movement that sought equality for women in the workplace and society yet bolstered the view that women were inherently different from men both biologically and socially. For auxiliary women, this was not a contradiction. They recognized the persistent sexism at home and in the workplace, yet were unwilling to capitulate to the National Woman's Party's individualistic definition of gender equality. This reluctance, I argue, is due to their refusal to allow their personal rights as women to trump the class position within the family.

**Educating the Masses**

The UAW Women's Auxiliaries, like many CIO auxiliaries, opposed an equal rights amendment for two reasons—one ideological and the other pragmatic. First, they believed that women carried “a double burden” that was a “critical national problem.”\(^{16}\) The Auxiliary leadership urged their membership to consider this double burden in a *Women’s Auxiliary News* article, arguing that for women to “[start] out on an equal basis with a man is absurd.”\(^{17}\) For working-class women the struggle to balance housework, including childcare, along with wage labor without essential resources such as affordable childcare created an inevitable imbalance for women. According to the auxiliary movement,


\(^{17}\) n.a., "'Equal Rights'? - NO!" ALUA, UAW Women's Department - *Women's Auxiliary News*, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder 1945.
these so-called "handicaps must be dealt with, not ignored." The consequence of the protective legislation was not to cement inequality; it was to ensure that women were given the opportunity to "do practically all the task which men can do, especially in mechanized industries."\(^{18}\) The second reason the Auxiliary opposed the ERA was the credible threat to protective legislation. In the opinion of the auxiliary movement, an amendment to the constitution threatened many of the gains made by the labor movement and their allies. According the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries (CWA), the proposed ERA "... would make unconstitutional hundreds of state, local and federal laws which represent years of hard-won progress, and which have enabled millions of women to achieve a considerable degree of REAL, not legalistic, equality with men." Furthermore, the CWA argued it would be a "road back to economic chaos for women."\(^{19}\) For auxiliary members, the ERA was "a dangerous instrument" that threatened women's economic stability in the home and the workplace. What is more, it was a measure "touted by leisure-class women and employer interests."\(^{20}\)

Beginning in 1943, the UAW Women's Auxiliary began its campaign against the ERA. The core message of the auxiliary emphasized the threat the National Woman's Party's (NWP) claims of equality held for working-class women's interests. In particular, the auxiliary stressed the legislative pitfalls of the proposed ERA. The Auxiliary leadership publicized the development of the NWP's ERA using the organization's monthly newsletter, the *Women's Auxiliary News*. The auxiliary educated their membership base through a

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries, "What the Equal Rights Amendment Is and Why It Should Be Opposed, March 2, 1943," ALUA, UAW Research, Box 11, Folder 14 - ERA.

series of articles aimed at establishing the class difference between pro-ERA groups such as the NWP and the concerns of organized labor. With a national distribution to 115 chartered auxiliaries in the U.S. and Canada, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary claimed a membership of over 150,000 working-class housewives.\textsuperscript{21} This number did not include the over 100,000 women workers represented by the UAW who were excluded from maintaining dual membership in the UAW and an affiliated auxiliary by the UAW International Executive Board.\textsuperscript{22} Consequently, the \textit{Women’s Auxiliary News} had a potential readership of over a quarter of a million women within the UAW alone. Given the large network created by the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries and the leadership role the UAW auxiliaries played in the organization, it is likely that members of other CWA-affiliated auxiliaries read the \textit{Women’s Auxiliary News} as well.

Education was vital to the mobilization of auxiliary members. And, the \textit{Women’s Auxiliary News} functioned as the central broadcaster of educational articles and calls for action. Between 1943 and 1949, the \textit{Women’s Auxiliary News} regularly featured articles on a variety of legislative campaigns in addition to monthly updates from auxiliaries around the country and reports on social and community events. In addition to the ERA fight, the need for increased access to childcare and equal rights for African American workers

\textsuperscript{21} It is important to note that the UAW Women’s Auxiliary did not begin keeping track of their membership numbers until 1943. Therefore, membership numbers are culled from various testimonies by auxiliary leaders as well as UAW and Auxiliary convention proceedings not membership records. Catherine Gelles, "Testimony Given to the Senate Banking and Currency Committee on Price Control June 7, 1945," ALUA, UAW Women's Auxiliaries, Box 6, Folder #8 - Testimony, C. Gelles before Senate Banking Cmte; UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, "Convention Proceedings: Fifth Annual Conference, October 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 1-3, Buffalo, NY.

through the Fair Employment Practice Commission were reoccurring topics. The diversity of topics raised in the Women’s Auxiliary News demonstrates a mission that went beyond the call to support their husbands in the workplace. Auxiliary members were concerned about national issues that impacted the working-class as whole. The attention paid to issues such as access to childcare and employment equity for women and African Americans is evidence of this concern. Yet, gender equality, oftentimes as the ERA, and its relationship to working-class women appeared in almost every issue. In the early years of the anti-ERA fight, the newsletter painted the NWP as the bedfellow of “powerful employer lobbying interests” and the Auxiliary leadership encouraged members to contact their congressmen and express opposition to the ERA. “Your Congressmen…should be told how you feel…,” declared a 1943 Women’s Auxiliary News article. “[S]o that if [the ERA] does come to a fight in Congress, they will know that labor is strongly against it, and wants it defeated.”

And, while the Women’s Auxiliary News was a useful tool, the auxiliaries did not rely solely on their editorializing to school their membership. The UAW Research department internally distributed detailed studies used to frame the debate as a class struggle rather than an issue of women’s inequality. In a 1944 memo, “Questions and Answers on the Equal Rights Amendment,” the UAW Research Department portrayed the National Woman’s Party leadership as a group of “…reactionary, wealthy women who spend their time lobbying for this bill in Washington; they have nothing in common with working women or

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23 As Chapter Three demonstrates the battle against the cost of living and campaigns for price controls were also covered by the Women’s Auxiliary News.

24 n.a., "Women’s Auxiliary News, February 1943," ALUA, UAW Women’s Department/Women's Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder - 1943, v.4.
with the average housewife.”\textsuperscript{25} In another report sent to Congressmen, the Research Department elaborated on the state-by-state impact of the ERA on working women. In their conclusion, they called on Congress to oppose the ERA, designating it “...a pernicious and anti-social piece of legislation which will perpetuate exploitation and discrimination.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{“Smooth Talk” and No Compromises}

After spending a year raising awareness about the ERA within their membership, the time had come for direct action. On September 28, 1944, a preliminary committee of women’s organizations met in Washington, D.C., to discuss strategies for defeating the ERA. Established with the sole purpose of defeating the NWP’s ERA, the NCDUERA convened a two-day conference in Washington, D.C., to strategize a plan to defeat the ERA. In a statement, the NCDUERA made clear their unequivocal objection to “legal discrimination against women.” At the same time, however, they believed that a legislative path would be a “more effective “ remedy than a constitutional amendment. It was the opinion of the committee that “...such an amendment to the Constitution of the United States [would] not attain its objective but in reality [would] prove detrimental to the interest of millions of women and their families.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} UAW-CIO Research Department, "Questions and Answers on the Equal Rights Amendment, February 19, 1944," ALUA, UAW Research, Box 11, Folder 14 - ERA.

\textsuperscript{26} UAW-CIO Research Department, "Why the CIO Opposes the Equal Rights Amendment, February 1944," ALUA, UAW Research, Box 11, Folder 14 - ERA.

\textsuperscript{27} National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment, "Meeting Minutes, September 28, 1944," ALUA, R.J. Thomas Papers, Box 25, Folder 12.
Among labor union auxiliaries, the CWA led the lobbying efforts; and, not surprisingly, Eleanor Fowler, the relentless voice of the CWA in Washington, D.C., helped to lead the charge. As a regular wartime columnist in the CIO News, Fowler trumpeted the need for auxiliary women to mobilize on issues related to the war as well as broader issues of equity and good citizenship. In the CIO News’ auxiliary column, Fowler called on auxiliary members to support a host of legislative initiatives in addition to opposing the ERA. Chief among Fowler’s post-war agenda items were childcare funding, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, school lunch programs, and cost-of-living policies.\(^{28}\) Fowler also represented the CIO auxiliaries’ interests in a variety of committees, such as the Consumer Clearing House and the Office of Price Administration’s Consumer Advisory Committee, giving voice to working-class interests in the midst of predominantly middle-class coalitions.\(^{29}\) Furthermore, Fowler regularly testified before Congressional committees representing the interests of working-class housewives. On one trip to Capitol Hill to lobby against the ERA, Fowler recalled the “smooth talk” of a NWP lobbyist as she was “honored with a two-hour monologue... when I incautiously sat down in the Senate waiting room.”\(^{30}\)

With the CWA functioning as a national lobby group and women’s auxiliaries scattered


\(^{29}\) For more on Fowler’s involvement in the Office of Price Administration and the Consumer Clearing House see Chapter Four.

\(^{30}\) Eleanor Fowler, "Women’s 'Rights' Line Slick and Dangerous," *CIO News*, February 2, 1944.
throughout the US in both rural and urban areas working as local community groups, working-class housewives used the auxiliaries to shape their political voice and assert their citizenship rights.

During 1943 and 1944, the CIO auxiliaries added the defeat of the ERA to their legislative plate. The NCDUERA asked the labor movement to oppose the ERA in three ways. First, the women urged unions to educate "...the average citizen in the real meaning and effect of the Amendment." Next the auxiliaries asked union members to communicate with and interview their Congressmen. Finally, the auxiliaries used women to action in states "...with a view to wiping out existing discriminations against women..."\(^{31}\)

For some politicians, women’s rejection of the ERA appeared to contradict calls for equality in the workplace. In a tongue-and-cheek commentary on Vice President Wallace’s apparent support of the ERA, Fowler wrote:

Don’t be too hard on Vice-President Wallace. He didn’t realize what he was doing when he endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment. The Women’s Party swooped down on him and put it to him this way:

‘Millions of women are doing a magnificent job on the production lines of our plants. We owe it to them to ensure them equality of treatment with their men fellow workers. Let’s guarantee them equal rights in the constitution by passing the equal rights amendment.’

See how good it sounds? \(^{32}\)

This sentiment rang true on both sides of the aisle. In 1944, Republicans and Democrats alike responded to the NWP’s call for equality by including the ERA in their national

\(^{31}\) National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment, "Letter from Dorothy McAllister, Chairman of the Ncduera, to R.J. Thomas, International President of the UAW, November 4, 1944," ALUA, R.J. Thomas Papers, Box 25, Folder 12.

\(^{32}\) Eleanor Fowler, "Women’s Rights' Line Slick and Dangerous," \textit{CIO News}, February 2, 1944.
platforms. Responding to a letter from Catherine Gelles urging opposition the ERA, Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan explained that he would support the ERA because he believed that the amendment “merely prevents ‘discrimination’” and did not threaten established labor laws. Furthermore, Senator Vandenberg wrote, “It is based upon my belief that when there is a very large element of our citizenship which wants a constitutional amendment...[it] is entitled to its ‘day in court.”’33 While the NWP membership was relatively small, their political voice was resounding given their backing by leading business organizations such as the NAM and Chamber of Commerce. The members of the NCDUERA clearly needed to develop a strategy that moved beyond a negative campaign.

By 1945, the NCDUERA ramped up its opposition by proposing an alternate route to equality. Rather than campaigning for the abolition of the ERA, opponents opted to challenge the ERA by lobbying for equality legislation. Believing that the ERA was a “golden apple filled with acid,” CIO auxiliaries and other NCDUERA organizations joined forces with Florida’s Claude Pepper, a New Dealer and leader of the liberal left in the Senate, and Representative “Battling” Mary T. Norton, a reformer from New Jersey who chaired the House Labor Committee and advocated for working-class interests, to introduce the Equal Pay for Equal Work bills.34 The equal pay approach garnered strong support among labor

33 Arthur Vandenberg, "Letter from Senator Arthur Vandenberg, to Catherine Gelles, Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, July 19, 1946," ALUA, Catherine Gelles, Series I, Box 1, Folder 1-7. Emphasis in the original letter.

34 n.a., "Neither Equal nor Right!," CIO News, January 15, 1945. In addition to the Equal Pay for Equal Work bill, Senator Claude Pepper also partnered with Senator Norton and introduced the Norton-Pepper Bill (S. 1318) to authorize financial support for maternal and child welfare in 1945. Yet, Pepper did not oppose the passage of the ERA. For more on Pepper’s involvement in the ERA, see Harrison. Tracy E. Danese, Claude Pepper
unions, and, in an effort to sustain a dual strategy for equality, the NCDUERA established an independent national equal pay committee.35 The Equal Pay Committee attracted significant labor support. In 1945, CIO, AFL, and railroad unions in addition to the UAW Auxiliaries and the CWA all committed their unions to support of equal pay legislation. Given the unique autonomy of the UAW auxiliaries, it was not surprising that they alone were the only auxiliary listed independently from their parent union.36 It is fairly likely that while other auxiliaries were not listed as committee members, they performed the legislative work for unions such as the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen.37

Auxiliary members now urged their congressmen to oppose the ERA by actively supporting equality legislation. One CIO News article instructed auxiliary members when lobbying congressmen to emphasize the Pepper Equal Pay Bill as "...the way for them to show that they are concerned about true equality for women at the same time that they

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35 Harrison, On Account of Sex.

36 The UAW Women’s Auxiliary functioned relatively independently from the UAW’s International Executive Board until the late 1940s. The auxiliary maintained a governing body called the International Coordinating Committee that ran the organizations. They held their own convention in conjunction with the UAW’s Constitutional Convention. And, they seemed to determine their own agenda as long as it did not directly contradict the UAW’s program. This autonomy ended with the election of Walter Reuther in 1946. Under Reuther, the auxiliaries were incorporated into the Women’s Department and their funding from the IEB was significantly reduced. See Chapter Three of this dissertation for more details on the organizational structure of the Auxiliary.

oppose the phony equality proposed in the Equal Rights Amendment.”
This new tactic bolstered the auxiliaries’ focus on the relationship of class to issues of equality. In a call to
members to lobby politicians, Fowler commented that politicians have “swallowed whole
the arguments of the rather well-heeled women who support this amendment [ERA]...And
in doing so they have certainly not displeased the Natl. Assn. of Manufacturers which would
like nothing better than a chance to exploit women workers...” With legislative hearings
scheduled for mid-October, Fowler was quick to point out that the National Woman’s Party
was “noticeably silent” on the issue of wage discrimination. This silence further highlighted
the gravity of the class animosity between the auxiliaries and the NWP; for according to
Fowler and the CWA, “elimination of [the] pay differential is the biggest contribution we
can make to equal rights for women.”

With the war over, the Women’s Auxiliary News turned its focus to reconversion and
issues of women’s role in the post-war world. For example, the Women’s Auxiliary News
offered an overview of the “changing world of women’s work,” starting with a nod to the
industrial revolution. “Women didn’t choose to leave the home,” the author pointed out. “It
was a natural transition. Industrialization shifted weaving to the textile mill, churning
butter to the dairy, and preserving food to the cannery...Women can’t be chased home now.
They are part of the permanent labor force...They cannot be denied the right to work, the
right to equal pay...” Despite the support among New Deal coalition forces, the moment


39 Ibid.


41 n.a., "Woman - Her Place in Industry," Women’s Auxiliary News, November 1945.
had passed for equal pay legislation. Norton and Peppers bill failed to advance under the weight of a growing mobilization by the National Association of Manufacturers and other business allies whose lobbying efforts and advertising were pushing a free market agenda that was in direct opposition to New Deal legislation and their supporters. For the NWP, however, this climate was ideal as they continued to wage their political campaign for the ERA.

The NCDUERA was not willing to give up their epic battle for gender equity on their terms. Refusing to cast aside long fought protective legislation, they turned their efforts to a new piece of legislation—the Women’s Status Bill. Introduced in 1947 by Mary T. Norton and her colleague in the House of Representatives Helen Gahagan Douglas, a New Deal liberal who traded a career on the stage for one on Capitol Hill, the bill rejected a uniform, gender-neutral legal approach. The bill sought to “eliminate unfair discrimination based on sex.” And, at the “heart” of the bill, according to the Women’s Bureau’s Frieda Miller, was a presidential commission on the status of women that would review on a case-by-case basis the laws affecting women.\(^{42}\) Rather than pour their energies into a negative campaign focused on eliminating the ERA, advocates of the Women’s Status Bill hoped to engage in a national debate over "the political, civic, economic, and social status of women."

Undaunted by the failure of the Pepper Equal Pay Bill to pass in 1945 and the challenges of forging a legislative path to equality, the CWA and UAW Women’s Auxiliary continued to work with NCDUERA members and refocused their efforts on the Women’s Status Bill. The bill sought federal legislation that would “eliminate unfair discrimination

\(^{42}\) Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 63.
based on sex.”

On February 17, 1947, the Women’s Status Bill (WSB) was introduced in both the House and the Senate. According to National Committee on the Status of Women in the United States, a lobbying group led by the retired director of the Women’s Bureau Mary Anderson dedicated to passing the WSB, the bill “should serve to break the deadlock over the so-called Equal Rights Amendment, which, for twenty-five years, has divided women leaders into two camps, and has hampered or delayed the achievement of their common aim—the effective removal of discriminations against women in laws and administrative practices.”

The bill was welcomed by the CIO and auxiliary leaders as an “important new women’s bill...[that] aims to remove unwise discriminations against women and yet preserve[s] labor laws...” Support for the WSB was evident when Helen Blanchard, the organization director of the CWA, was featured on Labor-USA, a national radio program. Calling on women to express their opposition to the ERA by supporting the WSB, the CIO national office was flooded with letters from women and men across the country. A woman from Denver, Colorado, wrote, “I was somewhat surprised to learn that some of our states are still in the ‘horse and buggy’ stage as regards [to] the status of women...Godspeed the day when we grow more intelligent and understand better the meaning of liberty and freedom.” Another woman from Pasadena, California, commented, “The point of particular interest to me was the enumeration of the number of states still imposing limitations on legal rights of women. For example, in 16 states women cannot sign a legal document

33 Ibid.


without their husbands’ consent.” In Nelson, Nebraska, a woman urged the radio show to encourage people to lobbying for the WSB, “Please count me [as] a supporter of the bill...invite people to write regularly. A lot can be done in the next three months.”

Unfortunately, the public support for the bill did not translate into legislative success. Yet, the bill was reintroduced every year until 1954 demonstrating the power of the bill. The Women’s Bureau Labor Advisory Committee called the WSB “a positive policy to get the wheels moving for the elimination of discrimination.”

By the late 1940s, the political participation of the CWA and their affiliate auxiliaries was considerably diminished. Eleanor Fowler, a stalwart on the national legislative scene, left Washington and moved to a farm in rural New Jersey with her husband C.W. Fowler, a labor journalist, and three young children. Within the UAW, the anti-ERA campaign began to take a backseat to more pressing household issues such as the mounting cost of living. By 1947, much of the auxiliary work reported in the CIO News and Women’s Auxiliary News revolved around meat protests and affordable childcare. Based on the meeting minutes of


47 Cobble, The Other Women’s Movement, 84.

48 According to Fowler’s children, they moved to a small farm in rural New Jersey in 1949. Fowler’s work with the CWA falls off significantly after 1946. Her friend and colleague Caroline De Caux of the CWA begins to attend meetings in her place. Fowler’s political career does not end with the auxiliaries. She resurfaces in the 1950s and 1960s as an active leader in the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom, but her auxiliary work ends by the late 1940s. Fowler’s husband, however, remained a labor journalist until his untimely death from cancer at 62. Emily E. LaBarbera Twarog, by Jane Morse, Personal Email, in Possession of the Author; n.a., "Eleanor W. Fowler Is Dead; a Labor and Peace Activist" New York Times, August 22, 1987.

49 By 1947, much of the auxiliary work reported in the CIO News and the Women’s Auxiliary News revolved around the 1947 meat protests and the cost of childcare. The ERA and related legislative work does not seem to rank as high a priority.
the UAW Women’s Auxiliary International Coordinating Committee, the ERA and related legislative campaigns did not seem to dominate their agenda as they did only a few years earlier. By 1953, when the Women’s Bureau announced the formation of the Committee for Equal Pay, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary was not listed as a member organization alongside the UAW. \(^{50}\) This reflects a shift from the earlier coalitions of the 1940s in which the UAW was represented at the table by both the union and the auxiliaries.

**Fade Out**

As the UAW Women’s Auxiliary organized their membership, they expressed concern over the seriousness with which union leaders were taking the ERA. At the start of their anti-ERA campaign in 1943, the Auxiliary leadership expressed frustration with “some trade unionists” who seemed to believe that “there is no danger of the [ERA] being passed.” \(^{51}\) One year later, the UAW continued to remain a reluctant participant in the anti-ERA campaigning. After repeated calls from Mary Anderson, the long-time Director of the Women’s Bureau, George F. Addes, the UAW International Secretary Treasurer, rejected the request from the NCDUERA for a $200 appropriation. Addes wrote, “I regret to advise that ...it will not be possible for us to contribute to the work of the National Committee to Defeat the Un-Equal Rights Amendment.” \(^{52}\) Addes went on to suggest the “UAW Legislative


\(^{51}\) n.a., "untitled," ALUA, UAW Women's Department/Women’s Auxiliary News, Box 3N-D-7(6), Folder - 1943, v.4.

\(^{52}\) George F. Addes, "Letter from George F. Addes, Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW, to Anna Berenson, December 15, 1944," ALUA, R.J. Thomas Papers, Box 22, Folder 4-E.
Committee in conjunction with the CIO should handle this matter.”

The struggle continued with the UAW International Executive Board as they drafted an anti-ERA resolution to be passed at the UAW Women’s Convention. Frieda Miller, the newly appointed director of the Women’s Bureau, seemed to exercise considerable patience as she worked with Douglas B. Maggs, the Solicitor at the Department of Labor, to craft a resolution that reflected the “broad objection that [the] Amendment would destroy innumerable legislative protective devices...” Upon reviewing the UAW’s original resolution, Maggs responded to Miller’s request for comments that the proposal was “inadequate” in that it focused too narrowly on working conditions. With Magg’s recommendations, Miller drafted a letter to Walter P. Reuther of the UAW urging a revision of the resolution. Miller wrote, “I do not think the issues in this situation are thoroughly understood...I do not think that the resolution passed at the women’s convention is clear...and indeed, to anyone reading the resolution, ...[it] will be very confusing.” For the ERA opponents, the offending portion of the resolution—“Nothing in this article shall be so construed as to invalidate or prevent the passage of legislation improving the working conditions of women”—focused too narrowly on working conditions as opposed to a broader equal rights agenda. Ultimately, with the recommendations of Maggs and Miller,

53 Ibid.

54 Douglas B. Maggs, "Letter to Frieda S. Miller, Director of the Women's Bureau, December 22, 1944," NARA II, RG86/Women's Bureau, Box 19, Folder - Equal Rights, 1945, Jan-Nov.

55 Frieda Miller, "Letter to Walter P. Reuther, Vice-President of the UAW, December 28, 1944," NARA II, RG86/Women's Bureau, Box 19, Folder - Equal Rights, 1945, Jan-Nov.

56 UAW Women’s Convention, "Resolution: Equal Rights Amendment December 1944," NARA II, RG86/Women's Bureau, Box 19, Folder - Equal Rights, 1945, Jan-Nov.
the UAW opted to strike the questionable paragraph and replace it with more sweeping language that reflected equity beyond the shop floor. The new resolution read, “That we urge the National PAC and CIO to conduct a campaign to rally public and congressional support of a real ‘equal opportunities’ bill.”\textsuperscript{57} While the implication of the resolution focused on gender, the CIO auxiliaries regularly included racial discrimination in their equality rhetoric and focused legislatively on supporting the passage of a permanent Fair Employment Practice Commission (FEPC).

In response to the NCDUERA’s call for opposition to the ERA, labor leaders across the country sent President Truman letters. While many leaders responded to this call, their enthusiasm for gender equality was not always reflected in their rhetoric. When D.R. Barneclio, the secretary of the Central Labor Union of Indianapolis, Indiana, took action against the ERA at the behest of the NCDUERA, he sent a letter to President Truman. "The male species of humanity have always tried to keep the female on a pedistal [sic] and accord them certain priveleges [sic] due to their sex. Supposing all the priveleges [sic] were suddenly taken away from them and they be declared on an even basis with men. It would not be long before the world would hear them screaming 'persecution' to the high heavens."\textsuperscript{58} While the tenor of his letter is decidedly tongue in cheek, Secretary Barneclio did heed the NCDUERA’s call for action along with labor leaders from across the country.

\textsuperscript{57} Victor G. Reuther, "Letter to Frieda Miller, Director of the Women’s Bureau, January 30, 1945,” NARA II, RG86/Women’s Bureau, Box 19, Folder - Equal Rights, 1945, Jan-Nov.

\textsuperscript{58} D.R. Barneclio, "Letter to Harry S. Truman, President of the United States, September 27, 1945," NARA II, RG86/Women’s Bureau, Box 19, Folder - Equal Rights, December 1945.
While the anti-ERA campaign sheds light on the strengths and weaknesses of labor’s participation in campaigns for gender equity, there is another layer to the class narrative of gender equity in the post-war period. During this time, the labor movement began to look internally for remedies to inequity by relying on collective bargaining resolutions rather than state interventions. Indeed, by 1953, AFL president George Meany pulled the AFL’s support for the equal pay bill. “We feel that in a free competitive economy, the task of establishing and safeguarding the principle as well as the practice of equal pay to women workers is properly within the province of collective bargaining and not of police action by the government.”59 Similarly, the UAW International Executive Board turned inward as they granted permanent status to the Women’s Bureau in 1946 as part of the newly established Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department. While this action symbolized a recognition of “the legitimacy of the demands made by women during the war and reconversion” as historian Nancy Gabin argues, it also suggests a trend to confront discrimination through collective bargaining rather than legislation.60 Lillian Hatcher, the first African American woman on the UAW’s staff as an international representative, recalls the early 1950s as a time “when we were really down to [the] serious business of eliminating discrimination as it might have been directed in contracts.”61 These shifts reveal the labor movement’s desire to seek organizational autonomy through collective

59 Harrison, On Account of Sex, 47.


61 Ibid.
bargaining as well as a mistrust of state intervention as the cold war ethos found a home in the labor movement.

In this context, it is essential to consider the symbiotic relationship between a union and its auxiliary. Within the UAW, there was a distinct decline in the political involvement as well as the organizational involvement of the women's auxiliaries in the union. While the UAW was a leader within the movement for gender and racial inequality, the extent of their commitment to gender equality for all women (not just women workers) was revealed in their actions to reorganize and cut funding to the auxiliaries. By the end of World War II, the International took a more active role in regulating the structure and activities of the auxiliaries.

With a postwar membership jump of 51 percent, the auxiliaries represented a significant percentage of UAW households.62 Unfortunately, this spike in membership turned out to be short-lived. Regardless, as membership in the auxiliaries grew immediately after the war, the International began to take a renewed interest in the organization. Under the leadership of Walter Reuther, the International sought to more closely regulate membership standards as well as to fold the auxiliary into a department within the union. In 1947, the union cut the Auxiliaries’ budget in half, severely limiting their ability to travel and organize new and existing chapters. At the 1949 Constitutional Convention the International Women’s Auxiliaries officially became the International Women’s Auxiliary Department. Article 51 of the 1949 UAW Constitution stipulated that

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the President of the International would "appoint the director to direct, coordinate, and
supervise the activities of the Women’s Auxiliaries.”

This type of oversight was common in AFL auxiliaries, but it was met with resistance
among UAW auxiliary members. At the 1949 UAW Constitutional Convention, Emil Mazey,
the Director of the Women’s Auxiliaries and UAW Secretary-Treasurer, stated:

I want to dispel some rumors that have circulated in some sections of the country
that these changes in the auxiliaries are designed to weaken, destroy, or limit the
auxiliaries. That is not so; they are designed to strengthen its functions and tie them
more closely to the International Union.

Mazey’s claims proved to be frail. At the 1951 UAW Constitutional Convention in
Cleveland, Delegate Herman Steffes, a member of Local 75 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, urged
the officers to revive the women’s auxiliaries. "We have taken a position in this
International union a year or so ago technically abolishing women’s auxiliaries, and I am
just wondering if something could be done in reorganizing the women’s auxiliaries...I know
the service we got from them in the last election, that we have to get our people educated,
and there is no better way of getting them educated than telling a women, because she can
really get around and do it. “ By 1955, Catherine Gelles firmly objected to the elimination
of their department altogether. In a memo penned to the UAW International Executive
Board, Gelles argued that wives rightfully deserved their own organization much as women
workers deserved union representation. "When the change was made in the structure of
the Auxiliaries back in 1947, when we agreed to change from an International Auxiliary


64 Ibid., 259-60.

65 United Auto Workers, "Proceedings of the Thirteenth Constitutional Convention,
organization with our own officers and our own convention, we held conferences in the various regions, pointing out some of the disadvantages and the problems that we were faced with under than structure,” reminded Gelles. “We agreed to change our status...and although there were some who didn’t wholeheartedly agree with the change nevertheless were willing to work under an Auxiliaries department...”\textsuperscript{66}

In a last-ditch effort, Gelles penned the 1955 memo in an attempt to preserve the auxiliaries as a substantial and relevant organization. However, in order to maintain the same level of influence in their communities and politically, the Auxiliary needed the infrastructural support provided by the International. By 1955, the International had established the Women’s Department and with the AFL-CIO merger on the horizon, the Executive Board sought to merge the Auxiliary and Women’s Department into one. The leaders of the Auxiliary movement firmly objected to this merger. Gelles wrote:

I am sure the majority of our membership will not like the idea of giving up our department and lose our identity as an Auxiliary organization...[T]he women in the union have their organization – their union. We have our organization – the Auxiliaries, and this is the only close tie with the union that the wives have – and we want to keep this tie...Far from being absorbed in another department the International should help us enlarge, increase and strengthen our department. Every effort should be exerted to assist us in building our organization as a recognized and important part of this great union of ours, where we, as wives of union members helped build this organization and rightfully belong.\textsuperscript{67}

Despite both organizational and ideological objections by auxiliary leaders, the International followed through with their plans and folded the auxiliaries into the UAW Women’s Department.

\textsuperscript{66} Catherine Gelles, "Memo, 1955," ALJA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 7, Folder 21.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
By the early 1950s, women again entered the workforce, generating another decline in auxiliary membership. For the first time, the UAW Executive Board relaxed the by-laws and allowed auxiliary members to hold dual membership in the auxiliaries and the union. An exchange of letters between Emil Mazey and Catherine Gelles underscores the need to allow dual membership in order stem the loss of members. Mazey wrote to Gelles,

It has been brought to my attention that a number of our Auxiliaries are faced with a tremendous loss in membership as a result of members of the Auxiliary obtaining jobs in plants under the jurisdiction of the UAW-CIO. I have been advised that unless we relax the interpretation of...the International Constitution, many of our Auxiliaries will be forced to discontinue their operations.68

While the UAW did allow for dual membership, this by-laws exception was temporary. And, furthermore, was distinctly uncharacteristic. The International typically resisted any exemptions to union policy. With the end of the war, the Executive Board returned to their original policy forbidding dual membership. And, despite the end of the war, many auxiliaries continued to lose members as women remained industrial jobs. This is most evident in an exchange of letters between Catherine Gelles and Ruth M. Gladow, an auxiliary president from Lockport, NY. Mrs. Gladow writes:

Our membership now numbers approximately 15 active members. At one time, we had a membership of 70, but as a result of the ruling of the International Convention prohibiting dual membership in both the Local Union and the Auxiliary, we decreased in size about 25 almost overnight, and since that time, others have become members of the Local Union and have, thereby, ceased being affiliated with our Auxiliary.69

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68 Emil Mazey, "Letter from Mazey to Catherine Gelles, 1951," ALUA, UAW Women’s Auxiliaries, Box 7, Folder 21.

In response, Gelles regrets the loss of membership and proposes to Gladow that the women workers should sponsor their mothers, sisters, and daughters to maintain auxiliary membership. Gelles writes, “It is little more difficult to organize an amalgamated local, especially when most of the members of the local are women, altho [sic] these women can sponsor their mothers, sisters and daughters into the Auxiliary.”

This recommendation reflects a significant turn around from the membership drives that shaped the early years of the UAW auxiliary movement. By 1957, the auxiliaries were struggling to remain active and relevant. With working-class women staying in the workforce, activism tied solely to domesticity was increasingly becoming a thing of the past. The future of the auxiliary movement looked bleak, yet their contributions during and after WWII contributed substantially to building the next phase of working-class women’s activism. The auxiliaries’ heyday had come to a close. Yet, within another decade, remnants of Pepper’s Equal Pay bill and the Women’s Status Bill could be found in legislative successes of the early 1960s. The political efforts of the auxiliaries were not wasted.

70 ibid.

71 In 1961, President Kennedy establishes the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Two years later, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 is passed as an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act. Both of these successes can be traced back to the legislative proposals of the 1940s with the Pepper Equal Pay Act and the Women’s Status Bill.
CHAPTER VI

FROM CITIZEN HOUSEWIFE TO THE POLITICS OF THE PANTRY:
THE DECLINE OF DOMESTIC POLITICS

On September 7, 1969, a truck pulled up in front of the manicured lawn of the Long Island home of Mickey and Ross DeLorenzo and dropped off a 400-pound steer as neighborhoods all stood in amazement. Sent as a challenge by Eddie Collins, a farmer and radio personality from Red Oak, Iowa, the steer was a publicity stunt meant to draw attention to the struggles of small family farmers in the midst of a meat boycott waged by suburban housewives led by Mickey DeLorenzo. Furious that boycotting housewives were claiming prices were too high, Collins declared that “Long Island suburban housewives don’t know what it takes...to bring a calf from birth to slaughter...[And] you don’t understand what is going on here [Ames].”¹ True to his word, Collins threatened to send the steer to Mickey DeLorenzo after they had gone head to head on a national radio program about the meat boycott she started over the summer. Mickey bit back declaring, “I can tell you this much. That calf will never be slaughtered.” Mickey and her husband, a union electrician, accepted the steer, who was appropriately named FLP (pronounced “flip”), in honor of the consumer organization DeLorenzo founded, For Lower Prices.² And, true to her word, FLP was never slaughtered. Instead, he spent part of his life in a Long Island petting zoo, and later moved upstate to live with a family.

This tension between the small family farmer and the suburban housewife represented a larger political tension between the meat industry, farmers, agricultural


policy, retailers, and consumers. Throughout the New Deal, policy makers struggled with how to address the issue of the Beef Trust and price fixing. Consumers and sympathetic politicians pressured the government to investigate the growing disparity between the cost of meat in the marketplace and the profits of the meatpackers. Mary Zuk, the Hamtramck leader of “the meatless summer of 1935,” pressed Secretary of Agriculture Wallace about the Agricultural Adjustment Act and demanded to know why the federal government was paying farmers not to raise pigs.\(^3\) In 1937, Massachusetts Governor Charles F. Hurley requested a formal investigation by the USDA of “exorbitant” meat prices.\(^4\) And, during reconversion after World War II, CIO women’s auxiliaries lobbied for price controls in an effort to stem the rising cost of meat only to be rebuffed by the massive lobbying efforts of corporate interests like the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce.\(^5\) With the Beef Trust looming like an impenetrable behemoth, farmers and consumers picked away at one another while housewives campaigned every decade between 1902 and 1969 for lower prices. And, with the exception of sporadic localized efforts, farmers suffered the consequences of diminished demand rather than build an alliance with consumer activists that could challenge the stronghold that the Beef Trust had over the cost of meat.\(^6\) And, by 1969, little had changed.

\(^{3}\) See Chapter One for more details on Mary Zuk and the "meatless summer of 1935."


\(^{6}\) In Chapter One, Mary Zuk and her organization the Committee Against the High Cost of Living was able to build an alliance with Michigan’s Farm Labor Party but the alliance was not the trend during consumer protests.
Functioning as one of two bookends that opened with the 1902 kosher meat boycott in New York City’s Lower East Side and ends with the 1969 and 1973 meat boycotts, this chapter is the story of why the auxiliary movement failed to maintain its progressive vision as well as who filled the void when the movement ended. To better understand this shift, this chapter relies on the experiences of three Jewish women whose roots go back to the mass migration of Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s. Each of the women featured in this chapter—Mickey DeLorenzo of Long Island, Jan Schakowsky of Chicago, and Ruth Goldway of Santa Monica, California—responded in precisely the same way that the housewives who established the Ladies’ Anti-Beef Trust Association did some seventy years earlier. And, according to interviews with all three women, they did so without prior knowledge of the meat boycotts that preceded them. Like Mary Zuk, all three of these women took leadership roles in their communities that garnered them national media attention and made them the local face of the meat boycotts.

In many ways, this is both a declension narrative as well as a story of progress. The 1969 and 1973 boycotts were the final meat boycotts in American history to date. They also marked the end of the citizen housewife and domestic politics as an effective strategy in the fight for a living wage for American families. But, these endings are as much about

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7 Both DeLorenzo and Goldway’s family migrated to New York City’s Lower East Side, while Schakowsky’s family came to Chicago after first migrating to Montreal, Canada.

8 DeLorenzo, Goldway, and Schakowsky all appeared in the media—newspaper and television—as spokeswomen for consumer activism. Because of Schakowsky’s position in the Congress, her history is better documented as she often cites her consumer activism as the starting point for her political career in both public lectures as well as her Congressional website. Jan Schakowsky, "Why Citizen Activism Matters: The View from Washington," in Distinguished Public Policy Lecture Series (Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University: 2002).
the victories of the civil and women’s rights movements as they are about the end of the New Deal “activist state” and a consumer movement heavily reliant on domestic politics. I argue that the waning legacy of the New Deal activist state and the last generation of the citizen housewife generated an atmosphere in which women used their pocketbook to mount a consumer campaign on behalf of the family economy.

These last two boycotts reflected all that was good and problematic with earlier boycotts. In one way, the boycotts regressed in that they were not part formally tied to an institutional campaign to address larger issues of consumption and the living wage similar to the 1902 kosher meat boycotts. They were largely localized boycotts that fueled other boycotts around the country especially as Ralph Nader’s Consumer Union drew increased attention to consumer issues. The impact of anti-communism after World War II destroyed any hope of a movement. As Annie Stein, an auxiliary leader in the CWA and member of the Women’s Trade Union League, wrote years later: “…the CIO was changing. And the great movement of which we had been a part, which had so much momentum, fell to pieces after the war.” Yet, despite the loss of a “great movement,” the consumer activism of 1969 and 1973 helped housewives use the supermarket as a site where women

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10 Initially published in 1965, Ralph Nader’s book *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* was updated and reissued in 1972.

demanded public authority. And with that authority, as Ruth Goldway recalled, they turned away from their “regular life” and funneled their anger into public lives that impacted politics and the community in a more lasting way than Zuk could have ever imagined.

As organized labor responded to the rise of anti-communism by effectively purging their rebellious past and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) merged in 1955, the militancy and community focus of the CIO women’s auxiliaries continued to slip away. The UAW Women’s Auxiliary struggled to maintain an autonomous identity apart from the increasing numbers of women who remained in the workforce after World War II and then the Korean War. Catherine Gelles’ fear that folding the Women’s Auxiliary into the newly formed UAW Women’s Department would diminish the relevance of the Auxiliary proved true. While the auxiliary movement did not disappear, the merger of the AFL and CIO meant that political campaigns engaged with a diverse community based coalition that concentrated on equality such as women’s right to jobs, equal pay, and childcare disappeared as priorities.

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14 See Chapter Five for more details on Gelles’ campaign to maintain a distinct identity for the Women’s Auxiliary.

15 This would change a little bit when organized labor shifted their position on the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and began to support the ERA. Dorothy Sue Cobble,
Years prior, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary had asked the UAW International to fund a full-time organizer only to be turned down. But, by 1959, the national AFL-CIO auxiliary agenda was now more fully concentrated on turning out the vote for the Democratic Party through the AFL-CIO’s Committee on Political Education (COPE). With COPE driving the agenda, this relationship was reminiscent of the early AFL auxiliaries’ oversight by the Union Label Trades’ Department. This new focus was evident when the AFL-CIO National Auxiliaries hired Marcella Beatty as the auxiliary movement’s first full-time organizer.\(^{16}\) The change in the AFL-CIO’s priorities for auxiliaries was evident by the appointment of Beatty. The AFL-CIO leadership decided to pull from the more conservative International Association of Machinists (IAM), an early AFL affiliate and home to one of the largest AFL women’s auxiliaries; rather than look to decidedly more progressive and politically engaged CIO auxiliaries.\(^{17}\) Beatty’s background was shop floor centered. She helped organize her fellow Boeing aircraft inspectors and later became a shop steward and full-time union organizer for IAM District 70 in Wichita, Kansas.\(^{18}\) She was then appointed state director of Kansas’ Women’s Division of the Committee on Political Education (COPE).

The national leadership of Faye Stephenson, Catherine Gelles, and Eleanor Fowler was over. And, in large part, their progressive leadership seemed to be the cause.

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 149-152.


Stephenson and Fowler were both investigated for suspected Communist Party ties. As president of the CWA, Stephenson was accused of being a “prominent left winger.”\textsuperscript{19} Stephenson certainly had left leanings. In 1939, Stephenson’s feature role in the film \textit{United Action: The Story of the GM Tool and Die Strike}; the film was produced by Nykino, a radical documentary film group allied with Popular Front.\textsuperscript{20} In 1944, Stephenson and Fowler were mentioned along with seventy other notable women in the labor movement during a hearing of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Both women had sent “warm greetings” in a message to the women of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China in honor of International Women’s Day.\textsuperscript{21} And, in 1949, Stephenson’s support for the Labor Extension Act to fund labor education appears to be her final act as president of the CWA.

Meanwhile, Gelles and Fowler continue their political activism following two different paths. Gelles continued her leadership in the UAW Women’s Auxiliary as their director until 1971. In a 1961 oral history interview of her experience with the UAW Women’s Auxiliary, Gelles noted that the platform of the AFL-CIO National Auxiliary was education, community services, the union label, political action, legislation, civil rights, and


safety. But unlike her stories from the 1930s and 1940s, she did not elaborate on her current activities; the interview simply ended.\footnote{Jack W. Skeels, "Oral History Interview of Catherine Gelles, July 7, 1961," ALUA, Oral History Collection, Folder - Catherine Gelles, 19-20.}

Fowler, on the other hand, returned to her roots and returned to working with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). In the late 1930s, Fowler was the labor secretary for the WILPF challenging anti-union films, testifying against lynching, and supporting the right to organize for agricultural workers.\footnote{Joyce Blackwell, \textit{No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975} (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 102; Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, \textit{Waves of Opposition: Labor and the Struggle for Democratic Radio}, The History of Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 36; Carrie A. Foster, \textit{The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946}, 1st ed., Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 167; Linda K. Schott, \textit{Reconstructing Women’s Thoughts: The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom before World War II}, Modern America (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 152.} After spending the 1940s as the secretary-treasurer of the CWA and the voice of housewives on Capitol Hill, Fowler reemerged as a national leader in the WILPF in the 1960s. She does not, however, remain involved in the auxiliary movement. Given Fowler’s earlier attitude about the AFL as “...a very conservative organization,” it is not surprising that she leaves the auxiliary movement in favor of a more progressive organization.\footnote{Foster, \textit{The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946}, 167.} Unlike Gelles and Stephenson, Fowler’s middle-class background and education offered any number of opportunities outside of the labor movement that would not have been available to two working-class women regardless of their extensive leadership skills. In this way, Fowler’s
career parallels that of Caroline Ware who spent her entire life dedicated to promoting economic justice for workers. With the autonomy and progressive vision of the UAW Women’s Auxiliary and the Congress of Women’s Auxiliary gone, the political participation of auxiliaries in cost-of-living campaigns was also over.

Just as the iconic image of Rosie the Riveter is tied to the 1940s, the 1950s is witness to the iconic image of the ideal domestic housewife. As historians have demonstrated, the 1950s housewife is just that—a fabrication of the corporate imagination. The National Association of Manufacturing and other business entities sought to generate an ideal for the American family through advertising campaigns and short films used in the workplace, the reality of the American family unit was one that was in flux. A survey conducted immediately after World War II by the Bureau of Women Workers showed that seventy-five percent of women workers preferred to remain working outside the home rather than returning to the duties of full-time homemaker. In spite of the post-war impulse to procreate, married women, including mothers, joined the labor force. Between 1940 and 1960, the total number of women in the workforce steadily increased from 24.6 percent to

25 For more on Caroline Ware, see Chapter Four.


32.3 percent. And, of the total female workforce, married women saw the largest jump. By 1960, married women made up 61 percent of the female workforce whereas in 1940 only 36 percent of the female workforce was married.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, \textit{Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970} Washington, D.C., 2002; Lynn Y. Weiner, \textit{From Working Girl to Working Mother: The Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1985).} As Ruth Rosen has demonstrated, many of these women worked for two reasons—frustration with the isolation of housewifery and the consumer desire to obtain the American vision of the “good middle-class life.”\footnote{Rosen, \textit{The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America}.} Of course, this was not the case for many African American and immigrant women workers as well as single mothers. And, by 1956, the white-collar jobs exceeded industrial jobs for the first time United States, with many of those jobs being low-skilled secretarial and clerical positions filled by women.\footnote{Rosen, p. 20}

While all women decidedly did not aspired to be homemakers, the reality remained that women continued to run and perform all the tasks necessary to maintain a household in spite of their status in the paid workforce.\footnote{Of course Betty Friedan shattered the myth when she publicly announced that there was indeed nothing wrong with her because she “...didn’t have an orgasm waxing the kitchen floors.” See: Betty Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, 20th anniversary ed. (New York, N.Y.: Dell Pub. Co., 1984). And, in turn, historian Daniel Horowitz shattered another myth when he revealed that Friedan was anything but a suburban housewife who “wasn’t even conscious of the woman problem.” See: Daniel Horowitz, \textit{"Rethinking Betty Friedan and the Feminine Mystique: Labor Union Radicalism and Feminism in Cold War America}," \textit{American Quarterly} 48, no. 1 (1996); Horowitz, \textit{Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism}. And most recently, Stephanie Coontz revisits the contributions of \textit{The Feminine Mystique} in Stephanie Coontz,}
one of the biggest, most time-consuming tasks for all women, and it continues to be. As historian Tracey Deutsch suggests, regardless of whether a woman worked outside the home, she was the default consumer of groceries—and this was no small task. She quotes one woman in 1968 who summed up her experience with the shopping: “It is difficult enough to watch the children, check how the bags are being packed...and count the change. But to add stamps, games, and coupons to all this is only insulting the shopper.”  

Mickey DeLorenzo, the Long Island housewife with the steer on her lawn, commented that in an effort to reduce her workload with a second baby on the way, she and her husband purchased a large freezer to help limit the number of times she had to go to the grocery store. Domestic labor was cumbersome and time consuming. New technology did not save women time; rather, it ramped up expectations about cleanliness and what the norm should be for the family’s weekday meals. As historian Ruth Cowan notes, new domestic technology simply “reorganized the work processes of housework” rather than functioned as a time saver.

Women were seeking ways to minimize the work of maintaining the household. Just as consumption was gendered female, grocery stores as a space in the public sphere were gendered female. As historian Tracey Deutsch argues grocery shopping and gender were deeply intertwined throughout the twentieth century. By the 1950s, a woman’s role as a consumer was no longer about safeguarding the family economy and

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34 DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".

promoting a living wage for workers. Instead, as Deutsch argues, “[f]emininity and passive shopping, once opposed, were now nearly conflated.”\textsuperscript{36} Grocery shopping was no longer a duty for the family manager in as much as it was a social activity or outing. Thus, protests over the rising meat costs and misleading food labels amounted to a challenge to gender norms and, in the words of Jan Schakowsky, incredibly “subversive.”\textsuperscript{37}

This type of direct action was, indeed, subversive. As Deutsch argues, grocery stores in the postwar period sought to transform their spaces into “an emblem of smooth-running consumption and domesticity.”\textsuperscript{38} Yet, in doing so, they became political spaces in which “...postwar liberalism and gender relations were reified, enforced, and linked.”\textsuperscript{39} While the grocery industry sought to create an atmosphere of leisure and comfort in each store, consuming housewives viewed grocery stores as a public space of protest where they could express their disapproval of food costs and quality. But this bumped up against the cold war vision of domesticity and femininity. Unlike the housewives enlisted by the Office of Price Administration during World War II who were fulfilling their citizenship obligations by recording and holding accountable grocers for the quality and price of goods, housewives in the 1960s were upending notions of gender roles and expectations; they were putting at “risk their femininity and access to the benefits of postwar shopping.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} Deutsch, \textit{Building a Housewife’s Paradise}, 201-202.

\textsuperscript{37} U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011," (Transcript in possession of the author).

\textsuperscript{38} Deutsch, \textit{Building a Housewife’s Paradise}. 184

\textsuperscript{39} ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
"I don’t know where I got the guts"41

In August 1969, Mickey DeLorenzo, a suburban housewife in Levittown, Long Island, got a call from her sister who had recently relocated from Brooklyn to Long Island. Struggling to make ends meet, her sister was finding it difficult to deal with rising prices. “[E]verything is so expensive and there is nothing you can do about it,” Mickey’s sister fretted. Ross DeLorenzo, Mickey’s husband and union electrician, “cavalierly” asserted, “Of course, there is something you can do about it...Boycott something!”42 With no knowledge of earlier meat boycotts, Mickey and her sister tried to figure out what food item their families could do without before arriving at the decision so many women before them had — meat. Just three years after the 1966 meat boycott that drew national attention and prompted Esther Peterson, President Johnson’s special assistant for consumer affairs and a former organizer for the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, to declare, “I just think it’s so beautiful that the gals are waking up,” two housewives from Long Island again called on the meat industry to lower the price of meat.43

DeLorenzo and her husband met at sixteen in their Brooklyn neighborhood. Mickey’s parents were first-generation Jews whose parents had immigrated to the Lower East Side at the turn of the twentieth century. Following the migration patterns of so many other immigrant families, Mickey’s parents settled in Brooklyn, working long hours at white-collar jobs, and found some measure of financial stability. Her father worked in the

41 DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".

42 Ibid.

composing room at the New York Times, and, as Mickey recalled, when her father “allowed” her mother to work, her mother found a job as a bookkeeper. Eventually, her parents saved enough money to open a small soda fountain shop in their neighborhood. After a few years of marriage, Mickey and her husband continued the migratory path and moved to Levittown, Long Island. One of three communities built by Levitt and Sons after World War II, Levittown was a “planned community” for GIs returning from the war. By the mid-1960s, it remained a largely white, middle-class community that built close-knit social groups that revolved primarily around raising their families. Mickey’s husband drove the twenty-five miles back into Manhattan to his job as a union electrician. They were living the dream—single-family home with two children and a stay-at-home mother.

By 1969, meat was a staple in the American diet of working- and middle-class consumers. Between 1947 and 1972 the weekly earnings of non-supervisory workers increased 62 percent. And the consumption of meat was symbolic of this success. Both working- and middle-class families ate meat on a daily basis. As working-class families consumed cheaper cuts such as hamburger, many middle-class families purchased sirloin and porterhouse steaks. In the DeLorenzo household, the ability to afford better cuts of meat was directly linked to the union wage earned by Mickey’s husband. Regardless of the quality of the cut, meat consumption rose from “57 pounds in 1955 to 70 pounds in 1965,

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reaching a peak of nearly 80 pounds of beef per American in 1970.”

Breaking this down into servings per year, it is estimated that Americans were consuming on average approximately three 8-ounces servings of beef a week. With the inclusion of cheaper meats such as chicken and pork, the average American potentially sat down to a dinner plate that included one serving of meat-based protein every night of the week.

During the summer of 1969, meat was increasingly more expensive. Middle-class consuming families like the DeLorenzo’s were choosing to buy cheaper cuts, while many working-class families as well as senior citizens on fixed incomes were finding it impossible to afford even the cheapest cuts of meat like hamburger. DeLorenzo noted, “The housewife we were most concerned about,” DeLorenzo emphasized throughout the boycott, “was not the one who had been able to afford sirloin and porterhouse before the prices rose, but rather the woman who is working within a fixed budget.”

Despite no prior political involvement and having just given birth to her second child that summer, DeLorenzo’s and her sister’s decision to boycott meat set into motion a national consumer action. Placing an invitation in the local newspaper, the *Levittown Journal*, Mickey called on local families to gather at the Levittown Hall, a community space in the town center. Not sure how many people to expect, Mickey’s father-in-law, a UAW organizer, advised her to set up a limited number of chairs. He explained, “If you have a lot more chairs and...people don’t show up, it’s going to look as it people aren’t concerned.” Lack of interest was not an issue. The room filled with families angered over high prices.

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Realizing that they were not the only ones concerned about the increased cost of living, it also occurred to DeLorenzo that she was “unprepared in every way.”

With no shopping centers in Levittown, one hundred housewives gathered to picket the grocery store at the Hempstead Turnpike shopping center on August 12, 1969. They called themselves For Lower Prices (FLP). Handing out menus for “tasty fish dishes,” the women chanted “Let the meat rot!” and “Prices too high, we won’t buy!” Making this their first stop, the women split up and targeted three supermarkets in the shopping center.

With her two children including her newborn son in tow, Mickey organized pickets around Nassau County. The pickets enraged the supermarkets, and FLP members were threatened with arrest on more than one occasion. Trained by Mickey’s father-in-law, the women knew “the ins-and-outs of walking the picket line” and Mickey carried his lawyer’s number in her back pocket as protection. By October, DeLorenzo estimated that 1,500 housewives on Long Island were actively participating in the boycott activities.

The boycott generated significant media coverage beyond the greater New York area. Within a month of organizing their first picket, FLP members were putting together FLP Kits, starter packets to help other communities organize a meat boycott. With no national coordination, meat boycotts sprung up in Virginia, Connecticut, Colorado, and

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48 DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".


50 DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".

Florida. In Arlington, Virginia organizers met at a local Lutheran church to drum up support for a Washington, D.C.-area boycott. And, like the Long Island housewives, women in Virginia began organizing other housewives by leafleting several shopping centers. DeLorenzo was in regular contact with about twenty leaders across the country with little time to do much else. In fact, DeLorenzo’s home had become the epicenter of the 1969 boycott with her phone ringing off the hook. With some local political pressure, the DeLorenzo’s were bumped to the top of the waitlist for an additional phone line. Arriving on a Saturday to install the new line, the telephone worker commented that he didn’t know what the rush was all about. As he plugged in the new phone, it rang!

Like Mary Zuk, DeLorenzo and other members of FLP were concerned about more than the price of meat. DeLorenzo demanded a federal investigation into the pricing of meat. Placing the blame on the packers and the public policy, she was careful not to direct her outrage at the farmers, as she believed that the blame lay with the policymakers and the packers. DeLorenzo succeeded in getting a hearing, but found it to be a farce. Just as Zuk had demanded a transparent investigation into the meat packing industry in 1935 only to be rebuffed and met with a closed-door hearing, DeLorenzo quickly realized the investigation was a “whitewash.” Prior to her testimony, the office of Congressman John S. Monagan of Connecticut contacted DeLorenzo. They firmly requested that her testimony

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54 DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".

55 Ibid.
not include the word “boycott” and sent a legal aid to her home to proofread her statement. On the day of the hearing, DeLorenzo presented two testimonies—the approved version and her own statement. In her testimony before the House Subcommittee on Government Operations, Mickey DeLorenzo expressed her frustration that the media was spinning a story to imply that housewives were angry with farmers. Commenting on her gift of FLP the Steer, DeLorenzo pointed out that raising a calf in suburban Long Island was “an unrealistic experiment.” She went on to comment that:

It was...[a] false assumption that the housewife blamed the farmer and ranchers for the high retail cost of meat. In truth, the housewife does not feel that the small cattleman, operating on a marginal profit is to blame....[W]e do know that after our first meeting with supermarket executives, retail meat prices in local stores of supermarket chains dropped by 20 to 30 cents per pound without a corresponding decrease in wholesale prices.\(^56\)

Months later during a trip to Indiana organized by local farmers, DeLorenzo discovered that some media outlets in the Midwest were selectively quoting her and editing out the boycotters’ support of the small farmer. This further confirmed for DeLorenzo that the issue of meat pricing was a complicated, intrastate cookie jar in which many people had their hands. DeLorenzo recalled that she went into the boycott “as an innocent and came out of it unfortunately a bit cynical.”\(^57\) Shortly after the boycott ended, DeLorenzo received a call from a local community leader asking if she would be interested in running for public office. DeLorenzo refused saying she was “exhausted” and had no interest. She did, however, return to college earning her bachelor’s degree and then went on to earn a master’s degree in social work. With the full support of her husband, DeLorenzo worked as a family therapist until her recent retirement.

\(^56\) DeLorenzo, "Federal Responsibility for Retail Price Increases for Beef".

\(^57\) DeLorenzo, "Telephone Conversation with Author, January 6, 2011".
**The Code Breakers**

Price hikes in food were not the only consumer issue impacting grocery stores and shoppers. Consumers were growing weary of a lack of transparency about the goods they were purchasing. This was evident by the quantity of consumer protection legislation that was passed between 1960 and 1970. Twenty-eight pieces of legislation was passed in Congress ranging from the Color Additive Amendment (1960) to the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (1966) to the Truth-in-Lending Act Amendments (1970).\(^58\) It was not uncommon for housewives to find food items to be both expired as well as inaccurately priced. And, when they inquired about the lack of labeling or the price discrepancies, they were typically rebuffed or ignored by the clerk or store manager. For a group of housewives in suburban Chicago, honest pricing and transparent labeling became a mission. For Jan Schakowsky, one afternoon shopping trip would turn out to be transformative.

In 1969, Jan Schakowsky, now a U.S. Congresswoman, was a newly married wife with two young children living in Mount Prospect, Illinois. Like Levittown, Mount Prospect was a town built to accommodate the baby boom. Only nine percent of the housing was built prior to 1940, with seventy-nine percent built during the 1950s.\(^59\) In 1960, the median value of the homes was $25,000, or the equivalent of $406,000 in 2010.\(^60\) Based on 1971

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\(^60\) The 2010 amount is based on the nominal GDP per capita. The nominal GDP per capita is the average person output of the economy in the prices of the current year.
sociological study of suburban Chicago, several women interviewed indicated "...a strong
prejudice against the neighboring farm-field community of Rolling Meadows.” Because of
Rolling Meadows’ lower socio-economic bracket, the women felt that Mount Prospect was
"...losing prestige and decline as a result of its proximity.”61 Schakowsky along with her
fellow boycotters were not in line with the more conservative views of Mount Prospect’s
housewives. In fact, all of them moved out of Mount Prospect during the 1970s.
Schakowsky was born in Chicago and grew up Rogers Park, a heavily Jewish neighborhood.
She attended the local neighborhood school, and, unlike DeLorenzo who did not complete
college before having her children, went onto the University of Illinois earning a degree in
education in 1965. But, soon after graduating, Schakowsky married, moved to Mount
Prospect, and had two children.

One day in 1969, Schakowsky loaded up her two kids in the car and headed out to
do her customary family shopping at a local grocery store. However, what she encountered
at the butcher counter was anything but business as usual. A group of housewives were
demanding information about the age of the meat behind the counter. Having been
rebuffed recently for asking the same question, Schakowsky sidled up to the group. ““If you
don’t like our meat or think it is good enough, then I can throw you out of here on your
fannies, you geeks!” the butcher yelled at the women. Schakowsky thought to herself, “This
was clearly more exiting than just being a housewife.”62 The women were “outraged” that
they could not get a straight answer out of their local grocery store about the quality of the

61 Lopata, Occupation: Housewife, 23.

62 Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011".
food they were feeding their young families. This quarrel between the Mount Prospect housewives and the local butcher led to the founding of the National Consumers United.63

Schakowsky, Lynne Heidt, Jackie Kendall, and Marian Skinner were not veteran activists. They were, in the words of Schakowsky, “authentic” in their desire to do their jobs as housewives and feed their families healthy meals. “We were so suburban housewife in out little polyester outfits and our kids [and] our starter houses...” she recalled.64 Yet, their authenticity did not preclude them from growing excited about the social and political upheaval that defined the late 1960s. Schakowsky and Heidt each participated in the United Farm Workers grape boycott along with ten percent of the rest of the American population. And Marian Skinner, whose husband was a union steelworker, had been involved in the 1966 meat boycott in Denver, Colorado. While their political participation was limited, the opportunity to use domestic politics as a route to greater political participation was exciting to Schakowsky.

It was not uncommon for consumers to wonder how long a packet of bologna or loaf of bread had been taking up space on a grocer’s shelf. Rather than a “Use by” stamp, consumers found a code that meant nothing to them. In fact, most consumers were unaware of the code altogether. Lynne Heidt’s attention was brought to the code when her milk delivery was spoiled. Heidt complained to the delivery driver, who twisted the bottle around and looked at a code. This prompted Heidt to examine other foods, and she realized

63 The group was initially named National Consumers’ Union until they realized that the name was already taken by the Consumers’ Union. Lynne Heidt, "Interview with the Author, Evanston, Il, January 13, 2011," (Transcript in possession of the author); Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011"; ibid; Lynn Taylor, "Suburban Housewives Declare Consumer Independence Day," Chicago Tribune, December 18, 1969.

64 Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011".
that most of the foods in the grocery store were imbedded with an expiration code that was only known to the producers and the sellers, but not the consumers.\textsuperscript{65} The women behind the National Consumers Union made it their mission to break this code. In essence, they became code breakers.

With national attention on the meat boycott waning, the women called for a “consumer independence day” in the fall of 1969. Invoking the lingo of organized labor, the National Consumers United (NCU) declared that consumers have the “right to collective bargaining, to limit the mounting costs of good and services, and to expect that purveyors have the authority and obligation to stand behind the goods they sell.”\textsuperscript{66} With this mission in mind, NCU members directed their attention to the local grocer. With clipboards in hand and kids in tow, housewives conducted store inspections. They examined food items such as Oscar Meyer bologna, bread loaves, and baby formula and foods recording the codes on the items. In order to understand the codes, the women turned to the stock boys. Calling their actions “subversive,” Schakowsky remembers, “push[ing] the stock boys against the shelves...[to] make them tell us how they knew to rotate the shelves.”\textsuperscript{67} To avoid the sale of potentially expired goods the women would stab pencils through packs of bologna and load up carts of expired foods and deliver them to the store manager.

The National Tea Company felt so threatened by the organizing efforts of the National Consumers Union that they hired Kirkland Ellis, one of the world’s largest corporate law firms, to investigate the group’s members. “Can’t you control your wife?,”

\textsuperscript{65} Heidt, "Interview with the Author, Evanston, Il, January 13, 2011".

\textsuperscript{66} Taylor, "Suburban Housewives Declare Consumer Independence Day".

\textsuperscript{67} Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011".
Lynne Heidt’s husband was asked when he received a call at his offices at Montgomery Ward. Jackie Kendall’s husband, then a lawyer at Abbott Labs, received a similar call. In 1970, National Tea operated 950 stores in 20 states including 250 stores in the Chicago area. Their annual sales were $1.5 billion. Yet, a group of suburban housewives and their clipboards seemed to threaten one of the largest grocery chains in the country.

By August 1970, National Tea’s anxiety increased further when the women purchased a share of National Tea stock and showed up at a shareholders’ meeting in Wilmette, Illinois, an upper-middle class enclave on Chicago’s north shore to voice their anger about the lack of transparency to consumers. The NCU’s shareholder action was part of a new strategy to hold corporations answerable to consumers. In the U.S., shareholder activism dates back to the late 1920s and the shareholders’ rights movement that was a reaction against the lack of corporate accountability and transparency that fueled the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression. However, it would not be until the early 1970s when organizations would be use shareholder activism for social causes.

68 Heidt, "Interview with the Author, Evanston, II, January 13, 2011". The National Tea Company

69 "Norman Stepelton, National Tea Vice Chairman, Dies at 57," Chicago Tribune, August 8, 1970; ibid. National Tea was a regional supermarket chain similar to Kroger and Piggly Wiggly, not to be confused with the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company established in 1859 and is now known more commonly as A&P.

NCU’s strategy for the shareholder meeting was to create a scene that would generate press about the issue of food labeling. At the meeting, the women used their one share to nominate Mike Royko, a Chicago muckraking newspaper columnist, to the board of National Tea. The following year, Royko gained national attention with his unauthorized biography of Mayor Richard J. Daley that characterized him as a corrupt and racist mayor.\(^1\) This stunt generate such an uproar and distraction that other shareholders began to ask for the proxies back. During the chaos, the women lobbed questions at National Tea’s president Norman Stepelton. The women demanded to see the companies books and records and wanted to know how much money the company had spent to spy on them. Stepelton lost his temper and yelled at the women, “I don’t know who you people are? Are you Communists? Or spies from Jewel?” The next day, Stepelton dropped dead of a heart attack at his home in Winnetka, Illinois.\(^2\)

Media played a critical role in the success of NCU’s campaign. While the women were anything but media savvy, they generated a good story. Schakowsky penned press releases drawing attention to their actions, but it was Ralph Nader’s comment about their “spontaneous consumer movement” on national television that turned the spotlight on them. “We were so suburban housewife,” Schakowsky remembers, and this was the appeal for the media she believed. Jackie Kendall made an appearance on a national radio show out of New York City, and Lynne Heidt found herself face to face with Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs on the Today show when it came through Chicago. Both Kendall and Heidt announced to the nation that they had developed a “codebook” to decipher the expiration

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\(^2\) “Norman Stepelton, National Tea Vice Chairman, Dies at 57”; Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, II, February 8, 2011". 
codes on foods. Pricing the books at 50 cents, the women soon began to receive orders
from across the country of the codebook. They found themselves opening sacks of mail and
sorting thousands of coins. In the end, they received upwards of 30,000 requests for the
book.73

With no institutional support, the NCU, like FLP, were funding their activities on
their own. But the production of a codebook was too rich for their pocketbooks. They
applied for a grant from the Chicago-based Playboy Foundation. Beginning in the late
1960s, the foundation with pressure from women’s rights groups started funding feminist
causes and women’s rights organizations, specifically they began to fund support for access
to abortions and organizations that helped rape victims.74 While food labeling and
expiration dates were not quite the same hot-button issues as abortion and rape, the
domestic politics that drove NCU’s campaign clearly appealed to the Playboy Foundation.
The small grant enabled the women to produce 50,000 bound copies of the codebook to
fulfill the orders. Housewives across the country were now armed with a set of codes to
decipher the age of the goods they were purchasing. Realizing that the issue was
widespread, Jewel grocery stores, National Tea’s competitor, began to run ads stating that
their store brand had freshness dates.

The campaign became an extension of the women’s job as housewives. For
Schakowsky and the others, the lack of transparency was a gendered assault on their ability
to do their jobs. “Would your husband buy a car from a dealer who refused to tell him what

73 Heidt, "Interview with the Author, Evanston, Il, January 13, 2011"; Schakowsky,
"Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011".

74 Carrie Pitzulo, Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy (Chicago ;
year it was?" Schakowsky and the other women would ask shoppers. They felt that because grocery shoppers were predominately women, the industry felt that they could take advantage of them. Yet, the NCU’s shoestring campaign succeeded in rattling the grocery industry and forced a change to the benefit of consumers.

It also launched and defined much of Schakowsky’s political career. After NCU’s campaign, Schakowsky moved to nearby Evanston, a more progressive university town despite its notoriety as the home of Frances Willard and the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, where she raised her children and went to work for Illinois Public Action and the Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens. And, unlike DeLorenzo whose cynicism about the political process led her to reject a possible career in politics, Schakowsky found herself excited about the possibility of a political career. Over fifteen years after her first consumer campaign, Schakowsky ran for the Cook County Board. She lost, but in the process discovered that she loved electoral politics. “I loved to campaign! I just loved it...I put a thousand miles a week on the car just driving around the county...It was the women that were just amazing...”75

1973

By 1973, wages were at a standstill while prices continued to climb. Calling the increase in meat “a serious drain of the average American’s take-home pay,” 3,000 AFL-CIO delegates took time out of their collective bargaining convention to pass an endorsement to support a weeklong meat boycott in April 1973.76 Between 1968 and 1973, housewives in

75 Schakowsky, "Interview with Author, Evanston, Il, February 8, 2011".

urban and suburban areas across the country felt the impact of stagnating wages on the family economy. They were stuck. Meat prices soared and wages fell flat. Meat was not the only grocery item becoming increasingly unattainable. Shoppers saw the price of instant coffee and onions on the rise as well. “You can't even afford to have a decent cry anymore,” one shopper commented in response to the soaring cost of onions, which had gone from five cents a pound to 35 cents a pound in a matter of months.77

With the high cost of food a national issue, elected officials began to call for intervention in the form of both a boycott and price controls. U.S. Representative William R. Cotter of Connecticut urged consumers, meaning housewives, to organize a national boycott of meat. In a March 1 speech in the House of Representatives, Cotter noted the boycott activities, which prompted Washington area housewives to organize a rally on the Ellipse. April Fool’s week (April 1–7) quickly took root as the optimal goal for a national boycott. Cotter commented that women will “no longer be fooled by a price control program that simply does not work.”78 Referring to President Nixon’s failed attempts to curb the increasing cost of living, Cotter was not the only politician who questioned the efficacy of Nixon’s financial policies. U.S. Representative Ogden R. Reid of New York introduced legislation several days before the start of the April Fool’s meat boycott calling for a “roll back” of food prices to the January 1, 1972, prices and a limit on all future


increases to 3 percent.79

The nation’s attention was fixed on the growing boycott and seemed to dominate the public discourse. In New Hampshire, legislators voted down a call to endorse the meat boycott, while in neighboring state Maine, the House of Representatives adopted a joint resolution endorsing the boycott and urged all state employees to “join in the boycott.” At the New Jersey State House, legislators, employees, and administrators found themselves eating fish, eggs, and cheese during the boycott week with the governor’s approval. Similarly, supervisors on the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to support the boycott, but refused to take the next step and ask their colleagues to pledge not to consume meat at their own dinner tables. Supervisor Kenneth Kahn “balked” at the prospect of elected officials pledging to uphold the boycott personally. Yet, mayoral candidate and Los Angeles City councilman Tom Bradley expressed “outrage” at the high cost of meat and said that he and his wife would abstain from meat during the weeklong boycott and continue not to buy meat on Tuesdays and Thursdays until the prices dropped. He also called on the city’s Bureau of Consumer Affairs to “enlist volunteers to monitor” meat prices and publish comparisons which was reminiscent of the World War II effort by the Office of Price Administration to rely on the shopping expertise of housewives to keep prices under control. In Cleveland, Ohio, a City Council resolution called for a “Boycott Meat Month” as opposed to the one-week April Fool’s boycott.80


80 The political support of this boycott is reminiscent of the 1910 meat boycott covered in Chapter One. "Bradley and Wife Boycott Meat in Protest on Prices," Los Angeles
And, while local, state, and federal politicians debated the merits of the meat boycott, families in all corners of the country began to turn to alternate forms of protein to supplement their diets. Housewives in Portland, Oregon replaced beef with horsemeat in response to the high prices. One area store sold 3,600 pounds of horsemeat in six hours. With a price difference of $2.00 a pound, horsemeat grew in appeal as customers lined up through the night. In Hellerton, Pennsylvania, one woman turned to dog food as a protein alternative as she and other housewives picketed outside a local A&P Supermarket. Wearing a placard calling for the boycott of meat, Mona Guth downed a spoonful of wet dog food to make a point that the family dog was eating better than their human companions. And, in New York City, Dorothea Hoskins reached for neck bones instead of sirloin steaks. Yet, she noted the neck bones would take longer to cook causing her to spend more in cooking gas. However some women who participated in the meat boycott, such as Janet Muchnik of Park Forest, Illinois, grew concerned after reading in Consumer Reports that “...hot dogs have a large percentage of water, and peanut butter is filthy.” Another Chicago area consumer bristled at Nixon's suggestion that housewives buy offal such as brains and intestines rather than standard cuts of meat. “I wonder how often those cuts show up on his plate,” the consumer asked. And, rejecting meat altogether, a Kansas City taco stand substituted cheese for meat with little comment by customers while a fast food chain in

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Omaha, Nebraska—home of the Omaha Steak—introduced the soybean burger.\textsuperscript{82}

Vegetarian menus seemed to pop up everywhere—at rallies, protests, and in the newspapers. To encourage housewives to stick with the boycott, organizers offered meat alternative menus for women to use at home. The Housewives of Azusa for Lower Priced Meat organized a parade through downtown Azusa, a small suburb of Los Angeles located in the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, demanding lower meat prices. Patricia Greenwalt, a leader and organizer of the group, saw the parade as an opportunity for housewives to also “exchange ideas for meatless meals.”\textsuperscript{83} The \textit{Washington Post} published two sample weeklong menus provided by the Virginia Citizens Consumer Council (VCCC), an organization promoting the boycott, and the Maryland Seafood Marketing Authority, who sought to take advantage of the high prices of red meat and chicken by encouraging women to buy fish. The VCCC board urged all consumers to switch to eggs, cheese, beans, and other high-protein substitutes stating that they were “[o]utraged by the recent climb in prices.” On Capitol Hill, Rep. Cotter published a “meatless menu” in the Congressional Record suggesting Congressmen to go vegetarian for the boycott week.\textsuperscript{84}

In California, housewives in suburban Los Angeles organized “Baloney Rallies” and adopted slogans like “Let Them Eat Cheese,” as the federal government failed to curtail the


growing gap between wages and the cost of living. In Azusa, California, the Housewives of Azusa for Lower Prices Meat organized 200 women who paraded past shopping centers to protest the prices. And, at a Santa Monica playgroup, a group of young mothers decided to join the boycott after one of the playgroup mothers had heard about the call for a weeklong boycott. With a vibrant press scene and one mother with some experience with the media, the women organized a picket. At the first protest, they had “as many press as people.” With a little bit of press coverage, other women joined in the boycott and the momentum grew as the rest of the country also pressure the meat industry to lower process and petitioned the federal government to put a stop to the rising cost of living.

Within a couple of months, many of the Santa Monica housewives had stopped their pickets and protests, but the experience was transformative for one member. Ruth Goldway was a young mother who has recently relocated to the Los Angeles area. On a hiatus from graduate school to raise her young son, the meat boycott has been an exciting entrance into consumer politics. Goldway was not new to political activism; her parents, Jewish intellectuals had been involved in left wing politics in New York and she had some experience with the UFW grape boycott and the civil rights movement. But, until the meat protests, Goldway did not see herself as a political activist. She was, however, deeply influenced by Frances Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Plant*, a 1971 manifesto against industrial agriculture, and the rampant practice of redlining in California communities.

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Rather than “going back to [her] regular life,” Goldway decided to funnel her anger into organizing and took over Fight Inflation Together (FIT), a local consumer organization.\textsuperscript{86}

FIT quickly became a go-to organization for food issues. Much like Schakowsky in Chicago, Goldway’s group turned their attention to better pricing on products and food labeling. With some grant money, FIT was able to expand their programmatic work as they made connections across the state. This shift from local neighborhood pickets in support of the weeklong boycott to a “real organization that worked on food” helped to institutionalize the work. FIT joined with other groups in California such as the UAW and the Consumer Federation of California to fight the “war on high prices.” Goldway and others took the momentum from the shockingly high food prices to address larger issues of the food industry in general. As Goldway built more networks, she was hired by the Governor Brown administration to the assistant director of consumer affairs. As she recalls, “In building this movement, I did naturally became more political.”\textsuperscript{87} And, Goldway’s position in the Brown administration marked the beginning of a long political career.

Goldway decided to run for political office. Her first political run was for a seat on the state assembly. She did not win, but it led to a strong group of supporters in Santa Monica. By 1981, Goldway was elected as part of a progressive slate to the Santa Monica city council, where she was eventually appointed mayor by the city council. Her tenure as mayor was marked by significant consumer issues such as access to healthy foods (they established a farmers’ market) and the introduction of rent control. In the 1970s and early


\textsuperscript{87} Goldway, "Telephone Interview with Author, February 1, 2011".
1980s, Santa Monica was a sleepy town filled with aging renters rather than movie stars. Using rent control as a key campaign issues, Goldway’s slate mobilized more residents to vote in the municipal elections than ever before.\footnote{James Ring Adams, "Santa Monica's Suburban Radicals," \textit{Wall Street Journal}, July 1, 1981; Goldway, "Telephone Interview with Author, February 1, 2011"; Derek Shearer, "How the Progressive Won in Santa Monica," \textit{Social Policy} (Winter 1982).} This “urban populism” is reminiscent of the populism of the early twentieth century that made its mark on the industrial triangle of Cleveland, Toledo, and Detroit.\footnote{Shelton Stromquist, "Claiming Political Space: Workers, Municipal Socialism, and the Reconstruction of Local Democracy in Transnational Perspective," in \textit{Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History}, ed. Leon Fink (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).} With these “building blocks” of progressivism, the local leaders of Santa Monica were able to counter the growing pressure from Reaganism and the New Right.\footnote{Shearer, "How the Progressive Won in Santa Monica".} Goldway’s political career moved beyond the California state lines when Goldway left Santa Monica to follow her husband to Finland where he was appointed ambassador by then-President Clinton. Upon her return to the United States, Goldway’s skills as a consumer activist and politician paid off when she was appointed chairman of the Postal Regulatory Commission by the Clinton administration; a post she still holds today.

The 1973 meat boycott was a turning point for both consumers as well as housewives. For DeLorenzo, Schakowsky, and Goldway, it created political possibilities beyond their community. While DeLorenzo declined the opportunity, it was her choice. Both Schakowsky and Goldway found fulfillment in political careers. The ability to make these choices reflects a coming together of domestic politics with second wave feminism.
a housewife. Yet, the flip side of this progress was the end of an era of the citizen housewife and collective action on behalf of domestic politics.

In some ways, the labor movement contributed to the decline of domestic politics as well. The AFL-CIO National Auxiliary was an increasingly irrelevant organization. In fact, during the 1973 meat boycott which dominated the national news, the AFL-CIO National Auxiliaries met in Miami in conjunction with the AFL-CIO’s national convention.\(^91\) And, not once did Novella Porter, the National Auxiliaries’ Executive Director, or any other auxiliary member raise the issue of the meat boycott. However, in his opening remarks at the Auxiliary convention, Wes Reedy, a representative from the AFL-CIO, focused on the high cost of living and the ineffectiveness of President Nixon’s price controls. Yet, he never appealed to the auxiliary members to engage in the boycotts using their roles as housewives. In fact, his only reference to housewives was in the third person. “Every housewife knows that the price of good is the fastest climbing item in the consumer price index.”\(^92\) Unlike a generation earlier, when union leaders called on housewives to use their roles in the public sphere to become politically active, Reedy called in the Auxiliary members to “...fight for a law to reform political campaign financing so that 1974 and 1976 elections will be decided by public issues and not secret dollars.”\(^93\)

The widespread support of the women’s movement along with the reality that women continued to enter the workforce, organized labor put resources towards the


\(^{92}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 25.
passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and the establishment of women’s organizations such as the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). Established in 1974, CLUW was a direct result of the success of the women’s movement. Unlike the contentious debates about the impact of the Equal Rights Amendment on working women, the 1970s was the dawn of a new era in the relationship between working women and feminism.\textsuperscript{94} Under pressure from union women’s committees, attitudes shifted and many women union leaders came out in support of the ERA.\textsuperscript{95} Whereas in the 1940s, the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries set the agenda for women in the labor movement, CLUW was now pioneering a new platform for women, and the emphasis was on the rights of women workers as both trade unionists and women.\textsuperscript{96}

Housewives were no longer a political interest group; “housewife” had, in essence, become a “dirty word.” Politicians no longer addressed the “concerns of housewives” as they did in the past; nor did they seek the “expertise” of housewives in domestic issues. Reports by mainstream media outlets stopped referring to women as housewives. On the upside, the media began to refer to women’s given names rather than the feminized version of their husbands’ name. This shift took place for two reasons. First, the influence of second-wave feminism created an environment in which the heterosexual nuclear family was seen as an agent of oppression. Perhaps just as influential as Betty Friedan’s \textit{The Feminine Mystique} in the 1960s, Kate Millet’s 1970 \textit{Sexual Politics} proclaimed that the


\textsuperscript{95} Of course support for the ERA was not unanimous, see: Cobble, \textit{The Other Women’s Movement}.

\textsuperscript{96} Balser, \textit{Sisterhood and Solidarity}, 154.
nuclear family was "a force frustrating revolutionary change." And for many feminists, the family became the place where the oppression of women was most overt. It was during this time that "...mother' was conflated with 'housewife,' and 'housewife' was a dirty word..." Furthermore, the effect of conservative crusader Phyllis Schlafly on the public debate about women's liberation drove home the dichotomy between the "housewife" and the "feminist" as antithetical to one another.

In 1969, the national pressure of the meat boycott forced a response from the new White House. Aiming his talk at American housewives, President Nixon's live radio address placed the blame for the "spiral of wages" and "upward climb of prices" on the Johnson administration. "[T]he Federal budget over the past 5 years has been the primary cause for unbalancing the family budgets of millions of Americans," Nixon declared. In fact, the cost of living was increasing so rapidly that Nixon imposed price controls for the first time since the Korean War. Nixon's controls were generally ineffective, but his choice to use

97 Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, [1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

98 Monica Dux and Zora Simic, The Great Feminist Denial (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 112-13. As Dux and Simic point out, not all feminist intellectuals of the time argued that motherhood was inherently "dirty." They point out that feminist Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born suggested, "women's biological capacities could revolutionize society." Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Norton, 1986).


price controls was evidence that the national government was still engaging in New Deal-style policies. By 1973, the final influences of the New Deal state were gone.

There are a number of reasons why 1973 has not been written into the history books as the year of the last great national meat boycott. Nixon resigned; the Supreme Court changed the course of reproductive history with their decision in *Roe v. Wade*; the draft end and the American troops were pulled out of Vietnam; the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) declared an oil embargo on the United States; and, PBS premiered the documentary *An American Family*, which “portrayed the dissolution of one white, middle-class family.”101 According to historian Jefferson Cowie, “[t]he hope and possibility marbled throughout the confusion of the early part of the decade began to fade into the despair of the new order emerging in the second half.”102

The decline of the citizen housewife was also impacted by the gradual loss of the American consumer identity. In his study of consumer activism and the failure to establish a Consumer Protection Agency (CPA), historian Lawrence Glickman argues that by 1977, “...conservatives no longer readily recognized the centrality of the consumer identity...The key metric to justice legislation became the 'higher cost to the taxpayer'...”103 If we look at this moment in time as one of decline—the disappearance of the “housewife,” the shift from a collective identity as consumers to a very individualistic identity as a “taxpayer,” and,


finally, an overall decline in a working-class identity, it became clear that a political agenda rooted in domestic politics was obsolete and dismissed as "politics of the pantry."\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. For a discussion of the decline of the working class, see: Cowie, \textit{Stayin’ Alive}. 
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In February 2011, the Chicago Sun Times reported that the wholesale prices of food took their biggest month-to-month jump in thirty-six years, and food prices for staple items such as vegetables, meat, and dairy spiked 3.9 percent between January and February 2011. Furthermore, the United States Department of Agriculture, forecasted that the cost of consumer food prices would continue to rise by three to four percent during the year.¹ Meanwhile, MomsRising, an organization that “encompasses the concerns of stay-at-home moms and working mothers” as they seek to bring important issues about motherhood and families to “the forefront of the country’s awareness,” failed to note this trend.² Aside from a handful of reports on the increased cost of school lunches, MomsRising offered little analysis on the relationship between real wages and the high cost of living despite the presence of the AFL-CIO, the American, Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and a handful of labor affiliated organizations on their list of over eighty-five “aligned organizations.”³ Recruiting thousands of mothers and “anyone who has a mother,” MomsRising echoes the vision of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries’ President Faye Stephenson as she sought to build a national movement of housewives. As a virtual movement of individuals and organizations, MomsRising hopes to “raise awareness of the

¹ n.a., "Food Prices Make Biggest Jump in 36 Years," Convience Store News (online), March 17, 2011 (accessed June 20, 2011).


idea of a New Bottom Line in America.”

So, why is MomsRising not calling for an uprising of mothers who are angry that their families’ wages are out of touch with the cost of living? Or perhaps the more meaningful question is: What happened to the housewife?

From the 1902 kosher meat boycotts until today, each generation of women witnessed an economic upheaval that in turn prompted them to respond by protesting. In the first decades of the twentieth century, immigrant women rallied against the high cost of living in their neighborhoods demanding economic justice in the marketplace. By the 1930s, Popular Front organizations and the Congress of Industrial Organizations helped to create institutional support for housewives to become even more politically active reaching beyond their communities and onto the national stage as they sought regulations to limit the disparities between corporate profits and the family economy. CIO auxiliaries such as the UAW Women’s Auxiliary believed that they could build a movement of housewives that was the most progressive organization in the world. And, for a brief moment in time, they did. The next generation, benefiting from the successes of organized labor at the bargaining table, migrated to the suburbs and found themselves picketing their local supermarkets when the price of food jumped three times between 1966 and 1973. And, yet, the current generation faced with a similar economic climate as 1973 is missing. Is the legacy of domestic politics obsolete?

Throughout the twentieth century, politicians and industry approached the American public as consumers who used purchasing both to attain the American Dream

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but also as a political tool in the workplace as well as in their communities. For example, the UAW Women’s Auxiliary effectively tied the purchasing power of their husbands’ wages to the capacity to consume in their campaigns to regulate the cost of living. And, in turn, government agencies such as the Office of Price Administration recognized the local authority of housewives as consumers. But, this was over. By the late 1970s, as historian Lawrence Glickman points out, citizens were no longer a collective body of consumers. Americans no longer saw their collective consumption as a political tool. Housewives were no longer experts on the family economy and barometers of the working-class economy; politicians dismissed domestic politics as irrelevant. The American worker was not a consumer, but a taxpayer. Thus, the concern for the community as a whole that drove the political agenda of labor union auxiliaries was replaced by concerns for the well being of isolated nuclear families. And, this concern, in turn drives the political agenda of groups like MomsRising. In essence, the mother replaced the housewife.6

It is the absence of the housewife that drives the failure of twenty-first century maternalists, like MomsRising, to incorporate class into their agenda. It is as though labor and working-class history is absent from their consciousness. The twentieth century’s


7 This can be seen in the plethora of books that have come out over the past decade that focus on women’s relationship to mothering, the history of mothering, and the decision by a growing number of middle- and upper-middle class women to “opt-out” of their careers and focus on mothering. Ann Crittenden, The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001); Rebecca Jo Plant, Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press); Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy: Women, Politics, and the Future (Emeryville, Calif.: Seal Press, 2004); Judith Warner, Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005); Naomi Wolf, Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2001).
housewife is the twenty-first century’s stay-at-home-mom. This new moniker emphasizes the shift away from a woman’s relationship to the family as whole to her relationship with her children in what Judith Warner calls the “mommy mystique.”8 Her job is focused on the details of parenting rather than the management of the home. While middle- and upper-middle class women “opt-out” and worry over the toxic chemicals in their children’s toys, poor and working-class mothers are struggling to make ends meet. In fact, poor and working-class mothers who want to stay home are barred from this option as time limits in welfare programs push them back into the workforce. The lack of a broad agenda focused on domestic politics pushes the issues of the American standard of living and the living wage out of the private sphere and into the public sphere.

The cleverly acronymic M.O.T.H.E.R.S. spells out the agenda for MomsRising - maternity and paternity leave; open, flexible work; toxic free families; healthcare for all; early care and education; realistic and fair wages; and sick days, paid.9 Their campaign for “realistic and fair wages” calls for “living wages for mothers and equal pay for equal work” as they support the Paycheck Fairness Act. As an update to the Equal Pay Act, MomsRising sees this new bill as a “comprehensive bill that would create stronger incentives for employers to follow the law, empower women to negotiate for equal pay, and strengthen federal outreach, education, and enforcement efforts.”10 Yet there is no call for women to use the labor movement to organize in their workplaces. And, furthermore, there is no dedicated blog link to the issue of a living wage and equal pay for women workers. This


10 Ibid.
lack of emphasis on issues for working-class and poor women functions to make MomsRising a legislative movement of middle- and upper-middle class mothers. MomsRising’s focus on legislative remedies mimics the early twentieth century’s campaigns for protective rather than transformative legislation.

Meanwhile, just as Jewish women of the Lower East Side organized the Ladies’ Anti-Beef Trust Association as a community response to high prices, African American communities across the country have turned their focus inward in an effort to bring fresh food into their communities. Coined “food deserts,” there are major swaths of urban neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods. In 2009, *Chicago Magazine* published a report that revealed over 600,000 Chicagoans live in food deserts, “a concentrated area short on access to fresh meat and produce, but flush with the packaged and fried yield of convenience stores and fast-food outlets.”¹¹ As big box stores and grocery chains fail to open in these communities, many are attempting to solve the problem themselves. For Food Desert Action, a Chicago community organization, the solution came in the form of a retrofitted former Chicago Transit Authority bus and the creation of the Fresh Moves campaign. Using a city bus, the Fresh Moves campaign carries fresh, organic produce to Austin and North Lawndale, two Chicago’s neighborhoods hit hardest by lack of healthy food. The Fresh Moves’ bus visits both neighborhoods weekly making three stops in each neighborhood for a total of six fresh food sites a week for residents. They accept cash as well as LINK cards that are part of the Illinois food stamp program. Funded primarily through grant money, the Fresh Moves program is an example of community innovation in the face of institutional neglect by government and industry.

By juxtaposing MomsRising with the food desert movement, I draw attention to the importance of class and the evolving definition of the American standard of living. The priorities of MomsRising and Food Desert Action reflect the class divide in this country. There is an opportunity to learn from earlier social movements such as the coalitional efforts of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries and the UAW Women’s Auxiliary. By placing the campaigns of these two groups into a historical context, the potential to build a political agenda around the needs of the family rather than the individual reemerges.
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