

RADICAL WOMEN OF TEXAS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION:
AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNISM AND
LABOR UNION ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

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Emma Tenayuca, Charlotte Graham, and Rebecca Taylor are representative of the diversity of agitators within the Texas labor movements in the 1930's as activists fighting for the conditions and rights of workers. While all three were involved in union organizing, which sought effective workers' rights, only Tenayuca joined the Communist Party to accomplish these aspirations. During the same span of years in Texas, Graham and Taylor organized workers for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, but for several contributing factors both chose not to join the Communist Party. While both unions and the Communist Party attempted to aid workers during the 1930's as evinced by Tenayuca, neither Taylor nor Graham chose to join in communist activities. While each of these women agitated for similar goals conceptions as to how best to pursue those goals distinguish their experiences from 1930-1938 in Texas.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression economically paralyzed the United States during the 1930s. The unemployment rate reached over a quarter of the population. Many Americans struggled to put food on the table, clothes on their backs, and keep their homes. The homeless lived in shantytowns or “Hooverilles” across the U.S. while others traveled around the country looking for work. Those who were able to keep work faced numerous challenges as well. Many people saw their wages fall lower than a decade earlier. Poor work conditions were a common experience laborers faced while earning small wages. Additionally, racial and gender discrimination was another obstacle workers faced in attempting to improve their income. In response to these issues, the labor force encountered much difficulty when they attempted to organize.

Emma Tenayuca, Charlotte Graham, and Rebecca Taylor were all active within the Texas labor movements of the 1930s. Though their labor activism was important, only Tenayuca chose to join the Communist Party (CP).¹ This thesis

¹ The Communist Party (CP) is the American Communist Party and I will refer to it as the CP throughout this paper.

will explore what led these three activist women to accept or refuse to join the CP while exploring their shared background of labor activism that included union organizing and fighting for workers' rights through strikes and demonstrations. Taylor and Graham were active in labor unions and while they experienced obstacles when struggling for workers' rights they chose not to become affiliated with the Communist Party as Tenayuca did. Taylor and Graham did not join the CP for several factors including success as union organizer, their unfaltering loyalty and support for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's (ILGWU), potentially racist attitudes, family background, the hostile anti-communist and anti-labor environment within the U.S. and specifically Texas, class elitism, and anti-radical attitudes.² Graham believed that the IGLWU was supportive of women's equality influencing her loyalty and support for the organization throughout the 1930s. However, Tenayuca chose to become openly affiliated with the CP largely due to its support of racial equality, its willingness to aid the unemployed and help workers gain better working conditions. Tenayuca also participated within the CP because it offered her an expanded position within leadership roles such as secretary of the CP in Texas and in its Unemployed Council and Workers' Alliance.³ Tenayuca's husband Homer

² Radical in this paper will be used to mean those ideas that deviate from the free market capitalist idea in society, different from the usual or traditional.

³ Vargas, Zaragosa, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 129; U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Emma Tenayuca Brooks*; File no. 64-261 (1937-1954): FBI states that Tenayuca was the Secretary of the CP in Texas.

Brooks may have also been influential in her decision to join. Brooks was a member of the CP prior to their marriage in 1937 and was sent to Texas to organize for the CP.⁴ The affiliation or denial of the CP by these three labor activists will be highlighted in this paper against the backdrop of economic, political, and social factors during the 1930s.

Communism was radical because it offered workers independence from employers and capitalism and a break in the common idea that capitalism should not be regulated, according to Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.⁵ The CP was actively involved in unionizing workers, promoting racial equality, supporting equal pay for women⁶, leading hunger marches for the unemployed, and organized the unemployed under the Workers Alliance and the Unemployed Councils.⁷ It was an avenue for those interested in workers' rights much like labor unions. These were all influential factors for why Tenaycua joined and was considered a radical.

The environment in Texas and throughout the nation in the 1930s was inhospitable to workers, women, unions, the CP and minorities. Employers,

⁴ Vargas, p. 133

⁵ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. ed. by Joseph Katz. trans. by Samuel Moore. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Pocket Books, 1964, p. 84, 90

⁶ Foner, p. 264

⁷ Cochran, Bert. *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*. Princeton University Press. pp.35-36, 63; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130, 135; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, p. 1; Kennedy, David M. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in the Great Depression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. pp. 222, 254; Foner, Philip S. *Women and the American Labor Movement: From World War I to the Present*. New York and London: The Free Press a division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980, p. 266

mayors, and police of Texas were openly against labor strikes and communists. Strikers were beaten and tear gassed by police and fired by employers if they tried to organize.⁸ Mayors were unsupportive of strikers and helped employers get injunctions against them.⁹ The Dies Committee or the House of Un-American Activities Committee created by Martin Dies in 1938 investigated anyone deemed un-American which included labor activists and communists.¹⁰ The environment discouraged labor activists and communists through the violence directed towards them.

Graham and Taylor worked through the ILGWU to help workers gain better wages and work conditions. Tenayuca was active in the CP and its organizations and the Pecan Shellers Union under the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Taylor and Tenayuca were active in San Antonio while Graham was active in Dallas. During their involvement in San Antonio, Tenayuca and Taylor clashed because Taylor was staunchly anti-communist and thought Tenayuca should not be part of any leadership role in the strike because of her CP affiliation. All three women participated in strikes against factories that would not pay a living wage.

⁸ Vargas, p. 134; *Dallas Morning News*, "Police Deny Tear Gas Killed Baby in Strike." February 14, 1938; *Dallas Morning News*, "Shellers' Strike Police Action Held Unjustified." February 16, 1938; *San Antonio Express*, February 13, 1938; Hield, p. 64

⁹ Vargas, p. 129

¹⁰ Carr, Robert K. *The House Committee on Un-American Activities 1945-1950*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1952, pp. vii-1

Numerous scholars explore these three women's involvement in the Texas labor movement but none explore why women in labor unions did or did not join the Communist Party. Several historians have specifically discussed women's roles in the labor movement during the Great Depression in Texas including historian Zaragosa Vargas who has written extensively about Mexican American workers' experiences from the 1930s to post World War II in his *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*.¹¹ Julia Kirkland Blackwelder discusses women in San Antonio during the Great Depression in *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio 1929-1939*.¹² Cynthia Orozco in *No Mexicans, Women or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* explores Mexican Americans involvement in the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in the 1920s and 1930s discussing women's roles within the organization as well.¹³ However, Vargas pays close attention to Tenayuca's association with the CP. These historians do not discuss Taylor or Grahams' rejection of the party. This research relies upon these secondary scholars because they are the few who specifically discuss these three women. Multiple primary documents such as newspapers, typescript oral histories and FBI files supplement these secondary sources to understand why Taylor and Graham were involved in

¹¹ Vargas, Zaragosa, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005

¹² Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio 1929-1939*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984

¹³ Orozco, Cynthia E. *No Mexicans, Women or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009

union activity but did not join the CP while Tenayuca joined the CP and its affiliated unions.

Some historians have discussed specific Texas women involved in strikes and union, but few have dedicated so much of their book as Zaragosa Vargas did in his *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*. It is here that Vargas discusses all Mexican¹⁴ workers' experience in the labor movement; he pays special attention to Emma Tenayuca's involvement in the labor movement in Texas. A particular weakness of Vargas is his exclusion of white women's involvement in labor activities except the mentioning of Rebecca Taylor, who opposed Emma Tenayuca during the 1938 Pecan Shellers' Strike because she was a communist.¹⁵ Vargas characterizes her as a puppet for the San Antonio police and a "bigoted ILGWU leader."¹⁶

Vargas emphasizes how the Communist Party helped Mexican workers in their struggle through their organizations such as the Unemployed Councils, Trade Union Unity Leagues, and the International Labor Defense.¹⁷ According to Vargas, Tenayuca joined with the Communists because they were the only organization that wished to help exploited Mexican workers, as she did.¹⁸

¹⁴ The term Mexican is used throughout referring to the people of Mexican heritage both citizens of the U.S. and non-citizens. Through my research there was no distinction made between Mexican people or other Latin/Hispanic people. All Mexican people are then assumed to be people of Mexican descent.

¹⁵ Vargas, p. 139

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 64-67

¹⁸ Vargas, p. 123

Blackwelder's work, *Women of the Depression: Cast and Culture in San Antonio 1929-1939*, explains how women survived the Great Depression. She writes particularly about three races of women White Americans, Mexican Americans and African Americans who experienced the economic crisis in San Antonio.¹⁹ Blackwelder also explains their varied experiences through discussion of a caste system in which Anglos kept Mexican Americans and African Americans in specific low-level jobs that failed to benefit both employee and employers.²⁰ Numerous charts reveal the differences between white Americans, Mexican Americans and African Americans, men and women including the number of unemployed, employed and wages.²¹

Blackwelder explains that women were more active in women's auxiliaries support systems for men's labor unions and these dealt directly with unemployment by raising funds to help those without work.²² She suggests, "...the union movement made little headway among women in [the] Depression [and in] San Antonio."²³ Blackwelder describes the numerous strikes in San Antonio only briefly-- the Cigar strikes, the ILGWU strikes, and the Pecan Shellers' Strikes.²⁴ The author explores women's involvement in the CP only when it relates to Emma Tenayuca's experience in the 1938 Pecan Shellers'

¹⁹ Blackwelder, p. xvii

²⁰ Ibid, p xviii

²¹ Ibid, Table 41, 42, 43, 44, pp.240-241 Appendix B

²² Ibid, p. 130

²³ Ibid, p. 132

²⁴ Blackwelder, p. 132, 133,134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143,

Strike, and her relationship to the CP is emphasized as only an attempt to gain new members.²⁵ She gives no reason as to why women may not have been involved in the CP. She offers important information on San Antonio during the Great Depression that is key in understanding Emma Tenayuca and other San Antonio women labor activists' experiences.

Another historian, Cynthia E. Orozco wrote *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Orozco discusses the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) as part of the Mexican American civil rights movement.²⁶ This author emphasizes that viewing the organization LULAC as adopting whiteness as some historians do--Armando Navarro and Alfredo Cuellar--is actually a misinterpretation of the organization's history.²⁷ Orozco regards LULAC as a prominent organization that has led the civil rights movement in Texas.²⁸ Orozco discusses women's participation in LULAC even though women were not allowed in the organization until 1933 and then, once in, were not welcomed by LULAC men who did not help organize them and openly discriminated against them.²⁹

Orozco confirms that Emma Tenayuca was a member of LULAC by the age of fifteen years old.³⁰ She fails to include when Tenayuca left the organization

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 144-150

²⁶ Orozco, p. 2

²⁷ Ibid, p. 3

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 3-4

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 196-197

³⁰ Orozco, pp. 213-214

besides mentioning she became radicalized as part of a reading group during high school.³¹ In an oral interview of Tenayuca by Emilio Zamora, Tenayuca says she joined LULAC "...my first year in high school, I joined the Ladies LULAC auxiliary."³² Tenayuca states, "I noticed that their policy, and I followed it for a while, was one of Americanization."³³ Tenayuca realized that LULAC was discriminating against the Mexican foreigners and she goes on to say, "...this is what really made me rebel against the LULACs. No matter how clean you were, how well scrubbed your neck was, if you had a name like Garcia it was bad."³⁴ Tenayuca states this awareness came to her around 1932-1933, revealing the time period she decided to leave LULAC.³⁵

Orozco discusses Tenayuca's involvement in the Communist Party and Tenayuca's essay, "The Mexican Problem in the Southwest" composed in the 1930s.³⁶ Discussing two sections of Tenayuca's essay Orozco explains that one section is opposed to LULAC while the other is pro-LULAC.³⁷ Orozco mentions Emma Tenayuca's criticism of LULAC for splitting the Mexican people and for not including women.³⁸ Orozco concludes Tenayuca felt that despite its

³¹ Ibid, p. 214

³² Emma Tenayuca interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986, p. 2

³³ Tenayuca interview by Zamora June 1986, p. 2

³⁴ Ibid, p. 2, 4

³⁵ Ibid, p. 4

³⁶ Orozco, p. 214

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Orozco, pp. 214-215

weaknesses, LULAC was important.³⁹ Tenayuca's criticism from the 1930s (and still in the 1980s) is significant because Tenayuca was part of the Mexican Civil Rights movement in the 1930s. If she found LULAC lacking in its equality, then perhaps her criticisms should not be overlooked. Tenayuca's desertion of LULAC between 1932-1933, pursuit of the political affiliation that was not against foreign Mexican people, and her criticisms of it can be interpreted as influential to her subsequent membership in the Communist Party.⁴⁰ The Emilio Zamora oral interview of Tenayuca in 1986 is more revealing than Orozco's analysis because Orozco fails to discuss why Tenayuca left LULAC. Orozco fails to discuss why Tenayuca or other women joined the CP or reasons why women did not join.

Another historian who explores women's roles in unions and their activities is Melissa Hield. Her article "'Union-Minded': Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50" written in 1979 discusses Taylor and Graham's involvement in Texas union strikes in which clothing was ripped from scabs, what non-union workers were called, leading to the arrest of women strikers.⁴¹ Hield concluded that women in the garment industry who made up seventy-five percent of the workers in Texas were serious about unions and were involved in aggressive strikes.⁴² She utilizes the 1932 Women's Bureau Survey to point out that of the

³⁹ Ibid, p. 215

⁴⁰ Tenayuca interview by Zamora June 1986, p. 4

⁴¹ Hield, Melissa, Glenn Scott, Maria Flores, Richard Croxdale, Lauren Rabinovitz. "'Union-Minded': Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1979, p. 67

⁴² Hield, pp. 59-60

seventy-five percent of Texas women workers over fifty-two percent worked in factories.⁴³ Women who worked in factories experienced lower wages and poor working conditions described by both Graham and Taylor in Hield's article. Hield discusses Taylor's involvement in San Antonio's garment industry and her effort in the ILGWU strikes in San Antonio from 1936-1938.⁴⁴

Hield also explores Charlotte Graham who was an ILGWU organizer and garment worker. Graham's employer told her to become a prostitute if she wanted more money when the garment factory she worked in went on strike in 1935, displaying the anti-union attitude in Dallas factories and the obstacles Texas women faced participating in unions.⁴⁵ Hield uses Graham's oral interviews to describe the horrible working conditions garment workers suffered.⁴⁶ In 1934, Graham began organizing workers into the IGLWU in Dallas stating that work conditions and the employers were not adhering to the National Recovery Administration codes.⁴⁷ Hield does not discuss the CP; however, Tenayuca's labor involvement and her association with the CP in San Antonio were happening simultaneously with these ILGWU strikes⁴⁸ and the CP was present in San Antonio during Taylor's garment strike.⁴⁹ Despite the similarities, Hield makes no mention of Tenayuca or the CP.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 61

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 63-64

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 61-62

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 64

⁴⁸ Vargas, pp. 128-129

⁴⁹ Vargas, pp. 128-129

In addition, Hield's article also gives attention to the lack of leadership roles allotted to women within the ILGWU.⁵⁰ There were minimal leadership positions, she asserts, given to women such as union organizer.⁵¹ Leadership roles in unions included union organizers, business managers, presidents, and those elected to national offices to make policy.⁵² In a union such as the ILGWU made up of seventy-five percent of women they were only given local leaderships roles, and in Texas Mexican women and black women were not allowed to be union organizers.⁵³ This lack of leadership roles available to women may explain why some joined the Communist Party--such as Tenayuca. The unawareness of or indifference to the lack of leadership roles given to women by the ILGWU would lead some, such as Graham, to believe as she did that it treated women equally to men.⁵⁴

One source important for this study because of its variety of edited primary documents is *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, eds. Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith. The editors pay specific attention to working women of Texas and have noticed that women in Texas were both "militant and tenacious strikers."⁵⁵ The authors highlight the discrimination against people of Mexican heritage in Texas by discussing signs that told Mexicans and Mexican Americans

⁵⁰ Hield, p. 67

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 68

⁵² Ibid, p. 67

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.1

⁵⁵ McArthur, Judith N. and Harold Smith, eds. *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth Century Experience*. University of Texas Austin Press. 2010, p.xii

publicly posting they were not welcome in certain establishments.⁵⁶ The authors discuss the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) organization did not want non-citizens joining its organization and it discriminated against women.⁵⁷ Another topic the authors address is the repatriation of Mexicans both non-citizens and citizens of the United States during the 1920s-1930s.⁵⁸ The repatriation of Mexicans in Texas during the Great Depression is an important aspect that needs addressing when attempting to understand Mexican workers who took part in strikes. The authors use an edited version of Graham's interview by Glenn Scott from 1977 in which Graham discussed her involvement in the ILGWU and the 1935 Dallas garment strike.⁵⁹

A disappointing aspect of *Texas Through Women's Eyes* is the lack of pages given to the CP in contrast to Vargas. It only briefly touches on the party when Tenayuca's story is told. Taylor is only briefly referenced when discussing the ILGWU strikes in San Antonio and no oral interview of Taylor is included.⁶⁰

Decade of Betrayal by Francisco E. Balderma and Raymond Rodriguez, *Labor and Communism* by Bert Cochran, and *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* by Teresa Paloma Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten are other important secondary sources on the topic of Tenayuca, Taylor and Graham. Cochran makes it clear that CP was not the one and only leftist organization that was formed in the U.S.,

⁵⁶ McArthur and Smith, pp. 78-83

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 122

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.85-86

because it was influenced from earlier organizations including the Hillquit-Debs Socialist party and the Industrial Workers of the World after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.⁶¹ Cochran's work discusses the American Communist Party's goals of spreading their message and helping workers gain rights such as better wages and work conditions. They did this through labor unions and the use of strikes.⁶² Communists were integrated into one of the major union of the 1930s the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) once it was formed in 1935.⁶³

It is important to understand the CP's role during the 1930s in the U.S. and Texas to determine why some labor activists women chose to join their cause and why would other women labor activist not join. Cochran focuses on large national northeastern disputes when he discusses the CP's involvement in strikes. Cochran fails to discuss Tenayuca, Taylor or Graham.

Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History by Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten is a source of Mexican and Mexican American women and their involvement with the labor movement in Texas.⁶⁴ The authors discuss Mexican women's lengthy involvement in revolutionary causes from the early 1900s including the example of the Villarreal sisters. Andrea Villarreal worked with Mother Jones (Mary Harris) and Teresa Villarreal created a socialist paper called

⁶¹ Cochran, pp. 5, 7, 20

⁶² Ibid, pp. 20, 21, 31, 36, 43-81

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 95-97, 102

⁶⁴ Acosta, Teresa Paloma and Ruthe Winegarten. *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* University of Texas Press, Austin. 2003

El Obrero also known as *The Worker*.⁶⁵ The authors of *Las Tejanas* also devote pages to Taylor and Tenayuca. Taylor is mentioned briefly with the San Antonio ILGWU strikes but Tenayuca's role in the Pecan Shellers' Strike of 1938 receives greater inclusion.⁶⁶ The authors point out (much like Vargas) that Tenayuca had joined the Workers' Alliance, a communist organization, early in her career.⁶⁷ These authors, much like the authors of *Texas Through Women's Eyes*, McArthur and Smith, do not mention the CP unless relating it to Tenayuca and do not discuss why women like Taylor and Graham did not join the CP.

Another source is *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* by Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, addressing the nation's repatriation campaign.⁶⁸ Repatriation during the 1920s and 1930s was directed against Mexicans both citizen and non-citizen in the United States. Mexicans were questioned about their citizen status in order to deport them.⁶⁹ These authors also focus upon the repatriation campaign in Texas and the working status and struggles of workers of Mexican heritage in the state.⁷⁰

David Kennedy's *Freedom from Fear: The American People in the Great Depression*, which presents a wide view of what was occurring during the 1930s throughout the nation. Kennedy incorporates the CP briefly in terms of the 1932

⁶⁵ Acosta, and Winegarten, p. 78

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp.134, 141-145

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.143

⁶⁸ Balderrama, Francisco E. and Raymond Rodriguez. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. 1995.

⁶⁹ Balderrama, and Rodriguez, pp. 57-59, 98

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 59, 79, 99

election, the Scottsboro Boys' case, the Unemployment Councils and its affiliation with the Workers' Alliance.⁷¹ By giving a broad overview of the Great Depression he includes not only the failure of banks, unemployment, people starving, and overproduced farm goods rotting, but also the legislation Franklin D. Roosevelt requested such as the National Industrial Recovery Act, National Recovery Administration, and Agricultural Adjustment Agency.⁷² Kennedy also discusses how common people attempted to solve what was happening to them--farmers attacking judges because of foreclosures of farms.⁷³ The communists were not the only ones wanting a drastic change to the government and economy. Kennedy highlights the campaign for the California governorship by Upton Sinclair, the famous novelist who was pushing for a utopian dream with confiscation of private property for the public and the dismissal of the profit system.⁷⁴ Senator Huey Long from Louisiana also stood on a platform very similar and stated "that the solution to the depression is an equitable distribution of wealth," starting the Share the Wealth Society in 1934.⁷⁵ Long also asserted that, "Unless we allow all the people to share in the wealth of the country and the fruits of the land, we cannot keep the people from various forms of criminality."⁷⁶ This suggests that this period had many new ideas coming from every side of the

⁷¹ Kennedy, David M. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in the Great Depression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. pp. 222-223, 254

⁷² Kennedy, pp. 65,66, 67, 86, 87, 139,151

⁷³ Ibid, p. 196

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 225-226

⁷⁵ "Huey Long Revives Waldorf Sandwich." *New York Times*, March 4, 1932; Kennedy, p. 215

⁷⁶ "Huey Long Reviews Waldorf Sandwich." *New York Times*, March 4, 1932.

political spectrum in attempts to solve the dire situation that faced the country-- communism was one of many. The Great Depression created an environment that allowed the communists, the Unemployed Councils and the Workers' Alliance to gain support. However, the CP tallied only 102,000 votes compared to the 22.8 million Roosevelt gained by the 1932 election.⁷⁷ That the vast majority of American people were unwilling to support the CP is evident in the lack of votes in 1932. However, Kennedy does not address the reasons why people like Taylor and Graham may not have joined the CP.

In addition to the repatriation campaigns of the 1930s, Martin Dies and his Dies Committee or the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) created in 1938 was a major obstacle to labor activists and communists. D.A. Saunders, a student of Dartmouth College, in 1939, published an article entitled "The Dies Committee: First Phase" describing why the Dies Committee formed and its purpose.⁷⁸ Saunders notes that Dies, the head of the committee, had aided the legislation against immigration and had been invited by Nazi groups in the U.S. to speak at their gatherings.⁷⁹ The Dies Committee was also reported to have accused the Works Project Administration and CIO of being full of Communists and accused the Department of Labor Secretary Francis Perkins of

⁷⁷ Kennedy, p. 222

⁷⁸ Saunders, D.A. "The Dies Committee: First Phase." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2, April 1939, pp. 223-238

⁷⁹ Saunders, p. 225

protecting a known communist—Harry Bridges.⁸⁰ Saunders also notes the political activities of the Dies' Committee such as attacking certain politicians and claiming they had communistic ties during elections.⁸¹ The Dies Committee created a hostile environment for labor activists and communists including Taylor, Graham and Tenayuca. The environment of the period was influential to Graham who described communists as things you looked under your bed for and Taylor's cooperation with the police in San Antonio in identifying them.⁸²

D.H. Dinwoodie in "Deportation: The Immigration Service and the Chicano Labor Movement in the 1930s," addresses the double obstacles of the Dies Committee and the Immigration and Naturalization Services' repatriation campaign to those involved in labor unions and the CP.⁸³ Dinwoodie points out the anti-immigration attitude of the newspapers of the nation during the 1930s as well as the close relationship of the INS with the Dies Committee in investigating illegal immigrants.⁸⁴ He gives evidence that the INS and Dies' Committee specifically targeted numerous labor activists of Mexican descent for deportation, such as labor activist and leader Humberto Silex from El Paso, Texas.⁸⁵

Dinwoodie concludes that the number of Mexicans who were non-citizens of the

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 228, 230, 231

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 233, 234, 235

⁸² Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora, June 1986, p.7

⁸³ Dinwoodie, D.H. "Deportation: The Immigration Service and the Chicano Labor Movement in the 1930s." *New Mexico Historical Review*, vol. 52, July 1977

⁸⁴ Dinwoodie, 197-199

⁸⁵ Dinwoodie, pp. 193-194

U.S. involved in labor activism in the 1930s was remarkable because of the great obstacles they faced.⁸⁶

The Catholic Church was in opposition to the Communist Party and it contributed to the anti-communist environment during the Great Depression. The Knights of Columbus, a Catholic organization, held a meeting in San Antonio in 1937 in which they voted unanimously to declare a war to exterminate communism.⁸⁷ The Catholic Church described communism as satanic and by declaring war they claimed they were crusading for truth, freedom and Christ.⁸⁸ Communism, in their opinion, was “dangerous to the temporal and eternal welfare of the people” and seen as sacrilegious because it supported atheism.⁸⁹ Vargas wrote an article specifically about Tenayuca’s participation in the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike and the opposition she met by both local officials in San Antonio as well as the Catholic Church.⁹⁰ The Catholic Church was against communism, according to Vargas, because they perceived it as a threat to their power over the Mexican people of San Antonio.⁹¹ Catholicism along with the Dies Committee made the national and state environment anti-communist.

Emma Tenayuca’s and Charlotte Graham’s oral histories state their opinions on their activism and the CP. Unfortunately Taylor’s oral interview is

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 203

⁸⁷ “For K. of C. Anti-Red Levy.” *New York Times*, August 20, 1937.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Vargas, Zaragosa. “Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement during the Great Depression.” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 66, no.4 (Nov., 1997), pp. 568- 569.

⁹¹ Vargas, “Tejana Radical”, p. 569

only within Hield's article and Green's article.⁹² The numerous strikes Taylor, Graham and Tenayuca were involved in were recorded in newspapers including the *San Antonio Light*, *San Antonio Express*, *Dallas Morning News*, *New York Times*, and other local Texas newspapers. Emma Tenayuca's FBI file is included in this research to portray her affiliation with the CP and its numerous activities.⁹³

Numerous scholars have discussed Taylor, Graham and Tenayuca but all these scholars neglect to connect the CP to these women activists except for Vargas. The CP according to Marxist doctrine believed that the working class would propel a nation forward, which would include the removal of capitalism.⁹⁴ The CP, according to historian Cochran, spent more time and energy on workers, strikes and labor unions than on anything else.⁹⁵

All three women were involved in fighting for workers' rights, but only Tenayuca found the CP as an avenue for success. Taylor and Graham were involved in strikes that will be discussed, but were unwilling to join the CP as they sought to fulfill their objectives to gain workers' rights. Each did not join for several significant factors including racism, family background, and the violent anti-communist environment. Taylor was an elitist, from the educated, non-

⁹² Hield, Melissa, Glenn Scott, Maria Flores, Richard Croxdale, Lauren Rabinovitz. " 'Union-Minded': Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1979; Green, George N. "ILGWU in Texas, 1930-1970" *The Journal of Mexican American History*, Vol. 1, No.2, Spring, 1971

⁹³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Emma Tenayuca Brooks*, file number 64-261, May 9, 1941; Also include: Other perspectives from the period such as films, plays, and novels including *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, *Waiting for Lefty* by playwright Clifford Odets. These sources give a full portrayal of the society and environment and should be considered.

⁹⁴ Cochran, p. 20

⁹⁵ Ibid

working class, who held anti-radical attitudes, and was successful in the ILGWU which are all contributing factors to her rejection of the CP. Graham's loyalty to the ILGWU is a major reason for her decision to not join the CP.

This thesis attempts to make it abundantly clear why Taylor and Graham chose not to join and why Tenayuca did. Chapter two gives background information on the Communist Party in the 1930s to clarify what the party was attempting to accomplish. Chapter three explores why Tenayuca joined the Communist Party, and her activities in it and its affiliated organizations such as the Workers' Alliance and Unemployed Council. Chapter four will discuss the factors that influenced Graham to refuse the Communist Party, and chapter five will discuss what factors influenced Taylor to deny the Communist Party as well. In my conclusion I will analyze that they were all able to accomplish common goals through organizations, the CP and labor unions. They were all three strong women activists. By exploring labor activism and activism in the CP it will be evident that they shared a similar experience while working for labor rights. It will also be transparent why Taylor and Graham did not join the CP while Tenayuca did.

CHAPTER II
THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN LABOR ACTIVITIES
DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Communism according to Marxist doctrine stressed that the working class was the most important class; therefore, the American Communist Party spent all of its time and energy on workers' issues including strikes and labor unions.⁹⁶ The workers were the ones to progress the nation forward to the revolutionary removal of capitalism.⁹⁷ The American Communist Party (CP), according to historian Bert Cochran in *Labor and Communism*, was a creation from a Socialist party under the influence of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution.⁹⁸ Its creation in 1919 in the U.S., was a split from the Russian parent, and its founding leaders were not Russians sent to America.⁹⁹ But Cochran maintains the CP was influenced by Russia.¹⁰⁰ According to historian Cochran, the CP was not composed of agents

⁹⁶ Cochran, Bert. *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*. Princeton University Press Princeton, New Jersey. 1977 p. 20; Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. ed. by Joseph Katz. trans. by Samuel Moore. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Pocket Books, 1964, p. 84, 90; The American Communist Party will be referred to as the Communist Party (CP)

⁹⁷ Cochran, p. 20

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.5

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

from the Soviet Union or people who wanted to be involved in such things as sabotage.¹⁰¹ Instead, the CP was a mix of people "... typical members of a millenarian sect, bickering zealots, ideologues, extremists, romantics, firebrand militants and saints, unworldly dreamers and worldly egotists, utopians and would-be-world-saviors and men of destiny."¹⁰² The Russian Revolution inspired people to believe that the utopian socialist dream had become a reality, and many saw communism as "...the only firm ground to stand on amidst a dying civilization that had torn itself apart in an insane war of mass carnage [referring to World War I]."¹⁰³ After its creation the CP became under the influence of Joseph Stalin leader of the USSR's Communist Party at the end of the 1920s.¹⁰⁴ During the Great Depression in the U.S. it seemed as though to some that the capitalist system had been destroyed.¹⁰⁵ From 1931-1934, 60,000 people filled out CP membership cards, but because of a notorious high turnover rate historian Cochran estimated that the CP membership grew from 7,500 in 1930 to 19,000 in 1933 nationally.¹⁰⁶ The CP helped strikers when the American Federation of Labor unions did not.¹⁰⁷ That such concepts had gained footing in the USA is

¹⁰¹ Cochran, p. 6

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 8

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, pp.45-46

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 46

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 46-47

evidenced through the 1932 presidential election, which offered voters the choice of a communist candidate.¹⁰⁸

The Texas labor movement cannot be viewed in a vacuum in the 1930s; the 1930s in turn, should not be thought of as an isolated era from the rest of labor history. One aspect of America's labor history is its association with the CP, since its founding in 1919.¹⁰⁹ The CP began its campaign for labor unions in 1923 with the help of William Foster and his Trade Union Educational League (TUEL).¹¹⁰ The CP eventually became connected with Taylor and Graham's union, the ILGWU. In 1926 prior to Taylor and Graham's activities in the ILGWU, the CP directed a strike in New York comprised of 40,000 cloakmakers of the ILGWU-- unfortunately the strike was unsuccessful.¹¹¹ The CP's union, the National Textile Workers, was directly involved in the bloody Gastonia Strike in North Carolina where the National Guard encountered the communist strikers in 1929.¹¹² Though the CP was involved in many strikes and had infiltrated unions most were unsuccessful.¹¹³ Therefore the CP's membership in infiltrated unions also known

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp.45-46

¹⁰⁹ Cochran, pp.5-6

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 21

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 40

¹¹² Cochran, pp. 35-36;The National Guard was called to Gastonia, North Carolina to stop picketing, and an armed mob destroyed the National Textile Workers union's headquarters while the National Guard arrested union members. The police of Gastonia fired into a tent settlement of union members killing one. Vigilantes went through the town whipping and terrorizing union members, and Ella May Wiggins a union member and mother of five children was murdered when vigilantes fired at union members. Cochran explains that the CP's message of racial equality was the cause of the backlash.

¹¹³ Cochran, pp. 44-45

as “red unions” (as they were called) was not impressive in the 1920s because members left the party after unsuccessful strikes.¹¹⁴

Not all who were labeled communist during the 1930s were actual members in the CP. Many who were labeled communist were not party members and never were during their labor activities though some non-members accepted CP support.¹¹⁵ Many of those labeled red were non-member radicals who worked with communists such as Albert Fitzgerald, who was president of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE).¹¹⁶ Harry Bridges affiliated with the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union was one of the most famous communists who in fact was never a communist.¹¹⁷ He refuted the label many times claiming he was a Marxist who sought communist’s advice.¹¹⁸ Many African American CP members denied their membership, especially in the South where they encountered much resistance even in the CIO to racial equality.¹¹⁹ Therefore, who was or who was not a communist during this period is based on the perceptions of society with membership difficult to verify.

The limited success of the CP during the 1920s led to the “popular front” idea of “boring... within” other unions (or infiltrating).¹²⁰ The CP played a major role in many unions as it began dissolving its “red unions” in 1934-1935 and

¹¹⁴ Cochran, pp. 44-45; Stepan-Norris, Judith and Maurice Zeitlin. *Left Out: Reds and America’s Industrial Unions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 15

¹¹⁵ Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, p.7

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp.7-8

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp.7-8, footnote 19, p.7

¹²⁰ Cochran, pp. 44-45

began an entrenchment campaign to enter other unions such as the AFL.¹²¹ Communists were present at the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1935 and were allowed to work within the union.¹²² The CIO was a union created out of the American Federation of Labor officially in 1938 to organize the unorganized, according to its founder John L. Lewis.¹²³ CIO unions were labeled “communist” by the AFL, employers, and Joseph McCarthy.¹²⁴ Some were left-wing unions including the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers’ Union, the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union along with the Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers.¹²⁵ A variety of unions had taken supportive positions on issues like the CP, according to the CP’s publication, the *Daily Worker*.¹²⁶

There were numerous strikes occurring across the U.S. during Graham, Taylor and Tenayuca’s involvement in the Texas labor movements, which originated with several organizations including the CP. Tenayuca viewed the CP as an organization of opportunity for her activism while Graham and Taylor’s lack of membership suggests they held the opposite view. Where there was labor unrest, the CP was involved in aiding workers in their strikes.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 75

¹²² Cochran, pp.95-97

¹²³ Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, pp. 1-2

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp. 5,10-13

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 14

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 12

In 1932, communist activists led two “hunger marches” with automobile workers and the unemployed to the Ford factory in Dearborn, Michigan.¹²⁷ Four men were killed in this bloody effort and twenty-eight injured.¹²⁸ Local police referred to this strike as a riot and actively sought to prosecute communists whom they accused of generating the riot, including William Foster the head of the CP.¹²⁹ Sixty men and women were arrested during the march and their names were handed over to immigration officials who were concerned that they were not US citizens.¹³⁰

Then in 1933, Detroit’s Briggs Mack Avenue plant and Philadelphia’s Storage Battery Company struck.¹³¹ The Detroit Briggs Mack Avenue strike was called by the Communist Party’s supported Trade Union Unity League’s Auto Workers’ Union.¹³² Both the CP and the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) had a considerable number of women involved from 2,000-4,500.¹³³

It was during this period that the CP’s Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) helped women organize.¹³⁴ The TUUL evolved from the Trade Union Education

¹²⁷ Cochran, p.63; Foner, Philip S. *Women and the American Labor Movement: From World War I to the Present*. New York and London: The Free Press a division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980, p. 266

¹²⁸ Cochran, p.63

¹²⁹ *New York Times*, “Reds Are Sought In Fatal Ford Riot.” March 9, 1932

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Strom, Sharon Hartman. “Challenging ‘Woman’s Place’: Feminism, the Left, and Industrial Unionism in the 1930s,” *Feminists Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1983), p. 363; Cochran, p. 64

¹³² Foner, p. 270

¹³³ Strom, p. 363; Cochran, p. 64

¹³⁴ Ibid

League under William Z. Foster, a CP member since 1921.¹³⁵ In 1930 the TUUL started organizing women and African Americans noting that the omission of these groups was a major problem that the American labor movement needed to address.¹³⁶ TUUL called for equal pay for equal work, a raise in women's wages, a minimum wage for agricultural and domestic workers, paid time for women nursing their children, paid maternity leave, an organization of nurseries for working women's children, and for social insurance that would cover all working women.¹³⁷ The TUUL established a National Women's Department, women's commission in trade unions and had trade union conferences just for women workers.¹³⁸ Workers in Detroit Briggs Mack Avenue auto plant were not alone in their demands as the ILGWU also engaged in the 1933 strike of several dress factories in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.¹³⁹ Likewise the Amalgamated Clothing Workers walked out on strike with many women in the Northeast participating.¹⁴⁰

In St. Louis, Missouri, a pecan shellers' strike involved 1,400 mostly African American women in 1933 because these women, who made up 90% of the work force in the factory, earned from 75 cents to \$2.50 a week while the few white women who worked in the factories earned on average \$4.¹⁴¹ There were

¹³⁵ Foner, pp. 157, 263-264

¹³⁶ Foner, pp. 157, 263-264

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 264

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Strom, p. 363

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Strom, pp. 363-364; Foner, pp.270-271

sixteen pecan-shelling factories and one communist woman working in one of the factories began organizing in secret until she and others reached out to the TUUL; the main leader of the strike was Connie Smith an African American sheller.¹⁴² Rising to the occasion, the members of the Unemployment Councils and the CP supported the St. Louis pecan shellers.¹⁴³

Mexicans and African Americans, frustrated by racial bias, joined the CP because of its willingness to attempt to stop discrimination in jobs and relief throughout the nation.¹⁴⁴ A leading African American communist-affiliated organization, the National Negro Congress, was present in seventy cities.¹⁴⁵ It helped recruit black workers for the CIO.¹⁴⁶ It would make some sense, due to racism during the 1930s, that as many as 20,000 or more African Americans joined the Communist Party because of its message of equality.¹⁴⁷ Cochran explains that communist officials over exaggerated party membership numbers include followers of the party.¹⁴⁸ Historian Harvey Klehr estimated that there were between 150-200 African Americans in the CP in 1929 and in 1936 there were 3,895 members.¹⁴⁹ It was a dangerous “roll of the dice” if one were African

¹⁴² Foner, pp. 271-272

¹⁴³ Strom, pp. 363-364; Foner, p. 272

¹⁴⁴ Garcia, pp. 145-146

¹⁴⁵ Isserman, p. 21

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ *New York Times*, “Negroes and Communism.” January 24, 1931; 60,000 people filled out membership cards from 1930-1934, Cochran, p. 46.

¹⁴⁸ Cochran, pp. 46, 124

¹⁴⁹ Klehr, Harvey. *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984, p. 5; Klehr states that there were around 9,219 CP members

American in the South where many CIO labor organizers were conservative relative to racial equality.¹⁵⁰ But addressing the issues of discrimination, the CP had an appealing anti-racist message.

John L. Lewis, head of the CIO, supported communists in CIO unions, especially the United Auto Workers.¹⁵¹ Another union leader who was not opposed to communists was the president of the Transport Workers Union, Michael Quill.¹⁵² Quill stated that he would rather be a communist than be associated with the Dies Committee who claimed him to be a communist and that communists controlled his CIO union.¹⁵³ Resenting Dies' accusations, the New York CIO convention did not support the Dies Committee in 1938.¹⁵⁴ It released a statement that the Committee was wasting funds proving that child actress Shirley Temple was somehow a danger to the US.¹⁵⁵ The CIO also recognized the danger the Dies Committee presented by its oppression of freedom of speech, censorship and freedom of the press.¹⁵⁶ Many in the CIO supported communists in unions while the Dies Committee found "these reds" to be a threat to the nation's security.

in 1931, 14,474 members in 1932, and 18,000 members in 1933. (Klehr, pp.91, 153); Klehr and Cochran are only 1,000 members off from one another for the 1933 membership estimates.

¹⁵⁰ Stephan-Norris and Zeitlin. p. 7

¹⁵¹ Isserman, p. 61

¹⁵² *New York Times*, "Quill Says No Party Controls His Union." September 23, 1938; *New York Times*, "5 Witnesses Call Quill a Communist; False He Declares." September 17, 1938

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ *New York Times*, "State CIO Gives President Support." September 18, 1938

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

In 1938, the IGLWU and its 250,000 members left the CIO because it claimed it wanted the AFL and CIO to get along instead of being adversaries.¹⁵⁷ Prior to the ILGWU leaving the CIO, the CIO was attacked by the mayor of Jersey City, N.J. and a representative of New York for having communists in its leadership.¹⁵⁸ The New York representative stated that he agreed with David Dubinsky, the ILGWU president, that the CIO's communistic elements prevented it from making peace with the AFL.¹⁵⁹ The communist elements of the CIO can be considered a major reason for the ILGWU leaving the CIO since the ILGWU's president was blaming communism as the problem. The ILGWU believed that the split between the CIO and AFL caused setbacks and that the labor movement did not need two separate unions when one would benefit workers the most.¹⁶⁰ Peace talks were called for the AFL to charter the CIO's unions, but the AFL would not accept those conditions.¹⁶¹ During the break up with the CIO, the ILGWU was having problems with a key CIO union the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, also known to be affiliated with the CP.¹⁶² The ILGWU claimed that the Amalgamated Clothing workers were trying to take over areas where the ILGWU

¹⁵⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, "Garment Union Quits CIO to Force Peace." November 12, 1938.

¹⁵⁸ *New York Times*, "Hague Begs Nation To Ban C.I.O. Reds." January 13, 1938

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, "Garment Union Quits CIO to Force Peace." November 12, 1938

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*

¹⁶² *Dallas Morning News*, "Rich Garment Workers Union Demands Peace." November 21, 1939; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, p. 15

operated which strengthened the attitude, according to the ILGWU, that it did not need to be part of the CIO.¹⁶³

Amid this turmoil, the CP held meetings, organized demonstrations and it had several publications such as the *Daily Worker* and the *Communist* for outreach and to gain members.¹⁶⁴ It actively sought membership through recruiting.¹⁶⁵ Homer Brooks, who married Emma Tenayuca in 1937, was sent to Texas by the CP to recruit members in the South and became the Texas Communist Party's secretary.¹⁶⁶ Brooks stated there were 600 or so CP members in Texas in 1940 an increase from 407 in 1937.¹⁶⁷ that created an opportunity for many, including Tenayuca, to address the social, political and economic inequality facing women, Mexicans and workers.

The CP was involved in Texas specifically through its organizations the Unemployed Council and Workers' Alliance that aided in protesting the elimination of relief jobs and ensuring WPA and relief jobs were spread equally to the population and not based on race.¹⁶⁸ Soon it was the CP that played an active role in the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike in San Antonio in 1938.¹⁶⁹

Even with success the CP experienced and the support it received from the CIO, in 1939, mobs attacked communists in several cities including San Antonio,

¹⁶³ *Dallas Morning News*, "Rich Garment Workers Union Demands Peace." November 21, 1939

¹⁶⁴ Cochran, p. 8

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁶ Vargas, p. 133

¹⁶⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, "State Red Aide Calls Dies Quiz Hysteria Body." July 26, 1940; Klehr, p. 275

¹⁶⁸ Vargas, pp. 130, 132

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 140

Detroit, and Washington.¹⁷⁰ Mayor Maverick, who allowed the communists to meet in San Antonio, faced recall after the communists were chased from an auditorium in which they attempted to hold their meeting.¹⁷¹ One hundred or more communists, including Emma Tenayuca, had to flee through back doors to escape a mob throwing rocks and at the ready to attack members.¹⁷² This drove CP members into hiding to escape the hostile environment.¹⁷³ Some hysteria prevailed in the fall of 1939 and throughout 1940s, as dozens of liberal organizations and unions adopted ‘Communazi’ resolutions, barring members of the CP and fascist groups from joining or holding office.¹⁷⁴

The CP was important because it aided workers, unemployed, women and minorities in the US and in Texas. Tenayuca who was concerned about all of these issues used the CP and its organizations to fulfill her desire to solve the work-related problems. Taylor and Graham did not. Understanding why they did not chose the CP will be explored.

¹⁷⁰ Isserman, p. 51; *Sweetwater Reporter*, “Petitions Circulated Today For Recall Of Maverick and Lipscomb.” August 31, 1939, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Sweetwater/Nolan County City-County Library, Sweetwater, Texas; *San Antonio Light*, “Injuries In S.A. Riot.” August 26, 1939, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

¹⁷¹ *Borger Daily Herald* “Mavericks Recall Sought Because He Allowed Free Speech.” August 30, 1939, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Hutchinson County Library, Borger Branch, Borger, Texas.

¹⁷² *New York Times*, “Communists Flee From 5,000 Texans.” August 26, 1939; *Sweetwater Reporter* “Communist Head Protests to U.S. Attorney General.” August 27, 1939, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Sweetwater/Nolan County City-County Library, Sweetwater, Texas.

¹⁷³ Isserman, pp. 51-53

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 44

CHAPTER III
EMMA TENAYUCA AND HER FIGHT FOR EQUALITY
DURING THE 1930S

Emma Tenayuca was a Mexican-American activist for labor and equality who informed Mexican people even if they were not citizens they had the right to join labor unions.¹⁷⁵ Tenayuca was supportive of all Mexican people in that she wanted them to have equality. She helped workers organize in San Antonio during the Great Depression to protest against the unfavorable conditions to which employers subjected them. This chapter will explore the repatriation campaign, Tenayuca's family background including her education, the poverty of San Antonio, and her involvement in the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike and will display Tenayuca's involvement in the CP plus her subsequent membership. Tenayuca's husband Homer Brooks can also be considered an influence in her life especially considering his CP membership. Tenayuca chose to become openly affiliated with the CP to combat these issues largely due to its policy of racial equality, its willingness to help the unemployed and its fight for workers' rights.

¹⁷⁵ Vargas, Zaragosa. *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005. p. 132.

Additionally, Tenayuca perceived that participation within the CP offered her an expanded position in leadership roles as well.

As an activist for equality and labor rights, Communism and the CP had an effect on Tenayuca's life. The communist's support of Mexican workers against employers and deportation, she found, coincided with her ideas on equality. Also the CP was opposed to repatriation because it believed the program was racist, imperialistic--the Party called it kidnapping.¹⁷⁶ Tenayuca thus joined the Unemployed Council and the Workers' Alliance; during the 1930s both were communist organizations.¹⁷⁷ During the Depression, the CP's International Labor Defense and its Unemployed Councils helped Mexican workers obtain relief, provided legal aid to help workers with police and employers, offered aid against threats of deportation, and helped Mexican workers during and after strikes.¹⁷⁸ It was the communist's treatment of workers and minorities that influenced Tenayuca as early as high school to join in their activities.¹⁷⁹

Prior to Tenayuca's involvement with the Communist Party, she was associated with a conservative organization. As a young teen, in high school, Tenayuca was part of the League of United Latin American Citizens, LULAC, a middle class organization that demonstrated the change of middle class Mexicans into

¹⁷⁶ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 54

¹⁷⁷ Kennedy, David M. *The American People in the Great Depression: Freedom from Fear Part I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999, pp. 222, 254; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 129

¹⁷⁸ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 64, 54

¹⁷⁹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130, 135; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, p. 1

Mexican Americans; however, Mexican women were discriminated from joining the organization on the “same basis” as men until 1933.¹⁸⁰ Tenayuca left the organization. In 1982, Tenayuca reported to historian Cynthia E. Orozco that LULAC had succeeded in dividing the Mexican people in Texas because it only represented U.S. citizens; it gave Mexican women no power.¹⁸¹ However, by 1934, Tenayuca was involved in the Unemployed Council a communist organization displaying her preference for the CP because it aligned fully with her desire to claim equality for women, people of Mexican descent and workers.¹⁸² LULAC’s discrimination against women and its division of the Mexican people did not fit Tenayuca’s vision for aiding workers, Mexicans, and women. Tenayuca states that LULAC’s discrimination against people of Mexican descent who were non-citizens caused her rebel against it in 1932-1933.¹⁸³

Tenayuca became a full member of the CP in 1937 and married Homer Brooks even though she had been active in its organizations prior to 1937 such as the Unemployed Council and Workers’ Alliance.¹⁸⁴ Brooks ran for governor of Texas in 1938 on the CP ticket while Tenayuca ran as the CP’s candidate for Congress.¹⁸⁵ The

¹⁸⁰ Orozco, Cynthia E. *No Mexicans Women or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009, pp. 213-214; McArthur and Smith, pp. 80-81

¹⁸¹ Orozco, pp. 214-215

¹⁸² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130, 135; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, p. 1

¹⁸³ Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, p. 2, 4

¹⁸⁴ McArthur and Smith, pp.133, 144; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Jerry Poyo, February 21, 1987, Institute of Texan Culture, University of San Antonio, p. 27

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

rights of labor were being trampled and activists such as Tenayuca attempted to protect them and assert them. John L. Lewis, in 1937, stated that labor needed to organize and be political in order to get legislation passed that would benefit the working people.¹⁸⁶ Tenayuca's involvement in the CP was a way to be political and help labor's cause but she was also influenced by racial inequality occurring during the period too.

Tenayuca was not only a member of the CP, as stated above, she also helped its membership grow. The *Daily Worker*, a communist newspaper, reported that Tenayuca had recruited ten or more people into the CP during a membership drive in 1937 and she had stated she wanted the membership to reach 1,000 in Texas.¹⁸⁷ The *Daily Worker* indicated that the party "...elevates women whose abilities equip them for high responsibility [there] are many fine organizers including...Emma..."¹⁸⁸ Tenayuca was thus actively involved in the membership of the CP increasing.

Tenayuca's involvement in the CP and its affiliated organizations was to combat racism against people of Mexican descent. The CP as stated earlier was against the repatriation of Mexican people. Racism in the United States and Texas not only fomented occupational segregation, but it also caused the repatriation campaigns during the 1920s and 1930s. During the 1920-1921 industrial

¹⁸⁶ Lewis, John L. "What Labor is Thinking" *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vo. 1 No. 4 October 1937, p. 27

¹⁸⁷ *Daily Worker*, December 6, 1937 and April 26, 1938, U.S. Department of Justice, FBI file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca; *Daily Worker* "21-Year-Old Girl Leads Texas Pecan Workers." June 28, 1938, UT Arlington, Special Collection, Labor Archives

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Worker* March 8, 1939, U.S. Department of Justice, FBI file no: 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

depression, cities in the U.S. teamed up with the Mexican government to repatriate Mexicans to Mexico and the majority of those repatriated voluntarily left while close to 5,000 unwillingly fled because of lost employment contracts.¹⁸⁹ Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1929, which made it a misdemeanor to enter the United States illegally; thus began the repatriation campaign with the U.S. Immigration Bureau's expansion of the Border Patrol, its regulations on immigrant workers, and its attempt to hinder Mexican immigration throughout the 1930s.¹⁹⁰ The U.S. government's involvement with repatriation during the Great Depression was significantly greater than in the 1920s. Repatriation during the Great Depression included raids, propaganda against people of Mexican descent both illegal citizens and citizens of the United States, and terrorism of the Mexican people.¹⁹¹ The Mexican people were repatriated from the U.S. during 1930-1935, with 1931 and 1932 being the years during which more than one-third (138, 519 people), of the total number of people of Mexican descent in the United States 345,839, were deported to Mexico; not all were illegally in the U.S.¹⁹² Repatriation had three goals: return Mexicans to Mexico, save welfare agencies' money, and create jobs for white Americans.¹⁹³ The federal government

¹⁸⁹ Valdes, Dennis Nodin. "Mexican Revolutionary Nationalism and Repatriation During the Great Depression." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1988), p. 5

¹⁹⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 47-48

¹⁹¹ Valdes, p. 6.

¹⁹² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 61

¹⁹³ Balderrama, Francisco E., Rodriguez, Raymond. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930's*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press. 1995, p. 99

specifically picked out certain people to blame for the Depression and to subject them to a deportation plan because of their race.

Citizens who did not have papers that proved their residency (because they had been in the country prior to the requirement of documentation), or citizens who could not present such documentation due to their poverty were targeted as illegal immigrants--people who needed to be removed by the U.S. government.¹⁹⁴ Some Mexicans were unable to obtain documentation that could prove they were legal residents.¹⁹⁵ The reason some people had trouble proving their legal residency was not always their fault or their inability to pay. Employers kept inaccurate records of their employment; some inspectors of the Immigration Bureau would not accept some letters that were attempts to prove residency, notary publics charged high prices, and it was expensive to have copies made of documents.¹⁹⁶ The inaccuracy of birth records proved problematic. In 1929 it was estimated that 10% of births (around 448 babies) were not recorded in Dallas alone, and this contributed to people nation-wide being exiled from their native land because they could not prove residency.¹⁹⁷ People of Mexican descent even if they were legal citizens were challenged to prove that they belonged in the United States.

¹⁹⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 48; to obtain documentation it cost money and those living in poverty could not afford to do this according to Vargas.

¹⁹⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights* pp. 56-59

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

¹⁹⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, "Pensions Denied, Citizens Exiled and Husband Killed By Failure to Record Births." February 6, 1929

Trains loaded with hundreds or thousands of Mexicans left “collection centers” such as Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and other large cities bound for Mexico.¹⁹⁸ Mexicans were loaded like cattle to be shipped out of the United States due to the perceived threat of their wanting relief money and taking white citizens’ jobs. An estimated 80% of those repatriated from California were legal residents or citizens of the U.S.¹⁹⁹ This forced removal of thousands of Mexicans was only one of the attacks on Mexican people during the Great Depression.

Along with the forced removal of people of Mexican descent, citizens and non-citizens, propaganda spread support for repatriation. The Immigration Bureau, county deputies, and city police spread anti-Mexican sentiment during the repatriation campaign, which led to suspicion among public officials and U.S. citizens of Mexicans as foreigners.²⁰⁰ They became scapegoats, rejected from participating in any aspect of American life, such as voting.²⁰¹ They were seen as failing to belong no matter their legal status.²⁰² The anti-Mexican attitude that was spread created social problems for Mexicans including the unavailability of aided relief, stereotyping the Mexican people into deserving only low wage jobs with less than acceptable working conditions.²⁰³ “No Mexicans” signs were hung in restaurants or stores (to keep people of Mexican descent out) portraying public

¹⁹⁸ Balderrama and Rodriguez, p. 101

¹⁹⁹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 53

²⁰⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 60-61; Balderrama and Rodriguez, p. 55

²⁰¹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 60-61; Balderrama and Rodriguez, p. 55; Tenayuca and Brooks, p. 264

²⁰² Ibid

²⁰³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 23-24, 60

abuse of Mexicans living in Texas with Jim Crow oppression.²⁰⁴ The attack on people of Mexican descent had negative consequences on all aspects of their lives. Although the Roosevelt administration tried to stop Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) from violating Mexicans' civil rights, deportation continued especially where there were large populations of Mexicans and where they were involved in union activities and strikes.²⁰⁵ President Roosevelt's administration decreased the fines from \$1,000-\$500 to \$150 for violators of immigration laws and for those seeking work in the U.S.²⁰⁶ The administration also reduced the number of violators from 1,100 to 400 in 1933-1934.²⁰⁷ Roosevelt's administration was able to decrease the deportation of Mexicans by 50%, compared to the Hoover administration, but the New Deal's programs continued the racism of the country's repatriation scheme thus giving the Mexican people, and specifically Tenayuca, a reason to seek collective action against the injustices they suffered.²⁰⁸ It was she who led demonstrations against the repatriation of Mexican-born workers for the Workers' Alliance, a Communist Party organization.²⁰⁹

Emma Tenayuca's background is important in understanding why she joined the CP and worked in its affiliated organizations during the Great

²⁰⁴ McArthur, Judith N. and Harold L. Smith, eds. *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth Experience*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010, p. 78

²⁰⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p.60.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 59-60

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 59-60, 61

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 131

Depression. Tenayuca was born in December of 1916 in San Antonio where she lived the majority of her life.²¹⁰ Repatriation was a terror for the Mexican people in San Antonio and throughout the nation.²¹¹ The repatriation campaign of the Depression was a deportation scheme that affected people of Mexican descent who were citizens and non-citizens including Tejanos who were people of Mexican descent who had lived in Texas for generations.²¹² Immigrant and Naturalization Services (INS) officials targeted all Mexicans through racial profiling and therefore Mexicans in general were raided, arrested without warrants, illegally searched, and were questioned about their citizenship.²¹³ One raid in Los Angeles, in 1931, happened as INS agents sneaked up on 400 Mexicans who were in a park and forced them to show proof that they were in the country legally.²¹⁴ Another raid in the 1930s left a family without their parents because they were found to be non-citizens of the U.S. living in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.²¹⁵ Such action forced a young boy to provide for his three sisters, which ended with all the children joining their parents in Mexico because the struggle was too much for the young boy to endure.²¹⁶ Mexicans were scrutinized once the INS obtained their documents to determine if they were

²¹⁰ Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, pp. 1,17

²¹¹ Ibid, p.1

²¹² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp.47-51

²¹³ Balderrama and Rodriguez, p. 55

²¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 57-58

²¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 57-58

²¹⁶ Ibid, p.59

acceptable.²¹⁷ But in 1931, repatriation was accelerated in many cities in Texas such as San Antonio, El Paso, and Houston resulting in more than 70% of the total 345,839 Mexicans being repatriated from Texas, the nation's leader in number of repatriated Mexicans during the Depression.²¹⁸ As a result, these policies enacted by the government became a major influence on Tenayuca's decision to become involved in the labor movement and the Communist Party to help Mexicans in the United States, both non-Americans and citizens.

The threat of deportation and racism affected those who were able to remain in the United States during the repatriation campaign of the 1930s. Those who were involved in union activities risked being deported because employers in San Antonio used the police and the INS to deport defiant workers.²¹⁹ In protest of such repatriation actions, Tenayuca planned demonstrations and marches in the mid to late 1930s for the Workers' Alliance against repatriation and deportation.²²⁰ The Alliance was created through a merger with the Unemployment Council in 1936 and both the Unemployment Council and the Workers' Alliance were Communist Party organizations that aided workers with relief payments, led strikes, and unionized workers.²²¹ In 1937, Tenayuca was a major leader of the Workers' Alliance, and she helped its membership grow to

²¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 57-58

²¹⁸ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp.50-51

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Ibid, pp.59-61, 130-131

²²¹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130; Kennedy, pp. 222, 254

3,000, in San Antonio alone.²²² Those who were involved in the Workers' Alliance protests and demonstrations were not only threatened but were physically beaten by San Antonio police.²²³ Tenayuca observed the discriminations and wanted to change how the U.S. government treated Mexican people; thus she turned to the CP's affiliated organizations.

Another issue that concerned Tenayuca was the poverty of people of Mexican descent. The West Side of San Antonio was poverty stricken, and the majority of its population was Mexican.²²⁴ The total population of San Antonio in 1930 was 231, 542 with 82,827-100,000 of that population identifying as Mexican.²²⁵ Two-thirds of Mexicans lived on the West Side where tuberculosis cases and infant mortality rates were high, poverty and prostitution was rampant, and factories whose employers exploited women of the area were located.²²⁶ The West Side also had overcrowded housing which consequently added to the high disease and death rates.²²⁷ The *San Antonio Light* in May 20, 1939 stated that ninety percent of the children in West Side clinics were being treated for malnutrition, and the *Dallas Morning News* reported that San Antonio compared to Dallas, Fort Worth, El Paso and Houston, had the highest infant mortality

²²² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 132

²²³ Tenayuca and Brooks, pp. 262-263.

²²⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 129-130

²²⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 129-130; Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression*, p. 15, Table 2 in Appendix; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population: Volume I Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*. p. 1057

²²⁶ Ibid

²²⁷ Blackwelder, p. 18

rate—an increasing during 1935-1936.²²⁸ Mexican women suffered a high death rate of 144 per 1,000 live births in San Antonio.²²⁹

Tenayuca was responsive to these issues in her community and became involved in the Unemployed Council as a relief worker upon graduating from high school in 1934.²³⁰ She helped the Mexican people organize to protest against the social and economic injustices they had suffered all of which led to her other contributions in the Workers' Alliance in 1936 and the Pecan Shellers Strike in 1938.²³¹ She witnessed the slums, poverty and disease stricken neighbors on the West Side, and understood organizing workers and helping unemployed protest for relief would help combat their problems.

Tenayuca's education as well as her community contributed to her involvement in numerous protests affiliated with the CP particularly those discussed above involving the Workers' Alliance and Unemployed Council. A young Tenayuca lived with her grandparents. Her grandfather worked as a carpenter in San Antonio and advised her that she should always remember that "...you have been here a long time. You have deeper roots than the Anglos."²³² As a teen, Tenayuca was reassured by her family that she belonged in the United

²²⁸ Blackwelder, p. 20, 168; *Dallas Morning News*, "Dallas Death Rate Rise 1.9 in 1,000 During Last Year." January 18, 1937

²²⁹ Blackwelder, p. 112.

²³⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130, 135; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, June 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, p. 1

²³¹ *Ibid*

²³² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 125; Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Jerry Poyo, Institute of Texas Culture Oral History Program, February 21, 1987, p.14; Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, p.1

States and deserved equality; a message she carried with her and passed on to other Mexicans. She was educated by her grandfather about white racism and political ideals, the horrors of Ku Klux Klan, and civil rights.²³³ Tenayuca remembered as a young child her grandfather discussing with the rest of the family the importance of voting for Miriam Ferguson to fight against the KKK's infiltration in the Texas government; "Ma" Ferguson was the only hope against the KKK in the 1924 governor's election.²³⁴ This education Tenayuca received at home enlightened her about issues of inequality, something she sought to combat through her activism in the CP.

During the early Depression years, poverty and illiteracy went hand in hand within the Mexican population with only five percent ever advancing above the fourth grade with one-third never enrolling in a school because either their families needed them to work or they were unable to provide the requisite books and supplies.²³⁵ Eleuterio Escobar a member of LULAC was concerned with the West Side's conditions and wanted to improve schools to increase the population of Mexican children attending.²³⁶ The conditions on the West Side attracted attention from those like Tenayuca who wanted to stop discrimination against the Mexican people. Escobar and others reported in 1934 that schools on the West

²³³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 125; Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Jerry Poyo, pp.12, 14

²³⁴ Tenayuca, Emma, Interview by Jerry Poyo, p. 12; McArthur and Smith, p. 69

²³⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 23-24.

²³⁶ Garcia, Mario T. *Mexican Americans*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, pp.66-68, 72.

Side were overcrowded, with 12,334 students in 11 schools compared to the 28 schools outside the West Side with 12,224 students.²³⁷ The West Side schools lacked sufficient numbers of teachers, children were forced to go half days, and as many as 6,000 children were not attending school.²³⁸ But often Mexican children who were attending school had unpleasant experiences with white racist teachers.²³⁹ A Mexican girl attending a school in El Paso during the 1940s experienced being sprayed for lice along with all her fellow classmates much the way animals were sprayed.²⁴⁰ Fortunately, Tenayuca did not experience such discrimination and inhumanity as a student. She graduated from Breckinridge High School, in 1934, where she was exposed to Karl Marx's ideas in Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution*; one of many books she read.²⁴¹ Her opportunity to attend school exposed her to new concepts including Marx's ideas on economics. Thousands of Mexican American children in San Antonio, however, never completed their elementary education because their families, unlike Tenayuca's family, were migrant workers.²⁴² Tenayuca's education was an extraordinary opportunity and accomplishment, placing her in an elite group among her peers leading to her awareness of the problems that

²³⁷ Garcia, pp.66-67

²³⁸ Ibid, pp. 66-67

²³⁹ McArthur and Smith, p. 78

²⁴⁰ McArthur and Smith, document 2.7 "Gloria Lopez- Stafford and Her Classmates Are Sprayed for Lice", p. 113

²⁴¹ Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, p. 1; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 125,129

²⁴² Blackwelder, p. 18

faced people of Mexican descent and with her exposure to Marxism she was well prepared for activism in the CP.

Tenayuca's ability to graduate high school in 1934 and take with her new ideas is significant considering many Mexican children living in her neighborhood and nation-wide were unable to go to school. Mexican American girls instead were more likely to leave school earlier than other ethnic girls in order to enter the work force.²⁴³ White-collar jobs for women required a high school diploma.²⁴⁴ Often Mexican women were excluded from taking these jobs because of their lack of education, racist employers, and insufficient skills which left them to work in low wage jobs in manufacturing or food processing.²⁴⁵ Women in 1930s San Antonio were occupationally segregated by race.²⁴⁶ For example, ninety-one percent of African American women were domestics, seventy-nine percent of women of Mexican descent were industrial workers, and white women worked in clerical and trade.²⁴⁷ Mexican women dominated the cigar and the pecan shelling industries in San Antonio.²⁴⁸ They were the poorest paid workers, and the pecan shelling plants were segregated to the West Side.²⁴⁹ Tenayuca's early involvement in relief work with the unemployed and laborers

²⁴³ Blackwelder, p. 33

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 33, 63, 81

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p.33, 63, 81

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 77-81, 223, 229

²⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 77-81, 223, 229

²⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 77-81, 223, 229

²⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 132-133, 140-141, 95

reflected the importance of her education because it gave the young woman the ability and the passion to act.

The National Recovery Administration (NRA) an agency created in President Roosevelt's New Deal, in 1933, enforced the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA).²⁵⁰ Section 7a of the NIRA allowed workers to collectively bargain thus enabling them to discuss with their employers grievances they had with their job and it gave the U.S. government the ability to regulate hours and wages of workers.²⁵¹ The NRA codes were a voluntary change to the work place such as allowing collective bargaining, minimum wages of forty cents per hour, and a thirty-five hour maximum workweek that was asked by the NRA's chief Hugh S. Johnson and President Roosevelt of employers to enforce.²⁵² But for whatever good the agency intended, the NRA and the New Deal adopted the wage and work segregation that existed in San Antonio in which women and minorities received lower wages than white men and they were segregated to specific work places.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Kennedy, pp. 291-292, 151

²⁵¹ Ibid

²⁵² Ibid, p. 183, 177

²⁵³ Tenayuca, Emma. Interview by Emilio Zamora with participation by Oralia Cortez, p.4; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 127; Pidgeon, Mary Elizabeth. *Differences In The Earnings of Women and Men*. Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, G.P.O., 1938. Part I.- MEN'S AND WOMEN'S WAGES, p. 2 (seq. 10) Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Harvard University; President Roosevelt, in 1934, would not support a federal anti-lynching bill because he did not want to offend Southerners who he needed to pass other legislation through the House and Senate. Kennedy, p. 210 Roosevelt's desire to keep Southern politicians happy reflects the New Deal's discriminatory policies for its own benefit in which regional differences were adopted resulting in lower wages in the south for minorities and women during the Depression along with a failure to address the problem of lynchings. Kennedy, p. 254; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 65

The NRA, however, contributed to the unionization of cigar and garment workers in San Antonio which ultimately led to the Finck Cigar Strikes in 1933 and 1934 during which an estimated 400 women went on strike for better working conditions.²⁵⁴ The cigar strikers were led by Mrs. W.H. Ernst because they would not suffer from low wages, bad working conditions in the factories, or punishments for making substandard cigars any longer.²⁵⁵ During the strike, sixteen-year old Tenayuca and one hundred other women picketed and were arrested by abusive police.²⁵⁶ Tenayuca was not a worker in the cigar company, but she went to the strike, saw the workers' struggle, and joined in the picketing.²⁵⁷ The Finck Cigar workers who went on strike were women who did so because Finck would not follow the NRA codes.²⁵⁸ As a result of the cigar strike, these women encountered police violence, deportation threats, and home invasions by San Antonio deputies.²⁵⁹ Tenayuca's first experience with labor activism in the Finck Cigar strike influenced her to begin an effort to prevent freedoms from being trampled reasons for her subsequent involvement in the Workers' Alliance and Unemployed Council.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Blackwelder, p. 132; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp.80-81; *Dallas Morning News*, "Cigar Roller Strikes Arbitration Sought." April 23, 1935

²⁵⁵ Ibid

²⁵⁶ Blackwelder, p. 132; Vargas, *Labor rights are Civil Rights*, pp.80-81

²⁵⁷ Vargas, Zaragosa, ed. *Major Problems in Mexican American History*. "Emma Tenayuca Reminisces About Labor Organizing in San Antonio, Texas, 1936-1938". Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999. pp. 282-283

²⁵⁸ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp.80-81

²⁵⁹ Ibid

²⁶⁰ Vargas, ed. *Major Problems*, p. 283

Shortly after the Fink Cigar Strike, in 1935, while Tenayuca was the secretary of the West Side Unemployed Council, one the CP's organizations, she gathered masses to protest against the city's elimination of Mexican families from its relief roll.²⁶¹ During the Great Depression white citizens in San Antonio did not want Mexicans receiving aid because they were viewed as migrant workers and wanted them to relocate to farms or be repatriated.²⁶² Motivated by the plight of Mexicans who needed relief aid and work during the Great Depression, Tenayuca became more radicalized. It was difficult for Mexicans to get relief jobs with New Deal programs such as the Works Project Administration (WPA) created during the second New Deal in 1935 from the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act to employ the 3.5 million jobless.²⁶³ The WPA found jobs for 3 million people its first year and 8.5 million jobs throughout its eight years of operation.²⁶⁴ The WPA jobs required citizenship and knowledge of the English language consequently many Mexicans, both non-citizens and citizens of the U.S., were turned away.²⁶⁵

The WPA discriminated against those who were desperate and unemployed during the Great Depression, and several of its programs were biased against minorities and women. White teachers and white students dominated the

²⁶¹ Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, p. 129

²⁶² Blackwelder, p. 177.

²⁶³ Tenayuca and Brooks, pp. 259-260; Kennedy, pp. 242, 251- 253

²⁶⁴ Kennedy, p. 242, 251-253

²⁶⁵ Tenayuca and Brooks, pp. 259-260.

WPA's education programs for the unemployed.²⁶⁶ Some Mexicans learned business and clerical skills in order to later earn white-collar jobs.²⁶⁷ But San Antonio's Mexican women and black women were involved in the Housekeeping Aid Project created to teach domestics; this was the only WPA program that taught black women.²⁶⁸ The WPA and the NRA continued the inequality that women and minorities suffered. Mexican and Latin women were only given part time opportunities and African Americans' WPA wages were \$23 per month, far less than whites' \$52 per month.²⁶⁹ Women obtained less than 20% of the jobs given by the WPA nationwide.²⁷⁰ One Mexican woman, who was an American citizen, living in Texas had to fight to get a WPA job because a judge denied it to her on the basis that her husband was not a legal resident of the U.S.²⁷¹ Incredibly this woman, desperately needing a job to feed her family, was almost denied because of whom she had married, a non-citizen. For whatever good, there can be little doubt that the New Deal's WPA and NRA programs contributed to and prolonged racist attitudes in the country. The environment Tenayuca experienced is important to understand since racial equality was a major concern of hers and a driving reason why she joined the CP and its organization to realize the desire of racial equality.

²⁶⁶ Blackwelder, pp. 109-110.

²⁶⁷ Ibid

²⁶⁸ Blackwelder, p.110

²⁶⁹ Kennedy, p. 254; Blackwelder, pp. 109-110

²⁷⁰ McArthur and Smith, p. 88

²⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 124-125

Also during 1935, President Roosevelt and his administration passed the Wagner Act or National Labor Relations Act.²⁷² It gave workers rights, regulated employers including preventing them from discriminating against union members or refusing to bargain with unions, and workers financial support of company unions.²⁷³ Workers could vote for the union they wanted and organize.²⁷⁴ The act created the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to enforce the act.²⁷⁵ However, employers ignored the National Labor Relations Act and Board because they assumed it would all be found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.²⁷⁶ The act also did not compel employers to settle with unions.²⁷⁷ This legislation can be seen as an attempt to help workers--the NLRB was a partnership between government and labor.²⁷⁸

The public also saw the unemployed as “reds” and as ungrateful for even thinking about wanting better wages let alone striking for them.²⁷⁹ However, there was a history of unemployed organizing in the nation to demand relief starting with General Coxey in 1894 and then again with the Bonus Army in 1932.²⁸⁰ The unemployed again were organizing after the Bonus Army’s march and Tenayuca

²⁷² Foner, Philip S. *Women and the American Labor Movement: From World War I to the Present*. New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980, p. 302

²⁷³ Foner, p. 302; Kennedy, p. 290

²⁷⁴ Ibid

²⁷⁵ Ibid

²⁷⁶ Kennedy, pp. 290-291

²⁷⁷ Ibid

²⁷⁸ Kennedy, p. 304

²⁷⁹ Cordell, Kathryn Coe and William H. Cordell. “Unions Among the Unemployed” *The North American Review*, Vol. 240 no. 3, December 1935, pp. 498-499

²⁸⁰ Cordell and Cordell, pp. 500-501; Kennedy, p. 92: The Bonus Army was a group a World War I veterans who marched to Washington, D.C. demanding their payment that would be owed to them in 1945 earlier because of the difficulty they faced during the Great Depression.

was involved in aiding them. The unemployed unions, affiliated with the Communist Party, described by Kathryn and William Cordell in 1935, were made up of women and men from different races with different political beliefs.²⁸¹ The unemployed unions had a large membership quoted at being around 20,000 by the Cordells.²⁸² The unemployed unionized because of the driving need for food during the Depression, "...the inalienable right not to starve in the midst of plenty."²⁸³ The right to eat that the unemployed felt they had was complicated with race and gender because women and minorities were not seen as deserving of relief jobs. Tenayuca, as an activist for the unemployed in the CP's Unemployed Council, began to address this inequality.

In 1936, while working for the Workers' Alliance in San Antonio, an offshoot of the Unemployment Council and still affiliated with the CP, Tenayuca encouraged Mexican workers both citizen and non-citizen to join the organization and protest for the WPA to increase minimum wages for Mexicans and women, restore WPA projects, and to establish a maximum work week for unskilled labor.²⁸⁴ Tenayuca sought to stop the WPA from discriminating against Mexicans and women who needed relief work and its wages. Tenayuca also called on WPA workers to perform sit-ins and demonstrations in order to protest the WPA wage

²⁸¹ Cordell and Cordell, p. 499

²⁸² Ibid

²⁸³ Ibid, pp.500, 506

²⁸⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 129-130; Kennedy, pp. 222, 254

cuts and racist policies.²⁸⁵ During a WPA wage-cut protest, in 1937, Tenayuca was charged, and later acquitted, for disturbing the peace and unlawful assembly while a man Robert Williams, another Workers' Alliance organizer, was fined \$25.²⁸⁶ Protesting against the government's discriminatory programs resulted in jail time or fines. Along with standing against the WPA, Tenayuca along with Jose Luna led 150 members of the Workers' Alliance to protest for the removal of police officers who had abused fellow Alliance members.²⁸⁷ With other Workers' Alliance members, Tenayuca was alarmed at the WPA's discrimination against those who desperately needed the government's help. Therefore, in the face of possibly being arrested or fined, they protested against its inadequacies and flaws.

Tenayuca became a full member of the CP in 1937 because of her belief in racial equality, the unemployed rights and workers rights that she found supported by the CP evident in her activism in the CP's organizations both the Unemployed Council and Workers Alliance.²⁸⁸ After she joined, her activity with the CP did not slow down, but only increased especially with her participation in the 1938 Pecan Shellers' Strike. In 1930s San Antonio, ninety percent of the twelve thousand Mexican pecan shellers were women.²⁸⁹ Pecan shellers strikes in San

²⁸⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 132; Foner, p. 314: The Supreme Court would later declare sit-ins illegal in 1939.

²⁸⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, "Alliance Worker Fined" August 3, 1937

²⁸⁷ *San Antonio Light*, February 24, 1937, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation file no. 100-1873

²⁸⁸ McArthur and Smith, pp.133, 144; Emma Tenayuca, interview by Jerry Poyo, February 21, 1987, Institute of Texan Culture, University of San Antonio, p. 27

²⁸⁹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 134

Antonio occurred in 1934, 1935 and with the longest lasting and most violent strike occurring in 1938 which involved Tenayuca.²⁹⁰

Employers did not enforce the NRA codes on wages and hours in San Antonio because they were voluntary.²⁹¹ Therefore in the pecan shelling industry wages fell from \$6-7 a pound in the 1920s to \$0.04 a pound by the late 1930s a weekly salary of only \$2.50.²⁹² The working conditions were crowded, hot, and dust from the pecan shells was heavy in the air of the workplace.²⁹³ As many as 50-60 people were crowded on wooden benches to shell pecans for 8-10 hours a day.²⁹⁴ Many workers' hands were swollen or infected from shelling the pecans by hand during which sharp broken shells pierced workers' fingers.²⁹⁵ On January 31, 1938, an estimated 6,000-8,000 pecan shellers quit their jobs at 170 pecan shelling plants because of a fifteen percent wage reduction, poor working conditions, and the requirement to take work home.²⁹⁶ Heeding the words of Tenayuca, claiming that everyone had the right to unionize, Mexican women workers protested against the low wages and unacceptable working conditions. Tenayuca, Maria Solis Sager, Minnie Rendon, and Willie Gonzalez helped to

²⁹⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 140-141

²⁹¹ Blackwelder, pp. 93, 95

²⁹² Ibid

²⁹³ McArthur and Smith, p. 87

²⁹⁴ "Talkin' Strikes and Bustin' Stereotypes." *Yesterday*, June/July 1979, p. 62, UT Briscoe Center, Melissa Hield Collection

²⁹⁵ McArthur and Smith, p. 87; "San Antonio the Cradle of Texas Liberty and its Coffin", Pecan Workers Local no. 172 leaflet, UT Arlington Special Collection Labor Archives, pp.1,4; Green, George. "The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio." *The Compass Rose*, Special Collections Division, the University of Texas at Arlington, Vol. VI, No.1, 1992, pp.1-3

²⁹⁶ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 135.

organize the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers Union under the United Cannery Agricultural Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), a CIO union in 1938.²⁹⁷ The union's numbers grew as Tenayuca encouraged the pecan shellers to strike and demand higher wages and better working conditions leading to one of the largest strikes in Texas.²⁹⁸ The CIO did not gain complete control over the strike at first because pecan shellers strikers elected twenty-three year old Tenayuca to lead their strike.²⁹⁹ The CIO eventually asked Tenayuca to step down from a public leadership role because of the negative press she attracted from her membership in the CP.³⁰⁰ Tenayuca's assignment as leader for even the brief period revealed her abilities, even at such a young age, to help minority working women and their acceptance of her.

The pecan shelling industry was dependent on Mexican workers, but the industry claimed it could not pay higher wages.³⁰¹ The federal Women's Bureau in 1932 recorded that Mexican American women were paid \$2.65 weekly for nut shelling, and \$9.00 in department stores, while white women were paid \$4.15 and \$12.45 for the same jobs.³⁰² The poor working conditions and the unfair wages especially when compared to white women made the Pecan Shellers Strike a

²⁹⁷ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 135

²⁹⁸ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 135; Acosta, Teresa Palomo and Winegarten, Ruthe eds. *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2003, p. 141

²⁹⁹ Ledesma, Irene. "Unlikely Strikers: Mexican-American Women in Strike Activity in Texas, 1919-1974" Dissertation from the Ohio State University, 1992, p. 105; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 135

³⁰⁰ McArthur and Smith, p. 87; *Dallas Morning News*, "C.I.O. Chief Leads Pecan Shellers' Strike." February 6, 1938; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 140

³⁰¹ *Time*, "Labor: La Pasionara de Texas." February 28, 1938, p. 17

³⁰² Blackwelder, pp.90-91

prime example of the suffering that these Mexican women workers and Tenayuca were not going to tolerate. However, this determination to proclaim their rights and demands to be recognized would not be an easy road. Tenayuca along with two pecan shellers strikers were arrested on the very first day of the strike prefacing how the police would handle the remainder of the strike.³⁰³ The strikers were not deterred by the police's reaction for they told newspapers that Tenayuca had been chosen by the strikers and they demanded her release.³⁰⁴ From the beginning, there was an attempt to bully the strikers and Tenayuca into submission.

Mexican women's discrimination by employers was influential to Tenayuca organizing the pecan shellers in 1938 to help them have their grievances met. She helped increase the Pecan Sheller's union membership to 10,000 from fifty from the first day of the walk out strike.³⁰⁵ It ended after six weeks with wages rising due to the passage by Congress of the Fair Labor Standard Act, but unfortunately shortly after the wage increase the plants were mechanized leading to the dismissal of its workers.³⁰⁶ Tenayuca and others like Mrs. W.H. Ernst, who led the Finck Cigar Strikes in 1933 and 1934, were concerned about the equality of workers no matter their sex, race, or how difficult

³⁰³ Ledesma, p. 105

³⁰⁴ Ledesma, p. 105-106

³⁰⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 142-143; McArthur and Smith, p.87

³⁰⁶ Ibid

the strikes became.³⁰⁷ Even though the pecan shellers inevitably lost their jobs, the strike was symbolically a win for Mexicans because it represented their refusal to accept discriminatory conditions and suppression. The strikers showed Tenayuca acceptance even though they knew she was a communist.

Tenayuca helped organize the pecan shellers strikers and aided their remaining out of work by organizing demonstrations, holding meetings to discuss their grievances, as well as writing circulars for the strike and meeting with picket leaders.³⁰⁸ She also gave speeches that attracted up to 5,000 of the pecan shellers.³⁰⁹ She was concerned with workers' equality therefore Tenayuca pushed the Mexican people to achieve what she thought they rightfully deserved.

Prior to Tenayuca's forced removal by UCAPAWA's leader Henderson she and other communists including her husband Homer Brooks were actively involved in the 1938 strike.³¹⁰ Brooks was concerned about the strikers being CP members, and he lectured to them about the CP's doctrines.³¹¹ Historian Vargas explains Brooks' marriage to Tenayuca helped him gain access to the Mexican pecan shellers and tried to implement a rule that if leaders were not CP members then actual members would replace them.³¹² Tenayuca was openly critical of Brook's tactics during the 1938 strike.³¹³

³⁰⁷ Blackwelder, pp. 132-143, 137-139

³⁰⁸ Vargas, ed. *Major Problems*, p. 284

³⁰⁹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 141

³¹⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 140

³¹¹ *Ibid*

³¹² *Ibid*

³¹³ *Ibid*

The women protestors, about half of all of those who worked in the industry, encountered police brutalities including tear gas, clubbing and beatings as they picketed or wore signs for their rights.³¹⁴ February 8, 1938, the Chief of Police Owen W. Kilday, maintained that peace had occurred around the pecan shelling plants even though a group of 300 or more strikers had been broken up and 100 or more were arrested for expressing their demands for workplace and wage changes.³¹⁵ Donald Henderson, the leader of UCAPAWA, wanted the employers to meet demands of the pecan strikers which were to increase wages for pecan halves seven cents a pound, for pecan pieces eight cents a pound, and for those employees who cracked the pecans, crackers, sixty cents for one hundred pounds.³¹⁶ Shortly after Henderson discussed the demands strikers wanted, Chief of Police Kilday ordered the San Antonio police to use tear gas on a crowd of 75 pecan shellers picketing.³¹⁷ He claimed that there was no strike happening even though he was recorded in the paper the day stating he was keeping the peace within the strike situation by putting more men on duty thus displaying his awareness of the strike.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 134; *Dallas Morning News*, "Police Deny Tear Gas Killed Baby in Strike." February 14, 1938; *Dallas Morning News*, "Shellers' Strike Police Action Held Unjustified." February 16, 1938; *San Antonio Express*, February 13, 1938

³¹⁵ *San Antonio Express*, "Police Disperse Pecan Strikers." February 8, 1938

³¹⁶ *Ibid*

³¹⁷ *San Antonio Express*, "Tear Gas used to Rout Striking Pecan Shellers." February 10, 1938

³¹⁸ *San Antonio Express*, "Tear Gas used to Rout Striking Pecan Shellers." February 10, 1938; *San Antonio Express*,

"Police Disperse Pecan Strikers." February 8, 1938

A man only referred to as Brophy by the *San Antonio Express* and claimed to be a close associate of John Lewis, the CIO leader, stated that the strikers had been peaceful and orderly, but they had unfortunately been met with violence from both police and vigilantes.³¹⁹ He described the civil rights violations strikers experienced such as not being allowed to picket even though it was legal in San Antonio and the injuries to strikers from the tear gas used on them.³²⁰ An outsider could see the inequality that the pecan strikers faced. The San Antonio police used violence against working women who only wanted a better wage and improved conditions in the work place.

Mexicans, non-citizens of the U.S., were affected by the pecan shellers strike of 1938 as well. Sixty-three non-U.S. citizens were rounded up with pecan strikers and arrested for blocking sidewalks and unlawful assembly.³²¹ The Mexican vice-consul R.S. Urrea threatened habeas corpus suits because he believed the non-U.S. citizens were being jailed illegally.³²² The threat of this to Texas Governor Allred perhaps influenced him to order an investigation of civil rights violations by the Texas Industrial Commission and to make a statement that he was for freedom of speech, picketing, the ability to collectively bargain for better wages, and assembly.³²³

³¹⁹ *San Antonio Express*, "Mexican Consul Intervenes in Arrest of Pickets in Walkout of Pecan Shellers: Demands Release of 63 Nationals Held by Police." February 12, 1938

³²⁰ Ibid

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Ibid

³²³ Ibid

The police violence was not the only opposition Tenayuca and the pecan shellers met. In February 5, 1938, Mayor C.K. Quinn of San Antonio made a speech at a pecan shelling factory stating that if the pecan shellers dismissed communist members from its strike, it would be settled peacefully.³²⁴ The Mayor was attempting to control how a group of Mexican women strikers would carry out their demand for better working conditions, a living wage and who would be able to join them portraying the hostile atmosphere affecting these working women. The San Antonio police were also claiming Tenayuca wanted the communists to take over the strike in order for them to burn down churches and kill priests.³²⁵ This was an outlandish claim in order to discredit Tenayuca as an activist for equality.

During the Texas State Industrial Commission's investigation to find out if there had been any violation of civil liberties, Chief of Police Kilday, stated that he was against the strike because Donald Henderson, leader of the strike under the CIO, was a communist.³²⁶ He also stated that the strike was an attempt to turn the West Side of San Antonio's population into communists.³²⁷ Mayor Quinn of San Antonio and the Fire and Police Commissioner Phil Wright both supported using tear gas to prevent "...threats of disturbances at the front."³²⁸ They both viewed

³²⁴ *San Antonio Express*, "Mayor Tells Shellers to Kick Out Reds." February 5, 1938

³²⁵ *San Antonio Express*, "'Red Plot' to Control West Side Charged at Strike Probe." February 15, 1938

³²⁶ *Ibid*

³²⁷ *Ibid*

³²⁸ *Ibid*

workers who were actively seeking better wages and better working conditions as threats who might turn into disturbances. The Commissioner went on to say that he did not believe that strikers could picket peacefully ever and it was “...the custom of the police department to keep order.”³²⁹ Even during the investigation to make right any civil rights violations, workers’ and labor activist’ rights were trampled. Outrageous charges against Tenayuca’s motivation were made because of her connection to the CP.

During the numerous strikes of the 1930s, Tenayuca and other activists attempted to answer the question of the rights of workers and through their action made clear what rights they expected to be protected. The right to organize and bargain with an employer was established by the Supreme Court in 1842 in the *Commonwealth vs. Hunt* which dealt with boot makers who wanted both of these rights.³³⁰ Laws such as the Railway Labor Act of 1926, 1934, and the National Labor Relations of 1935 protected labor rights from being interfered with by employers as well as preventing employers from creating company unions.³³¹ However, as discussed previously the San Antonio police and mayor denied strikers these rights. People who wore signs such as the worker photographed in the *San Antonio Express* February 13, 1938 that said “This Shop Unfair Pecan Workers Local No. 172 CIO” were violating the non-picket order of the San

³²⁹ *San Antonio Express*, “‘Red Plot’ to Control West Side Charged at Strike Probe.” February 15, 1938

³³⁰ Green, William. “The Rights of Labor Under the Constitution”, *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 4 *The Constitution and Social Progress*, January 1936, p. 80

³³¹ *Ibid*

Antonio police.³³² Also reported was the arrest of ten men for unlawful assembly during the Pecan Shellers Strike, a right supposedly enjoyed by all citizens.³³³ Throughout the pecan strike workers and the labor activists, such as Tenayuca, had their rights violated.

Tenayuca was a determined leader for the pursuit of equality for minorities, women and workers in general who had demonstrated her leadership skills within the CP organizations, the Pecan Shellers strike, and continued her mission through the CP after the 1938 strike. Her activism in the CP continued with a published article written by her and her husband Homer Brooks in *The Communist* journal in 1939 entitled, “The Mexican Question in the Southwest” which discussed the civil rights issues that Mexicans experienced in the U.S.³³⁴ Tenayuca’s article emphasized that Mexican people should unite to fight economic discrimination, educational and cultural inequality, social oppression such as Jim Crow, and fight for the right to vote and be represented.³³⁵ “The desire of the Mexican people for unification...uniting the interests of large and important sections of the population, over two million strong, who, ...can free themselves from the special oppression and discrimination in all its phases that have existed for almost a century.”³³⁶ Tenayuca and Brooks claimed in their article

³³² *San Antonio Express*, “Signs Under Banner.” February 13, 1938

³³³ *San Antonio Express*, “Signs Under Banner.” February 13, 1938; Green, p. 78

³³⁴ Tenayuca, Emma and Homer Brooks. “The Mexican Question in the Southwest.” *The Communist*, March 1939

³³⁵ Tenayuca and Brooks, p. 264

³³⁶ *Ibid*

that there was a Mexican American civil rights movement in 1939, which according to historian Cynthia Orozco, is not widely accepted by other historians who study Mexican American history.³³⁷ Instead, historians refer to the period after 1965 as the Mexican American civil rights movement.³³⁸ Communism gave Tenayuca an outlet to express her passion for equality, and be part of a collective group that shared her ideas of supporting all workers. Her sympathy for the communist's message of equality for workers resulted in numerous arrests such as that with the Pecan Shellers' Strike of 1938 along with being personally attacked by San Antonio's Chief of Police Kilday and Mayor Quinn.³³⁹ Her involvement with communism and the CP was a positive driving force that she used to pursue her goals of racial equality, labor rights, aid to the unemployed, apparent in her activism in the Unemployed Council. The CP and its organization gave her leadership roles including a voice in its publication, *The Communist*.

After the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike in San Antonio, in 1939 a riot broke out at the Municipal Auditorium (mentioned previously) when citizens discovered that Mayor Maury Maverick had allowed the CP to hold a meeting.³⁴⁰ Mayor Maverick was elected after Mayor Quinn, and the pecan shellers in San Antonio

³³⁷ Tenayuca and Brooks, p. 268; Orozco, pp.185-186: These include Carlos Larralde and Mario Garcia.

³³⁸ Orozco, pp.185-186

³³⁹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, p. 135; Blackwelder, pp. 144-145.

³⁴⁰ Gonzalez, Gabriela. "Carolina Munguia and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, Gender on the Borderlands (2003): p. 217; *San Antonio Light*, "Mob Makes Auditorium A Shambles." August 26, 1939, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

had campaigned for him.³⁴¹ A huge crowd of 5,000 gathered outside the meeting on August 25, 1939 and once stirred up by a Catholic priest, M.A. Valenta, and an American Legion leader, Clem Smith, the crowd began throwing bricks and rocks through the auditorium's windows.³⁴² As many as sixteen people were injured during the riot, and Tenayuca, her husband Brooks and other communists were secretly led out of the building to escape while tear gas and water hoses failed to impress the crowd.³⁴³ Prior to the riot the American Legion had issued a complaint to the city council over Mayor Maverick's decision to give Tenayuca a permit to hold a CP meeting in the auditorium.³⁴⁴ The Legion wanted to make public that the auditorium had been dedicated to the WWI veterans by placing a wreath there after Maverick had issued his permit.³⁴⁵ After the riot, several in San Antonio wanted to recall the mayor since he had given permission to the communists to hold their meeting.³⁴⁶ The American Legion was among many organizations to protest the CP meeting including the KKK, Catholic Church, other veterans' organizations, the Texas Pioneers and the *San Antonio Express*

³⁴¹ Vargas, p. 143, 146

³⁴² Gonzalez, p. 217

³⁴³ Gonzalez, p. 217; *San Antonio Express*, "Windows Rocked By 5000 Angered By Red Session." August 26, 1939, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

³⁴⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "Maverick Reaffirms Red Rally Permit." August 20, 1939

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*

³⁴⁶ *Sweetwater Reporter*, "Maverick Permits Recall Meeting." August 30, 1939, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Sweetwater/Nolan County City-County Library, Sweetwater, Texas

newspaper.³⁴⁷ The FBI was also informed immediately after the riot had occurred at 9 o'clock the next morning.³⁴⁸

After the riot Tenayuca received death threats and was blacklisted in San Antonio.³⁴⁹ With no job opportunities, Tenayuca moved to Houston in July 1941, to continue work in the CP.³⁵⁰ In Houston, she was investigated by the FBI for the possibility of sabotage against seamen who were anti-communistic and for setting fire to seaports.³⁵¹ The Dies' Committee investigated Homer Brooks, Emma Tenayuca's husband.³⁵² Brooks stated he would not help Dies create a blacklist.³⁵³ Homer Brooks also compared the Dies Committee to Hitler's tactics creating hysteria to suppress democratic rights.³⁵⁴ The FBI compiled records of where Tenayuca lived and where she went.³⁵⁵ For example, the Bureau reported that she attended the National Committee of the CP in New York City on June 28, 1941, as a delegate.³⁵⁶ Tenayuca was seen as a threat and the FBI recommended, in her file, that she be held under custodial detention if there was a national crisis.³⁵⁷ Along with records on her whereabouts, the FBI also tracked who employed her

³⁴⁷ Gonzales, p. 217

³⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

³⁴⁹ Gonzalez, p. 218; Tenayuca, Emma interview by Poyo, pp. 34-35

³⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca; Gonzalez, p. 218

³⁵¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file no. 100-1873, Emma Tenayuca

³⁵² *Dallas Morning News*, "State Red Aide Calls Dies Quiz Hysteria Body." July 26, 1940

³⁵³ *Ibid*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, file no. 65-894, Emma Tenayuca

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*

as well as her educational endeavors.³⁵⁸ The Bureau knew her attendance at the University of Houston's business school and the time of her classes.³⁵⁹ Tenayuca carried on with attempting to help workers in the Houston area. She held meetings for the Oil Workers in her apartment and went to communist training classes.³⁶⁰ At the Oil Workers Branch of the CP meetings, Tenayuca "...discussed the Mexican and Negro questions."³⁶¹ Informants reported that Tenayuca tried to organize workers of the Humble Oil and Refining Company in Ingleside near Corpus Christi.³⁶² Her efforts to organize workers were wide spread in Texas displayed through her activities from San Antonio to Houston and Corpus Christi. Her involvement in the CP as well as the continued investigation by the FBI, reveals her continued effort.

Tenayuca protested for Mexicans and women's equality during the Depression through her affiliation with the CP.³⁶³ She was influenced to

³⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, file no. 65-894, Emma Tenayuca

³⁵⁹ Ibid

³⁶⁰ Ibid

³⁶¹ Ibid

³⁶² Ibid

³⁶³ Two other women activists worth mentioning who were active at the same time as Tenayuca was Luisa Moreno and Manuela Solis Sager. Ruiz, Vicki. "Una Mujer Sin Fronteras: Luisa Moreno and Latina Labor Activism." *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Feb., 2004) explores Luisa Moreno Communist Party affiliation like Tenayuca and her departure in 1935 along with her activities in the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike in San Antonio and in an organization for civil rights for Latin people called El Congreso that met 1939 in Los Angeles. Manuela Solis Sager's activities are explored through an oral interview done by Dedra McDonald, Phyllis McKenzie and Sarah Massey, the Institute of Texan Culture, UTSA, August 11, 1992, Hield, Melissa, Glenn Scott, Maria Flores, Richard Croxdale and Lauren Rabinovitz. "Union-Minded": Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer, 1979) and Zargosa Vargas' *Civil Rights are Labor Rights*. Sager was involved in the 1938 Pecan Shellers strike, the Communist Party and in agriculture strikes in the Rio Grande Valley.

participate in the CP and its organizations through demonstrations and strikes because of the education she received from both family and school, her suffering community, the repatriation campaign of the 1930s, the discrimination of the New Deal, and prejudice in the workplace against both women and Mexicans. The CP's message influenced her and gave her a way to combat these problems she saw affecting Mexican people, workers and the unemployed through organizations, such as the Unemployment Council, the Workers' Alliance and as being a leader in the Pecan Shellers Strike as a communist. She suffered arrests encountered police brutalities including tear gas, clubbing and beating because of her activism. The study of Tenayuca's activism sheds light on the inequalities that were present during the Depression and how both the U.S government and San Antonio's local government exacerbated those inequalities.³⁶⁴ Tenayuca joined the CP to help workers gain rights, to aid unemployed and through it she gained leadership positions.³⁶⁵ Rebecca Taylor and Charlotte Graham were active in similar ways through labor unions and experienced the same type of brutality when struggling for workers' rights but they chose not to become affiliated with the CP, which will be explored in the following chapters.

³⁶⁴ Others who attempted to change the status quo during the Great Depression were Huey Long of Louisiana, Dr. Townsend and Upton Sinclair of California.

³⁶⁵ Tenayuca left the party in 1946 while living in Los Angeles and before moving to San Francisco. (FBI file April 13, 1953, interview of Tenayuca by FBI agents) Further research is needed to understand why she decided to leave and whether her husband Homer Brooks played a part.

CHAPTER IV
CHARLOTTE GRAHAM AND HER AVERSION TO
THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Women joined the union organizing efforts in Texas, during the Great Depression, but some decided not to embrace the Communist Party. One woman was Charlotte Graham a native to Dallas who was a worker in its garment industry in the 1930s.³⁶⁶ Her father was a union man and she felt the need to aid others in their fight for labor rights.³⁶⁷ She was born in 1914 in Dallas, and lived at home with her parents and husband during the 1930s.³⁶⁸ Her mother was active in church and her father held membership in a carpenters' union; he was racist but Graham described him as "a rebel."³⁶⁹ Graham adored her father's rebel status because he was a union man.³⁷⁰ Graham's grandfather was a Methodist minister

³⁶⁶ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, in Melissa Hield's Papers 1889-1991 University of Texas Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas, pp. 1-2

³⁶⁷ Ibid

³⁶⁸ Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, pp.2-4, UT Arlington Labor Archives, Oral history; Charlotte Graham and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 1977, p. 17

³⁶⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert, interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, UT Arlington Special Collections, Labor Archives, pp. 25- 26

³⁷⁰ Ibid

and because of him Graham wanted to be a foreign missionary.³⁷¹ To her, however, work in unions served as a unique mission field.³⁷² She did not go to college because she was from a working class family and she stated she did not even think of being able to attend school.³⁷³ She joined the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and became an organizer and helped lead the 1935 Dallas garment strike.³⁷⁴ She wanted workers' rights to be met, particularly higher wages and better working conditions.

The thesis of this chapter is through her work with the ILGWU Graham risked losing her job, the needed wages from it, and physical injury to resolve issues facing garment workers through labor activism, but for many significant reasons she did not perceive the Communist Party as an avenue for success. In this chapter Graham's union activism with the ILGWU in Dallas, Texas will be explored along with the anti-union and anti-communism environment in Texas and the U.S. to explain why she did not join the CP. The participation of several hundred women in the 1935 Dallas garment strike exemplifies both the demand for unions in Texas and women's labor activism.³⁷⁵ The garment industry during

³⁷¹ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, Third Transcribed, UT Arlington Texas Labor Archives Special Collections, Oral history, p.17; Charlotte Graham interview with Glenn Scott, August 1978, UT Briscoe Center, Melissa Hield's Collection, p.1

³⁷² Ibid

³⁷³ Charlotte Graham interview with Glenn Scott, August 1978, UT Briscoe Center, Melissa Hield's Collection, p.1

³⁷⁴ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, Third Transcribed, UT Arlington Texas Labor Archives Special Collections, Oral history, p.17; Charlotte Graham interview with Glenn Scott, August 1978, UT Briscoe Center, Melissa Hield's Collection, p.1

³⁷⁵ Hield, Melissa. "Union-Minded: Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50." *A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer, 1979), p. 59

the 1930s and 1940s was seasonal; workers were exploited while they labored through the piece-rate system with their wages dependent on employer's whims.³⁷⁶ The contributing factors of why she did not join the Communist Party includes fear she felt from the Texas environment and that of the nation which included violence against communists and pro-labor activists, racism, the ILGWU's anti-communist attitude, and her unwavering support and loyalty for the ILGWU. The factors that led to Graham's refusal of the CP are not conclusive, but opinions based upon extensive research the 1930s. Additional investigation is necessary to come to definitive answers on why she chose to not join the CP.

Graham's labor activism is important to explore because it reveals her willingness to risk her job, her family's approval, and possible physical injury from the strikes and picketing. She was willing to risk these things, but was unwilling to join the CP who was aiding workers similar to labor unions as discussed earlier. The anti-labor/ pro-business environment in Dallas is highlighted in all of Graham's experience throughout her labor activism and is a contributing factor for her not joining the CP a radical organization that supported workers and the overthrow of capitalism. It was difficult to be in a labor union in Dallas during this time thus being a communist could be even more dangerous.

³⁷⁶ Hield, p. 61; Blackwelder, p. 99; Garment workers were only paid for the products they made that satisfied employers also known as the piece-rate system.

The Communist Party was small and isolated in the South during the 1930s where it was called illegal by an Alabama member.³⁷⁷ There were only 409 members in 1937 in Texas, but the number grew to around 600 estimated by Homer Brooks.³⁷⁸ In 1935 the CP's Sharecroppers Union, the Socialist Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, and other communists and left organizations were driven from several attempted meetings in Chattanooga, Tennessee.³⁷⁹ Members were kidnapped and beaten up and its organization such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) was investigated by the Dies Committee.³⁸⁰ The obstacles and possible violence that met communist would have been a deterring factor to anyone in the South including Graham. The anti-union environment that Graham encountered was aggressive, but the attitude towards communists was much more hostile. This was a major reason for her to not be associated with the CP along with the lack of success the party had in the South.

Graham worked out of necessity if not survival during the Great Depression and explained, "Nobody could stay home then. I think between the two of us [her husband and herself] we made \$15 a week."³⁸¹ Graham explains how important it was for everyone to work in the 1930s, "Remember, this was during the depression, and anybody who worked wasn't working for just pin

³⁷⁷ Klehr, p. 273

³⁷⁸ Klehr, p. 275; *Dallas Morning News*, "State Red Aide Calls Dies Quiz Hysteria Body." July 26, 1940

³⁷⁹ Klehr, p. 274

³⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 276-278

³⁸¹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.29, 30

money. They were working either to have maybe a little something extra or more or less to eat.”³⁸² During the Great Depression, older married women labored for their families’ survival not for the ‘pin money’ myth, but for a “survival” wage even if the work was seasonal, marginal and without benefits.³⁸³ The notion of working for pin money or extra money was the thought that women were only working for unnecessary money to buy things they wanted.³⁸⁴ Charlotte Graham stated women worked to survive during the Great Depression.³⁸⁵ Her necessity to work made workers’ rights important which were her rights too.

A 1932 study conducted by the Women’s Bureau of the US Department of Labor discovered that women worked in factories, laundries and department stores-- they worked around 54 hours weekly.³⁸⁶ Half of the population in Texas were women; nineteen percent of these Texas women were above the age of ten and gainfully employed.³⁸⁷ The study divided women into racial/ethnic categories and included whites, Mexicans and African Americans to express the differences in wages between women of different races; black and Mexican women were paid approximately \$5.85 but white women averaged \$8.75 weekly.³⁸⁸ Graham remembers there were few Mexicans who worked in the garment shops in Dallas

³⁸² Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977. p. 11

³⁸³ Hield, p. 60

³⁸⁴ Foner, pp. 278-279

³⁸⁵ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, Third Transcribed, pp. 19, 26

³⁸⁶ Hield, p. 61

³⁸⁷ Sullivan, Mary Loretta and Bertha Blair. *Women in Texas Industries*, U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, Washington: U.S. G.P.O., (1936), Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Harvard University, p.8. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HBS.BAKER:455403>

³⁸⁸ Hield, p. 61

and there were no African Americans in the Justin McCarty factory in 1929.³⁸⁹ Graham stated, “Mexicans [were] used as strike breakers. They needed to establish themselves in a trade where they had not been permitted to do that before.”³⁹⁰ One gathers from Graham’s statement that Mexican women were used by employers to prevent the labor unions from improving working conditions. Graham recalls that there were few black women working and most who did were used as scabs.³⁹¹ This was the work environment Graham was exposed to in Dallas.

It was there that Graham went to work in Justin McCarty’s garment factory because she was young and needed a job, she recalled.³⁹² However, the majority of workers in this Dallas garment factory were not young like Graham but older women.³⁹³ Wages were so low in Dallas garment factories that no one could tell the Great Depression’s onset; people had no choice but to work for any meager wages they could earn.³⁹⁴ Sadly, in the 1930s 75% of Texas’ garment workers were women who earned 50 percent or lower wages than those earned by garment workers in the East.³⁹⁵ According to Graham, women were paid \$5 for 54 hours in the garment factory where she worked--even lower than what the

³⁸⁹ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott Third Transcribed, pp. 19,30

³⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 31

³⁹¹ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott Third Transcribed, p.31

³⁹² Ibid, p. 18

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 27

³⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 19, 26

³⁹⁵ Hield, p. 60

Women's Bureau had discovered.³⁹⁶ The dress factories in Dallas employed some 1,800 workers where some earned \$12 as operators to \$27 as cutters working 35 to 40 hours a week.³⁹⁷

In addition to inadequate wages women earned in garment factories working conditions were deplorable. The shop where Graham worked was a hot and dirty place without fans--dust was everywhere.³⁹⁸ Women workers wore rag dresses in the sweltering heat; they weren't allowed to leave their workstations.³⁹⁹ They called out to "bundle girls" to bring them more work.⁴⁰⁰ Time was wasted in the process and Graham expressed that waiting on the "bundle girls" could cost her a loaf of bread.⁴⁰¹ In short, time was money to her. Graham had first-hand experience relative to how employers failed to care about their workers' well being. Injured, she had to wait an hour and a half for a doctor after running a needle through her finger.⁴⁰² Given no time off for her injury, she returned to the factory.⁴⁰³ Employers even regulated workers' lunchtime to thirty-minutes along with a fifteen-minute break during the workday.⁴⁰⁴ Almost half of all the women who participated in the Women's Bureau study mentioned they received a thirty-

³⁹⁶ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, Third Transcribed, p. 21

³⁹⁷ Green, George N. "ILGWU in Texas, 1930-1970" *The Journal of Mexican American History*, Vol. 1, No.2, Spring, 1971, p. 154

³⁹⁸ Hield, p. 62; Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.4

³⁹⁹ Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.6

⁴⁰⁰ Hield, p. 62; Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.6

⁴⁰¹ Hield, p. 62; Blackwelder, p. 99, Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.6, Garment workers like Graham who worked by piece-rate had to make so many pieces in the work week satisfactory in the eyes of employers to gain wages.

⁴⁰² Hield, p. 62

⁴⁰³ Ibid

⁴⁰⁴ Hield, p. 62; Interview of Charlotte Graham with Glenn Scott, August 1978, p. 5

minute lunch break.⁴⁰⁵ However, since there were only few bathroom facilities in the plant (5-6 women at a time) and 400 workers, one worker had a bathroom accident in her chair.⁴⁰⁶ Graham became livid over the incident.⁴⁰⁷ Rebellious, she sat in the bathroom simply baiting her boss to fire her--he did not.⁴⁰⁸ Graham risked being fired to protest the treatment of her fellow co-worker something other workers did not do since Graham makes no mention of others behaving the same. It appears that Graham's reasons for her involvement in labor activities was based upon her wish to assist others who were unable to help themselves. She states, "All of these things, outside of low wages, every fight I had was for somebody else, not me."⁴⁰⁹ Not for selfish gain, but to assist others motivated Graham.

Low wages, the large number of garment workers, sweatshop like working conditions, and the economic depression were indicators that ILGWU organization was necessary. In the Southwest throughout the 1930s and 40s--which included Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, and parts of Illinois and Tennessee--Meyer Perlstein led an organizational effort.⁴¹⁰ A Russian immigrant, in 1903, he began work as a shirtmaker, became the secretary in the New York's Joint Board of Cloak

⁴⁰⁵ Sullivan and Blair, p.13

⁴⁰⁶ Hield, p. 62; Interview of Charlotte Graham with Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.5-6

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid

⁴⁰⁸ Hield, p. 62

⁴⁰⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, in Melissa Hield's Papers 1889-1991 University of Texas Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas, p. 21

⁴¹⁰ Green, p. 145

Makers' Union, and became active in Ohio's garment union organization before World War I.⁴¹¹ He finally became the vice-president of the ILGWU when he was sent to the Southwest in 1934.⁴¹² Roosevelt's NRA gave labor the right to collectively bargain. This gave leaders in the IGLWU success in strengthening membership; it grew from 50,000 in 1933 to 200,000 in 1934.⁴¹³ In August 1933, 5,000,000 workers were affected by the NRA, an agency attempting to increase wages, lessen hours, and encourage collective bargaining, all a part of section 7 of the legislation.⁴¹⁴ Importantly, David Dubinsky president of the IGLWU in 1934 assigned Perlstein to the Southwestern region, with Texas included.⁴¹⁵ The ILGWU seemed on the path, as the CP, to aid the numerous workers who had been ignored by the AFL--workers suffering in the state. The ILGWU's membership in 1932 was around 20,000 and it rose to 450,000 in 1940.⁴¹⁶

Perlstein and the presence of the ILGWU in Texas solidified the determination of the workers to go on strike. Shortly after he arrived in the area a general strike vote was held in February 1935.⁴¹⁷ The result was that around 40% of Dallas garment workers made a decision in which "...the membership voted 382-8 in favor of a general strike against all thirteen Dallas garment shops."⁴¹⁸ Graham recalled that many textile mills carried through with the general strike

⁴¹¹ Green, p. 145

⁴¹² Green, p. 145; Hield, p. 62

⁴¹³ Hield, p. 62; Foner, p. 282

⁴¹⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "Half of Nation Already Under Blue Eagle," August 4, 1933

⁴¹⁵ Hield, p. 62

⁴¹⁶ Green, p. 144

⁴¹⁷ Hield, p. 64

⁴¹⁸ Ibid

decision and struck including Justin McCarty, Marcy Lee, Aronson Rose, Lowerman, Lorch, Donovan, and L and M of the Dallas area.⁴¹⁹ According to Charlotte Graham, McCarty's garment factory had 200 women employed, Lowerman the same number, as did Marcy Lee.⁴²⁰ Arson Rose employed 35 women while Lorch employed 200.⁴²¹ Of this number, on the first day of the general strike, February 7, 1935, only 150 women walked out to picket the factories even though 382 voted to walk out.⁴²² Since women were often fired for striking and for union activity this explains the paltry numbers.⁴²³ Graham emphasizes the problem. Many people were scared to come to meetings because employers were firing those involved in the union.⁴²⁴ When they did come to vote at meetings for the general strike in 1935, not all would participate in the strike.⁴²⁵ Graham and historian Hield estimate the total involved were 125-150 women.⁴²⁶ "The strike failed because "...we weren't strong enough," Graham lamented.⁴²⁷

The anti-labor/pro-business attitude of Dallas is portrayed by garment working women being intimidated or frightened by employers threatening them

⁴¹⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 7

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 9

⁴²¹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 9

⁴²² Ibid

⁴²³ Hield, p.65; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, pp. 4-8; Hill, Patricia Everidge. "Real Women and True Womanhood: Grassroots Organizing among Dallas Dressmakers in 1935," *Labor's Heritage: Quarterly of the George Meany Memorial Archives*, vol. 5, no.4, 1994, p. 8

⁴²⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, 1977, p. 10

⁴²⁵ Ibid

⁴²⁶ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15; Hield, p.65; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, pp. 4-8

⁴²⁷ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15

not only with being fired, but also with blacklisting.⁴²⁸ It appears that employers also threatened workers by suggesting their sick children might suffer because strikers could not afford medication in Dallas.⁴²⁹ Soon Graham's life was affected by her involvement in the strike. Her mother worried and became unhappy about her daughter's involvement.⁴³⁰ The anti-labor environment in Dallas also affected Graham outside the factory when she was asked to give up teaching a Sunday school class once it was known that she was in the 1935 strike.⁴³¹ Added to women's struggle over the strike was the strikers' inability to draw financial support from the ILGWU at the onset of the 1935 strike.⁴³² Strikers instead had to depend on donations because the unions were broke.⁴³³ Within the one-year duration of the strike the strikers were paid \$5 a week by the ILGWU, according to Graham.⁴³⁴ Union and strike involvement came at a price for all involved.

Dallas' environment was anti-labor and pro-business yet another unfortunate matter for the IGLWU and those who were pro-labor.⁴³⁵ So much so that the *Dallas Morning News* had openly stated that the city was "...the largest open shop city in the nation and ...that Northern industrial leaders will find it a

⁴²⁸ Hield, p.65

⁴²⁹ Ibid

⁴³⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16

⁴³¹ Ibid

⁴³² Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.10; Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 17

⁴³³ Ibid

⁴³⁴ Ibid

⁴³⁵ Green, p. 157

haven, free from left-wing labor movements.”⁴³⁶ Soon ILGWU’s attempt to organize women garment workers resulted in “brutal tactics by manufacturers” to keep the union and interested workers down.⁴³⁷ Unfortunately for workers, creative employers developed ways of repressing the union’s activities. Lester Lorch, the Texas Dress Manufacturers Association president refused to cooperate with unions through collective bargaining, arbitration, or raising workers’ wages.⁴³⁸

Unions had to be on the defensive in Dallas because of the Open Shop Association. Graham remembered that the Association did not want unions in the city and encouraged the use of strikebreakers and runaway shops--shops that would leave cities to avoid unions.⁴³⁹ The Open Shop Association sent out a memo in affiliation with Dallas’ Chamber of Commerce stating that if one is failing to cooperate with the Association, then one is supporting “radical” labor unions.⁴⁴⁰ The memo included the conclusion that the Association was not trying to prevent employees from gaining a living wage but for employees being paid for what they earn and for “equal rights and justice for all men in all stations of life, whereas the Closed Shop means only Union men have the right to work.”⁴⁴¹ The Association saw any attempt to unionize as wanting special treatment. The Open

⁴³⁶ Green, p. 157

⁴³⁷ Hield, p. 60; Hill, p.11; *New York Times*, “Women Stripped and 'Spanked' in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police,” August 8, 1935

⁴³⁸ Green, p. 154

⁴³⁹ Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973 p. 14

⁴⁴⁰ “Open Shop [Square Deal] Association” memo, unknown date, UT Briscoe Center, American History, Melissa Hield’s Papers

⁴⁴¹ Ibid

Shop Association was linked to Lorch's Dress Manufacturers Association but newspapers (during the strike) would not investigate or report on their "linkage."⁴⁴² Among other efforts, the Open Shop Association supported injunctions against the garment strikers.⁴⁴³ The *Dallas Morning News* was supportive of the Open Shop Association and reported that employers were suffering under the strike.⁴⁴⁴ The newspaper reported the ILGWU had wasted a substantial amount of money on the strike thus far.⁴⁴⁵ The Open Shop Association claimed, in turn, that the majority of employers were members of the organization but that strikers compromised only 10% of the union's membership.⁴⁴⁶ The strikers, according to the Open Shop Association, did not represent all of the employees—only a few had a problem with the garment factories.⁴⁴⁷ Employers along with their associates tried in various ways to present the union and the strikers negatively. The anti-labor environment Graham experienced was a challenge and helped Graham understand the pro-business/capitalist world in which she lived.

Employers, innovative as they were, attempted other tactics to get what they wanted--the unions to disappear. Graham recalled how the employers attempted repeatedly to prevent their employees from joining unions. Lester

⁴⁴² Hill, p. 11

⁴⁴³ *Dallas Morning News*, "Cost of Garment Workers' Strike Placed at \$30,000," April 21, 1935

⁴⁴⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "Cost of Garment Workers' Strike Placed at \$30,000," April 21, 1935

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid

Lorch, for example, claimed that there were no sweatshops in Dallas.⁴⁴⁸ He added that the ILGWU had only one motive. That, to him, was providing workers its union members higher wages to pay more union dues.⁴⁴⁹ According to Graham, “They [employers] would call meetings and tell them we were all one big happy family and we don’t need any outsiders and all the bad things that would happen- you’d have to pay big unions dues and it would take away everything, and you wouldn’t be your own boss.”⁴⁵⁰ It was Lorch who claimed that employers and employees had a harmonious relationship.⁴⁵¹ But Lorch alluded that workers could join unions if they so desired.⁴⁵² Workers, in Lorch’s view, had always been allowed to demand what they wanted and that he had told employees about Section 7 (a) of the NRA.⁴⁵³ Again, he claimed they could join any union they wanted.⁴⁵⁴ Infamously, “One plant manager told Charlotte Graham that \$5 a week was enough to make in the shop, and that she ‘could make the rest on the outside,’ that is, as a prostitute.”⁴⁵⁵ To employers, ILGWU organizers were “foreigners” who were not concerned with the workers’ well being but only wanted to make

⁴⁴⁸ Garment Industry in Dallas Company Hearing no.1 July-August, 1935, UT Arlington Special Collection, Labor Archives, pp. 4, 6

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid

⁴⁵⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 9

⁴⁵¹ Garment Industry in Dallas Company Hearing no.1 July-August, 1935, UT Arlington Special Collection, Labor Archives p. 7

⁴⁵² Garment Industry in Dallas Company Hearing no.1 July-August, 1935, UT Arlington Special Collection, Labor Archives p.8

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p.9

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵⁵ Hield, p. 61

money off the workers by collecting dues.⁴⁵⁶ It seems, in the larger picture that employers did not want union involvement in their plants to change their exploitation of workers; financial gain was the proverbial “bottom line” for them.

The Federal government attempted to combat the exploitation of the nation’s workers specifically with NRA codes, but the employers in Dallas ignored it displaying the pro-business/anti-labor environment in Dallas. While the NRA was in effect, women in Dallas making cotton dresses were supposed to receive \$12 per week while those sewing and crafting silk dresses were to be paid \$14 weekly.⁴⁵⁷ Nevertheless, employers avoided the NRA codes. They did so by claiming workers were in a training period and as such they received only \$9 for a week’s work.⁴⁵⁸ A minimum of two weeks served as a training period, a status they were to be classified as temporarily, but employers kept workers in the classification of training well over the two-week period.⁴⁵⁹

Wisely, Graham understood that the Justin-McCarty firm where she worked avoided the NRA codes in this way and never paid women what was due them-- \$12 a week.⁴⁶⁰ The employers also avoided the maximum workweek by “clocking out” workers, leave the plant, and then return without “punching” the clock.⁴⁶¹ Graham lamented that they worked from 5pm-11pm without pay.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁶ Hield, p. 65

⁴⁵⁷ Hill, p. 6

⁴⁵⁸ Hield, p. 62; Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.10

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid

⁴⁶⁰ Hield, p. 62

⁴⁶¹ Hield, p. 62; Graham, Charlotte interview with Glenn Scott, August 1978, p. 7

⁴⁶² Graham, Charlotte interview with Glenn Scott, August 1978, p.7

“Off the clock” factories, occasionally, opened on Saturdays to “stir around” the NRA.⁴⁶³ The only punishment for NRA violators was that their names would be published.⁴⁶⁴ It seemed that publishing names of employers was not a serious enough punishment to prevent Graham’s factory from violating NRA regulations; thus women workers continued to suffer despite the NRA and New Deal efforts.

Families did not support the union and strikes in all workers’ homes. Charlotte Graham’s mother, for example, cried when she saw her daughter’s involvement displayed in newspaper photos.⁴⁶⁵ Graham empathized with her mother being upset when she recalled, “Women had never walked picket lines. As far as that goes, not many men had walked a picket line in Dallas. I knew very few.”⁴⁶⁶ The *Dallas Morning News* published articles containing the names of the women arrested including Graham’s for their involvement in the 1935 strike.⁴⁶⁷ Both husbands and parents did not want their daughters or wives to strike because of the possibility of losing wages—these were needed by families desperately.⁴⁶⁸ “The idea of Dallas women walking a picket line was unheard of and very upsetting to people...” Graham added.⁴⁶⁹ Women’s involvement in strikes and picket lines were controversial issues even in Graham’s family who had a history

⁴⁶³ Hill, p. 6

⁴⁶⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, “More Wage Earners Put Under NRA as New Codes Offered.” August 9, 1933

⁴⁶⁵ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid

⁴⁶⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, “Injunction Fights Mark Beginning of Dress Plant Strike.” March 8, 1935; *Dallas Morning News*, “Pickets Arrested As Court Orders Are Disregarded.” March 12, 1935

⁴⁶⁸ Hield, p. 65

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid

of union activity through her father's involvement. The possibility of striking and union activity worried many workers' families who were unsure what might occur by means of lost wages needed for economic livelihood.

However, not all women workers were intimidated by their family's or their employers' views; instead, women who worked in the garment factories of Texas "...fought back [against the employers' attempt to keep them "un-unionizing"], using legal and, if necessary, violent actions to secure union contracts."⁴⁷⁰ Charlotte Graham was not discouraged by her family or employer and became involved in unionizing her co-workers in 1934; then she took part in the 1935 garment factory strike in Dallas because of the horrible sweatshop conditions in the factory, the employers' refusal to follow the NRA codes, and employers' refusal to collectively bargain with the unions.⁴⁷¹ She suffered alongside other garment workers because of these issues. According to Graham, those who sought to unionize began meeting in secrecy.⁴⁷² Soon the employers fired twelve women who were talking union in the shop and Graham was warned that she would be next.⁴⁷³ Women attended organizational meetings Graham attempted to hold, but if their boss found out meetings were scheduled, they would stop coming.⁴⁷⁴ As an example to others, the Morten-Davis garment

⁴⁷⁰ Hield, p. 60; *New York Times*, "Women Stripped and 'Spanked' in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police." August 8, 1935

⁴⁷¹ Hield, p.64; Green, p.154

⁴⁷² Hield, p.64; Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, Third Transcribed, p. 2

⁴⁷³ Ibid

⁴⁷⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 9

factory fired four union women.⁴⁷⁵ Graham responded to the threat of being fired by emphasizing freedom of speech existed for people.⁴⁷⁶ They could discuss religion and their children at work without the threat of being fired as long as they continued to do their work.⁴⁷⁷ If that were permissible, therefore, she could talk about unions as she worked.⁴⁷⁸ Graham was determined to defend her right to talk union in the shop and was busy after work continuing to talk union.⁴⁷⁹ Involved in the unions' effort to strike, she remembers urging workers to become union members: "We took cards and tried to get them to sign, and many of them did sign until the bosses started firing people."⁴⁸⁰ Despite this, employers' and family's conservative views failed to intimidate all women who suffered because of low wages and terrible working conditions. Graham stated, "Out of a potential of 800 or 1,000 people, we got about 125 people [to strike and picket.]"⁴⁸¹

Another aspect of the anti-labor/pro-business environment in Dallas was the actions of the Dallas police department. The strike was not only daunting for financial reasons for women like Graham, but the involvement of the Dallas police department was also a cause for concern for women rallying against employers in the city. Police and other "plain clothes men" employed by the manufacturers outnumbered the strikers and picketers to intimidate and spread

⁴⁷⁵ Green, p.154

⁴⁷⁶ Hield, p. 64; Graham, Charlotte interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, pp. 13-14

⁴⁷⁷ Hield, p. 64

⁴⁷⁸ Hield, p. 64

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid

⁴⁸⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 9

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, p. 15

fear.⁴⁸² Employers were cooperating with the police to frighten picketers. Not just content with this tactic, they also used the employers association--the Texas Dress Manufacturers' Association, (TDMA) -- composed of thirteen member garment factories.⁴⁸³ Striking workers discovered that Lester Lorch, a garment factory owner, thwarted strikers by taking advantage of the city's anti-picket laws and use of the police.⁴⁸⁴ The police intimidated the strikers. This occurred because of sheer numbers of police on the picket line.⁴⁸⁵ Names were shouted at the strikers-- taunting them.⁴⁸⁶ The Texas Dress Manufacturers Association provided funds for investigation of picketers by private detectives that later turned into an increase in police brutality of strikers.⁴⁸⁷ In addition, as many as 100 private guards, who carried guns, did their best to harass strikers.⁴⁸⁸ It is unclear whether private guards or police participated in more brutality of strikers. The anti union activities can be applied to Grahams' denial of the CP and her reasons for not joining it.⁴⁸⁹ The CP was more radical than labor unions and during this period organizers and strikers were being beaten by the city police not a great outlook for CP members.

Employers claimed they could not increase the garment workers' wages to the \$12 a week, NRA requirement, but paid private guards \$25 a week, spending

⁴⁸² Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.13; Hield, p.65

⁴⁸³ Ibid

⁴⁸⁴ Hield, p. 65

⁴⁸⁵ Hield, p. 65; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.13

⁴⁸⁶ Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.13

⁴⁸⁷ Hill, p. 11

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid

⁴⁸⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16

a total of \$2,000 on detectives and \$100 on pictures provided by photographers.⁴⁹⁰ The police resorted to unnecessary violence as well as the intimidation of strikers like Bessie Havens who was beaten by the police and hospitalized.⁴⁹¹ Another incident involved a woman who the police threw to the ground hospitalizing her with a hip injury.⁴⁹² Employers and police resorted to many unethical, if not brutal, methods to ensure women workers were afraid of joining the union and striking, but their efforts failed since women did strike against the Dallas garment manufacturers. It is important to realize the environment that affected anyone pro-labor in Dallas a fact not overlooked by the radical communists either. It would have been difficult for a communist in this environment to be active in anyway.

During the strike, Lester Lorch the owner of Lorch textile mills in Dallas and president of the Texas Dress Manufacturers Association (TDMA) wanted the strike called off during the “market week”.⁴⁹³ Beginning in 1929 market week was part of the “...aggressive campaign of advertising and trade promotion...” that was put on by the Wholesale Merchants’ Association beginning during the buying season at the end of January in order to attract buyers and portray Dallas as a market center.⁴⁹⁴ In March, of 1935, 6,000 retail merchants planned to travel

⁴⁹⁰ Hill, p. 11

⁴⁹¹ Ibid

⁴⁹² Hill, p. 9

⁴⁹³ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p.5; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973 p. 15.

⁴⁹⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, “C. of C. Forgets Past Work, Sets New Year Goal.” January 1, 1929

to Dallas for a pre-Easter market that would take place during the first week of April, 1935, where spring and summer merchandise would be displayed.⁴⁹⁵

Lorch assured the ILGWU that after “market week” the strike would be settled.⁴⁹⁶ Newspapers owned by anti-union, anti-communist businessmen of Dallas largely controlled public opinion.⁴⁹⁷ ILGWU organizer Meyer Perlstein, wise to Lorch, knew that the manufacturer was insincere in his promise.⁴⁹⁸ But Perlstein knew that he could not turn the public against the women strikers and the ILGWU, therefore, Perlstein called the picketing off during March.⁴⁹⁹ Once the union and the strikers realized Lorch had lied about settling with the strikers, they began picketing Lester Lorch’s factory.⁵⁰⁰ It was here that the stripping of strikebreakers occurred because strikebreakers were attempting to take the strikers’ jobs and stripping was just a way to drive them away from the garment factories.⁵⁰¹ Historian Hield writes of the incident: “There was almost [a] riot situation in which one scab had her clothes stripped from her and then it continued with other scabs being stripped.”⁵⁰² Graham recalls that it had been the

⁴⁹⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, “Easter Garment To Be Shown to Retail Merchants.” March 5, 1935

⁴⁹⁶ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p.5; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p. 15

⁴⁹⁷ Hill, p. 8

⁴⁹⁸ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p.5; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p. 15

⁴⁹⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 6; Hield, p. 65

⁵⁰⁰ Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.17

⁵⁰¹ Ibid

⁵⁰² Hield, p. 65

police who pressured her to strip scabs.⁵⁰³ One police officer told her to, “Go back and get another one, but I’ll take ya [sic] to jail when it’s over.”⁵⁰⁴ Lester Lorch may have tried to control the strike, but it was his refusal to settle with strikers that caused the strike to become more violent.

The 1935 strike made national and international news even though it only involved around 125-150 women strikers.⁵⁰⁵ The *New York Times* published an article on the stripping of four strikebreakers who were completely naked.⁵⁰⁶ Six other women had their clothes ripped and they were then chased away from the factory as they were scratched and spanked.⁵⁰⁷ Six people were injured including police officers.⁵⁰⁸ Twenty-seven women and three men were arrested for their participation in the riot and stripping event all of which occurred in front of Lorch’s and the Davis-Morten’s factories.⁵⁰⁹ Another act of violence by strikers happened when they assaulted a factory owner, John Donovan.⁵¹⁰ He was attacked by three union women.⁵¹¹ Graham admitted that she was involved in Donovan’s attack along with two others when he left the Chamber of Commerce

⁵⁰³ Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.22

⁵⁰⁴ Hield, p. 65; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p. 22

⁵⁰⁵ Hield, p. 65

⁵⁰⁶ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p.5; *New York Times*, “Women Stripped and ‘Spanked’ in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police.” August 8, 1935

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid

⁵⁰⁸ *New York Times*, “Women Stripped and ‘Spanked’ in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police.” August 8, 1935

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid

⁵¹⁰ Hill, p. 14

⁵¹¹ Ibid

office.⁵¹² The incident was reported and it appeared in the newspaper--he was unable to identify his assailants.⁵¹³ Graham was arrested for striking and picketing during the 1935 strike and therefore it can be assumed she did not fear being arrested for assault.⁵¹⁴ The strikers including Graham were serious about their demands; they wanted the community of workers and those in garment factories to understand they were willing to go to almost any lengths to accomplish what they wanted.

The consequences for stripping the clothes from scabs were arrests and fines. The Chief of Police, Robert Jones, told the women they could have a strike but "...when you cease to be ladies we will arrest you."⁵¹⁵ His comments serve as a reflection of the atmosphere women workers had to deal with in conservative Dallas. To him and others, they were not ladies if they partook in a strike that included violent acts. The persecution of those involved in ripping clothes from scabs happened within a week of the incident and it included fines up to \$25 (at a time when they were only making around \$9 per week) and jail time for participants.⁵¹⁶ However, the ILGWU's manager in Dallas, John Radkin, and Meyer Perlstein, the regional director of the ILGWU, both said that they would continue the strike until their demands of higher wages, shorter hours, the

⁵¹² Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, pp. 19-20

⁵¹³ Ibid

⁵¹⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15; Hield, p. 65

⁵¹⁵ *New York Times*, "Women Stripped and 'Spanked' in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police." August 8, 1935

⁵¹⁶ Hill, p. 13

recognition of the ILGWU in the shop were met.⁵¹⁷ A guarantee that strikers would not be discriminated against because they were involved in the union was an added demand.⁵¹⁸ Those who were arrested had citations for contempt filed against them because the Lorch and Morten-Davis factory had obtained restraining orders against strikers who resorted to violence while picketing.⁵¹⁹ Strikers suffered low wages and horrible work conditions. Factory owners believed they had to be punished for demanding work-related problems be altered another example of the anti-labor/pro-business atmosphere in Dallas.

The garment strike of 1935 lasted an entire year. Graham recalls the strike's conclusion and consequences of her involvement in it, "I went to jail fifty-four times. We didn't let up on the picketing until it was officially called off a year and a day."⁵²⁰ She adds, "The picket lines never let up."⁵²¹ Serving three days in jail for contempt of court, she was arrested another seven times for demonstrating and picketing for the strike on the city's sidewalk.⁵²² The strike did not win or work because "...we weren't strong enough," she lamented.⁵²³ "You can see how many came out here [to strike.] Out of a potential of 800 or 1,000

⁵¹⁷ *New York Times*, "Women Stripped and 'Spanked' in Strike; Garment Workers Battle Dallas Police." August 8, 1935; *Dallas Morning News*, "Women Strippers To Be Objects of Contempt Action." August 9, 1935

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, "Women Strippers To Be Objects of Contempt Action." August 9, 1935.

⁵²⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15; Hield, p. 65

⁵²¹ *Ibid*

⁵²² Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 4; Graham, Charlotte interview by Patsy Putnam, 1973, p.22

⁵²³ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15

people, we got about 125 people [to strike and picket.]”⁵²⁴ Graham and other strikers unidentified revealed their determination and courage against difficulties they faced from employers, police and families for an entire year.

Graham maintained that the Dallas strike was not a complete failure but instead recalled, “ I don’t think you could say Dallas was a mistake of the organizing, do you? I think it was a well-organized Manufacturer’s Association in a very anti-labor city with the backing of big money, along with the police force. The whole community was against us.”⁵²⁵ Even though the strike ended unsuccessfully, Graham thought they all had done their best in the anti-labor/pro-business environment. Graham experienced harsh resistance in her attempt to be a labor activist along with the other strikers suggestive of how difficult the CP would have found Dallas.

Many of those involved in the 1935 strike were blacklisted; the same outcome Tenayuca experienced after the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike. The State Industrial Commission became aware of employers’ blacklisting of strikers, a clear violation of national and state laws.⁵²⁶ The manufacturers and Open Shop Association admitted to the State Industrial Commission that blacklisting would be the fate of those involved in the strike.⁵²⁷ The Commission was only able to

⁵²⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 15

⁵²⁵ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, pp. 11-12,

⁵²⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, “Dressmakers and Employers Present Cases,” July 9, 1935

⁵²⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, “Dressmakers and Employers Present Cases,” July 9, 1935; Hill p. 11

find facts and lacked any power to carry out policies.⁵²⁸ The manufacturers got away with implementing a blacklist, and in an interview Graham mentioned that, “Some of us went down to the streetcar company and even tried to get jobs sweeping the streetcar tracks just to see, to prove our point that we’d been blacklisted. They kept saying there was no blacklist. We made all kinds of tests to prove the blacklist was working.”⁵²⁹ She added, “We tried to get jobs washing dishes everywhere they had signs up... because we didn’t want to leave Dallas. But there wasn’t anyone that would hire us. They had a blackball list.”⁵³⁰ The consequences of being involved in labor movements included banishment from one’s town because of the blacklist, family disappointment, arrest and violent encounters with police.

Along with anti-labor feelings, even stronger anti-communist attitudes were present in Texas. Additional violence against communists was a contributing factor for Graham’s unwillingness to join the CP. The Red Scare affected the nation especially many programs and activities that were labeled Bolshevik, including women’s organizations--the National Woman’s Party and the Women’s International League.⁵³¹ News articles indicated that communist activity was occurring in Texas in the early 1930s. *The New York Times* reported that the KKK

⁵²⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, “Dressmakers and Employers Present Cases,” July 9, 1935

⁵²⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott April 7, 1977, p. 17

⁵³⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p. 33

⁵³¹ Scott, p. 303; Weigand, p. 6

in Dallas, Texas, beat two communists in 1931.⁵³² Communists Lewis Hurst and C.J. Coder, were arrested in Dallas for participating in street demonstrations that included speeches attacking Jim Crow segregation.⁵³³ The two were released but as they left the jail, they were kidnapped (along with their lawyer), driven into the countryside where the two communist men were attacked.⁵³⁴ Evidently their talk of racial equality raised the ire of the KKK who assaulted them.⁵³⁵ The lawyer was threatened by the Klan to never represent communists again.⁵³⁶ The CP's International Labor Defense issued a statement explaining the two men's beating at the hands of the Klan and the refusal of police to arrest the Klan hoodlums.⁵³⁷ The assault was carried out by "... well known business men."⁵³⁸ This incident included kidnapping by vigilantes and an unknown quality of what would happen to a person quite different from Graham's involvement with violence in the 1935 garment strike that was public with several hundred witnesses and while unpleasant held less real fear of death than the communists faced.

The incident received more press coverage on March 29, 1931. There was doubt, the article stated, whether or not the two communists had been beaten and if mob violence occurred; therefore no one expected anyone to be arrested.⁵³⁹ The article went on to describe citizens in Texas relaxing since they no longer had to

⁵³² *New York Times*, "Charges Klan Mob Beat Reds in Texas," March 15, 1931

⁵³³ *Ibid*

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*

⁵³⁵ *New York Times*, "Charges Klan Mob Beat Reds in Texas." March 15, 1931

⁵³⁶ *Ibid*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*

⁵³⁹ *New York Times*, "Red Fuss in Texas Stirs All Classes." March 29, 1931

think about communists having civil rights.⁵⁴⁰ Black citizens, too, no longer had to fear the KKK's retribution over the communists' message of racial equality.⁵⁴¹ CP members were beaten up, according to the newspaper, because of racial equality speeches. But the CP could not accept a city in which communists or African Americans' civil rights were violated.

This incident portrays the danger that came with the anti-communist environment and it may have aided Graham in the conclusion that communism was dangerous for her as well. The KKK was a real threat to African Americans as well as Jewish, Catholic, leftists, and immigrants too.⁵⁴² Hatreds in several different forms thus emerged in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁴³ Those who supported the KKK claimed to be ultra patriots, Protestants and important citizens who linked the Klan with a revival of morality in the country—a morality that had slipped away with the rise of industrialism.⁵⁴⁴ Dallas, Texas, was no exception to the trend with one of the largest chapters in the South—13,000 members.⁵⁴⁵ Coming of age in Dallas, with a racist father, and the national news coverage about communists being beaten in Texas by the KKK, Graham had to have been aware of hatreds.

⁵⁴⁰ *New York Times*, "Red Fuss in Texas Stirs All Classes." March 29, 1931

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁵⁴² McArthur and Smith, p. 67

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*

There are other examples of communists making news in Texas. For example, the Texas Rangers warned oil companies in 1931 that communists were planning to blow up oil plants and oil pipelines.⁵⁴⁶ Perhaps Graham was playing it safe by stating she knew nothing about communists.⁵⁴⁷ She knew that the KKK attacked communists and nothing was done to stop or prevent future attacks on other Texas communists. The Texas Rangers were not to be taken lightly either. They were known to be able to quell riots with one ranger.⁵⁴⁸ They worked their own particular way without any interference, drills, or uniforms, and few regulations to handle problems.⁵⁴⁹ It cannot be discounted that Dallas where the KKK had much power, thrived in anti-communist, anti-labor, racist hostile city environment.

Racism was an effective cause for Graham to not join the CP. Graham was in contact with the issue of race in Texas and California.⁵⁵⁰ Cotton dress companies in Los Angeles employed Mexican and black workers, and while Graham was unionizing workers in the garment industry, 1936-1941, she denied a black woman the opportunity to join the union because black workers were not welcome in Texas unions.⁵⁵¹ Graham admits she was "...raised in Texas with racism, had that upbringing too."⁵⁵² Graham's roots of racism dictated how she

⁵⁴⁶ *New York Times*, "Guard Oil Plants to Foil 'Red Plot'." April 26, 1931.

⁵⁴⁷ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16

⁵⁴⁸ *New York Times*, "Texas Rangers to be 'G' Men." September 8, 1935

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁵⁰ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.41

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 36

⁵⁵² *Ibid*

dealt with African Americans.⁵⁵³ The union culture dictated and supported racial bias and prevented their place in unions. The ILGWU had Mexican and black women as members but few if any became union leaders.⁵⁵⁴ Andrea Martinez, an ILGWU organizer in Laredo during the 1940s, recalled that white women overall had superior jobs in the union compared to Mexican women.⁵⁵⁵ The AFL for example, failed to support 400 black women tobacco workers to organize when they walked out of their factory in 1937.⁵⁵⁶ These black women formed a union, the Tobacco Stemmers and Laborers' Union, with assistance from the Southern Negro Youth Congress and the National Negro Congress a CP affiliated organization.⁵⁵⁷ The AFL and Graham did not think that women of color were capable of union work. Graham could have just been following ILGWU's policy on denying colored women positions within the union. The CP supported black workers' rights therefore if Graham was racist, something the evidence suggest but which is difficult to confirm, it could have been a contributing factor in why she did not become interested in the CP.

The CP dedicated much of its efforts toward racial equality. It sought racial equality within the party and throughout the nation by an educational campaign then one of self-criticism to rid itself of white chauvinism within the

⁵⁵³ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.36

⁵⁵⁴ Hield, p. 68

⁵⁵⁵ Hield, pp. 65, 68

⁵⁵⁶ Strom, p. 370

⁵⁵⁷ Strom, p. 370; Vargas, p. 180

party.⁵⁵⁸ The CP believed that racism prevented the unity of workers that was necessary for its revolution to transform society and that it helped the ruling class/employers.⁵⁵⁹ The CP went so far as to publicly expose members who were racists by putting them on trial and prosecuting them in an integrated workers' court of the party's.⁵⁶⁰ Members of the party in Seattle were dismissed when they objected to black workers at their social events.⁵⁶¹ The CP's commitment on race became public by its defense of nine black men in the Scottsboro, Alabama case and by supporting integration of the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama.⁵⁶² This also helped them gain a black membership of 9% by the mid-1930s.⁵⁶³ Attempting to change the nation's attitude toward race, the CP, as described earlier, met resistance in Texas and elsewhere and could have factored into Graham's decision not to be a part of the CP.

Graham, labeled a communist by the garment factories, remembers, "Of course, the companies branded us as commies. Perlstein was branded as a commie, and we didn't even know what a communist was. We thought it was something you looked under the bed for."⁵⁶⁴ Graham understood communists to be monster like beings hiding under beds. Graham's sister, a Republican, called Graham a communist thinking it was the most terrible thing you could call

⁵⁵⁸ Weigand, p. 19

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid

⁵⁶¹ Ibid

⁵⁶² Weigand, p. 21

⁵⁶³ Ibid

⁵⁶⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 16

someone.⁵⁶⁵ Ironically, Perlstein had actually been involved in the removal of communists from the ILGWU in the 1920s, a fact unknowingly or conveniently forgotten by the Dallas community.⁵⁶⁶ Another influence for Graham's denial of the CP and non-membership was the ILGWU's anti-communist environment. However, Graham's explanation of what communists were during the 1930s is interesting even though she portrays her negative views by stating they were things under beds. Homer Brooks, a CP member who ran for governor of Texas for the party, stated there were 600 or so CP members in Texas.⁵⁶⁷ Communists were present in Texas as exclaimed by Tenayuca's chapter. Raised by a father who was an avowed racist and having an anti-red sister complicated matters for Graham and can be seen as contributing factors for her denial of the CP and her non-membership status along with the ILGWU's anti-communist views.

The ILGWU's anti-communist feelings among its leaders including both David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU, and Meyer Perlstein southwest regional organizer was an influential factor contributing to Graham's denial of the CP.⁵⁶⁸ David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU, believed that communists in the CIO were to blame for the fighting between the AFL and CIO and he wanted the communists purged.⁵⁶⁹ Dubinsky argued with John Lewis about letting communists into the CIO and warned it would cause disasters but Lewis ignored

⁵⁶⁵ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p. 27

⁵⁶⁶ Hill, p. 9

⁵⁶⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, "State Red Aide Calls Dies Quiz Hysteria Body." July 26, 1940

⁵⁶⁸ Foner, pp.160-161; Klehr, p. 250; Cochran, pp.97-98.

⁵⁶⁹ *New York Times*, "Hague Begs Nation To Ban C.I.O. Reds." January 13,1938

him.⁵⁷⁰ Dubinsky and Meyer Perlstein detested the communist presence in the CIO, and the ILGWU had been against a leftist influence, since the 1920s, specifically the communistic Trade Union Education League who they condemned as promoting dual unionism.⁵⁷¹ The ILGWU departed from the communist-labeled CIO in 1938 and joined the American Federation of Labor an anti-communist union.⁵⁷² Graham's two bosses, Perlstein and his boss Dubinsky, were both anti-communist, a logical explanation of why Graham denied the CP. If she wanted to stay with the ILGWU then she would not go against their anti-communist policies. The CP was small in Texas and the nation and it attracted violent attacks from vigilantes. She likely saw little advantage and great disadvantage to joining.

Graham was loyal to the ILGWU and continued to work for them after the 1935 strike. She went to Los Angeles a month after the 1935 strike was called off to continue her work as a union organizer.⁵⁷³ The ILGWU was also loyal to Graham and made sure she remained employed. Graham stated, "The picket lines were called off [in Dallas] and we were told that there was [*sic*] places [jobs] in other cities and we'd done a good job."⁵⁷⁴ The ability to keep her job as an

⁵⁷⁰ Cochran, pp.97-98

⁵⁷¹ Foner, pp.160-161; Hill, p.9

⁵⁷² *Dallas Morning News*, "Garment Union Quits CIO to Force Peace." November 12, 1938; Renshaw, Patrick. "Why Shouldn't a Union Man be a Union Man? The ILGWU and FOUR." *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1995, p.186

⁵⁷³ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.41; Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 17

⁵⁷⁴ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, April 7, 1977, p. 17

ILGWU organizer after being blacklisted influenced her to stay with the ILGWU contributing to her adoption of their policies on communists.

Another contributing factor to Graham's support of the ILGWU and their policies on the CP was her belief that the ILGWU was an egalitarian union, supporting women's rights. Graham took the position that it was insignificant if one were a woman in the labor strikes and union work—women had a mission to fulfill. Graham insisted that the men in ILGWU felt she was their equal, "They didn't think of me as a woman. They were aware we were women, but we were one of them, and [being a] woman didn't have that much to do with it."⁵⁷⁵ She added, "We just had a different face and a different profile. If we had wanted to use the fact that we were a lady to last, we would not have lasted."⁵⁷⁶ Her belief that the ILGWU was treating her well would have lead her to support the union and its policies even those on the CP.

Graham's relationship with Meyer Perlstein, the IGLWU organizer, is an example of how much the ILGWU had influence over her. Perlstein and Graham argued over everything that Graham did. What she wore, what she ate and where she had her meals all were sources of friction between Perlstein and Graham.⁵⁷⁷ Perlstein attempted to control all of Graham's actions while she was working for him.⁵⁷⁸ Graham stated she had the upmost respect for Perlstein.⁵⁷⁹ The close

⁵⁷⁵ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, p.1

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.20-22

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid

relationship that Graham had with Perlstein would have included his thoughts on other matters perhaps his previous expulsion of communist from the ILGWU especially since he was dictating where Graham went for dinner. The child-like treatment she received and her continued employment by the ILGWU portrays the great influence it wielded over her a reason for an unwavering support and acceptance of ILGWU's policies against communism.

Graham's involvement and loyalty to the ILGWU was extensive. She was not part of the CP and described communist as things you looked under your bed for. There were many contributing factors for her decision to not to join the CP including the hostile anti-labor/anti-communist environment within the nation and in Texas, the ILGWU's anti-communist attitude and either her or the ILGWU's racism. The danger of communistic activity because of the violent environment and her support of the ILGWU whose leaders were anti-communists both influenced Graham greatly in her decision to deny communism and the CP. Graham was not the only woman who was involved in labor activities and who did not find the CP appealing.

⁵⁷⁹ Graham, Charlotte and Latane Lambert interview by Glenn Scott, December 26, 1978, pp.20-22

CHAPTER V
REBECCA TAYLOR, THE ILGWU AND HER OPPOSITION TO THE
COMMUNIST PARTY IN SAN ANTONIO

Rebecca Taylor organized garment workers in San Antonio for the ILGWU in the mid-1930s throughout the Great Depression, but was not involved in the Communist Party. She lived in San Antonio during a period when Emma Tenayuca was also organizing workers in the pecan shelling industry and was an active communist. Taylor's involvement in several garment strikes during the period will be discussed, hereafter displaying the national and Texas anti-labor/pro-business environment. Her involvement was important because like Graham she was willing to risk being arrested and experienced other negative outcomes from being involved. Her family history is explored along with her education background highlighting her elite or middle class status. Garment workers in San Antonio worked under sweatshop conditions in factories and did homework for barely subsistence wages during the era of Taylor's activism.⁵⁸⁰ Factors that

⁵⁸⁰ Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Women of the Depression: Cast and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, pp. 96-99, 103; Women in San Antonio working for garment factories experienced the same work conditions that Graham has described.

contributed to Taylor's rejection of the CP include the national and Texas political environment, which will be discussed through the exploration of her labor activism, her elite/non-working class status and rejection of the left in general. A major reason for her rejection of the CP was the success she experienced in the ILGWU as a union organizer. The reasons for Taylor's refusal of the CP and the left are not conclusive, but are instead assumptions based upon evidence about her and her involvement in the labor movement. Absolute answers on why Taylor did not join the CP would require further research and could still be considered circumstantial.

A contributing factor for Taylor was opposed to the CP was because of her family's negative dealings with the Mexican Revolution, a radical event. Taylor, an Anglo, was born in Mexico where she came into contact with the Mexican Revolution of 1910 in which her family's property including land was seized, as she states in an oral interview.⁵⁸¹ Taylor's father was a manager of Mexico's interest in a US oil company until Mexico nationalized its oil resources and the family had to flee Mexico and move to San Antonio.⁵⁸² The Mexican Revolution resulted in Taylor's family home and property being confiscated thus turning her against any radical leftist organization. Taylor stated in an oral interview with historian George Green that she did not think that leftist political views helped

Poor ventilation, unsanitary toilets, few toilets, and not enough setting areas were just a few of the problems San Antonio garment workers faced.

⁵⁸¹ Green, George N. "ILGWU in Texas, 1930-1970." *The Journal of Mexican American History*, Vol. 1, No.2, Spring, 1971, p. 159

⁵⁸² Blackwelder, p. 145

anyone not even the labor unions.⁵⁸³ The CP was supportive of labor's freedom from capitalism and the workers taking control of the nation through a revolution as explained earlier. Taylor's negative experience with the Mexican Revolution made her opposed to radical ideas and radicals.⁵⁸⁴

Taylor was in the non-working educated elite-middle class compared to working class people. She went to Sullins, an all-girl school, and then earned a B.A. in speech from Curry College in Boston.⁵⁸⁵ Taylor grew up in middle to upper class unlike Charlotte Graham or Emma Tenayuca (who lived in the poverty stricken West Side of San Antonio) who were both unable to attend college in the 1930s. Graham remembers that workers and workers' families did not think about going on to school or have the money to do so even if they had wanted more education.⁵⁸⁶ Tenayuca went to high school and remembers it fondly, but did not attend college until she moved from San Antonio to Houston in the 1940s.⁵⁸⁷ The differences are drastic between these three women and Taylor stands out as the more privileged union organizer because of her Northeastern education.

⁵⁸³ Green, p. 160; the oral interview is in the possession of Professor Green and is not at any archives; therefore, there I am unable to quote Rebecca Taylor.

⁵⁸⁴ Green, p. 159

⁵⁸⁵ Green, p. 159; Blackwelder, p. 145

⁵⁸⁶ Charlotte Graham interview by Glenn Scott, August 1978, UT Arlington Special Collection, Labor Archives, pp.1-2

⁵⁸⁷ Emma Tenayuca interview by Emilio Zamora, San Antonio, Texas, June 1986, p.1, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection; US Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, file #100-1873 Emma Tenayuca, Houston, December 15, 1942; Tenayuca attended Taylor Defense School in Houston, Texas.

Taylor was not a worker in the San Antonio factories like Graham and did not deal with the same obstacles Tenayuca faced; this can be considered as influential to her aversion to the CP. Taylor instead was a teacher and gave up teaching school in San Antonio in order to earn additional money to educate workers under Meyer Perlstein with the IGLWU in 1935.⁵⁸⁸ Her attraction to union activity was based on financial gains not necessarily helping workers in their struggles. The ILGWU wanted an educational director-- someone who would be able to speak Spanish and English, a talent Taylor possessed perhaps from all the years spent in school and in Mexico.⁵⁸⁹ Rebecca Taylor has been identified as “one of the strongest educational efforts of San Antonio,” according to historian George Green, even though as a whole the ILGWU failed at educating members on the benefits of unionism.⁵⁹⁰ Rebecca Taylor joined the ILGWU for financial gain alone recorded as her motivation by historian Green’s interview.⁵⁹¹ Taylor’s motivation for involvement in the labor movement in Texas was drastically different than Tenayuca and Graham, both of whom sought to help others while never seeking financial gain. Taylor was also in a quite different role within the ILGWU than Graham or Tenayuca. Taylor was educating workers not organizing them. Taylor’s monetary concern was in opposition to the CP’s policy whose concern was the working class rising up.

⁵⁸⁸ Green, p. 159

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, p. 160

Wages affecting women workers in Texas is important in understanding why the ILGWU and labor organizations were needed along with Taylor's organizational career. In exploring Taylor's labor activism the pro-business environment in Texas is described a contributing factor for Taylor's rejection of the CP. San Antonio was an important garment manufacturing city along with Dallas, Houston and Laredo.⁵⁹² There were as many as 8,000 women in Texas involved in factory work estimated from the 1936 study by the U.S. Department of Labor from a total of 15,343 women reporting to the study.⁵⁹³ The 1936 Department of Labor study used data from one week in February of 1932 from a total of 369 working establishments.⁵⁹⁴ Half of these women in factories worked over fifty hours a week while thirty percent reported they worked over 54 hours a week.⁵⁹⁵ It was reported that Mexican women earned in these specific industries: \$5.50 in men's work clothing, \$5.45 in women's clothing, \$2.65 in nut-shelling, \$9 in department/read-to-wear stores, \$6.35 in laundries, and \$9.25 in limited prices stores (reference is weekly wage).⁵⁹⁶ In addition, there were 898 Mexican women employed in the clothing industries in Texas including men's work, women's, infants' and children's of a total 2,857 Mexican women working in

⁵⁹² Green, p. 145

⁵⁹³ Sullivan, Mary Loretta. *Women in Texas Industries*. US Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1936. p. 2, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Harvard University

⁵⁹⁴ Sullivan, p. 1

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 7

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 8

industry who reported to the 1936 Department of Labor study.⁵⁹⁷ Mexican women who worked at home (almost all the homeworkers were Mexican) making infants' and children's garments and handkerchiefs earned 1-12 cents less per hour.⁵⁹⁸ Mexican women, of course, who worked in San Antonio and Laredo's garment factories were paid far less than what the garment actually sold for in retail stores.⁵⁹⁹ If their work was rejected, they were not paid; their paydays thus were inconsistent.⁶⁰⁰ Data from a Woman's Bureau study suggest that 52.4% of the 2,748 Mexican women who worked in factories, laundries and stores earned less than \$6 a week while only 25.2% of white women earned less than \$6 a week.⁶⁰¹ African American women were paid low wages as well. Of the 248 African American women who worked in factories included in the 1936 Women's Bureau study only 8 earned as much as \$10 weekly.⁶⁰² African American women at least the majority, in the state, worked in laundries with a median wage of \$7.25 and factories with a median wage of \$3.75 weekly.⁶⁰³ It remains clear that women, especially Mexican and African American women, workers suffered under low wages in Texas. This situation created a need for unions or organizations that would relieve the suffering and combat the employers' abuse of workers.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 2

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 8

⁵⁹⁹ Hield, Melissa, "Union-Minded: Women in the Texas ILGWU, 1933-50." *A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer, 1979), p. 61

⁶⁰⁰ Hield, p. 61

⁶⁰¹ Sullivan, p. 23

⁶⁰² Ibid, p. 27

⁶⁰³ Ibid

They suffered from long hours and other nuisances because of the lack of regulations in workplaces. In 1936, through a Women's Bureau study, Texas authorities revealed the lack of regulations for women working before they gave birth or afterwards, or in their lifting heavy weights.⁶⁰⁴ Washington State, for example, prohibited women from working 4 months before giving birth and 6 weeks after they gave birth.⁶⁰⁵ Texas prohibited in general women pregnant or not from working more than 54 hours a week, but there were many exceptions to this rule.⁶⁰⁶ If employees were consulted and agreed to working extra hours, they could do so if they were paid double or if they worked more than nine-hours a day.⁶⁰⁷ Minimum wage laws in Texas in 1936 were non-existent with no regulation for homework.⁶⁰⁸ Texas labor laws, benefited the employers more than working women.

Mexican women were employed in Texas factories with a total of 1, 916 and they earned a median weekly wage of \$5.40 with as many as 600 earning less than \$4 weekly.⁶⁰⁹ White women earned more with a median wage of \$7.45 and a

⁶⁰⁴ Smith, Florence P. *State Labor Laws for Women: Hours, Home Work, Prohibited or Regulated Occupations, Seats, Minimum Wage*. US Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1937, pp.8-9, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Harvard University

⁶⁰⁵ Smith, pp.8-9

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 27

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid

⁶⁰⁸ Smith, pp. 3, 12

⁶⁰⁹ Sullivan, p. 24; There is discrepancy between the US Department of Labor's 1936 Texas study and Blackwelder's findings listed Appendix B in Table 18. (Blackwelder, p. 214) Blackwelder reports that there were 7,294 Mexican women working in San Antonio in 1930. (Blackwelder, p. 214) Blackwelder finds her data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population, vol. 3, pt.6, Texas. (Blackwelder, p. 214)

total of 5,736 white women working in Texas factories.⁶¹⁰ The ILGWU began organizing workers in San Antonio in 1933 and it proved to be successful in creating two ILGWU locals the following year.⁶¹¹ A grassroots drive by workers made public their despair.⁶¹² The ILGWU initially was unsuccessful in obtaining union contracts from the garment factories in San Antonio because these plants closed once unionization occurred.⁶¹³ The A.B. Frank factory exemplified this.⁶¹⁴ Another tactic, of the Halff factory, was to begin a new line of work to escape unionization.⁶¹⁵ San Antonio, however, had more victories in unionizing than the other garment cities in Texas.⁶¹⁶ The ILGWU's unsteady start would persist through a long struggle including many ups and downs in San Antonio to unionize garment workers and to improve working conditions in factories. Taylor was part of its journey—keeping pace with the union's efforts.

Fortunately, the ILGWU would experience success in the 1930s due to Meyer Perlstein's and Rebecca Taylor's diligence. As ILGWU organizers, they established locals in San Antonio.⁶¹⁷ Fighting hard, they prevailed in contracts with the Texas Infants, Juvenile firms and the Dorothy Frocks garment factories.⁶¹⁸ This success led to Taylor's advancement in the organization to

⁶¹⁰ Sullivan, p. 21

⁶¹¹ Hield, p. 63; Blackwelder, p. 135

⁶¹² Blackwelder, p. 136

⁶¹³ Hield, p. 63; Blackwelder, p. 137

⁶¹⁴ Ibid

⁶¹⁵ Ibid

⁶¹⁶ Hield, p. 63

⁶¹⁷ Green, p. 145, Blackwelder, p. 135

⁶¹⁸ Green, p. 145

director of the educational program of the ILGWU, a position in which she served from the late 1930s to the 1940s.⁶¹⁹ Workers wanted the ILGWU in San Antonio, as elsewhere, to save them from exploitation.⁶²⁰ Taylor's success in the ILGWU is a contributing factor for why she did not look to the CP as an avenue for success. Her success would be reason for her to not look elsewhere.

Perlstein, an anti-communist, directed the ILGWU to persevere and led to the 1936 garment strike in San Antonio involving Taylor.⁶²¹ Perlstein was Taylor's boss who was against communists yet another reason for Taylor's aversion to the CP. Workers walked out at the Dorothy Frocks factory, a completely union--organized factory.⁶²² Local businessmen there claimed that ninety percent of the garment workers were satisfied with their jobs; nevertheless these businessmen felt threatened by the likelihood of 500 women workers walking out.⁶²³ The strike gave garment working women an empowerment to threaten leading businessmen. Mayor Quinn quieted the employers fears and demands for aid by promising to protect them "...even if the city has to deputize businessmen."⁶²⁴ The Mayor chose to support the employers and their wishes before the strike occurred revealing the pro-business attitude in San Antonio.

⁶¹⁹ Hield, p. 63

⁶²⁰ Ibid

⁶²¹ Hield, p. 63; Blackwelder, p. 138

⁶²² Ibid

⁶²³ *Dallas Morning News*, "Strike Threat Heard; City to Aid Employers." October 2, 1936

⁶²⁴ Ibid

While Taylor was actively involved in the ILGWU, the San Antonio strikers in 1936, publicly stripped clothing from scabs who were replacing them in the Dorothy Frocks factory, like the Dallas strike in 1935.⁶²⁵ Strikers also picketed the Esser Manufacturing factory, making dresses as a sub-contractor for the Dorothy Frocks' company.⁶²⁶ At the Esser factory twenty picketers gathered and ripped clothes from a woman while scratching and bruising her.⁶²⁷ Eggs became "bombs," thrown at scabs.⁶²⁸ Lunches were stolen, and hair yanked as they were tearing scabs' garments.⁶²⁹ Subsequently, many arrests were made during the melee or strike.⁶³⁰ At one point, the strike turned into a riot as one woman was dragged by a car while strikers and workers fought the police who used sticks against them.⁶³¹ As many as thirty women charged into police lines to get to the scabs police were protecting.⁶³² Many were injured in the riot, five people were arrested, and fifteen had charges filed against them.⁶³³

⁶²⁵ Green, p. 145; Blackwelder, p. 138

⁶²⁶ *San Antonio Light*, "Strip Clothes from Striker." May 22, 1936

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*

⁶²⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, "Seven Strike Pickets Placed Under Arrest." July 3, 1936; *San Antonio Light*, "Two Women Booked in Strike." May 26, 1936; *San Antonio Light*, "Women Held in Strike Fight." May 29, 1936

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*

⁶³⁰ *Ibid*

⁶³¹ *Dallas Morning News*, "Trouble Flares In San Antonio Garment Strike." June 9, 1936

⁶³² *The Breckenridge American*, "The San Antonio Strike Breakers Guarded." June 28, 1936, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Breckenridge Library, Breckenridge, Texas.

⁶³³ *Dallas Morning News*, "Trouble Flares In San Antonio Garment Strike." June 9, 1936

The owners of Dorothy Frocks wanted to make sure this kind of violence never happened at their factory again.⁶³⁴ They, the owners, sought a ban in a San Antonio court to limit picketers to a small number--the city obliged the factory.⁶³⁵ The court injunction against the strikers included a prohibition of violence at the plant as well as a limitation on the number of picketers.⁶³⁶ Importantly, the anti-labor attitude of employers in San Antonio also affected how the police would react to striking women in San Antonio.

The anti-labor attitude continued in 1936 revealed by the owner of the garment factory's unwillingness to sign union contracts with the ILGWU and then their subsequent escape from San Antonio to avoid the union.⁶³⁷ The ILGWU, not to be outdone, picketed the plant in Dallas once it relocated.⁶³⁸ Willing San Antonio strikers came to help the Dallas ILGWU picket the old San Antonio factory (now in Dallas) with signs that read, "Run away from San Antonio to avoid paying living wage".⁶³⁹ Mrs. Schwartz, the employer, stated that the employees in San Antonio were working on the piece rate system making around \$40 a week.⁶⁴⁰ An unlikely occurrence --such wages--since the Women's Bureau

⁶³⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "Trouble Flares In San Antonio Garment Strike." June 9, 1936; *Dallas Morning News*, "Seven Strike Pickets Placed Under Arrest." July 3, 1936; Blackwelder, p. 138

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*

⁶³⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, "Seven Strike Pickets Placed Under Arrest." July 3, 1936; *The Breckenridge American*, "The San Antonio Strike Breakers Guarded." June 28, 1936, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Breckenridge Library, Breckenridge, Texas

⁶³⁷ Hield, p. 63

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*

⁶³⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, "Strikers Picket New Dress Firm." September 22, 1936

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid*

had found in 1932 that Mexican and black women in Texas earned around a median wage of \$5.85 to \$5.60 a week; although white women earned a median wage of \$6.50 a week, the amount was not even close to the wages Schwartz claimed.⁶⁴¹ The Dallas ILGWU decided that it would support the San Antonio's ILGWU efforts when workers picketed the San Antonio factory.⁶⁴² Continued picketing drove the owner to sign a contract by November of 1936, but in Dallas, not San Antonio.⁶⁴³ The 1936 strike was not necessarily a win for San Antonio women, but it was a success for the ILGWU because it gained a contract with a run-away shop. It displayed that the ILGWU in Texas had influence.⁶⁴⁴

In 1937 Myrle Zappone, an ILGWU organizer, led workers to strike against the Shirlee Frock Company a manufacturer of infant's and children's

⁶⁴¹ Hield, p. 61; Sullivan, pp. 8, 14,

⁶⁴² *Dallas Morning News*, "Strikers Picket New Dress Firm." September 22, 1936

⁶⁴³ Hield, p. 63

⁶⁴⁴ One aspect of the period to consider are the literary works that influenced society. *Dallas Morning News*, "Pair Prizes Offered For Play That Deal With Labor Problems." August 14, 1936: During the 1936 strike, the ILGWU held a contest for the best theatrical play that dealt with labor issues, "...the first contest of this kind in the history of the American labor movement"; Odets, Clifford. *Waiting for Lefty*, (1935) Clifford Odets. New York: Random House, 1933, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1939 New York: Twayne Publishing, 1962: One Great Depression playwright was Clifford Odets who wrote many plays including *Waiting for Lefty*, published during the outbreak of the garment strikes in 1935; Also refer to Steinbeck, John. *East of Eden*. 1952. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 2003; Stokes, Rose Pastor. *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1916: Another literary work about unions and labor activity was Rose Pastor Stokes' drama, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, a play about the rights of women to live independently from men written in 1916; Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Enstad describes the working class women in the early 1900s who read dime novels were inspired by the women characters who were working class too who became heroines and free from gender, class, work, family and ethnicity. (pp. 50, 72-75, Enstad) Dime novel working class women characters changed the idea of true ladyhood to include those who had adventures and who were workers could be considered ladies as well. (p. 77, Enstad) The working women who went on strike during the 1909 NY shirtwaist strike considered themselves ladies inspired by the dime novels to fight the villains or employers. (pp. 75, 83, Enstad)

clothing.⁶⁴⁵ During the strike Taylor assumed the role of public relations person for workers expressing their opinions to the public.⁶⁴⁶ A major complaint voiced by workers was that homework was required of them.⁶⁴⁷ As discussed earlier, homeworkers could earn less than a cent per hour--a major concern for those suffering under those conditions.⁶⁴⁸ The factory, in turn, was dependent on women who worked at home; these women made up the majority of those who picketed the factory.⁶⁴⁹ The IGLWU, with tenacity, held to its efforts through another strike despite the previous 1936 strike's failure.

The *New York Times* reported on the 1937 ILGWU strike describing it as sporadic--involving only fifty women.⁶⁵⁰ The national news downplayed the seriousness of the strike in San Antonio when in reality eighty or more strikers were arrested during one day of the strike.⁶⁵¹ The garment workers' wanted the ILGWU recognized as the bargaining agent and held out for NRA wages and hours.⁶⁵² Interestingly, the owner of the Shirlee Frock Company claimed there was no strike and that picketing was illegal because those workers at home were not real employees to the employer displaying the pro-business/anti-labor attitudes.⁶⁵³ Of course they could do work for him, but he did not consider them

⁶⁴⁵ Hield, p. 63

⁶⁴⁶ Blackwelder, p. 139

⁶⁴⁷ Vargas, p. 128

⁶⁴⁸ Sullivan, p. 8

⁶⁴⁹ Hield, p. 63

⁶⁵⁰ *New York Times*, "Midwest Is Center of Sit-Down Fever." March 21, 1937

⁶⁵¹ Hield, p. 63

⁶⁵² *New York Times*, "Midwest Is Center of Sit-Down Fever." March 21, 1937

⁶⁵³ Hield, p. 63

to be actual employees--yet another obstacle women workers faced in San Antonio. During the strike, the owner teamed up with the police and mayor of San Antonio, all pro-business, to harass strikers and picketers to have them arrested.⁶⁵⁴ During the 1937 strike, arrests were commonplace. San Antonio police arrested eighty or more picketers more than once in a day for allegedly blocking sidewalks, vagrancy and unlawful assembly.⁶⁵⁵ Court injunctions were used that restricted the number of picketers to three as well as prohibiting banners.⁶⁵⁶ It is no secret, and obvious that police, employers, mayor, and the court system all attempted to limit labor demonstrations and labor activism.

The 1937 strike was successful because of the National Labor Relations Board. The National Labor Relations Board was created out of the Wagner National Labor Relations Act in 1935 to guarantee that workers could organize and that their union representative would bargain with employers.⁶⁵⁷ The NLRB also attempted to prevent employers from discriminating against union workers; employers now were to bargain and support company unions.⁶⁵⁸ The employers must have known as Taylor said, “We (the union) weren’t going away.”⁶⁵⁹

During the 1937 strike, Rebecca Taylor asked for an investigation. She had at least two concerns: manufacturers were trying to get rid of a living wage;

⁶⁵⁴ Hield, p. 63; Blackwelder, p. 139

⁶⁵⁵ Hield, p. 63

⁶⁵⁶ Vargas, p. 128

⁶⁵⁷ Kennedy, David M. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in the Great Depression*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 290

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid

⁶⁵⁹ Hield, p. 64

and she wanted to know how the police were profiling Mexican garment workers.⁶⁶⁰ San Antonio Police Commissioner Wright maintained that the city did not recognize the strike, no compromise would be forthcoming between the factory and picketers, and that picketing at the Shirlee Frock Company would be prohibited.⁶⁶¹ In response, Taylor exhibited Social Security cards and pay envelopes to prove that workers who were picketing were in fact employees of the Shirlee Frock Company to combat the owner's and others' positions that those on the line were not employed there.⁶⁶² In a small victory, the ILGWU won a restraining order against Mayor Quinn and Police Commissioner Wright to prevent them from arresting picketers.⁶⁶³ Picketing and intervention by the National Labor Relations Board made the 1937 strike a success with a contract signed with the ILGWU.⁶⁶⁴ Taylor's involvement in the ILGWU's successful 1937 strike is a contributing factor for why there was no reason for her to look to another organization if she was earning money and was an effective employee of the ILGWU.

The aggressiveness of Mexican garment women who went on strike, impressed ILGWU organizers such as, Myrle Zappone and Rebecca Taylor.⁶⁶⁵ The contract in the shop with the ILGWU removed low wages they were forced to

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 63

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, p. 64

⁶⁶² Hield, p. 64

⁶⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁶⁴ Hield, pp. 63-64; *Dallas Morning News*, "CIO Wins Strike." August 5, 1937

⁶⁶⁵ Vargas, p. 128

endure and increased pay to twenty cents per hour or \$8 a week.⁶⁶⁶ The work week decreased to 40 hours and to five days.⁶⁶⁷ The contract required fired strikers to be rehired and forced scabs to join the ILGWU or leave the shop.⁶⁶⁸ Now this was a monumental win for the ILGWU especially when compared to its 1936 strike outcome. Taylor's participation played a major role in the success since she emerged as one of the union leaders.

The ILGWU's success in 1937, woefully did not free the garment factories of San Antonio from work problems. In 1938 the ILGWU led another strike against the Texas Infants' Dress Company.⁶⁶⁹ Here strikers demanded wages to be increased, hours decreased, and the piece rate system abolished.⁶⁷⁰ Workers at the Texas Infant Dress Company walked out on strike for four months in 1938, and were met with violence and lawsuits.⁶⁷¹ Like in so many other strikes, during the Great Depression, the San Antonio police again arrested strikers and picketers for numerous reasons including obstructing the sidewalk and unlawful assembly.⁶⁷² In an old tactic, the factory manager, Jay Nedler denied that there was a strike because employees belonged to the company union, the Council Garment

⁶⁶⁶ Hield, p. 64; *Dallas Morning News*, "CIO Wins Strike." August 5, 1937

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁶⁸ Hield, p. 64

⁶⁶⁹ Hield, p. 64

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid

⁶⁷¹ Green, p. 162

⁶⁷² Ibid, p. 145

Workers Union, and because many women did homework thus work at the factory continued.⁶⁷³

The end result was that the garment factory recognized the union, the shop became unionized in the ILGWU, and three other companies signed contracts helping establish the ILGWU as the bargaining agent.⁶⁷⁴ The ILGWU with the help of the National Labor Relations Board charged that the company union was not a bargaining agent because it had forced workers to join it with their wages taken to pay dues.⁶⁷⁵ Rebecca Taylor one of the IGLWU's organizers and representatives during the 1938 strike helped obtain the right to organize workers in the ILGWU and assisted in eliminating the company union.⁶⁷⁶ Unfortunately, wages and hours changed minimally and the ILGWU failed to get Mexican women fired for striking rehired after the strike was over.⁶⁷⁷ The result of the 1938 strike was that it failed to be as successful as the 1937 strike; but Taylor was effective in unionizing the shop under the ILGWU and ridding it of the faux union, the company union. The importance of reviewing Taylor's labor activism is to establish the anti-labor environment she and other labor activists experienced. It has also been to show Taylor's success working in the ILGWU and its success in San Antonio. If it was this difficult to be involved in a labor union and Taylor was successful in it then this is considerable reason for Taylor to

⁶⁷³ Hield, p. 64

⁶⁷⁴ Green, p. 162; Vargas, p. 128

⁶⁷⁵ Hield, p. 64

⁶⁷⁶ Hield, p. 64

⁶⁷⁷ Green, p. 162; Hield, p. 64

not join the CP an organization that would have received even harsher, violent treatment revealed earlier.

There are other reasons why Taylor may have been so anti-leftist. The Dies Committee was another anti-labor/anti-radical attitudes in addition to employers that existed in the Texas and U.S. environment. In 1938 the Dies Committee was active investigating un-American activities especially communism.⁶⁷⁸ The communists were not the only group the Dies Committee found to be troubling. Throughout the Dies Committee's existence it investigated the German-American Bund, the CIO, Brooklyn College, Federal Theater and Writers' Project, Nazism, the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota, sit-down strikes and the American Civil Liberties Union.⁶⁷⁹ The Dies' Committee also found the new labor movement tactic of sit-down strikes, begun in 1936, to be suspicious.⁶⁸⁰ The Texan also pushed for an Americanism league to support stringent immigration and deportation laws and to block foreigners with "Nazi ideas" along with those favoring communism.⁶⁸¹ Dies and his committee felt strongly that communists were detrimental to the US.⁶⁸² This atmosphere affected many and Taylor was surely no exception to the hysteria.

⁶⁷⁸ Carr, Robert K. *The House Committee on Un-American Activities 1945-1950*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1952, p. vii, pp.1-2; Saunders, D.A. "The Dies Committee: First Phase." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Apr., 1939), p. 225; Isserman, Maurice. *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1982, p. 48

⁶⁷⁹ Carr, p. 18

⁶⁸⁰ Strom, p. 364; Carr, p. 18

⁶⁸¹ *New York Times*, "Dies Plans to Form Americanism League." September 21, 1938

⁶⁸² Isserman, p. 48; Carr, pp.1-2

The Daughters of the American Revolution members chanted for Dies to become president at a mass meeting on national defense in April of 1939.⁶⁸³ Organizations were not the only support Dies and his committee received. L. B. Russell of Comanche, Texas, stated in the *Dallas Morning News* that he was “...heart and soul with the Dies investigating committee...” of un-American activities and described Dies as one of “...real manhood caliber.”⁶⁸⁴ An editor of the *Sweetwater Report*, local Texas newspaper in Sweetwater, encouraged Dies and stated that Texans should be proud of the native who was from Orange, Texas.⁶⁸⁵ The editor thought that Dies and his committee should receive additional funds and improved cooperation with the Department of Labor especially Secretary Perkins.⁶⁸⁶ The editor agreed with Dies’ investigating of communists and of those who supported them.⁶⁸⁷ Other newspapers around the country joined in and published much about the Committee’s concerns while Dies used the radio to publicize as well.⁶⁸⁸ If Taylor was already unsure about leftist’s intentions, then the Dies’ Committee and the support it received could have pushed her into adopting views much like those of Dies—communism was horrible and had to be extricated. Taylor could not have been unaffected by the

⁶⁸³ *Dallas Morning News*, “DAR Booms Martin Dies For President.” April 19, 1939

⁶⁸⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, “Letters From Readers.” December 20, 1938

⁶⁸⁵ *Sweetwater Reporter* “Editorial Page.” September 12, 1938, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Sweetwater/Nolan County City-County Library, Sweetwater, Texas.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁸⁸ Saunders, p. 224

riots against communist described earlier especially considering the 1939 riot happened in San Antonio against Tenayuca and other CP members.

Many organizations supported the Dies' Committee's investigation, such as the American Legion. The Legion wanted the Dies' Committee to receive added support and congressional funding.⁶⁸⁹ The Legion encouraged the Dies' Committee's investigation of the Labor Department's policies and its efforts for the deportation of Australian Harry Bridges, a union leader, involved in numerous strikes on the West Coast.⁶⁹⁰ The conservative Texan Dies was not above threatening the Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, of impeachment if she did not deport Harry Bridges who the Committee considered a radical and active communist.⁶⁹¹ The editor from *Sweetwater Report* agreed that Perkins looked suspicious and should be investigated for protecting the alleged communist Bridges, whom the editor believed was definitely a communist.⁶⁹² There was no one safe from the Dies Committee's judgments and its allegations.

Another force in Texas and the nation was religion, specifically the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, in 1936, was willing to align itself with Adolf Hitler to eradicate the Bolshevik, communism, threat of spreading.⁶⁹³ The German Catholic Bishops warned Hitler that guns would not be enough to stop

⁶⁸⁹ *New York Times*, "Legion's Platform Hits Labor Policy." September 23, 1938

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁶⁹¹ *New York Times*, "Dies Would Call Secretary Perkins." September 7, 1938; *New York Times*, "Miss Perkins Criticized." September 9, 1938

⁶⁹² *Sweetwater Reporter* "Editorial Page." September 12, 1938, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Sweetwater/Nolan County City-County Library, Sweetwater, Texas.

⁶⁹³ *New York Times*, "Bishops Would Join Nazi Anti-Red Fight." Aug 28, 1936

communism.⁶⁹⁴ He needed to consider religious education as a permanent way to rid the world of it.⁶⁹⁵ The Catholic Church's Knights of Columbus voted in 1937 to continue their "war of extermination" on communists, and viewed them as a "Satanic scourge" that must "...be driven from the earth which it pollutes."⁶⁹⁶ Catholics were anti-communist; Pope Pius XI denounced the party in 1937.⁶⁹⁷ Another entity of the Catholic Church, that was staunchly was anti-communist, was the organization the Catholic Daughters of America. This organization attacked communism, birth control and films they considered scandalous.⁶⁹⁸ The Daughters sought other women's organizations to aid it in its campaign and declared its opposition for some women's organizations such as the American Association of University Women and the General Federation of Women's Clubs all of which supported birth control.⁶⁹⁹ The Catholic Church was an active institute in San Antonio during Taylor's labor activism. The Church was also openly hostile against Tenayuca's control of the 1938 San Antonio Pecan Shellers' Strike.⁷⁰⁰ The Church participated in red-baiting and spreading false statements about Tenayuca to prove that she and the communists did not need to be leading the Mexican people involved in the strike.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁹⁶ *New York Times*, "For K. of C. Anti-Red Levy." August 20, 1937

⁶⁹⁷ Schatz, Ronald W. "American Labor and the Catholic Church, 1919-1950." *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1983, p. 183

⁶⁹⁸ *New York Times*, "Catholic Daughters Push Anti-Red Drive." Aug 9, 1936

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid*

⁷⁰⁰ Vargas, p. 137

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 137-138

Another anti-communist environment Taylor experienced was in the ILGWU. David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU, believed that communists in the CIO were to blame for the fighting between the AFL and CIO and he wanted the communists purged.⁷⁰² Dubinsky and Meyer Perlstein detested the communist presence in the CIO, and the ILGWU had been against a leftist influence, since the 1920s, specifically the communistic Trade Union Education League who condemned as promoting dual unionism.⁷⁰³ The ILGWU's departure from the communist-labeled CIO in 1938 must have satisfied Taylor's desire to remain separately from the radical left.⁷⁰⁴ Her two bosses, Perlstein and his boss Dubinsky, were anti-communist, explained in Graham's discussion, and if Taylor was against her bosses she could have lost her ILGWU job.

Taylor's negative view on the radical left was a contributing factor for her refutation of the CP. In an oral interview, Taylor stated she did not think that leftist political views helped anyone not even the labor unions.⁷⁰⁵ She was opposed to Tenayuca's involvement in the Pecan Shellers' strike of 1938.⁷⁰⁶ This attitude has been attributed to her early encounter with leftists in the Mexican Revolution which according to her, from an oral interview, was the cause for her family's land and property theft forcing them to flee Mexico.⁷⁰⁷ Taylor claimed

⁷⁰² *New York Times*, "Hague Begg Nation To Ban C.I.O. Reds." January 13, 1938

⁷⁰³ Foner, pp.160-161

⁷⁰⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, "Garment Union Quits CIO to Force Peace." November 12, 1938

⁷⁰⁵ Green, p. 160

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁰⁷ Green, pp. 159-160

that Tenayuca and her communist allies had taken control of the strike threatening the CIO's leadership.⁷⁰⁸ The ILGWU president's opinion could have swayed Taylor's views on communism as well, blaming them for CIO and AFL fighting.⁷⁰⁹ Taylor remained adamant over time and she opposed, as well, the Mexican La Raza Movement.⁷¹⁰ Taylor's experience as a child whose family fled from the Mexican Revolution caused her to reject more radical aspects of the labor movement, which would include the radical CP, whose motivation was to overthrow capitalism worldwide. Her rejection included Tenayuca.

Taylor was actively against communists, including Tenayuca, an obvious cause for her not joining the CP. Taylor became an ally with the American Federation of Labor's efforts to crush Tenayuca's communistic involvement in the Pecan Shellers' Strike.⁷¹¹ In 1938 the ILGWU left the CIO because of its communistic ties and the only other large union was the AFL a staunchly anti-communistic organization that the ILGWU joined the same year.⁷¹² Tenayuca recalls several workers, during the 1938 strike, relating that Taylor was riding around with the San Antonio police pointing out alleged communists.⁷¹³ It appears that Taylor could have been an undercover informant for the police or the employers during her entire career as an ILGWU organizer. Taylor's indictment

⁷⁰⁸ Blackwelder, p. 148

⁷⁰⁹ *New York Times*, "Hague Begs Nation To Ban C.I.O. Reds." January 13, 1938

⁷¹⁰ Green, p. 160

⁷¹¹ Vargas, p. 139

⁷¹² *Dallas Morning News*, "Garment Union Quits CIO to Force Peace." November 12, 1938; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, p.34; Renshaw, p.186

⁷¹³ Emma Tenayuca, interview by Emilio Zamora, June 1986, p.7

and criticism of Tenayuca made Mexican workers suspicious of Taylor and her link to the police.⁷¹⁴ Taylor also accused a labor activist Manuela Solis Sager and her husband of being communists in order to warn workers they were attempting to organize in the 1930s.⁷¹⁵ Taylor was opposed to communists having power suggestive in her labeling them and helping police identify them a factor in her decision to not be a member of the CP.

The CP sought to do away with problems that workers faced as is evident from their various activities throughout the 1930s from Gastonia, North Carolina's textile strike where workers suffered from low wages and demands by employers to operate more machines to the Pecan Shellers' Strike in San Antonio where workers suffered from poor ventilation, no running toilets, and were paid the lowest wages in the country around \$192 a year.⁷¹⁶ In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels explained that communists would offer workers independence from employers and capitalism.⁷¹⁷ Thus communists were not afraid if the old way of worker- employer relationships were destroyed.⁷¹⁸ This communist goal could have aroused Taylor's disapproval. Taylor seems to have been involved in the union work because it paid better than teaching, as she stated

⁷¹⁴ Vargas, p. 139

⁷¹⁵ Manuela Solis Sager interview by Dedra McDonald, Phyllis McKenzie, and Sarah Massey, August 11, 1992, p. 26

⁷¹⁶ Cochran, p. 34; Vargas, p. 134

⁷¹⁷ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Edited by Joseph Katz. Translated by Samuel Moore. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Pocket Books, 1964, p. 84, 90

⁷¹⁸ Marx and Engels, p. 95

in an oral interview.⁷¹⁹ Her negative opinion of radicals from the Mexican Revolution, her affluent upbringing, and her concern for monetary gains could have also caused Taylor to hate communists who wanted workers to achieve independence from the elites and ruling capitalists—a class Taylor could identify with.

In summary, Taylor was involved in numerous strikes with the ILGWU; however, she failed to perceive the CP as a formidable ally or accomplice in combating employers' injustices. Instead, she fought against its moving into San Antonio by her criticism and disapproval of Tenayuca and helping identify communists for police. Factors that influenced Taylor's unwillingness to join the CP were the anti-labor and anti-communist environment in Texas, her and her family's negative experience with the radical Mexican Revolution, her success in the ILGWU and the ILGWU's anti-communist opinions held by its leaders, her employer.

⁷¹⁹ Green, p 159

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The diversities of those involved in the labor movement during the Great Depression are evident when one views Graham, Taylor, and Tenayuca especially when considering why one joined the CP and the others did not. All these women were active in the labor movement and facilitated worker's rights in achieving better working conditions and better pay. Workers needed leaders to aid them in their stand against employers and society's exploitation. Tenayuca fought for racial equality, labor rights, and the unemployed through the Communist Party. Taylor and Graham, as has been noted throughout this research, all had contributing factors in why they did not join the CP because of racism, elitism, success in the ILGWU, the ILGWU's anti-communist policies and attitudes, their loyalty and support of the ILGWU, the anti-communist and anti-labor environment in Texas and the U.S., and the distaste for the radical left.

Women's activism or rejection of the CP in Texas is important to study because not many scholars have done so. Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, is the only major work that discusses specific women's involvement in the

CP in Texas, but fails to discuss why some women such as Taylor and Graham did not join. This thesis presents and substantiates reasons for Graham and Taylor's rejection of the CP. But Graham never states why she did not join the CP. Taylor's oral history was unable to be found, but is only referenced in George Green and Melissa Hield's articles. The evidence I give for their refusal of the CP is not definitive, but assumptions based upon much documentation associate with the era. Therefore further research is needed to come to a definitive answer on why these two women remained aloof from the CP. Taylor, Graham and Tenayuca are all valuable women to study especially in trying to answer Tenayuca's joining the CP while the other two did not while all three were involved in similar labor activities or disputes. This thesis explored what led these three activist women to accept or refuse the CP while exploring their shared background in labor activism.

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