

From “Servant” to “Hotel Worker”

Class Warfare, Hotel Workers, and Wobblies in New York City, 1893-1913

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Acronyms and Abbreviations:

IHWU: International Hotel Workers Union (IWW affiliate)

HRE: Hotel/Restaurant Employees Union (AFL affiliate)

AFL: American Federation of Labor

IWW: Industrial Workers of the World

HTC: Hotel Trades Council – the present hotel workers union successfully organized in 1938

IHW: International Hotel Worker (Official Publication of the IHWU)

JPA: Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago

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Introduction: “Strike Is On!”

On December 31st, 1912, the wealthy elite at New York City’s finest hotels and restaurants – such as Delmonico’s, the Plaza, the Belmont, and the Waldorf-Astoria – expected to ring in the New Year like any other. Behind the façade of “servant” geniality, approximately forty-two thousand disgruntled hotel and restaurant workers of the City were working twelve to eighteen hour days in less than ideal conditions.¹ During the winter of 1912-1913, the New York elite met face to face with the types of industrial warfare they had perhaps only read about in the *New York Times* and *Herald*.² At more peaceful walkouts wealthy hotel guests joked, suggesting that they were “greatly amused” at being present at a real walkout.³

But at other establishments New York hotel workers organized the first mass strike in the industry in direct opposition to not only their bosses, but the elite patrons as well.⁴ Throughout January, organizers entered the dining rooms of famous hotels, like the Astor, blew their strike whistles, and shouted the “strike is on;” leaving food uncooked and guests sitting dumbfounded in their seats. Outside of these hotels, workers marched in moving picket lines throughout Midtown Manhattan. Strike leaders urged cooks and waiters to engage in industrial sabotage so waiters exchanged plates of food for bricks through windows to serve to the elite diners. Cooks exchanged spices for stink bombs to drive out guests. Hotel workers attempted to storm the front doors of the Waldorf-Astoria and smashed windows along Forty-Fourth Street. On December 31, thirteen hotels gave in to the International Hotel Workers’ Union’s (IHWU) demands.⁵

¹ New York Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report of the Corporation of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York* (New York: Press of the Chamber of Commerce, 1910), 211.

² Frank Bohn, “The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers,” *International Socialist Review* Vol 13 (February 1913): 620-621.

³ “Brick Calls Out Mouquin’s Waiters,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1913.

⁴ “A Few Bricks, ETC,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; “Chronicle of the New York Strike.” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; “Waiters Attack the Hotel Astor: Strikers Hurl Volleys of Bricks,” *New York Times*, January 1, 1913.

⁵ “Chronicle of the New York Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

The strike was a reaction to poor working conditions in the hotels and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union's (HRE), the existing AFL-affiliated hotel workers' union, inability to address them. The strike first started on May 7, 1912, when three hundred members of the IHWU walked out of the Hotel Belmont in response to the termination of workers who marched in the May Day parade.⁶ Thousands more walked out at other hotels in a general strike beginning on May 24. Before it ended one month later 2,500 waiters, 1,000 cooks, and 3,000 other hotel workers at 54 hotels and 30 restaurants had gone on strike with the guidance and endorsement of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).⁷

Hotel workers, like many other early twentieth century workers, complained of unsanitary and dangerous working conditions.⁸ Hotel workers often endured low wages, job insecurity, and working weeks in excess of 56 to 59 hours exclusive of overtime. The average day for a New York hotel worker ranged from twelve to eighteen hours, seven working days a week. In addition, workers endured managerial discrimination for engaging in union activity.

Some conditions, however, were peculiar to the hotel industry. Management arbitrarily and tyrannically fined hotel workers, which often left them with substantially reduced paychecks. The new tipping system also forced workers to depend sometimes entirely on variable tips rather than on consistent wages. In addition, the tipping system degraded the hotel worker to serve "two bosses," the manager and the customer, according to IWW union organizers.⁹ In response, throughout June 1912 hotel workers staged a general strike and demanded a minimum wage scale, a ten-hour day, a six-day week, union recognition, the abolition of fines, overtime pay,

⁶ Melvyn Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 7-13.

⁷ New York State Department of Labor, *Special Bulletins – State of New York, Department of Labor Issues* 50-53, September 1912, 275-277.

⁸ Andre Tridon, "The Shame of the Hotel Kitchen," *International Hotel Worker*, May-June 1913.

⁹ Bohn, "The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers," 620-621; Matthew Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House: The History of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union, AFL-CIO* (New York: Random House, 1956), 86-90.

semi-monthly payment of wages, better sanitary conditions, and quality food served during mealtimes.¹⁰

Following the June general strike, the IHWU considered itself victorious in winning concessions from managers, higher wages, and improved conditions. Additionally, the IHWU claimed that the detested fining system was eliminated and that IHWU membership swelled to 17,000 total members in New York City (as opposed to the 900 members prior to the strike).¹¹ Hotel managers throughout the City, however, refused to recognize the IHWU. F.A. Reed, President of the Hotel Men's Association, threatened to close every hotel before recognizing the union.¹² One journalist for the *Hotel Monthly*, a publication printed for hotel proprietors, stated:

“Let us [management] say to the waiters now: Yours will be a losing fight, for the one point you are asking can never be granted. You have been given many things – an increase in wages, shorter hours, and improved conditions... to this your leaders say ‘don’t take them: insist upon the union being recognized.’ ”¹³

In essence, New York hotel managers claimed they could not recognize the hotel union because recognition would destroy the authority management exercised in the workplace. Without the job security that only a union could offer, managers continued to threaten workers with the prospect of being fired and replaced by “other men... [who are] coming to the city day by day” to take their “places.”¹⁴ Without union recognition, by September 1912, according to the New York

¹⁰ Bohn, “The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers,” 620; Mary Alden Hopkins, “International Hotel Workers’ Strike,” *Collier’s Magazine* Vol. 49, June 1, 1912.

¹¹ “Victory,” *International Hotel Worker*, June 1912, “International Hotel Workers’ Union Has Won The Victory,” *International Hotel Worker*, June 1912.

¹² “More Waiters Out,” *New York Tribune*, June 1, 1912.

¹³ “Strike Leaders,” *The Hotel Monthly*, February 1912, 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

State Department of Labor, fines returned, wages decreased, and conditions returned to the way they were prior to the May-June strike.¹⁵

Thus, the fifteen thousand or so IHWU members (out of forty-two thousand total New York City hotel workers in establishments with more than fifty rooms) went on strike again.¹⁶ Although, some IHWU organizers were critical of the IWW in the June leg of the strike – claiming that the IWW wanted “easy money” from dues paying members and also wanted to claim credit for a group of already organized hotel workers, which the IWW had not previously considered (which is untrue considering that the Western Federation of Miners, a predecessor of the IWW, had organized hotel workers in the West since the 1890s) – this time the IWW explicitly led the strike.¹⁷ Beginning with the December 31st walkout at “scab houses,” which did not recognize the union, the IHWU endorsed sabotage and did not discourage, nor explicitly promote, brick throwing or other forms of property destruction. Clashes between police, strikers, and hotel “private detectives” raged throughout the month. Private detectives beat strikers in back rooms with brass knuckles leading to fractured skulls; police threatened to kill and smashed strikers’ faces with their clubs; and strikers hurled brick projectiles through windows.¹⁸ On January 10, famous IWW strike leaders Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Joe Ettor explicitly took charge of the strike by dominating the five-member steering committee. Ettor and Flynn espoused the virtues of “sabotage.” The mainstream press lambasted the “anarchistic” and “radical” IWW, which it perceived to be spreading violence throughout New York.

¹⁵ “International Hotel Workers Union Has Won the Victory,” *International Hotel Worker*, July 1912; New York State Department of Labor, *Special Bulletins – State of New York, Department of Labor Issues 50-53*, September 1912, 275-277.

¹⁶ New York Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report of the Corporation of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York* (New York: Press of the Chamber of Commerce, 1910), 211.

¹⁷ Caroline Nelson, “Something Doing In Old New York,” *Industrial Worker*, January 16, 1913; “‘Victory’,” *International Hotel Worker*, June 1912; Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 42.

¹⁸ “Brick Calls Out Mouquin’s Waiters,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1913; *New York Call*, January 10, 1913; “Attack Big Hotels,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 1913.

On January 15, two thousands union members unanimously, by show of hands, voted for a general strike. A ballot vote was still required to authorize the general strike, however.¹⁹ Flynn set forth new demands: abolishment of the tipping system in favor of higher wages; clean and sanitary working conditions; clean and “wholesome” food; semi-monthly payment of wages; abolishment of the fining system; free uniforms; establishment of a uniform eight-hour day for all; and the outlaw of private employment agencies.²⁰ The demand of union recognition was noticeably absent, however. The anarcho-syndicalist IWW favored indefinite class warfare over the labor contract, which sought “industrial peace” through “obligation to the boss” and stripped the union of the “right to strike,” according to the IWW.²¹

Eighty-four percent of six thousand union members voted on January 23 for a general strike. From January 23 to January 27, walkouts occurred at about thirty more establishments but, altogether, only four thousand workers were now out on strike. Strikers once again marched throughout Midtown in flying picket lines, stormed hotel entrances, and were arrested and held at high bails for yelling “scab” or shouting “strike.” “Blood flowed freely” during brawls between strikers, policemen, and private detectives at Bryant Hall, the Astor Hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria, and so forth. IWW strike leaders insisted that the strikers obey police, but workers asserted their “right to march” by the thousands.²² On January 31st, however, another unanimous vote ended the strike, as most strikers had already drifted back to work.²³ By the end of the strike, twenty-nine, mostly smaller, hotels gave in to strike demands and became closed shops, according to the IHWU. By the end of 1913, however, the IHWU was defunct and workers’ gains vanished. The

¹⁹ “Chronicle of New York Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁰ *New York Call*, January 17, 1913; Caroline Nelson, “Something Doing in Old New York,” *The Industrial Worker*, January 16, 1913.

²¹ “Recognition of the Union Again,” *International Hotel Worker*, December 1912.

²² “Regan’s Private Police Arrested,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1913.

²³ “Chronicle of the New York Strike (continued from last month),” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1913; New York State Department of Labor, *Special Bulletins Issue 15, Issues 54-56*, June 1913, 155.

IHWU blamed a lack of preparedness, a lack of hotel worker solidarity, and the IHWU members that returned to work during the strike.²⁴

Within much of the secondary literature, historians have deemed the 1912-1913 “waiters’ strike” a failure. Howard Kimeldorf, who devotes a chapter in *Battling for American Labor* to the union organization of New York hotel workers, adeptly narrates the strike. Kimeldorf concludes that the strike was always “unwinnable,” and workers lost because the IWW failed to provide “credible leadership in a moment of crisis.”²⁵ Kimeldorf also exclaims, however, that the strike was significant because it made “deep and lasting inroads” amongst New York culinary workers.²⁶

There is only one text that specifically narrates the organizational history of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (HRE) – *Union House, Union Bar* written by Matthew Josephson. While Josephson comments on the peculiar status and conditions of hotel workers, he cites almost exclusively articles written within the HRE official publication, *The Mixer & Server*, in order to construct a picture of workers’ conditions. Additionally, Josephson does not analyze in detail the words of management to prove a degraded status, in reference to hotel workers’ employers.²⁷ Like Kimeldorf and Dubofsky, Josephson deems the strike a failure for its violent rhetoric and failure to appeal to public sympathy.²⁸

Many other labor historians have sequestered the strike to the realm of insignificance in the litany of IWW strikes. The lone sentence in Morris A. Horowitz’ *The New York Hotel*

²⁴ “Chronicle of the New York Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; “Chronicle of the New York Strike (continued from last month),” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1913; “Young Woman Leads the Waiters’ Strike,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1913; “Waiters Advised to Return to Work,” January 27, 1913; Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 106-110.

²⁵ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 112.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 113.

²⁷ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 92-93.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

Industry (an oft-cited labor relations study of the New York Hotel Industry from 1960) to describe this radical moment reveals how it is often abbreviated in the secondary sources related to the New York hotel industry.²⁹ As a “failed” strike within the IWW narrative, between the relative “successes” at Lawrence and Paterson, massive IWW chronologies – Melvyn Dubofsky’s *We Shall Be All*, Philip Foner’s *The Industrial Workers of the World*, and Patrick Renshaw’s *The Wobblies* – mention the strike or service worker organization of the East in a footnote, or not at all.³⁰ One may think that a strike with leadership by significant and mythologized IWW leaders – Elizabeth Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Joe Ettor – would receive more analysis. After all, Flynn, in her 1955 autobiography *Rebel Girl*, asserted that she was “never in such a hectic strike,” which is quite a characterization considering her long career as an IWW organizer.³¹

These works generally neglect the working conditions of service workers, and even Kimeldorf and Dubofsky, while documenting hotel worker strikes, do not describe in detail the working conditions and stigmatization of “service work” that radical labor organizers claimed were the crux of worker dissatisfaction.

Perhaps the strike was an utter failure for the IWW due to the incompatibility of IWW “Western... character and style” of “direct action, sabotage, and violence infused rhetoric” with the New York hotel industry, as Dubofsky contends within *When Workers Organize*.³² As noted

²⁹ Morris A. Horowitz, *The New York Hotel Industry: A Labor Relations Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 22; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 154; Jay Rubin (1943, March 4) [History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 4, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

³⁰ Philip Sheldon Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 349.

³¹ Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 153.

³² Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize*, 121; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World (2nd edition)* (New York: Quadrangle Books/The New York Times Book Company, 1988), 16; Caroline Nelson, “Something Doing In Old New York,” *Industrial Worker*, January 16, 1913.

in the *Industrial Worker*, a Spokane-based IWW newspaper, the “Eastern” IWW was fundamentally of a different character. Even in appearances, New York union orators became popular by “using proper language” and “dressing properly,” compared to the flannel-shirted, open-throated “Walt Whitman types” of the American West.³³

All of these works, however, contend that the IWW “failed” in New York, to some extent, because IWW ‘firebrand’ rhetoric and tactics of sabotage were incompatible with the New York hotel industry. Classifying the strike as a “failure,” however, is dismissive rather than truly analytical. The designation of the strike as a “waiters” strike is also problematic because it minimizes the ramifications of the strike to workers outside of the narrow job classification of “waiter” and eschews the fundamental contribution – the industrial union (the IWW and IHWU organizing tactic of organizing all workers in a workplace – bartenders, waiters, chambermaids, electricians, housemen, painters, etc. – rather than just one job classification – like waiters – as the AFL and HRE organized in the 1910s) – of the 1912-1913 IWW hotel workers’ strike to future organizing efforts in the industry. The IWW appealed directly to the concerns of hotel workers by speaking about status, degradation, and servility in addition to industrial unionism, sabotage, and syndicalism. The IHWU did not simply distribute a “Western” message to the workers of New York, but rather one tailored for the New York hotel industry. Simultaneously, IWW blue-collar “hobohemian masculinity,” however, alienated the majority of female hotel workers.³⁴

Although the strike did not “win” at the moment, it set an example that hotel worker organizers followed for twenty years following the strike. Shaun Richman notes the “wobbly beginnings” of the Hotel Trades Council (HTC) during the 1912-1913 IWW strike that put hotel

³³ Nelson, “Something Doing In Old New York,” *Industrial Worker*, January 16, 1913.

³⁴ Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 121.

workers out on the streets for the first time in significant numbers.³⁵ Richman notes that strike veterans of the 1912-1913 strike went on to organize the Amalgamated Food Workers (AFW), a food service industry, three years later, which continued to appeal to the multiple ethnic groups of the industry and eventually merged with HRE in 1937 to form the present HTC. Like the IWW, the AFW was a dual union to the AFL that did not believe in the labor contract, believed in industrial unionism, appealed now more explicitly to women, and employed spontaneous strike actions, while the HRE continued to sign sweetheart deals with employers to break strikes.³⁶ Richman, thereby, provides evidence of a link between the IWW and the structure of the present union without detailing the strike itself, which this thesis will.

More recent scholarship has begun to include the narratives of service workers in labor history. Dorothy Sue Cobble writes about the “occupational subcultures” and peculiar working conditions of waitresses. Cobble, thereby, partly informs this thesis in her use of sources, which looks at pamphlets of Progressive-era charitable organizations and contemporary periodicals detailing conditions of waitresses. Cobble’s goal is to challenge the male, blue-collar theoretical frameworks for the study of labor history. Cobble proves that a study of waitresses and their unions reveals the gendered nature of work and unionism. Cobble’s study is a critical step in reassessing the masculine and blue-collar labor histories of the past to include the conditions of female service workers and the ways in which they organized. While Cobble addresses how waitresses built their own, and participated in, unions, this thesis addresses how the IWW

³⁵ Shaun Richman, “Ideology Vs. “Rule or Ruin:” Politics in the Downfall of the Communists in the NYC Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, 1934-1952,” *American Communist History* Volume 11, No. 3 (2012): 244-245.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 245.

attempted (and failed) to incorporate women while also promoting an ideal of masculinity for service workers.³⁷

Likewise, Daniel Sutherland has contributed to the literature on American service workers with the discussion of the domestic “servant problem” in turn-of-the-century America. Sutherland addresses social stigma, paternalism, and an anachronistic feudal relationship between employer and employee in domestic service.³⁸ Literature on domestic service is important for this study as it informs how this thesis argues that hotel corporate management attempted to recreate and magnify the traditional anachronistic “master-servant” relationship of the upper-class home in a massive service business.

The impact of the IHWU cannot be understood without examining the working conditions and symbolism of Progressive Era America present in the New York palace hotel. This thesis focuses on the new “palace hotels” that employed hundreds of employees rather than the smaller working-class inns and boarding houses that only employed a handful of employees. The reason for this focus is twofold. Firstly, the majority of the workers that struck during the 1912-1913 IWW strike worked at large “palace” hotels and luxury restaurants like the McAlpin, Delmonico’s, the Waldorf-Astoria, the Ritz-Carlton, etc. Secondly, the focus on “palace hotels” highlights turn-of-the-century socio-economic class stratification, which was the basis for the IWW critique of hotel working conditions, as their status as “servants” was exacerbated and highlighted in settings where they had to serve the wealthiest clientele. This thesis will analyze the language that the IWW/IHWU used during the strike to denote New York “palace hotels” as the fundamental battleground for socio-economic class inequality and class warfare as well as

³⁷ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7-13.

³⁸ Daniel Sutherland, *Americans And Their Servants; Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 2-8.

the ways that the white masculinity of the IHWU and IWW in New York undermined its all-inclusive industrial organizing.

Historian Thai Jones, in *More Powerful Than Dynamite*, emphasizes “the anarchists’ impact on officials, policymakers, and others whose task it was to suppress their activities.”³⁹ Likewise, this thesis studies how the IHWU and IWW called attention to the social injustices heaped upon the modern and anachronistic “servant” in the early twentieth century New York hotel industry that the AFL-affiliated HRE refused to recognize or address. In the process, the IWW laid the foundation for the eventual organization of the Hotel Trades Council in the 1930s through its use of Industrial Unionism, the treatment of female workers, and the plea for the self-respect of the hotel worker in contrast to the HRE, which eventually adopted the same strategies in the 1930s. The supposed “failure” of this 1912-1913 strike was not the end of a hotel workers’ union, but it was simply the beginning.

As Melvyn Dubofsky contends, “the history of the Industrial Workers of the World can be understood only in relation to the economic and social changes between 1877 and 1917.”⁴⁰ Likewise, the history of the 1912-1913 IHWU/IWW hotel workers’ strike cannot be understood without considering the understudied economic and social conditions of the hotel “servant” that became the peculiar centerpieces of IHWU rhetoric and action against the HRE, hotel management, and the elite guests. Thereby, part one discusses the massive socio-economic class stratification in the hotel as well as the working conditions and “peculiar status” of the “hotel servant” at the beginning of the twentieth century. The documentation used for this section to describe the conditions of the hotel “servant” range between 1895 and 1920 prior to unionization. There are a few sources from the 1930s and 1940s from corporation-owned hotels

³⁹ Thai Jones, *More Powerful Than Dynamite: Radicals, Plutocrats, Progressives, and New York’s Year of Anarchy* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), 6.

⁴⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 5.

and restaurants that do not describe conditions but the social status of the “servant” from management’s perspective. In order to construct this picture, this thesis analyzes accounts from workers, government testimonies and labor studies, progressive era reform association documents, mainstream press depictions, and the words and deeds of employers.

Part two discusses the inefficiency of the HRE, the rhetoric and strategies that the IWW/IHWU used during the strike concerning the “hotel worker,” and the IWW/IHWU’s paradoxical attitude towards strikebreakers, as well as towards female workers. Although, the IWW was insufficient in appealing to all the workers in the hotel, the main thrust of the strike was transforming the peculiar “servant” into a “hotel worker,” which had significant consequences for forging working-class consciousness in the industry.⁴¹

The industrial organizing strategies and labor militancy of the IWW – organizing every ethnicity in the shop and challenging business unionism through syndicalism – categorizes IWW organizing drives in the American Northeast during the 1910s. The peculiar terrain of the hotel service industry, however, revealed some deficiencies within the IWW. The strike brought into question the use of sabotage and public opinion, highlighted masculine union culture in an industry that was forty percent female, and thereby tested the IWW’s actual active commitment to the inclusion of women as well as Afro-American workers. Nevertheless, the presence of the IHWU and IWW left long-lasting radical inroads into the class-consciousness of New York hotel workers.

⁴¹ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 109-110.

Part 1: Behind the Gilded Curtain: Working Conditions in the New York's Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century 'Palace Hotels'

“Versailles In New York”:

At the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, the New York bourgeoisie did not live and socialize in Versailles, but rather in luxurious hotels that resembled such old-world palaces.⁴² Historian



Figure 1: The old Waldorf-Astoria (1897)
Source: New York Historical Society, Hotel Files, Waldorf-Astoria (old)

Sven Beckert argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, a financial elite in America had formed. Beckert suggests that this elite was a cohesive bourgeois class defined by their capital investments, employment of wageworkers, and action in defense of class interests.⁴³ Hotels like the Waldorf-Astoria, the Plaza, the Belmont, and the Astor became mainstays of social life where banquets were held and wealthy financiers and industrialists lived.

New York hoteliers prided themselves on the replication of old-world royal

magnificence and the elite of New York indulged in such replication.⁴⁴ The Waldorf-

⁴² “Modern: Hotels That Rival Palaces of Royalty,” *Courier-Journal*, July 22, 1900.

⁴³ Sven Beckert, *Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-12.

⁴⁴ *The Story of A Great Hotel: The Waldorf Astoria*, New York: The Waldorf-Astoria, Inc., 1929, 1-8, Waldorf-Astoria (new), Hotel Files, New York Historical Society.

Astoria – perhaps the most famous, largest, and most grandiose hotel constructed during this period in 1893 (owned in part by William Waldorf Astor and John Jacob Astor IV) maintained an “exact replica of the historic Soubise ballroom” in the style of



Figure 2: Bradley-Martin Ball at the Waldorf-Astoria, 1897.
Source: New York Historical Society

Louis XV as well as an “exact replica of the Crystal Room at Versailles.”⁴⁵ Likewise, the Belmont Hotel contained a ladies’ reception room decorated “in the style of Louis XVI,” crystal chandeliers, bathrooms of “royal magnificence,” gold ceilings, and friezes reminiscent of “French Royalty.”⁴⁶ The Waldorf-Astoria was even the site of the infamous Bradley-Martin Ball, in which the most famous financiers and New York socialites dressed up like old-world French royalty and one guest even wore a ten thousand dollar gold suit of armor.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “Waldorf-Astoria Hotel Has Thirtieth Anniversary,” *New York Evening Post*, March 10, 1923; “A Souvenir of The Waldorf Astoria (New York, Waldorf Astoria, Inc., 1929), 2-3, Waldorf-Astoria (new), Hotel Files, New York Historical Society.

⁴⁶ “The Belmont,” *New York Herald*, April 29, 1906.

⁴⁷ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America*, (Oxford), 3-7; Frederick Townsend Martin, *Things I Remember* (New York: John Lane Company, 1913), 280-285; “The Bradley Martin Ball,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1897; “Echoes of the Big Ball,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1897; The Bradley-Martin Ball cost approximately 369,000 dollars in 1897, estimated to be equivalent to nearly 9 million in 2012 dollars (Source: Meredith Galante and Gus Lubin, “The Most Ostentatious Party in US History,” *Business Insider*, November 6, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/bradley-martin-ball-of-1897-2012-11>).

“Palace hotels” symbolized the inequality of turn-of-the-twentieth century America, as it was a place where a cohesive bourgeois class daily met face-to-face with the working-class.⁴⁸ Prior to the 1890s the wealthy dined and resided at establishments typically only six stories or less, such as the Fifth Avenue Hotel or Brevoort.⁴⁹ The Brevoort employed four hundred employees in the 1880s, which was considered an extravagance.⁵⁰ Many other hostelrys were small taverns and inns that rendered lodging and food service on a small scale and only employed perhaps two or three workers.⁵¹

By the turn-of-the-century many hotels were twenty or thirty stories tall with one thousand or more rooms and over a thousand workers of a multitude of different trades and nationalities that served food and lodging on a massive scale.⁵² The Hotel Belmont, for example, opened in 1906, was twenty-eight stories, contained 1,006 rooms, a bar, café, barber shop, sixteen elevators, and employed upwards of 1,000 employees.⁵³ In the opinion of future labor leaders, the expansion of the hotel industry meant the neglect of “the human element.”⁵⁴

Thus, to pan the lens beyond the marble floors and crystal chandeliers of bourgeois opulence in “palace hotel” ballrooms and living spaces throughout Midtown and the Upper East Side of Manhattan, one would observe a harsh juxtaposed reality for the so-called “servants” who worked and lived in vastly different conditions from those they served. In the dark, moist, and dangerous cellars below and behind the gilded curtains of the Waldorf’s Grand Ballroom

⁴⁸ Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 2-3, 12.

⁴⁹ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 672; Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 4-5.

⁵⁰ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 672.

⁵¹ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 41; Rufus Jarman, *A Bed for the Night: The Story of the Wheeling Bellboy E.M. Statler and His Remarkable Hotels* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), 7.

⁵² Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 5, 85, 279.

⁵³ “The Belmont,” *New York Herald*, April 29, 1906.

⁵⁴ Hotel Trades Council, *The American Way* [pamphlet] (New York: New York Hotel Trades Council, 1939), Folder 41, Box 12, New York University Wagner Archives, New York Hotel and Motel Trade Council Files, WAG .123.

laid, perhaps, the epitome of Progressive Era juxtaposition to New York bourgeois extravagance. As the “protectorate of the American Dream,” according to Ward Morehouse, the Waldorf-Astoria and other palace hotels not only represented the gilded material end-goal of American capitalism, but they also underscored the vast inequality inherent in the so-called “American Dream” as a point of direct encounter between the bourgeoisie and the working-class.⁵⁵

These hotel workers encountered conditions akin to other workers in the industries one normally associates with turn-of-the-century labor unionism, such as mining, textiles, railroading, and construction. But, hotel workers had an additional obstacle to overcome in their struggle for labor unionism – the denigrated social status of “servant” that was propagated by managers, guests, and fellow workers. Indeed, as one “experienced mistress” observed, in reference to household labor, “there is something terribly wrong in the relations between mistresses and servants; a something that one does not find in any other sphere of labour.”⁵⁶

This chapter details the conditions of hotel workers in palace hotels that proprietors subjected them to prior to unionization. Through comprehending the labor abuses foisted upon workers in palace hotels (such as long hours, dangerous conditions, and low wages) compounded with understanding the “peculiar” conditions of employment and undignified character of service work, one will understand the gravity of IHWU demands.⁵⁷ The purpose of this section, thenceforth, is to elucidate the largely undocumented conditions of hotel workers, male and female, which remained mostly unchanged after the construction of the first palace hotels and prior to permanent unionization in the New York hotel industry.

⁵⁵ Ward Morehouse III, *The Waldorf-Astoria: American's Gilded Dream* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2005), 1.

⁵⁶ *The Servant Problem: An Attempt At Its Solution By An Experience Mistress* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., LTD, 1899), 8.

⁵⁷ Bohn, “The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers,” 620-621; Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 86-90; “Public Sympathy and the Public,” *International Hotel Worker*, Vol. 1 No. 12, January 1913; William Whyte Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 19; L.S. Chumley, “Hotel, Restaurant, and Domestic Workers” (Chicago: I.W.W. Publishing Bureau, 1918), 27.

Hotel workers faced arbitrary patriarchal and paternal management, constant surveillance, sexual harassment, and the destruction of a democratic workplace by corporate management and the tipping system. By studying palace hotels – in opposition to working-class inns – as sites of juxtaposition between those served and those who serve, one can understand the significance of the IHWU claim that the palace hotel signified class struggle and conflict in the early twentieth century.

A Number, Not A Name: Managerial Hegemony, Conditions in the Shop, and the Workplaces of American Workers:



Figure 3: Maître d'hôtel Oscar Tschirky of the Waldorf-Astoria reprimands waiters.
Source: *New York Times*, April 23, 1905

Deplorable material working conditions and authoritarian managerial control bound practically all working people in the United States during the early twentieth century. Massive labor histories, however, do not include service workers in their chronologies, unless writing about post-1960s labor unionism.⁵⁸ The inclusion of service workers into early twentieth century labor history requires one both to note the similarities in working conditions, as well as differentiate their status.

Firstly, like most workers at the beginning of the early twentieth century, hotel workers were victim to severe discipline and managerial control. The Waldorf-Astoria embodied this

⁵⁸ Randi Storch, *Working Hard For The American Dream: Workers and their Unions, World War I to the Present* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 94-98.

management style. George C. Boldt – the first Waldorf general manager – created the “maxims of the hotel world” and was a preeminent speaker for the New York State Hotel Men’s Association, the New York hotel proprietors employer association.⁵⁹ *The Hotel Monthly* – a nationwide hoteliers’ publication – stated that the Waldorf-Astoria reflected the “greatest of all geniuses” in employee and business management.⁶⁰

Journalist Ward Morehouse III – who mostly praises the Waldorf’s management conduct – describes Boldt’s managing style as “disciplinarian,” although he justifies it as being executed with “filial,” “brotherly” or “paternal” “affection.”⁶¹ Morehouse claims that Boldt worked waiters 12 hours a day, seven days a week, refused to give workers a day off and only offered employees food known as an “Irish Stew,” which was comprised mostly of rotten food and leftovers.⁶² Likewise, “Oscar of the Waldorf,” the famous maître d’hôtel of the Waldorf, described his own management style as being executed with “military discipline” and that workers were constantly under the “eagle eye” and “surveillance” of a head waiter and three monitors or captains, whose goal it was to “note in little books every slip that a waiter makes.”⁶³ Oscar simply followed the maxims of contemporary hotel management. *The Hotel Monthly*, for example, asserted that hotel management should replicate “military government... the world over” and deal with “the help... more severely” in New York City than in cities with smaller labor markets.⁶⁴ Thus, on principle, Oscar refused to address workers by their given names (even though he claimed to know the name of “every guest in the [dining] room”).⁶⁵ Instead, Oscar addressed workers by a number because, as he stated, he could handle his men better by number

⁵⁹ “George C. Boldt Dead,” *The Sun*, December 6, 1916.

⁶⁰ “The Head Center of New York’s Social and Business Life,” *Hotel Monthly*, February 1912, 44.

⁶¹ Morehouse, *The Waldorf-Astoria*, 1, 25.

⁶² *Ibid*, 25.

⁶³ “How Oscar of the Waldorf Earns His Salary,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1905.

⁶⁴ John Tellman, *The Practical Hotel Steward* (Chicago: The Hotel Monthly, 1900), 7-8.

⁶⁵ “How Oscar of the Waldorf Earns His Salary,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1905; Lucius Boomer, *Hotel Management: Principles and Practice* (New York: Harper, 1938), 137.

rather than by name.⁶⁶ Oscar publically embarrassed, scolded, and “roasted” hotel employees by noting “every trivial fault,” “shaking his finger,” and shouting.⁶⁷ This style of management dehumanized the employee as simply a number and not a man.

Prior to unionization, “military discipline” and “clockwork efficiency” at the Waldorf, and other establishments, persisted until 1946 (when the Hotel Trades Council finally organized it after an eight-year organizing drive), according to hotel workers. Morehouse claims that Lucius Boomer – manager of the Waldorf and McAlpin hotel between the 1910s and 1940s – was also a “disciplinarian,” who was strict with the staff in a way that “would bring him legal trouble today” because he had “a hell of a temper.”⁶⁸ One bellman reported that, “if there was a complaint about service, that was it, you were fired on the spot. There was no such thing as unions when I came here.”⁶⁹ Workers at the Belmont Hotel were often “suddenly discharged” for talking union on the jobsite. These workers were subsequently placed on a blacklist, which was shared amongst the Hotel Men’s Association and thereby banished workers from the New York hotel industry.⁷⁰ Not until union organization in 1946, as the bellman claims, and the outlaw of blacklists in the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 did conditions begin to ease in the Waldorf, for example.

Secondly, in some instances, the most notorious union busting and disciplinarian employers in labor history also employed hotel workers. The Pennsylvania Railroad Corporation owned the Hotel Pennsylvania and the New York Central Railroad Corporation owned the

⁶⁶ “How Oscar of the Waldorf Earns His Salary,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1905.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Morehouse, *The Waldorf-Astoria*, 42-45; New York State Hotel Association, *Official Membership Book* (New York: Redfield-Kendrick-Odell Co., Inc., 1919), 20-24; Lucius Boomer was general manager of the Waldorf-Astoria throughout the 1930s and 1940s upon its reopening in 1931. Boomer was also, however, a manager at the Waldorf –Astoria and McAlpin hotel throughout the 1910s and 1920s, according to the 1919 edition of the *Official Hotel Membership Book* of the New York State Hotel Association.

⁶⁹ Morehouse, *The Waldorf-Astoria*, 42.

⁷⁰ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 86.

Biltmore, Commodore, and Roosevelt, for example.⁷¹ Both the Pennsylvania Railroad Corporation and the New York Central Railroad were key belligerents in the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. These corporations used the Pennsylvania National Guard to break the strike, which resulted in the death of twenty people.⁷² Management of railroad companies in the early twentieth century, like that of the hotel industry, controlled the ability of workers to unionize by instituting blacklists. As stated in the “Report of the Industrial Commission of Transportation,” “railways discriminate against labor organizations... [through] the practice of blacklisting... despite legislation prohibiting [it].” Thereby the U.S. Industrial Commission determined that railroad owners unjustly disciplined employees by discharging them for participating in unions.⁷³ Additionally the Pennsylvania Railroad Company was famously embarrassed during the release of the December 1937 La Follette Civil Liberties Committee report, which indicated the Philadelphia Railroad Corporation in using labor spies, a violation of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, as late as 1937.⁷⁴

It is, therefore, not surprising that hotel employers used the same union-busting tactics to control hotel workers as the great robber barons of the nineteenth century. It was commonplace in the 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike that management, at establishments like the Astor and Belmont, used so-called labor spies – or “private detectives” as the mainstream press called them

⁷¹ Jay Rubin (1943, March 4)[History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 4, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

⁷² Philip Dray, *There Is Power In A Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 106-110.

⁷³ United States Industrial Commission, “Report of the Industrial Commission on Transportation, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), XLVII-XLVIII.

⁷⁴ Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 481.

– to drive back strikers with “doubled fists and burley shoulders” and beat strikers and union men in back rooms of hotels with the permission of management.⁷⁵

Thirdly, like other turn-of-the-century workers, hotel workers signed contracts that prohibited unionization and instituted ‘at-will’ employment. A “yellow dog contract” was a labor contract, which bound the worker to surrender his or her right to organize. The employer could, therefore, unilaterally determine wages, hours, terms of employment, and working conditions without bargaining with a union of workers. These contracts were a method of union busting – alongside the labor spy, blacklist, and “private detective” – to discourage the worker from even speaking with a union organizer out of fear of losing their job.⁷⁶

The right of New York hotel workers, and other service workers, to organize remained outside the purview of federal and state legislation until the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932, which outlawed the “yellow-dog contract,” and the New York State Labor Relations Act of 1937 (the “‘baby’ Wagner Act”), which reaffirmed the right to organize for workers in intrastate industries.⁷⁷ In other industries, like the railroad industry, the “yellow-dog contract” was prohibited and the rights of union organizing were upheld earlier by federal law in the Erdman Act of 1898.⁷⁸ Thus, the Hotel Astor, for instance, maintained a contract in 1912 that prohibited affiliation with the International Hotel Workers’ Union and striking. In addition, hotel workers were “at-will employees,” like most workers in the country, meaning that their employment could be “terminated” “at any time during the month, without notice” or reason. The Astor

⁷⁵ “Belmont Waiters Refuse To Go Out,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1913; “Waiters In A Riot Around Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1913.

⁷⁶ Elliot E. Cohen, *The Yellow Dog Contract* (New York: International Pamphlets, 1932), 1-4.

⁷⁷ National Labor Relations Act of 1935 only affirmed the right of workers employed in inter-state industries to organize; Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 244-258, 417; “Facts about the Hotel Organizing Drive,” Folder 13, Box 34, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Lucius Boomer, “Speech to Housemen and Maids (1938),” Folder 13, Box 32, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁷⁸ Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 244-258, 417.

contract even subjected workers to search at any time.⁷⁹ Without a union to negotiate terms of employment and with no federal law prohibiting intimidation by the “yellow dog contract” in the hotel industry, hoteliers subjected hotel workers to contracts unilaterally authored by the employer, which left workers with no job security and no right to privacy.

Although wages were already low, housing was poor, and the food was potentially poisonous, hotel workers, unlike other workers, were often victim to a complex system of fines that equated, essentially, to wage theft (which one magazine denoted as the immediate impetus for the May-June strike).⁸⁰ In the Hotel Belmont, for example, managers fined workers between twenty-five cents and five dollars for dropping a piece of silver, being late or talking to customers, not standing in his station, sitting down, consuming leftover food or coffee, and even witnessing somebody consume leftover food or coffee without reporting them.⁸¹

The effects of the fining system were twofold. Firstly, it left workers with incredibly reduced paychecks. Chas Johnson, a waiter in the Huntington Room of the Hotel Astor, was contracted to receive a monthly paycheck of \$25 throughout 1906. Johnson’s monthly check, however, varied month-to-month due to fines and the cost of his uniforms. Thereby, Johnson never actually received the contracted wage of \$25 per month. During 1906, Johnson received paychecks as low as \$18.33 meaning that management garnered almost a quarter of his wages.⁸² In October 1912, when his monthly wage was increased to \$30, Johnson’s paycheck was \$11.08, as he was required to purchase a new uniform that month. Without recourse to the union,

⁷⁹ “Chas Johnson,” Folder 11, Box 2, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 6 Photographs Photos .098, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Local 6 Photos .098.

⁸⁰ Hopkins, “International Hotel Workers’ Strike,” *Collier’s Magazine* Vol. 49, June 1, 1912.

⁸¹ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 86; Hopkins, “International Hotel Workers’ Strike,” *Collier’s Magazine* Vol. 49, June 1, 1912; Tellman, *The Practical Hotel Steward*, 8; Elizabeth Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, *Industrial relations: final report and testimony submitted to Congress* (Washington D.C., 1914), 3247.

⁸² “Chas Johnson,” Folder 11, Box 2, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 6 Photographs Photos .098, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Local 6 Photos .098.

Johnson's wage was drastically and arbitrarily reduced to \$20 per month in 1913, which left him with wages as low as \$9.40 one month. In addition to the fines, management expected waiters to pay the omnibuses from their own paycheck.⁸³

Secondly, the system of fines represented the hegemonic control of management, which could at whim materially affect the daily lives of the workers. The employer labeled such fining as "discipline." When and who received fines was dependent on the daily temper of the manager who dispensed the fines. Thus, management, because of its control over an arbitrary fining system, could drastically reduce even the meager wages of hotel workers.⁸⁴

Women, "Living-In," and Hours of Work:

Unlike workers in other occupations, some employees in the hotel were required to "live in," or live on the premises as a stipulation of employment.⁸⁵ According to a 1922 investigation by the Consumers' League of New York, the hotel industry was one of the few industries that continued to house female employees as a portion of wage payment.⁸⁶ In many of the largest hotels in New York City a rather large portion of the hotel staff resided within the hotel.⁸⁷

Alongside living-in came additional conditions for female workers that were often unavoidable. Prior to moving in, female workers had no conception of the state of their future residence or the quality of food. Usually, however, the bed spaces were "everywhere overcrowded." Bunks were placed side by side, and it was not unusual for female workers to be crowded in a small room with anywhere from eight to about "fifteen others," as one

⁸³ Hopkins, "International Hotel Workers' Strike," *Collier's* Vol. 49, June 1, 1912, 27.

⁸⁴ "Chas Johnson," Folder 11, Box 2, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 6 Photographs Photos .098, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Local 6 Photos .098.

⁸⁵ "Servants in No Danger," *New York Times*, January 2, 1895; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 39.

⁸⁶ Consumers' League of New York, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel* (New York: Consumers' League of New York City, 192), 5-7; Consumers League, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 31; "Why Hotel Workers Want to Be Organized," *Hotel Worker*, Folder 51, Box 2, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 6 Photographs Photos .098, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁸⁷ Consumers' League, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 40.

chambermaid noted.⁸⁸ Furthermore, managers often required live-in female workers to pay for their own linens by renting them by the day.⁸⁹

In addition to ill-ventilated, overheated, and cramped living spaces, all hotel workers were subject to poor food. Meals oftentimes included wilted greens, stale pastries, poor cuts of meat, and leftovers in the form of stew or hash.⁹⁰ One cook, who had worked in the kitchen department “of the best of hotels” in New York for twenty years, noted that the “most disgusting” aspect of hotel work was “the food we had to serve to the help.”⁹¹ Without proper ventilation, chefs typically prepared workers’ food in kitchens with thermometer registers ranging from 100 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit, which led the kitchen to be a breeding ground for respiratory disease.⁹² One cook stated that the food mostly consisted of “old scraps of meat, the trimmings, which have a very bitter taste” and suggested that a manager asked him to “use the skin of fowls which were hairy and dirty to make hash.”⁹³ Elizabeth Maloney, when testifying before for the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, reported that in some cases “girls” were “poisoned on food that was spoiled” or “decomposed” as a result of “ptomaine poisoning.” Thus, even workers who had board included in their wages often spent “whatever tips” they got “to buy things to eat” because the food was “not fit to eat half the time.”⁹⁴

Lucius Boomer, a manager of the Waldorf-Astoria, suggested that the cost of employees’ meals greatly negated the profits of a hotel restaurant and implied that the cost of employees’

⁸⁸ Consumers League, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 42; “Hark, Dear public, How About This?” *New York Call*, June 12, 1912.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, *Industrial relations: final report and testimony submitted to Congress* (Washington D.C., 1914), 3255.

⁹⁰ Consumers League, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 41; Chumley, *Hotel, Restaurant, and Domestic Workers*, 11-12.

⁹¹ “A Cook’s Statement,” *New York Call*, June 12, 1912.

⁹² Andre Tridon, “The Shame of the Hotel Kitchen,” *International Hotel Worker*, May-June 1913.

⁹³ “A Cook’s Statement,” *New York Call*, June 12, 1912.

⁹⁴ Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, *Industrial relations*, 3255.

meals should, therefore, be “controlled.”⁹⁵ As in most business arrangements, the stated goal was profit, but oftentimes this came at the expense of the working and living conditions of laborers.

Managers often required all job classifications to work in “split” or “broken” shifts, but live-in chambermaids and waitresses were expected to submit to such hours because they lived on the premises. This made life outside of work difficult to plan as the regular weekly shifts varied. These “broken shifts” led to a “hit or miss” existence, as a reporter for the Consumers’ League suggested, because the whole week became occupied by work. Working hours were often distributed over a period of 14-18 hours, seven days a week. On average, according to a study conducted by the Consumers’ League of New York in 1922, hotel workers’ hours ranged from 45.5 to 59.5 hours per week. Sometimes, however, extra shifts could lead to a 70-hour workweek.⁹⁶ Even into the 1940s, the Industrial Commissioner of New York State determined that seventy-five per cent of female and male minor hotel workers worked split shifts that extended the working day beyond “a reasonable amount.”⁹⁷ Although a worker could plausibly eat outside the “Help’s Hall” during these brief breaks, some hoteliers maintained a policy, as waiter John Bookjans reported, that did not permit workers to leave the premises even during unpaid breaks.⁹⁸

Hotel management surveilled its live-in female hotel staff in order to “look after for [their] morals.”⁹⁹ *The Hotel Monthly* suggested that management should surveil chambermaids at

⁹⁵ Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 50-51.

⁹⁶ Consumers League, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 18-19.

⁹⁷ New York Department of Labor Minimum Wage Board Division of Women in Industry and Minimum Wage, *Report of the Industrial Commissioner To the Hotel Minimum Wage Board* Volume I, March 1940, 144; Consumers League, *Behind the Scenes in a Hotel*, 21-26.

⁹⁸ John Bookjans, quoted in *Union House, Union Bar*, 90-91.

⁹⁹ Mary Bresnan, *The Practical Hotel Housekeeper* (Chicago: The Hotel Monthly, 1900), 7; Perhaps a more extreme, and oft-studied, example of the types of surveillance management subjected workers to in the early twentieth century took place in Southern Piedmont mill villages, in which mill managers were vested with “dictatorial power,” as historian Jacquelyn Dowd-Hall states, through control of housing arrangements, schooling, company stores, church attendance, village morality, and drinking habits, which led to a situation, as one mill hand

all hours of the day.¹⁰⁰ If chambermaids resided in the hotel, the *Hotel Monthly* advised that management:

“do all in [its] power to try and prevent her help from staying out late at night... Some will say ‘how is the housekeeper [manager] to know when a girl stays out all night... She can and ought to know, if the night watchman does his duty, and he knows it is contrary to the rules of the house for girls to make a practice of staying out late at night. He should report such girl to the housekeeper [manager]... Of course now and then a girl or woman will get into such a house that will laugh at such an advice... quietly let her go before she has time to sow the seed of mischief among better girls... because a girl works in a hotel that fact does not give her more liberty or license to do or say anything she would not be permitted to do or say in any respectable family...”¹⁰¹

The hotel management saw itself as the moral paternal leaders of a “respectable family” that entailed limiting the liberty of its workers. The hotel proprietors understood the hotel as an establishment of the “domestic type... a private home... operated for profit,” as Lucius Boomer extolled his book about hotel management.¹⁰² This domestic analogy did not only extend to a hotel’s business description, but also to the moral surveillance of its staff.

Management assumed it knew what was “better” for “the help” than “the help” itself. Thereby, young women, at least, were subject to constant moral injunctions on their activities by management. The “better” and more “faithful” “girls,” according to Housekeeping manager Mary Bresnan, were those who abided by the moral dictates of management, which could

stated, “almost like slavery” (Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1987), 120-125).

¹⁰⁰ Bresnan, *The Practical Hotel Housekeeper*, 7, 24-26.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 24-26.

¹⁰² Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 1.

include church attendance, staying in during the evenings, and avoiding “familiarity” with male coworkers.¹⁰³

In this way, management dictated the personal time of hotel workers. Hotel management subjected chambermaids to being “let go” if they did not abide by the moral standards that management established. Boomer extolled that it should be the policy of management to “control the thoughts and acts... of [all] employees of a hotel.”¹⁰⁴ This “dictatorial power” was justified by management, as in the Waldorf-Astoria, as being out of paternal affection.¹⁰⁵

Historian Daniel Sutherland, along with contemporary commentators of the “servant problem,” noted that the relationship between a service worker and her employer resembled that of an anachronistic medieval “master-servant” feudal arrangement that had not developed with the rest of “modern capitalism.”¹⁰⁶ This work arrangement maintained characteristics of an antiquated “master-servant” relationship because the manager was expected to provide room and board for their employees as well as morally surveil their work and private lives – a “patriarchal” vestige “incongruous with modern conditions.”¹⁰⁷ According to one contemporary commentator, the modern “slavery” was engaged in a “medieval” relationship with their employer because the “servant” was expected to live under a foreign roof in isolation from her “native interest” and at the beck and call of the housekeeper.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the live-in situation of many modern servants became an “embarrassing status” because the service worker was stripped of “personal liberty” outside of working hours. Instead of simply selling their labor power, as a steel worker for

¹⁰³ Bresnan, *The Practical Hotel Housekeeper*, 7; Tellman, *The Practical Hotel Steward*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Morehouse, *The Waldorf-Astoria*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Hopkins, “International Hotel Workers’ Strike,” *Collier’s Magazine* Vol 49, June 1, 1912, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Pattison, *The Business of Home Management* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1918), 56.

example, the “servant” was selling herself because she was obliged to live with, be fed by, and their morals watched out for by their employer.¹⁰⁹

Hotel workers, like many workers in the early twentieth century, were subject to tyrannical management that maintained blacklists to ward off unionization, dehumanized its labor force, and undermined the individual license of its workers. Of course, it is not the case that all hotel workers were necessarily subject to the “military government” of tyrannical management as well as the customer. Hoffman House bartender managers suggested that it was “absolutely necessary” for the proprietor to protect “his people” from the insults of customers, give encouragement to employees through high wages and vacations, treat them “kindly,” and generally follow the “golden rule.”¹¹⁰ These dictates were an exception however, and perhaps a result of the noticeably higher status of the “skilled,” English-speaking, and, thereby, less dispensable bartender.¹¹¹ Female hotel workers in New York City, however, were disproportionately affected by the industry-specific live-in conditions of the hotel workplace, in which management reproduced the paternalism of the home in the workplace.

Guest and Servant: The “Peculiar” Status of the Hotel Worker in the Early Twentieth Century:

The 1905 novel *The Long Day* by Dorothy Richardson depicts the contemporary “social stigma” of service workers. Typical of a progressive era reformist novel, there is a specific reform agenda as the author intends to detail the daily struggles of the “working girl.” Even in a book that attempts to rally sympathy for working-class women in order to encourage labor reform, with nowhere to live and little to live on, the protagonist bluntly and proudly refuses her landlady’s suggestion that she “go into service” by stating that she refuses to wear “the definite

¹⁰⁹ I.M. Rubinow and Daniel Durant, “The Depth and Breadth of the Servant Problem,” in *McClure’s Magazine*, Vol 34 (1910): 580-584.

¹¹⁰ Charles S. Mahoney, *The Hoffman House Bartender’s Guide: How To Open A Saloon* (New York: R.K. Fox, 1905), 55-65.

¹¹¹ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 39.

badge of servitude.”¹¹² While this problematic work shows both condescension as well as intimacy towards workers, it also offers genuine insight into the ways that even a “progressive” middle-class reformer viewed service work.¹¹³ Another commentator stated that the “servant,” or “slavy,” was a class unto itself that lives a life of “menial drudgery” in the form of “Contract Semi-Slavery.”¹¹⁴

Hotel workers acknowledged the “servility” management expected from them and their degraded “social status” with contempt. One waiter did not mince words when interviewed about the “servant’s” “status problem.” He stated “you can’t be a man when you are a waiter... you are just a servant. You can’t talk back to people... you have to put off being a human being while you are at work.” Although this waiter despised his position as late as 1948, he commented that it was much worse “when the waiter was still mud under the feet... we had to keep our hands behind us with a towel across them, and we would have to bow to the customers. Why should we bow to anybody? We are just as good as they are.”¹¹⁵

The hotel service worker had the additional gilded-age societal burden of being a supposedly more “feminine” and “servile” self-selected group of workers, as can be seen by the above waiter’s feeling that he lacks “manhood” in his occupation; to serve was to lack “masculine” traits commonly associated with more defiant coal miners, factory workers, railroad men, and longshoremen.¹¹⁶ According to another veteran waiter, attempts by management to control everything from dress to the type of facial hair a waiter had (e.g. mustache bans) were

¹¹² Dorothy Richardson, “The Long Day,” in William L. O’Neill (ed.), *Women at Work* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 3-57; Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants*, 2.

¹¹³ Cathryn Halverson, “The Fascination of the Working Girl: Dorothy Richardson’s Long Day,” in *American Studies* Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), 95-96.

¹¹⁴ Pattison, *The Business of Home Management*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 370.

¹¹⁶ Kimeldorf, *Battling For American Labor*, 91; Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 89.

examples of managerial control to limit the “manhood” of the waiter and make him appear more “servile.”¹¹⁷

Hotel managers perceived the hotel “servant” as inferior. Sutherland argues that the proprietor’s sense of the “servant’s” social and intellectual inferiority is also a continuation of the “medieval” “master-servant relationship” in the twentieth century hotel employer-employee relationship.¹¹⁸ New York hoteliers, for example, in the 1920s even barred waiters from wearing glasses because eyeglasses were a mark of distinction that would undermine the servility of the waiter, according to the president of HRE Waiters’ Union Local 16.¹¹⁹ Lucius Boomer, proprietor of the Waldorf-Astoria, was noted as saying the following at a November 10, 1937 meeting of hotel proprietors at the American Hotel Association national convention:

“The preponderance of our employees are in service occupations... many of them are not suitable for skilled or heavy factory work or mercantile occupations... some of our jobs do not and cannot pay wages adequate to support families on the so-called American standard basis and should not be judged on that basis. As a matter of fact, we should claim credit for employing great numbers as service employees who would otherwise be unemployable because unsuitable – a great many of them – for factory, commercial or farm work.”¹²⁰

The IWW, twenty years earlier in a 1918 pamphlet on hotel work, was therefore not misrepresenting the attitudes of management towards hotel workers by asserting that the hotelier considered a hotel worker “a fellow who has tried every other line of business and failed,” that

¹¹⁷ “Waiters Forbidden to Wear Glasses; Detract from Their Servility,” *Daily Worker*, August 4, 1926, 5.

¹¹⁸ Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants*, 27.

¹¹⁹ “Waiters Forbidden to Wear Glasses; Detract from Their Servility,” *Daily Worker*, August 3, 1928.

¹²⁰ Lucius Boomer, “Mr. Lucius Boomer Explains His Position: To the Editor of the New York Post,” *New York Post*, December 8, 1937.

the “waiter is a servant; a menial engaged in servile work,” and that “waiters must be servile and humble... they are not treated like ordinary human beings.”¹²¹

Such statements that intimate the inferiority of hotel workers are incongruous with the reality of their so-called “suitableness.” Many hotel workers were indeed “suitable” enough, for example, to serve in the Second World War, as listed on the June 10th, 1944 cover the HTC’s official publication the *Hotel and Club Voice*.¹²² In addition, amongst the ranks of hotel workers was Frank Tannenbaum, future Columbia-educated historian, criminologist, and labor leader.¹²³

In order to ensure that they employed only the “servile,” hoteliers often stereotyped certain ethnicities that they deemed more fit for the work of a servant. Lucius Boomer praised the “European employee” as one who was “more generally ready to accept hotel service as a life work and to be reconciled to it as incident to his capacities... and he is more satisfied with modern economic reward than the American.”¹²⁴ Boomer believed that Europeans were trained through “traditions established by generations” to be servants. Boomer thereby valued “European employees” because he believed they belonged to a “servant class” that was an inherited and “natural” social class, as one labor relations study detailed. This inherited and “natural order” made European workers acquiesce to an inferior social position, low wages, long hours, and no union, according to one restaurant manager.¹²⁵ One headwaiter was more blunt in stating the following:

¹²¹ Chumley, *Hotel, Restaurant, and Domestic Workers*, 5-6.

¹²² “Our Members in the European Theater,” *Hotel and Club Voice*, June 10, 1944.

¹²³ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 442-448.

¹²⁴ Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 5-6.

¹²⁵ Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 95-97.

“European waiters have the servant attitude. American born people don’t have that attitude at all. They have this democratic notion. They think they’re just as good as the customers. Now that’s a lot of hooey. They’re not so good as the customers.”¹²⁶

The Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, established by Jane Addams in 1901, conducted a study of the conditions in hotels in 1912. The JPA declared that hotel managers wanted foreign-born workers, in this case Polish workers, because management believed them to “come from a strong peasant stock and accomplish a large amount of work,” they were “willing to take very low wages” “ they were submissive,” they were “ignorant of the laws of this country and are easily imposed upon,” and they “never betray[ed] their superiors.”¹²⁷ Likewise, the Consumer’s League of New York reported that an employment manager declared that “foreigners” were preferred because “they don’t expect to spend so much money, and they’ll put up with more.”¹²⁸

It was not, however, the “European employee’s” sense of inferiority that made him or her more servile. Deference to management was also a result of the economic situation of new immigrants. The financial insecurity of immigrant workers forced them to accept low wages, poor conditions, and allowed management to abuse these vulnerable workers, as they feared losing their jobs if they reported a labor violation.¹²⁹ Once foreign-born service workers had been in the country long enough, one service industry study observed, they no longer tolerated “being classed as servants.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹²⁷ Louise Haddock de Koven Bowen, *The Girls Employed in Hotels and Restaurants* (Chicago: Hale-Crossley Printing Co., 1912), 4-5.

¹²⁸ Consumer’s League of New York City, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 37.

¹²⁹ Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3259.

¹³⁰ Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 96.

The identity of “servant” impacted the service worker’s self-perception, as well. By identifying as “servants,” according to historian Paolo Raspadori, many hotel employees had a close relationship with the lifestyle of the middle class and aristocracy that received scorn by others in the working-class.¹³¹ Hence, many hotel employees peculiarly perceived their position as a stepping stone to a managerial role. This was the case for “Oscar [Tschirsky] of the Waldorf,” the famous maître d’hôtel of the Waldorf-Astoria from 1893 until 1943.¹³² Oscar, a Swiss immigrant, began in the hotel business as a bus-boy in 1883 at the Hoffman House, advanced to waiter at the famed Delmonico’s, and subsequently headwaiter and maître d’hôtel at the Waldorf-Astoria upon its opening in 1893. Oscar’s rise in the hotel industry was a symbol of the supposed upward mobility of hotel staff.¹³³ The story of Oscar, purported to have earned more than a railroad president, was not universal, however.¹³⁴ The majority of hotel managers, head waiters, assistant managers, and so forth were Cornell School of Hospitality graduates, or related to other famous managers of New York ‘palace hotels’ like the Biltmore, Vanderbilt, Plaza, and so forth. In the corporately owned “palace hotels,” the vast majority of hotel workers remained lifelong employees in subordinate positions. Patrick Brady, for example, an Irish footman and steward at the Waldorf-Astoria, expected to be “engaged for a day’s work” on February 10, 1897, but forty-four years later, Brady exclaimed that “the day isn’t up yet!”¹³⁵

The hopes of upward mobility led hotel employees into complacency, according to Raspadori. It was plausible, in smaller working-class establishments, for a busboy, for example, to eventually own his own inn, but in corporate ‘palace hotels’ that goal oftentimes proved an

¹³¹ Paolo Raspadori, “Becoming Workers?” Strikes by Hotel and Restaurant Staff in Italy (1902-1923),” in *International Review of Social History* Volume 60 No. 3 (December 2015): 382-385.

¹³² “Oscar and Waldorf Celebrate Half Century; Famed Host Then Retires From Active Duty,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1943.

¹³³ Jane Kirk Huntley, “Oscar of the Waldorf’s Famous Host, Prefers Corn Beef and Cabbage,” *Christian-Science Monitor*, February 23, 1940.

¹³⁴ “How Oscar of the Waldorf-Astoria Earns His Salary,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1905.

¹³⁵ “Thought It Was Only A Temporary Job,” *Hotel Gazette*, September 13, 1941.

impossibility. Thus, the hotel worker – like every worker, as anthropologist Oscar Lewis argues – existed in his/her own “culture of poverty.” According to the IHWU, the hotel workers’ “culture of poverty” prescribed the “servant” to low wages and a tipping culture that enslaved the worker to the whims of the upper-class guests. This ‘culture of poverty’ resulted in a paucity of class-consciousness by association with the middle-class lifestyles in the hotel. Additionally, the hotel work culture stressed “servility” and explained that the hotel worker’s lesser socio-economic status was a result of personal inadequacy or inferiority.

“The Cant of Custom and Prejudice”: The Tipping System

The “cant of custom and prejudice” of the tipping system condemned “the servant” to “servility” to the bourgeoisie, alienation from the rest of the working class, and a lack of dignity on the job.¹³⁶ The feelings of inferiority, servility, and indignity on behalf of hotel workers as described above was, in part, a result of the loathed institution of tipping, which both progressive reformers and revolutionary radicals alike lambasted as derogatory and oppressive.

There was a time, however, when Americans abhorred the practice of tipping. Numerous periodicals around the turn-of-the-century lamented the arrival of the foreign and “European” tipping system to the United States. Tipping was typical of a “sojourn in Europe” rather than expected for a stay at a New York hotel. Indeed the tip was regarded as a practice that reinforced old-world class boundaries between a “servant class” and the rest of society. Journalists deemed tipping a foreign custom because it was not characteristically “American,” or democratic (as turn-of-the-century journalists seemed to conflate the terms), in character because it demarcated social difference between one who serves and one who is served. One manager argued that higher status people did not receive tips for their services and thus tipping was an indicator of the

¹³⁶ Charles Edward Russell, “Why Should the Waiter Cringe?,” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1912.

“servant class.”¹³⁷ According to one blunt headwaiter, waiters should not refer to each other as mister because “gentlemen do not take tips.”¹³⁸

During the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the practice that journalists in the 19th century regarded as “European,” un-American, “an aristocratic hangover,” and unequal – precisely because it materially created and reproduced social difference – had arrived in Gilded Age America.¹³⁹ One *Washington Post* article stated, “there was a time when returning tourists kicked vigorously over the European system of tips for any and all service... they kick no more.”¹⁴⁰ Seven states (Washington, Mississippi, Arkansas, Iowa, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia), however, even enacted anti-tipping legislation between 1909 and 1918.¹⁴¹

The arrival of the tipping system in New York’s finest hotels meant material displays of inequality and socio-economic class difference. One journalist argued that tipping was a signifier of the “degree and extent of poverty” of a nation, which caused sympathetic patrons to flip a coin to the “servant class” and the normally “proud” and “decent” “hard-working folk” to accept the degrading and social stigmatizing tip because of the “unequal division of wealth” in Progressive Era society.¹⁴²

Progressive era reformers, left-of-center newspapers (such as the *New York Tribune*), and IWW labor radicals opposed tipping for both financial reasons and the degradation it entailed. The Consumer’s League of New York City, for example, exclaimed that tipping was practically untenable as a form of labor remuneration because it was unstandardized. The hotel worker, the

¹³⁷ Josephson, *Union House*, *Union Bar*, 89-91; Julian Ralph, “The Tipping System,” *New York Tribune*, January 7, 1899; “Tipping System: It Is an Almost Universal Practice Exceptions Being Few,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 11, 1900; “Growth of the Tipping System,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 1901; Helen Dare, “Even Hotel Man Tackles the Troubles of Tipping System,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25, 1913.

¹³⁸ As quoted in Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 372.

¹³⁹ Leo P. Crespi, “The Implications of Tipping in America,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1947): 430-431.

¹⁴⁰ “Growth of the Tipping System,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 1901.

¹⁴¹ Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 42.

¹⁴² Julian Ralph, “The Tipping System,” *New York Tribune*, January 7, 1899.

Consumer's League argued, lacked the financial security of a consistent wage because they could never know exactly what their weekly earnings should be and thus could not plan expenses accordingly.¹⁴³ It was true that some waitresses, who were tipped much better than chambermaids, could make more than most female industrial workers, but financial security was impossible with the dependence on the public for a tip.¹⁴⁴ One maid interviewed claimed that she could make a \$5 tip occasionally, but she would go without a tip for weeks at a time. According to the Minimum Wage Board of 1919, the tips received by maids were not sufficient to make any appreciable addition to their wages.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, Maloney's primary argument before the Commission on Industrial Relations was the practical concern that waitresses were not able to financially plan their lives.

This was an argument that was made to appeal to middle-class reformers who were obsessed with financial planning, economic rationality, and home economy. For a woman at the time to be able to rationally plan her life outside the home meant self-improvement, individualism, and personal fulfillment. Working-class women supposedly could not self-improve through financial planning if they were unsure of their weekly economic situation.¹⁴⁶

Unlike the radical labor organizers of the IWW, middle-class progressive era reformers did attempt to argue that the tipping system was also unpractical for the hotelier who was attempting to combat the high labor turnover rate of the "servant problem." The Consumer's

¹⁴³ Consumer's League of New York City, *Behind the Scenes in a Hotel*, 31-33.

¹⁴⁴ Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 40-41.

¹⁴⁵ Minimum Wage Board of the District of Columbia, "Wages of Women in Hotels and Restaurants," 1919, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Clara Ingram Judson, "The Item of Operating Expense on the Household Budget," *Fort Dearborn Magazine*, September 1920; Wesley C. Mitchell, "The Backward Art of Spending Money," *The American Economic Review* 2, no. 2 (1912): 273.

League, thereby, suggested that tipping caused workers to leave one hotel to work at another if the worker thought another house had a better chance for tips.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, most critics argued that the tipping system was beneficial to the employer. Thus, tipping was another plank on the list of abuses that hotel management foisted on the worker because hoteliers encouraged, or at least did not deter, the practice of tipping. HRE labor organizer John Bookjans regarded the tipping system as undermining the scale of hours and wages, as well as “other restrictions placed upon the proprietors for the protection of the workers.”¹⁴⁸ With no wage and hour laws that affected the hotel industry directly, “servant workers” could work extremely long days.¹⁴⁹ According to Maloney, the incentive of the tip led hotel workers to work longer hours for lower wages, which created a lower standard of working conditions in the service industry.¹⁵⁰ Into the 1940s, the New York State Industrial Commissioner determined that even the earnings of the highest paid women and male minor hotel workers were “extremely low” and were “not sufficient to provide adequate maintenance and to protect health, as determined by the Department of Labor.” Some workers received no cash wages at all in light of tips and if these workers did receive wages, the wages were not “commensurate with the value of the services rendered.”¹⁵¹ In other words, the tipping system reinforced and encouraged the poor working conditions in the hotels.

In addition to lowering wages and extending the workday, the tipping system also intensified the peculiarly degraded and stigmatized status of the hotel “servant.”¹⁵² Opponents of

¹⁴⁷ Consumer’s League of New York City, *Behind the Scenes in a Hotel*, 34.

¹⁴⁸ John Bookjans, “The Growing Need of Organizing from the Bottom Up,” *Mixer & Server*, July 1915.

¹⁴⁹ Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3257-3258.

¹⁵⁰ Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3257-3258; Consumer’s League of New York City, *Behind the Scenes of a Hotel*, 32-33.

¹⁵¹ New York Department of Labor Minimum Wage Board Division of Women in Industry and Minimum Wage, *Report of the Industrial Commissioner To the Hotel Minimum Wage Board* Volume 1, March 1940, 142-145.

¹⁵² Dorothy Pope, “Hours of Labor of Hotel and Restaurant Employees,” in *Monthly Labor Review* Volume 10, (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1919), 91-108.

the tipping system based their criticisms in the “Statler Service Codes” – written by E.M. Statler, owner of the early national Statler Hotels chain – which served as the “catechism “ of service to employees, according to Lucius Boomer.¹⁵³ Statler was the first hotelier and service industry manager to coin the phrase “the customer is always right.”¹⁵⁴ According to Statler, and contemporaneous hoteliers, the employee is always “dead wrong” no matter how major a disagreement between the worker and the patron.¹⁵⁵ Any worker that did not fall in line with every whim of the guest was to be “perfunctorily” fired. In exclaiming that the guest is always right, Statler blurred the line between “service” and “servility.” According to Statler, a tip is to reward “intelligence,” but he admitted that it oftentimes is an “abuse” that is an “insult” and reward for “servility.”¹⁵⁶

According to critics, the tipping system was beneficial to the employer because it made the “servant” servile to the “two bosses” in the hotel industry, the manager and the guest.¹⁵⁷ The IWW argued that the tipping system had its origins in “chattel slavery, as it is an ideal incentive for slaves... [tipping] harms both the giver and the receiver. It has the effect of making the giver arrogant, dictatorial, imperious, etc. and the receiver becomes servile, slavish, mealy – mouthed and beggarly.”¹⁵⁸ In the firebrand rhetoric, typical of the IWW, Chumley exclaimed that the tipping system reinforced the denigrated social status of the hotel worker by actually making them servile. As a form of social engineering, the tip, thereby, benefited the hotelier because it reinforced the quality of servility, which both management and the guest purportedly desired. Workers themselves referred to the tipping system as a “great evil” that contributed to their

¹⁵³ Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 131.

¹⁵⁴ Rufus Jarman, *A Bed for the Night*, 4.

¹⁵⁵ E.M. Statler, “Statler’s Service Codes,” *Rotarian*, March 1913, 30.

¹⁵⁶ Statler, “Statler’s Service Codes,” *Rotarian*, March 1913, 30-31.

¹⁵⁷ Bohn, “The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers,” 620-621; Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 86-90; “Public Sympathy and the Public,” *International Hotel Worker*, Vol. 1 No. 12, January 1913; Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant*, 19; Chumley, *Hotel, Restaurant, and Domestic Workers*, 27.

¹⁵⁸ Chumley, *Hotel Restaurant, and Domestic Workers*, 7.

“inferiority complex” and made the “servant” feel constantly “at the mercy of the customer all the time.”¹⁵⁹

Others contended that the tipping system, alongside the industry-wide “Statler Service Codes” degenerated the “morality” of otherwise “decent” and “modest” young women in extreme cases. Maloney suggested that the tipping system blurred the “line of propriety” for the female hotel worker because she no longer resents what “should be resented” because she wants the “dime or quarter” the guest might leave.¹⁶⁰ Because the “line of propriety” was blurred by the tipping system and the “Statler Service Codes” that asserted that the “guest is always right,” progressive reformers argued that female workers were exposed to “moral dangers” in the hotel because some guests sexually harassed them. Progressive reformers argued that dependent, vulnerable (and perhaps immigrant) female hotel workers fell victim to sexual abuse with little recourse because of the Statler maxims – which prescribed subservience to the guest and fear of being fired – and the tipping system, which established a “relation of subservience and patronage which may easily be made the beginning of improper attentions.”¹⁶¹

Some historians recently, like Dorothy Sue Cobble, have highlighted that tipping, and the service industry generally, rewards certain traits and suppresses other more “natural” responses even to rude, belligerent, and demanding customers. In addition to the reduced pay and denigrated social status that the tipping system entailed, it also heaped an additional load of “emotional labor” onto the service worker, according to Cobble, which could be “as exhausting as mental or physical work.”¹⁶² Sociologist William Foote suggests that the main challenge of waitressing is maintaining emotional equilibrium in light of a stressful work environment, the

¹⁵⁹ Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 372.

¹⁶⁰ Maloney, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3257-3258.

¹⁶¹ Bowen, *The Girls Employed in Hotels and Restaurants*, 8-10, 20.

¹⁶² Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 48.

promise of a tip, and potentially rude and offensive customers.¹⁶³ Such work environments that prized the “Statler Codes” led to “self-alienation” and emotional breakdowns in response to the suppression of natural human responses, expected in upper-class establishments, to ornery customers, according to Foote, in the pursuit of a tip.¹⁶⁴

The unique social standing of the “servant” at the beginning of the twentieth century was reinforced by the expansion of the tipping system. Tipping represented socio-economic othering of the hotel worker from the rest of working-class – by creating alternative expectations of payment, behavior, and relationship with the boss and customer for the “servant class.” Moreover, tipping disproportionately heaped additional burdens on female hotel workers, as they were vulnerable to unwanted advances from male guests who felt they deserved recompense for their nickel or dime tip.

The statements of managers revealed their disdain for their own employees and how they sought out more “servile” peoples. Managers mistook their mostly immigrant workforce’s economic vulnerability for “servility.” Hoteliers and elite guests would thereby be thoroughly surprised when their so-called “servants” acted in a manner similar to other working-class people – by striking.

¹⁶³ Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 106-109, 282-284.

¹⁶⁴ Foote, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, 282-284; C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 182-188; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 48.

Part 2: Testing Ground for Class Warfare



Figure 4: Striking Hotel Workers Outside Bryant Hall during January 1913

Source: Box 2, Folder 11 Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 6 Photographs Photos .098, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

Although acknowledged as an essential precursor to the HTC, the 1912-1913 strike was largely overlooked in the triumphalist narrative of how New York City hotel workers eventually organized in 1938. Rubin stated, “the sacrifices of 1912-1913 “laid the foundation for [the hotel worker’s] improvement.”¹⁶⁵ Although the strike may not have been “the greatest success that ever was known in the labor movement,” as one article in the *International Hotel Worker (IHW)* (the official publication of the IHWU) prematurely claimed in June 1912, the strike was a valuable and significant learning experience and model of organizing for future leadership.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Jay Rubin (1943, March 11)[History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 4, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

¹⁶⁶ “Victory,” *International Hotel Worker*, July 1912.

The strike was significant for a number of reasons – both as an historical first and a moment that attempted to alter the public image and identity of the hotel worker. This strike was the first massive and attempted general strike against the hotel trade of New York City (there would not be another industry-wide general strike until 1985).¹⁶⁷ The strike, thereby, caused the relatively more conservative Hotel/Restaurant Employees (HRE) craft union to give a significant amount of attention to New York City.¹⁶⁸

The IHWU/IWW saw the hotel as the fundamental site of class warfare – the crossroads of Progressive Era class conflict. The existence of Ivy League strikebreakers, elite derogatory statements about “servants,” and state violence merely strengthened the IHWU argument that the New York bourgeoisie was committed to upholding their hegemony in the workplace by any means necessary. But, unlike other industries, where the patrons may be other working-class people, the patrons of palace hotels were the New York upper classes. Therefore, public sympathy was extremely difficult to garner as the IWW struck at the heart of early twentieth century bourgeois social life. The IWW understood the importance of public sympathy, but hotel workers resorted to public fear through sabotage and IWW-unsanctioned violence.

Although the IHWU/IWW claimed to stand for workers of all races, genders, and ethnicities, in practice the IHWU/IWW failed to fulfill its revolutionary rhetoric and thus failed to undermine the self-conscious white masculinity in the industry. Nevertheless, the IWW/IHWU did import multi-ethnic industrial and syndicalist organizing into the New York hotel industry in an attempt to transform the “servant” into a “hotel worker,” unlike previous unions. To understand the novelty of the IWW/IHWU organizing strategies, it is important to

¹⁶⁷ Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 97.

¹⁶⁸ Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 97; Jay Rubin, *Growth of a Union: The Life and Times of Edward Flore* (New York: The Historical Union Association, Inc., 1943), 145; Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 154; “Thousands Hit By Hotel Strike,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1985.

first understand the nativism of the predominately male and bartender trade-specific HRE in New York.

Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (HRE): The “Irish Bartender’s Union” and the “Czar of Cincinnati”:

Since its 1904 convention, the HRE deemed New York City “impossible to organize.” The HRE claimed this was due to the multitude of jurisdictional squabbles between locals, the polyglot workforce that was divided ethnically and by job classification, and the advent of new “palace hotels.” The existing New York hotel workers’ union, HRE Local 1, was not able to keep pace with such expansion due to International Union General Secretary Jere Sullivan’s conservatism and unwillingness to organize these new “palace hotels.”¹⁶⁹

By the 1910s, Sullivan presided over the HRE as General Secretary. In this position, Sullivan controlled finances, was the managing editor of HRE’s official news organ – *The Mixer & Server* – controlled the official seal of the HRE and thus oversaw every statement of the International Union, issued charters, published financial records, collected union dues from locals, and assigned International Organizers. The president, on the other hand, maintained a mostly honorary role as the General Organizer and acted as an arbitrator between the International Union and locals, but depended on the General Secretary for approval.¹⁷⁰ Known as the “Czar of Cincinnati” by some delegates to the International Union, Sullivan took on all executive functions.¹⁷¹ According to Sullivan, the General Secretary was in fact “Chief Executive

¹⁶⁹ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 67-68.

¹⁷⁰ “Duties of General President; Duties of General Secretary – Treasurer,” *Mixer & Server*, June 1911; Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 68, 77, 83.

¹⁷¹ Jere Sullivan, “Who Is Your Chief Executive? A Pertinent Interrogation,” *Mixer & Server*, June 1911.

Officer,” was the “entire mechanism of this International Union,” and managed “seventy-five percent of matters.”¹⁷²

Sullivan grew increasingly nativist, xenophobic, and thus less venturesome throughout his thirty-year tenure as General Secretary. Like his close-friend, AFL president Samuel Gompers – who opposed immigration and thought foreign-born workers were strikebreakers – Sullivan believed that the ideal hotel worker was “American-born.”¹⁷³ In corporately managed ‘palace hotels,’ the replacement of American labor with foreign labor led to “cheapness and a lack of manhood” in the New York hotel workforce, according to Sullivan.¹⁷⁴ The IWW outburst of 1912-1913, thereby, was the fault of ‘palace’ hotel management, which hired a predominantly immigrant workforce. Sullivan stated that “[IWW strikers] are the kind of ‘continental experts’ (foreign-born hotel workers) whom you and your agents scoured the foul spots of the earth to bring to Manhattan to take the places of good old-fashioned American born and bred servitors in order that your well lined pockets should overflow.”¹⁷⁵ Instead of trying to organize foreign-born hotel workers, Sullivan denounced their “plastic-minds” and foulness.

Instead of organizing all trades, nationalities, and sexes, Sullivan clung to business craft unionism between 1902 and 1914, which focused organizing efforts almost exclusively on bartenders. Sullivan sought to quickly build up the organization and maintained that bartenders were easier to organize because they were mostly male (and thus supposedly more militant) and English-speaking compared to the many new immigrant non-English speaking cooks, waiters,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 30-35; Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 86; University of Oklahoma Special Collections, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor Collection, Box 1, Folder 1: American Federation of Labor, 1923-1925; Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 516-517.

¹⁷⁴ Sullivan, “As Ye Sow So Shall Ye Reap,” February 1913, *The Mixer and Server*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

and chambermaids.¹⁷⁶ Even the official HRE publication, *The Mixer & Server*, was named after bartenders – those who mix and serve liquors.¹⁷⁷ The greatest crime that the “men” of the HRE could commit, according to Sullivan, was to let “inexperienced men and women” become members.¹⁷⁸ *The Mixer & Server* even mocked the movement for equal pay for equal work assessing that it would lead to an emasculated society.¹⁷⁹ Women were outside the organizing focus of the HRE and were generally classed as only supportive figures to men – as wives or amongst the “inexperienced” “unorganizable” workers, like the “foreign-born.” Sullivan deemed cooks, waiters, and chambermaids (positions occupied women and/or those of foreign-birth) as outsiders and dangers to the privileged position of the already organized bartenders.¹⁸⁰ HRE was essentially a “skilled” white male trade union prior to the 1912-1913 IWW strike.

Sullivan’s nativism and sexism was paired with a strict allegiance to business trade unionism. This business unionism equated to top-down organizing, or negotiating directly with employers. Sullivan believed that it was possible to organize without “strike, boycott, or other alleged radical method” and thus “secure reasonable concessions” from an employer.¹⁸¹ This strategy was known to work within smaller privately owned establishments in working-class neighborhoods. In the nineteenth century, many small saloon, lunch-counter, and restaurant proprietors worked in the kitchen before owning their own establishment. It was rather simple to convince an employer to allow his workers to organize through the ready-made market that the Union Label, which advertised the existence of a union at an establishment, provided in working-class neighborhoods. This was an easy method of unionization that did not drain union funds or

¹⁷⁶ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 36.

¹⁷⁷ Jere Sullivan, “A Chapter From The Early Period Of Our Organization,” *Mixer & Server*, April 1904.

¹⁷⁸ Jere Sullivan, “Between Ourselves,” *Mixer and Server*, February 1912.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Rice, “Women Days,” *Mixer and Server*, July 1913.

¹⁸⁰ David J. Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Policies and Tactics* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 101; Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 320.

¹⁸¹ Jere Sullivan, “Between Ourselves,” *Mixer & Server*, February 1912.

the energies of union officials and members in organizing campaigns and strikes, and was thereby “conservative.”¹⁸²

This “conservative” organizing method was not conducive, however, to the new impersonal corporate management in New York “palace” hotels, which catered to upper class customers. Even after the IWW hotel strike, Sullivan promised hotel managers and the public that they would continue to organize New York on a “top-down” and “conservative basis.”¹⁸³ It would not be until the 1930s – when the New York ‘baby Wagner Act’ guaranteed collective bargaining rights and Sullivan had died – that the HRE adopted more radical organizing models, industrially organizing the foreign-born, which the IWW embraced in 1912-1913.

Sullivan’s nativism and strict trade unionism expressed itself in New York. HRE Local 1 of New York virtually closed union membership by raising initiation fees from \$15 to \$65 in 1909.¹⁸⁴ This created a “job trust” by restricting higher paying HRE union jobs to American-born workers. The HRE, also known as the “Irish Bartender’s Union,” made no attempts to appeal to the largely “new immigrant” and forty percent female workforce of the New York ‘palace hotels.’ As a result, approximately 1,800 organized chefs withdrew from the HRE in 1904 stating that the HRE did not understand the “needs” of the “European, working-class” New York service workers.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, 108; John Bookjans, “The Growing Need of Organizing from the Bottom Up,” *Mixer & Server*, July 1915; Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 37.

¹⁸³ “Regan’s Private Police Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, January 26, 1913.

¹⁸⁴ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 95-98; Jack Britt Gearity, “You and the Other Fellow,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913; Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 85-86; David Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, 112-116.

¹⁸⁵ César Lesino, quoted in Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 58.

International Hotel Workers' Union, Industrial Workers of the World, and Industrial Unionism:

In this vacuum left by the HRE's nativism and business unionism, in stepped the IHWU/IWW. By engaging in the first general strike, the IWW/IHWU shook the sleeping HRE awake to the necessity of organizing New York, as both Jay Rubin, the first president of HTC, and Flynn suggested.¹⁸⁶ The IWW/IHWU claimed that the new 'palace' hotels were in effect factories serving food and shelter on a big scale with whole battalions working in these service factories from dawn to dawn.¹⁸⁷ By equating the hotel to a factory, the IHWU and IWW taught the labor movement a useful lesson that the more conservative HRE would later take up in the 1930s: the necessity of organizing all workers of every classification and nationality in 'one big industrial union' rather than by craft/job classification.

The IHWU was a dual union – meaning it operated alongside the existing HRE union. As a dual union, the IWW and IHWU would later have even far-left critics. William Z Foster, future chairman of the Communist Party (1945-1957) and IWW member (1909), claimed in a 1937 memoir that he always perceived the IWW as “naïve” because of their dual union policy, their lack of leadership in the organization, and their overestimation of worker class-consciousness and spontaneity.¹⁸⁸ The dual hotel workers' union failed, according to future HTC president and communist fellow-traveller Jay Rubin and Foster, in retrospect, because the “undeveloped masses of workers, full of capitalist illusions, were not ready to rally to the revolutionary slogans,” the government was more hostile to dual unions, and the more conservative HRE spoke to the “patriotism” of the American working class.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Jay Rubin, *Growth of a Union: The Life and Times of Edward Flore* (New York: The Historical Union Association, Inc., 1943), 145; Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 154.

¹⁸⁷ Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 85, 279.

¹⁸⁸ William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), 47-49.

¹⁸⁹ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 55; Rubin, *Growth of a Union*, 144-147.

As an alternative to the HRE, the IHWU attracted the numerous poorer and more radical immigrant hotel workers disaffected with the HRE.¹⁹⁰ While the HRE raised initiation fees, the IHWU lowered them to one dollar and dues to fifty cents per month for waiters and cooks, and thirty cents per month for female and all other workers.¹⁹¹ The IHWU accommodated the multiple foreign language groups present in the New York hotel industry. The IHWU held meetings in multiple languages to appeal to specific ethnic groups, like Germans.¹⁹² Additionally, the IHWU translated every message into at least four languages and published literature on the pages of the *IHW*, and on pamphlets, in all of the languages represented in the hotel workforce: German, Italian, French, Greek, Polish, Spanish, Finnish, Russian, Hungarian, Czech, and even Chinese.¹⁹³ The IHWU also relied on ethnic communities for strike support by organizing strike committees by nationality.¹⁹⁴ The IHWU, for example, appealed directly to the largest ethnic community in the hotel industry – Germans. The IHWU asked German striking waiters to snap photos of strikebreaking waiters and thereby “ostracize them” from the community, and to warn fellow German waiters, recently arrived on ocean liners, to not work at striking hotels, for example.¹⁹⁵ Thus, much like in Lawrence, the IHWU, aware of the ethnic composition of the hotel industry, effectively appealed to local ethnic communities in order forward the interests of the strike.

The IHWU even attempted to organize female workers by hiring two female organizers. Like the HRE, however, female workers took a backseat to the majority male waiters and cooks. Nonetheless, the IWW introduced industrial unionism to the industry, called attention to the

¹⁹⁰ Josephson, *Union House, Union Bar*, 98.

¹⁹¹ Jack Britt Gearity, “You and the Other Fellow,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

¹⁹² Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 319-320.

¹⁹³ Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 98; “Taft Warned to Shun Hotel Food,” *New York Tribune*, January 19, 1913; Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 318-319.

¹⁹⁴ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 318-319.

¹⁹⁵ “Will Use Cameras in Waiters’ Strike,” *New York Times*, June 10, 1912.

unequal treatment of the hotel worker as a so-called “servant” through controversial and sometimes violent rhetoric, attempted to redefine service work through sabotage, and appealed to the peculiarities of the multi-ethnic hotel industry workforce like no previous labor union.¹⁹⁶

The IHWU and Self-Respect: From “Servant” to “Hotel Worker”:

At its very core, IWW labor organizers claimed that the 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike was a strike for the self-respect of the hotel worker.¹⁹⁷ The 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike thereby became the physical and rhetoric testing ground for the class antagonisms established in the hotel service industry for the previous quarter century. Up against a negative public image and a demeaning work environment, the organizers of the strike often framed both the strike and union activity as symbolic of forging self-respect in the workplace and elevating the social status of hotel workers. One union newspaper stated:

“A little over a year ago the papers and periodicals of this country would not mention a waiter or other hotel worker, except to joke... no more of that now... we are considered now as useful and most necessary workers, and not as servants, owned body and soul by the boss.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ “Sabotage,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, 112-116; Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 154.

¹⁹⁷ Russell, “Why Should the Waiter Cringe?,” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1912; “International Hotel Workers’ Union Has Won the Victory,” *International Hotel Worker*, July 1912; Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 92.

¹⁹⁸ “Public Sympathy and the Public,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

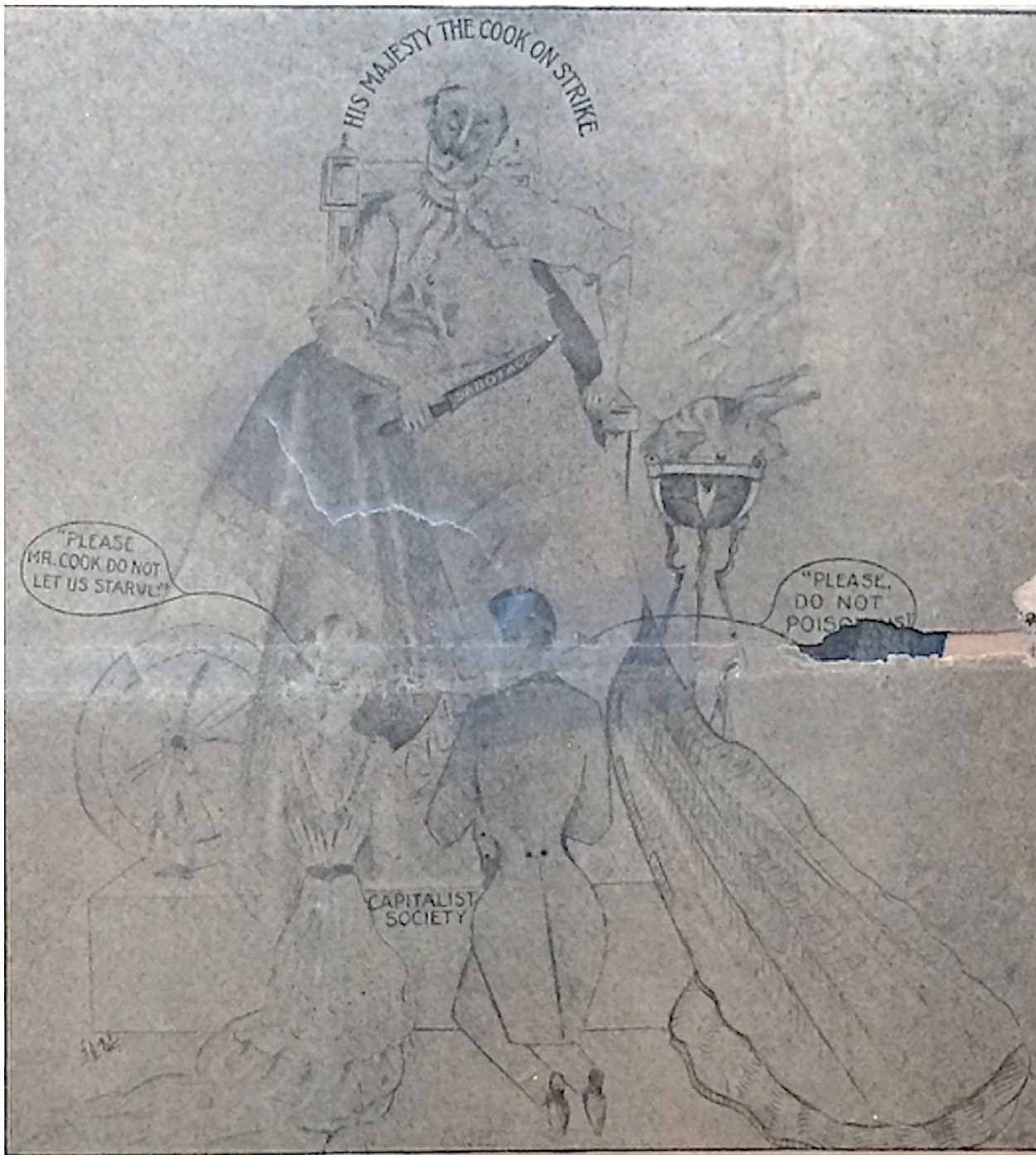


Figure 5: A Cartoon in the February 1913 *International Hotel Worker*, showing a cook standing on the pedestal of the “capitalist society.” In the cook’s hand is a knife that says “sabotage.” Above the cook’s head it says, “his majesty the cook on strike,” while two begging “capitalists,” in suit and dress, beg the cook. The woman on the left is saying, “please, Mr. Cook, do not let us starve,” while the man on the right is saying, “please do not poison us.”

In fact newspapers and periodicals continued to disparage hotel workers. In response to the strike, the Hotel Men’s Association, the police, and even the mayor belittled the “servant

class.” The Hotel Men’s Association explicitly revealed its opinion of their own employees. The Hotel Association asserted that the strike leaders and union members were “no better than the savage Mores in the Philippine Islands.”¹⁹⁹

The New York Police Department also explicated their views of the social status of hotel workers. Police Sheriff Harburger stated that it was due to a characteristic “feeble-minded[ness]” of hotel workers that the strikers were led by the IWW.²⁰⁰ Throughout the strike, press perceived hotel workers as subjects, “servitors,” and “acquisitions” that could be easily controlled by any “outside” force – management or the IWW.²⁰¹

Even Mayor Gaynor of New York expected hotel workers to act servilely during the June 1912 bout of the strike. Mayor Gaynor wrote a letter to the secretary of the IHWU stating that he supported the right of unions but denounced any militant action to enforce said right, such as striking. Gaynor expected “servants” to act “honorably” and “decently” by serving their social betters.²⁰²

In response to the above-stated socio-economic elitism, the IWW/IHWU proposed to flip social Darwinism and social inequality on its head through building the self-respect and power of the hotel worker.²⁰³ A social Darwinist may suppose that the wealthy had risen to the top of American society due to fitness, while the poor were dependent “servants” because of their assumed unfitness.²⁰⁴ The IWW/IHWU, on the other hand, believed the working class was most fit because they were not the “idlers and parasites” who dined and resided in New York’s hotels,

¹⁹⁹ “Regan’s Private Police Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, January 26, 1913.

²⁰⁰ “Harburger Classes Ettor as Destroyer: Sheriff Scores Labor Leader’s,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1913.

²⁰¹ “Harburger Classes Ettor as Destroyer: Sheriff Scores Labor Leader’s,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1913; *New York Herald*, June 4, 1912, 10; “Waiters in a Riot Around Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1913.

²⁰² William Jay Gaynor, “Gaynor Loves Fair Play,” *Hotel Monthly* Vol. 20, July 1912.

²⁰³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 149-153.

²⁰⁴ William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other* (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, 1974), 114-115.

and thus the working class, through “trustified labor,” would become the ruling class.²⁰⁵ Service work, according to the IHWU, was “a useful and necessary work... it is respectful and worthy,” therefore the working class was the stronger class as a result of their expenditure of labor power.²⁰⁶

A political cartoon (*Figure 5*) in the *IHW* captures this very idea. Through the means of “sabotage” – the knife in the cooks’ hand – the hotel worker was to become the ruling class – “the majesty” – standing atop “capitalist society.”²⁰⁷ In the cartoon, the former capitalists beg the working class hotel workers not to allow them to fall victim to the same starvation the working class in capitalist society had to experience. As the cartoon implies, this revolution was not to be accomplished by peaceful means, but through the threat of violence – a chef with knife in hand and control over food production. As one IWW pamphlet exclaimed, “it is the law of nature that the strong rule and the weak are enslaved,” but that did not necessarily mean the workers, although supposedly enslaved today, were always to be enslaved.²⁰⁸

The IHWU attempted to spark this revolution by instilling working-class consciousness in the hotel worker rather than allegiance to the middle- and upper- classes as “servants,” as Raspadori contends.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the IHWU attempted to instill the idea that the union represented the interests of “workers” rather than “servants.” The IWW directly challenged the servant’s ‘culture of poverty’ created by the tipping system and expectations of upward mobility in its rhetoric and demands. IWW organizer Patrick Quinlan stated that the waiter should not depend on the “benevolence” of a man like John D. Rockefeller for a five-cent tip. The IWW

²⁰⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 153; “That Poison Scare,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁰⁶ Russell, “Why Should the Waiter Cringe?” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1912.

²⁰⁷ “The Majesty The Cook On Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁰⁸ Industrial Workers of the World, *The Lumber Industry and Its Workers* (Chicago: IWW Publishing Bureau, 1922), 59.

²⁰⁹ Raspadori, “Becoming Workers?,” 382.

intended to completely abolish the tipping system that both demoralized the worker and was condemned by the public.²¹⁰ Through the abolishment of the tip, the improvement of self-image and self-respect, and union organizing, the IHWU claimed to free the service worker from the taxing emotional labor of the service industry and societal degradation – exemplified by statements from management, the mayor, and the police – and turn the “servant” into a “worker.”²¹¹ Therefore, the IHWU used the term “worker” – rather than “servant,” “waiter,” or “cook” – in order to destroy the “medieval” “master-servant” relationship between employer and employee and forge working-class solidarity.

Class War, the “Dear Public,” Sabotage, and Public Sympathy/Public Fear

Much as the mainstream press implied that the strike undermined the class status quo between those who serve and those served, the IHWU/IWW interpreted the strike as form of class warfare. In defining who the “dear public” was, the IHWU identified the “public in our industry” as the “patrons of the hotel...[which] belong to the same class as our bosses belong to... they are one, and in sympathy with each other, not with the working class.”²¹² Dubofsky and Kimeldorf claim that the strike “failed” because the IHWU did not appeal to public sympathy.

The IHWU, however, defiantly abhorred appealing to the entire public and instead divided the public along class lines. The *IHW* stated, “it is not ‘public sympathy’ that... can make a strike successful ... [because] the public in our case is just as much an enemy as the boss against whom we fight.”²¹³ IWW/IHWU organizers were conscious of their public image during the strike, as every strike is fought in the public eye, but they made sure to underline that the

²¹⁰ “Taft Warned to Shun Hotel Food,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1913.

²¹¹ “The ‘Caterer’ Turns Lecturer,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913; Harry H. Pratley, “Reminiscences of a Waiter,” *International Hotel Worker*, October 1912; “When Waiters and Cooks Cooperate,” *International Hotel Worker*, May 1912 ; Raspadori, “Becoming Workers?,” 382; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 149-51.

²¹² “Public Sympathy and the Public,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

IHWU was waging class war against both hotel managers and elite palace hotel guests. The issue of deciding who “the public” was in the case of the strike was, therefore, of vital importance.

Ideologically, the hotel service industry was the perfect battleground for the IWW to showcase “class antagonism,” the “irrepressible conflict between the capitalist class and the working class,” the “displacement of human skill,” and the “servitude of all workers” in the early twentieth century. The hotel dining room was a crossroads of the “riotous living” and “exploitation” of the capitalist “nobility of wealth” and the working-class.²¹⁴ To the IHWU, the palace hotel embodied class polarization that approached on “European standards” – a bygone pejorative that suggested a loss of idealized American republicanism – underscored by the tip.²¹⁵

As the hotel was the symbolic battleground of the early 20th century, strike organizers claimed that syndicalist sabotage worked best in the palace hotel industry. As Frank Bohn noted, “in no other industry can sabotage be so successfully employed as in that of preparing and serving food.”²¹⁶

First, however, it is essential to decode the IWW’s definition of “sabotage” in reference to the 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike as the interpretations by the IWW and the mainstream press differed. The mainstream press used a speech by IWW organizer Joe Ettor to fundamentally undermine the strike and define “sabotage” for the IWW:

“If you are compelled to go back to work under conditions unsatisfactory to you, you go back with determination to stick together and with your minds made up that it is the

²¹⁴ William Haywood (1905) [IWW Manifesto], Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University Libraries, New York, New York; Dick Richards, “The Cause of the Great Discontent of the Working Class and the Remedy,” *International Hotel Worker*, April 1913.

²¹⁵ Dick Richards, “The Cause of the Great Discontent of the Working Class and the Remedy,” *International Hotel Worker*, April 1913; Russell, “Why Should the Waiter Cringe?,” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1912.

²¹⁶ Bohn, “The Strike of the New York Hotel and Restaurant Workers,” 621.

unsafest (sic) proposition in the world for the capitalists to eat food prepared by members of your union.”²¹⁷

The press and the police sheriff stipulated that Ettor prompted hotel workers to poison “the public.”²¹⁸ Police Sherriff Harburger characterized the protest as criminal, claiming that the IWW’s “remarks [are] apt to bring about murderous designs” and went so far as to say that “better men have been electrocuted.”²¹⁹ The press and police used Ettor’s supposed statement to undermine the legitimacy of the strike by falsifying the IWW/IHWU’s own definition and endorsements of industrial sabotage by denoting sabotage as violent, “lawless,” and a form of “terror.”²²⁰

Kimeldorf and Dubofsky both accept that Ettor uttered these comments because they were “consistent with the IWW’s views at the time on industrial sabotage.” But Ettor unequivocally denied the charge and declared, “our cause is not to be won by any policy that endangers human life.”²²¹

Fundamentally sabotage, according to the IWW, meant the “withdrawal of efficiency.” As a weapon of industrial warfare, the IWW saw sabotage as an exhibition of workers’ power in the workplace in order to achieve demands in lieu of the sympathy of the elite guests. The intense police brutality, beatings of organizers by private detectives during the strike, the tipping system and the “at-will” nature of employment showed that the employers, in coalition with the elite guest and state, held hegemonic power over the worker.²²² Sabotage was a means to engage

²¹⁷ “Ettor’s Advice Holds Threat,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 11, 1913.

²¹⁸ “That Poison Scare,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²¹⁹ “Harburger Classes Ettor As Destroyer,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1913.

²²⁰ “New York Hotel Strike,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 1913.

²²¹ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 108; “Denies He Gave Poison Advice,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 11, 1913.

²²² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 157; “Sabotage,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

in industrial warfare against the bosses and hotel guests and seize power – by striking at the “pocketbook [and stomach] of the masters.”²²³

The IWW, however, illustrated in their official literature that “sabotage is not physical violence.... sabotage is an internal, industrial process... to affect quality, the quantity, and the service.”²²⁴ Ettor’s rebuttal is, therefore, in alignment with the official IWW stance – as the implication of his supposed statement, which implied poisoning food, was contradictory to the *official* nonviolent IWW stance on sabotage.²²⁵

According to Flynn and Ettor, although engaging in sabotage was typically called “immoral” by the mainstream press because it undermined the intertwined “moral and economic system” of the boss by damaging his pocket book, sabotage, especially in the service industry, was in the best interest of “the public” as well. ‘Open Mouth’ sabotage, which was used in the hotel strike, entailed enlightening the customer about the unsanitary conditions in which the food was prepared and collecting affidavits of kitchen and pantry conditions.²²⁶ The only form of adulteration used in the strike was the addition of salt to make food inedible. Flynn stated that ‘Open Mouth’ sabotage was in the interest of the public because “the diner, or customer... would be a lot better off... to have [food] unfit for consumption than to have it left in a state where it can be consumed but where it is continually poisonous” due to the conditions in the kitchen.²²⁷

As a strategy of class war, the IWW attempted to force a public boycott of the palace hotels. Flynn noted that many elite guests were uninterested in aiding the hotel strikers because they targeted their elite bourgeois lifestyle directly in a way that a garment workers strike did

²²³ “Sabotage,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *Sabotage, the Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers’ Industrial Efficiency* (Cleveland: IWW Publishing Bureau, 1916), 13-15.

²²⁴ Flynn, *Sabotage*, 5.

²²⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 161.

²²⁶ Flynn, *Sabotage*, 14-15; Joe Ettor, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, *Industrial relations : final report and testimony submitted to Congress* (Washington D.C., 1914), 1556.

²²⁷ Flynn, *Sabotage*, 16.

not, for example. A large portion of her pamphlet *Sabotage* is dedicated to the way in which Flynn was able to get the “dear public” on the side of the strikers by explaining the unsanitary kitchen conditions, which disgusted the upper-class reformers because it “[struck] at their taste.”²²⁸ Sabotage, either open-mouth or the inefficiency of service, was meant to divide-and-conquer the capitalist class by pitting the elite guests against hotel management.

“Slow and bad work in the kitchen, bad service in the dining rooms, and apartments, mistakes when cooking, accidents when serving.... will all tend to force the diners to seek safety and comfort in other establishments... we are forcing our snobbish capitalist public to help us fight their own brethren, the bosses help us, the workers win the victory.”²²⁹

The “dear public” was thence to be a tool of the workers – not by appealing to their sympathy (as they were the enemy as well) – but by inciting fear in the “dear public” through the withdrawal of workers’ efficiency, or sabotage.

The New York hotel workers strike lacked a *cause célèbre* for public sympathy like the children’s crusade in Lawrence, which garnered national sympathy because of the “sight of undernourished children removed from their parent’s home” and the police brutality that followed, according to Dubofsky.²³⁰ In the 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike, there were no “pitiful, emaciated” children parading up New York’s Fifth Avenue, nor police officers brutality arresting women and children at train stations to rally working-class, and even middle-class, support.²³¹

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁹ “Sabotage,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²³⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 251, 279.

²³¹ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 326-327.

Perhaps, therefore, the reason the IWW/IHWU did not actively employ public sympathy in the hotel workers' strike was simply because it could not rally working-class support for "servants" – considered close to the middle and upper classes – nor upper class support from hotel patrons. Unlike the undernourished children of Lawrence or "the pigtailed, worn-out women, or ascetic looking male Jewish immigrants" of the 1913 New York Garment Workers' strike, the well-dressed waiter in a "good house" was a worker peculiarly devoid of pity by New York upper-class reformers.²³² The "dear public" had no clue what lay behind the veil of the waiters' smiles and the immaculate gilded curtains and marble pillars in the dining rooms of the Essex House, for example. The IHWU was cognizant of the fact that "the clean, neatly dressed, polite and smiling waiter" would not elicit public sympathy. The IHWU argued that the waiter was like an actor; stating, "the actor jokes for the same reason as the waiter smiles; they both are making their living that way... the [hotel] houses know it ... they can therefore mistreat the waiter as they please."²³³

Thus, the IWW/IHWU employed public fear as a tactic because it could not employ public sympathy. As one organizer stated, "the fear of another strike makes the dear public considerate towards our fellow workers... it is not sympathy with the workers that does it."²³⁴ The peculiarity of the hotel industry, and the framing of the customer as the enemy thereby, did not make appealing to the elite guests for this strike possible. The IWW/IHWU could not both espouse the hotel dining room as the prime symbol of industrial warfare and capitalist degradation of the working class while also appealing to the "public sympathy."

²³² Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize*, 124; "The 'Caterer' Turns Lecturer," *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

²³³ "The 'Caterer' Turns Lecturer," *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

²³⁴ "Recognition of the Union Again," *International Hotel Worker*, December 1912; "Public Sympathy and the Public," *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

Although official IWW periodicals described “class war” as non-violent, on the streets of New York “class war” realized itself in physical clashes between strikers, police, and “private detectives” hired by the hotel companies. Indeed many hotel workers, as well as “private detectives” and police, instigated violence during the January 1913 leg of the 1912-1913 strike wave.

Throughout the strike, the IHWU and mainstream press reported hotel detectives (labor spies) beating strikers.²³⁵ In one instance, the management of the Hotel Knickerbocker hired an entire force of special guards from ex-Fire Chief Croker’s Fire Prevention Bureau to protect the hotel from attack by striking waiters.²³⁶ The guards wore blue police uniforms, pinned silver shields to their coats, and carried clubs that differed from regulation police clubs only in color. The police arrested and quickly discharged the former Fire Chief for impersonating an officer. But, the police sent its own detachments to the Waldorf, Belmont, McAlpin, Ritz-Carlton, Plaza, and Sherry’s, disallowed “parading,” “broke heads” of strikers who called fellow workers out on strike, and banned picketing in order to “guarantee protection” for the “life and property” of Knickerbocker manager James B. Regan.²³⁷ The police thence became the hotel’s private guard, irrespective of the illegal crew of “private detectives” that threw the first blows at strikers, according to the *Times*.²³⁸

The Hotel Astor was a continuous sight of bloodshed from the start of the strike to its end.²³⁹ On January 8, two organizers jumped atop a table and screamed a “general strike is on! Everybody quit!” “Hotel detectives” blocked the organizers’ exit and mauled them “in a rain of

²³⁵ “Belmont Waiters Refuse To Go Out,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1913; “Waiters In A Riot Around Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1913.

²³⁶ “Regan’s Private Police Arrested,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1913.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ “Waldo Raids Regan’s Special Hotel Guard,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1913; “Waiters In A Riot Around Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1913.

²³⁹ “Waiters Attack The Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 1, 1913.

blows.” The organizers were subsequently arrested. Meanwhile the two hotel detectives were discharged. In response to the violence by the “hotel detectives,” four hundred strikers around the Hotel Astor “armed themselves with bricks and pieces of stones,” shouted “down with the cops” and continued to shower the police with “bricks and blows.” Police used their clubs against strikers and threatened to “kill” any strikers attempting to enter a hotel. Subsequently private detectives alongside police officers drew revolvers, which strikers wrenched from their hands. Police blackjacked hotel workers, and general manager Muschenheim at the Astor physically blocked exits and locked the doors to stop a general walkout in response to the beating of the two organizers. Bricks flew right and left, smashing windows in the heart of Times Square.²⁴⁰

Locally, the IHWU was not as timid in its promotion of violence after the strike, unlike the IWW nationally. During the strike, IHWU and IWW leaders stated they did “not at all approve such tactics [brick-throwing] of ‘violence.’”²⁴¹ One columnist for the *IHW* promoted explicit violence after the strike, however. “Everybody smiles when the union officials protest their organizations to be peaceful and law-abiding,” he stated, “because everybody knows they are lying.” He continues:

“A strike of any size means violence... throwing of bricks through windows where people are at dinner, demonstrations with fights... spoiling thousands of dollars worth of raw materials... destroying other thousands of dollars worth of glasses ... and always

²⁴⁰ “Chronicle of the New York Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; “Belmont Waiters Refuse To Go Out,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1913; “Waiters In A Riot Around Hotel Astor,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1913; “Bricks Call Out Mouquin’s Waiters,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1913; “Mob Storms Hotel,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 9, 1913; “Waiters Fight Police,” *The Sun*, June 2, 1912.

²⁴¹ “A Few Bricks, ETC.” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

everywhere, and all the time, fights between strikebreakers and scabs against strikers and strike sympathizers, between people and the police.”²⁴²

For the IHWU, this was not just class war, but “actual warfare” instigated by the “capitalist class” because of blacklists, lockouts, and company “thugs.” The violent IHWU actions during the strike and the violent rhetoric to follow contradicted the earlier, official IWW stance.

Nevertheless, sabotage, as a working-class weapon, stood at the center of the IHWU strike. Violent or non-violent, the IHWU used sabotage to instigate fear rather than forge public sympathy. The hotel was simply too closely associated to lifestyle of the New York upper classes and too distant from the lifestyle of the New York working classes to garner sympathy from either.

Strikebreakers: “College Rah-Rahs” and “Negro Scabs”:

Like any strike, proprietors employed strikebreakers in order to bust the union’s organizing efforts. The IHWU, however, took advantage of the peculiar strikebreakers that sometimes replaced striking hotel workers – college students. Hotel managers contacted college registrars throughout the City in order to find strikebreakers to wait tables.²⁴³ As reported in the *Columbia Spectator*, Columbia students, as well as some Harvard undergraduates, quickly replaced striking waiters and bellboys because they wished to uphold anti-union ideology, euphemized as the “right to work” and the “freedom of labor,” according to one Columbia University undergraduate.²⁴⁴ The *Atlanta Constitution* described scenes of college students in

²⁴² “Direct Action,” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1913.

²⁴³ “Waiters’ Strike Spreading Fast,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1912.

²⁴⁴ Simon Barr, “Communications,” *Columbia Spectator*, March 7, 1913.

“fashionable attire” serving guests and then sitting at the tables and sipping cocktails alongside the patrons.²⁴⁵

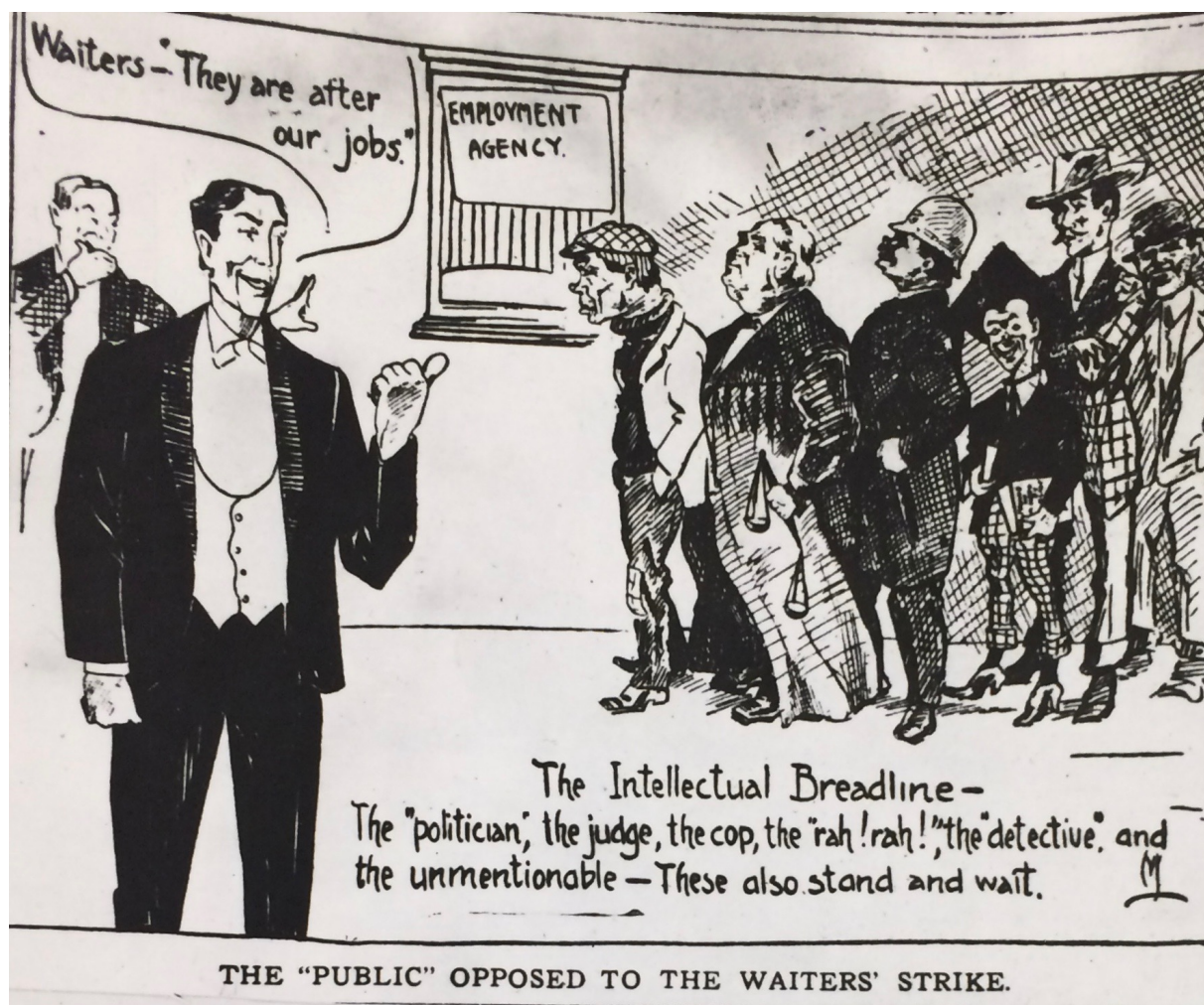


Figure 6: A cartoon from the *New York Call*, which intimates the supposed class-consciousness of “elite” members of society (like college students, “Detectives,” politicians, judges, etc.) who acted as strikebreakers, or “scabs,” during the 1912-1913 strike.
Source: *New York Call*, June 12, 1912.

The Ivy League strikebreakers revealed bourgeois class solidarity, according to the IHWU. The sons of the New York bourgeoisie quickly replaced striking waiters and did “the dirty work of scabs” on behalf of the class interests of their bourgeois fathers who dined and/or

²⁴⁵ “Strikers Invade Columbia,” *Columbia Spectator*, January 27, 1913; “Hotel Strikers Grow Riotous,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1912; “Waldo Raids Regan’s Special Hotel Guard,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1913; “Waiters Fight Police,” *The Sun*, June 2, 1912.

potentially owned such establishments.²⁴⁶ *Figure 6* from the socialist *New York Call* depicts the “scabs” for the hotel strike consisted of an “intellectual” elite of politicians, judges, and college “rah rahs.” The actual number of college student strikebreakers was minimal, however. If the majority of “scabs” were in fact “College Rah Rahs” then the total class warfare element of the strike would have perhaps cohered.

A number of strikebreakers were Southern Afro-American workers. President Reed of the Hotel Men’s Association and general manager Fred Sterry of the Plaza promised to furnish five to ten thousand “negro helpers” for the entire New York hotel industry.²⁴⁷ The majority of hotels – like the St. Regis – however, refused to employ Afro-American strikebreakers because hoteliers “did not look with favor on negro help as a steady institution.”²⁴⁸ Afro-American strikebreakers were only used in the Plaza in the room service department, as the upper-class guests scorned the presence of “negroes” in the main dining halls of first class hotels.²⁴⁹ Even into the 1940s hoteliers refused to hire black workers and when the state forced them, black workers worked solely in the back-of-the-house because of objections by guests.²⁵⁰

Black strikebreakers obviously did not maintain the bourgeois class-conscious motives that the IHWU assumed Ivy League college students had. Much as historian Jarod Roll suggests, unions and mainstream press historically neglected the agency of black strikebreakers.²⁵¹ The *Times* reported black strikebreakers as being “brought in” by the employer rather than actively

²⁴⁶ “Public Sympathy, and the Public,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

²⁴⁷ “Negro Help For Hotels,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 31, 1912; “Hotel Strikers Grow Riotous,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1912.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ “Waiters’ Strike Spreading Fast,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1912; “Hotel Strikers Grow Riotous,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1912.

²⁵⁰ Boomer, *Hotel Management*, 282.

²⁵¹ Jarod Roll, “Sympathy With The Devil: The Notorious Career of Missouri’s Strikebreaking Metal Miners, 1896-1910,” in *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* Volume 11, No. 4 (2014): 13.

traveling to Northern hotels.²⁵² Instead of having legitimate reasons for finding work in hotels, the *IHW* depicted the “negro scab” as a vile and evil creature.²⁵³ The IHWU supported “retribution” against “the scab,” which culminated in violence, for example, against the “negro scabs” at the Endicotte Hotel on January 9, 1913.²⁵⁴ The IHWU reduced the “negro scab” to a passive being that “has been fed the dope” of “race war” and that does not understand “that their interests are the same as every other worker.”²⁵⁵

Afro-American strikebreakers did, however, act in their own interest in deciding whether or not to “scab” on hotel workers. Many potential black strikebreakers did not travel north, for example, because Southern preachers exclaimed that black workers were not welcome in Northern upper-class hotels.²⁵⁶ Even though the IHWU claimed to end all “race prejudice and old enmities,” the IHWU in word and deed targeted disenfranchised “negro scabs,” which did not fit into their logic that the hoteliers primarily employed fellow bourgeois Ivy League strikebreakers.²⁵⁷

Most strikebreakers, however, were not Afro-Americans. The majority of strikebreakers were Euro-American New Yorkers, women, and IHWU members who forfeited union membership.

²⁵² “Hotel Strike Grows,” *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1912; “Waiters’ Strike Spreading Fast,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1912.

²⁵³ “Hunting the Scab,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁵⁴ “Chronicle of the New York Strike,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913; “Hunting the Scab,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁵⁵ “Playing Race Against Race,” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁵⁶ “Hotel Strikers Grow Riotous,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1912.

²⁵⁷ “Urge Chambermaids To Join The Union,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1912.

Female Hotel Workers and the IHWU:



Figure 7: Chambermaids at the Hotel Astor in 1905

Source: New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records Local 6 Photos The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives (Box 2.), New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

While attempting to forge self-respect in the workplace, organizers perhaps overcompensated for the supposed feminine qualities of the hotel service worker by expounding and reinforcing a masculine image of the American worker. This sort of messaging alienated forty percent of hotel workers – those occupying female job classifications.²⁵⁸ It is difficult to construct an image of the activity of female workers during the strike, as both the mainstream papers and labor press were generally silent. In fact, there is only one article in the two-year run of publications by the IHWU that speaks directly to female workers. In an article entitled “To Our Female Fellow Workers,” the IHWU exclaims, “whatever you are doing... you are a hotel WORKER!” The article then goes on to exclusively invite female workers to have tea, read,

²⁵⁸ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 100; Consumer’s League, *Behind the Scenes in a Hotel*, 7.

write, and have a “social good time” at the union hall.²⁵⁹ Other than this single appeal, there was a large drought in IHWU efforts, at least as represented in the labor press, to appeal to female workers.

The majority of IHWU appeals to workers urged hotel workers to assert masculinity. The IHWU urged the hotel worker to “be a man – and act as such” and avoid acting femininely.²⁶⁰ Although the IHWU claimed that female workers were hotel workers as well and thereby deserved to organize just as men should, there was an ingrained lack of true equality between men and women inherent in the IHWU’s demands. In the June 1912 demands, the IHWU demanded \$10 per week for steady waiters, \$7 per week for bellboys, \$12 per week for porters, but only \$5 per week for the all-female job classification of chambermaid.²⁶¹ A difference in skill did not account for the large pay disparity between the all-female chambermaid staff and the other job classifications. All of these positions were considered equally “unskilled” and replaceable, even though there is an incredible amount of ability required for performing the duty of a chambermaid, for example.²⁶²

Thus, the IHWU, prior to the December-January strike, did not equally represent women as they claimed. It was, therefore, not surprising that when the union leaders called the chambermaids to join the waiters and cooks during the June general strike, they simply did not join. One chambermaid, while writing a statement on her working conditions within the *New York Call*, asserted that she was “also a hotel worker.” The fact that this chambermaid felt impelled to include this self-assertion of her equal status as a “hotel worker” signifies that the

²⁵⁹ “To Our Fellow Female Workers,” *International Hotel Worker*, July 1912.

²⁶⁰ New York State Department of Labor, *Special Bulletins – State of New York, Department of Labor Issues 50-53*. September 1912. 274-277. “Have Done With Slavery. Organize, Then Fight It!,” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1912; “Hotel Workers Plan National Strike November,” *New York Tribune*, October 23, 1912.

²⁶¹ “What the Hotel Men Really Wanted,” *International Hotel Worker*, June 1912.

²⁶² Jay Rubin (1943, March 4) [History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 4, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

IHWU neglected to regard the female worker in their organizing drive. The chambermaid continued to state that “nobody seems to deem it necessary to say anything about the grueling work” of a chambermaid.²⁶³ The IHWU’s neglect of the female workers and the gendered wage gap between hotel workers was simply too large and the appeal to have tea at the union hall was obviously not enough to compensate for the considerable weekly pay gap between male and female hotel workers.²⁶⁴

The IHWU did attempt to rally female support for strike action, but regarded female workers as ancillary to men rather than as hotel workers in their own right. The IHWU had at least two female organizers for female hotel workers, a Mrs. Brown and a Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes, and claimed to have organized 800 chambermaids by June 1912. In addition, the IHWU held a mass meeting for all female hotel workers in June 1912, but less than fifty female hotel workers attended.²⁶⁵ The IHWU did not attempt to organize female workers and speak to their specific gendered concerns in the hotel, such as “living-in,” paternalistic management, and sexual harassment. Instead, IHWU organizers framed the female strike activity as being “in sympathy” with the male hotel workers rather than in pursuit of their own particular interests.²⁶⁶ The IHWU stated that the role of the woman in the hotel strike was to “see the boys through this thing” rather than for female workers to assert themselves.²⁶⁷

This is not to say that female workers were not militant or did not institute their own spontaneous, or ‘wildcat,’ strike actions. The live-in chambermaids of the Hotel Knickerbocker went on strike on October 4th, 1912 because they complained of the quality of the food. Every

²⁶³ “Hark, Dear Public, How About This?” *New York Call*, June 12, 1912.

²⁶⁴ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 103.

²⁶⁵ “Urge Chambermaids to Join The Union,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1912.

²⁶⁶ “The Chambermaid In Repose,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 8, 1912; “Maids All To Go Out With Hotel Waiters,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1912.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

single chambermaid packed her suitcase and informed the manager of her intention to walk out at 7:30 AM prior to their 9:00 AM shift. The hotel manager thence immediately ordered the chef to prepare a meal that the maids would consider “excellent!” and the chambermaids called the strike off. On January 23, the chambermaids walked out at the Knickerbocker once more, as well.²⁶⁸

There were also some exceptional women who sought out the IHWU. Ten chambermaids at the Hotel Imperial, for example, wished to join the IHWU. Some chambermaids even contributed money to the union coffers stating, “[waiters] are not treated like human beings, and unless they buy their own food they have to eat food unfit to be placed before them.”²⁶⁹ This limited female strike activity and the union’s meager attempts to appeal to female workers only took place in the May-June leg of the 1912-1913 strike wave. By the big contest of January 1913, neither the mainstream press nor the union made mention of the female worker or “chambermaid.”²⁷⁰ It is not the case that female hotel workers did not share the same interests as their male counterparts. Instead, the IHWU was unable to sufficiently appeal to and organize the mostly gender-segregated female hotel occupations.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ “Chronicle of the New York Strike.” *International Hotel Worker*, February 1913.

²⁶⁹ “Chambermaids Join Waiters In New York Strike,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 5, 1912; “Maids All To Go Out With Hotel Waiters,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1912.

²⁷⁰ “Young Woman Leads The Waiters’ Strike,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1913.

²⁷¹ “Chambermaids Go On Strike In Knickerbocker Hotel; Win In Two Hours,” *International Hotel Worker*, October 1912.

Conclusion: “Turning the Tables”

The strike was fundamentally about dignity in the workplace of the “peculiar” hotel service industry in addition to reforming the same sorts of Progressive Era working conditions almost all American workers faced. This required not only rebutting the degradation service workers faced in the press, but also contemporaneous notions of service work reinforced by legislation that excluded hotel workers, management’s treatment and attitude towards its workers, police statements by Sheriff Harburger, the attitude of the HRE, and the ways hotel workers self-identified. The IHWU, under the auspices of the IWW, was unsuccessful in inciting a full-scale class revolution and fashioning a hotel workers’ union after 1913. The IHWU later blamed the strike on a lack of “working-class consciousness” and a “reactionary element” in the working class. Some critical IHWU members even blamed the IWW as an outside “forceful” “foe” that “gobbled” up the IHWU by prematurely forcing the relatively conservative, “oppressed and morally prostituted by the tip-system” “servant” to subscribe to working-class “ultra” radicalism.²⁷² Nevertheless, the IHWU, alongside the IWW, did highlight the peculiar situation of the New York hotel worker by emphasizing turn-of-the-century degradation and inequality under capitalism in the fashionable New York dining rooms. Through the study of this strike from the perspective of the hotel worker rather than the IWW as a national organization, one can perceive both the peculiar status of the hotel worker, or so-called “servant,” and the similarity of the hotel worker’s experiences to those of other American workers at the time.

As Elizabeth Gurley Flynn stated, the strike “helped to lay a basis for industrial unionism in this industry, which expressed itself in the 1930s, in the Food Workers Industrial Union, out of

²⁷² “Chronicle of the New York Strike (continued from last month),” *International Hotel Worker*, March 1913; “Past Experiences And a Question Concerning The Future,” *International Hotel Worker*, June 1913.

which the present Union (HTC) grew.”²⁷³ Although the strike fatally overlooked female workers and “negro scabs” as fundamental to its organization (despite the all-inclusive IWW rhetoric), the IWW and IHWU nevertheless succeeded insofar as they forced the HRE to accept “radical methods” in New York and created an industrial model for future organizing. It only takes a simple comparison of statements by the general organizer in 1912-1913 and the first President of HTC in 1943 to validate Flynn’s statement. Jack Britt Gearity, the general organizer of the IHWU in 1913, stated that the only possibility to organize effectively in the hotel industry is to organize from “cellar to roof” in “one big union of hotel workers.”²⁷⁴ Likewise, the first HTC president Jay Rubin stated, in a 1943 shop delegate class about the history of the Union, that it is a necessity to organize hotel workers “from the roof to the basement’ in “one big union.”²⁷⁵

Morehouse laments that after the Hotel Trades Council organized the Waldorf-Astoria in 1946, the “tables really began to turn on management” and he states that “today, it’s often the union that turns the screws.”²⁷⁶ However much Morehouse scorns the “turning of the tables on management” in the hotel, he concedes that conditions generally improved when the welfare of the workers in the hotel did not depend solely on the daily “temper” of management. Prior to any sort of unionization, hotel workers endured the complete hegemony of hotel management, who instituted dehumanizing, paternalistic, cruel, tyrannical, and unsanitary practices.

The strike increased the militancy of the hotel worker, politically educated future leadership, led to a series of IWW-inspired strikes – in 1918, 1924, 1929, 1934, and 1936 – and motivated the eventual organization of the Hotel Trades Council industrial union in 1938. As Jay

²⁷³ Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 154.

²⁷⁴ Josephson, *Union Bar, Union House*, 98; Gearity, “You and the Other Fellow,” *International Hotel Worker*, January 1913.

²⁷⁵ Jay Rubin (1943, March 8)[History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 4, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

²⁷⁶ Morehouse, *Waldorf-Astoria*, 25.

Rubin stated in 1943, “the Hotel Union did not start in 1937-1938 when the Hotel Trades Council was organized. The union was born because hotel workers fought for many years within the industry.” And that fight began with the 1912-1913 hotel workers’ strike.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Jay Rubin (1943, March 4) [History of Our Union: Shop Delegate Class, (Unpublished)], Folder 34, Box 34, New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council Records WAG.123, The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, New York.

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