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Negotiated Loyalty: The Response to Welfare Capitalism

Be Loyal!

Be loyal to God and your country,
To your innermost self be true,
But don't forget there's another debt,
To the Boss be loyal, too!

He has paid for your time and your labors,
You have given your promise to work;
It's up to you to be honest, true,
And it's hardly the square thing to shirk.

It is easy to knock down the minutes,
To clip off an hour here and there,
And none may know you are doing so,
But ask yourself now, Is it fair?

He has taken you as his servant—
Stenographer, bookkeeper, clerk—
He expects from you what you're paid to do—
To be loyal to him and to work.

Would you cheat playing cards, dice, or checkers,
Deceive any man in a game;
In a moment rash steal jewels or cash
And think you were never to blame?

Most certainly not! You'd assure us.
You're honest, you'd pridefully say;
Yet men like you who boast proudly, too,
Would try to down the boss every day.

It's cowardly, despicable, yellow;
And a man is a thief no less
Who would steal or rob when upon the job,
And boast of his faithfulness.

So be loyal to God and your country,
 To your innermost self be true,
 But don't forget there's another debt,
 To the Boss be loyal, too!¹

I

Glowing accounts of Endicott Johnson and its patriarchal management appeared in popular newspaper and magazine stories as well as trade publications from the mid-1910s through the 1930s. Writers typically viewed the corporation as a model of progressive business practices.² The loyalty of Endicott Johnson's workers was described as the product of a truly benevolent industrial endeavor and a testament to the achievement of a corporate collective identity. A 1919 *New York Times* headline noted the "Extraordinary Contentment in Shoe Manufacturing Plant Where Organizers Have Failed after Having Free Opportunity to Unionize 13,000 Workers."³ Almost twenty years later, in the midst of a growing and militant national labor movement, a magazine writer described the Endicott Johnson workers' attitude toward the firm in these terms: "Twenty thousand loyal employees—20,000 men and women working contentedly at fair wages and considering themselves and their bosses all one big family—that is the cheering and inspiring picture presented by the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company."⁴

While the conservative press found much to praise in Johnson's "ideal community," trade unionists and radicals did not. A concern over welfare capitalism had come to characterize much of the organized labor community and its sympathizers in the 1910s and 1920s. Strident criticism of welfare capitalism appeared in trade union papers and in many popular journals.⁵ Radical and socialist critics actively joined labor leaders in assailing this "new tactic" in the social conflict of classes. Stock ownership plans were attacked as "devices or weapons in the arsenal of welfare," which, along with pension plans, health insurance, and various other corporate welfare programs, were employed in "chloroforming the group consciousness of the workers."⁶ Trade union and radical publications circulated Will Herford's "Welfare Song," which, from 1913 until well into the middle of the century, summarized labor's view of corporate welfarism:

Sing a song of "Welfare,"
 A Pocket full of tricks
 To soothe the weary worker
 When he groans and kicks.
 If he asks for shorter hours
 Or for better pay,
 Little stunts of "welfare"
 Turn his thoughts away.

Sing a song of "Welfare,"
Sound the horn and drum,
Anything to keep the mind
Fixed on Kingdom Come.
"Welfare" loots your pocket
While you dream and sing;
"Welfare" to your pay check
Doesn't do a thing.

Sing a song of "Welfare,"
Forty 'leven kinds,
Elevate your morals,
Cultivate your minds.
Kindergartens, nurses,
Bathtubs, books and flowers,
Anything but better pay,
Or shorter working hours.⁷

According to critics on the left, and organized labor as well, employer welfare programs were aimed at halting the development of a real industrial democracy by buttressing traditional exploitative relationships with minimal yet effective reforms. The socialist League for Industrial Democracy, meeting for its twelfth annual conference in 1926, extensively discussed the welfare initiatives of employers and reached a disheartening conclusion.

The net result of all these activities in some cases seems to be what the employer expects—an increased loyalty to the firm, a greater dependence upon welfare features as a part of the payment for the job. This fixation of loyalty upon the employer . . . alienates the worker from his fellow workers in the industry at large and leads him to identify his individual interests with those of the company rather than with those of his class. The result is . . . "factory solidarity" as opposed to "class solidarity."⁸

Abraham Epstein, who attended the conference, published an extensive survey of industrial welfare practices in 1926 and concluded that such reforms were indeed "sapping American trade unions." After examining the welfare programs of 1,500 firms and the general plight of organized labor, he found that "all the evidence seem[s] to indicate that the organization of wage-earners on a belligerent basis is gradually becoming a thing of the past."⁹

When critics came to write specifically about Endicott Johnson and its famed labor loyalty, they generally repeated many of the themes cited above. Depicting an authoritarian, albeit benevolent, management with a co-opted or passive work force, their hyperbolic condemnations reduced both managers and workers to caricatures. The Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, which failed in several attempts to unionize Endicott Johnson workers in the 1920s and 1930s, consistently attacked welfare capitalists in its journal. Endicott Johnson was a prime target:

We have a few real Mussolinis in our shoe industry. One of the most prominent of these is the head of the Endicott Johnson Company. This executive exercises absolute control over the earnings and lives of several thousand employes and their families. . . . All power is exercised at the top and yet the executive seems to wish to sell the idea of a super management to his employes so as to enthuse them with greater confidence in his dictatorship.¹⁰

Radical critics expressed indignation over the seemingly effective dilution of class consciousness that corporate paternalism at Endicott Johnson achieved. An article from the *New York Call*, reprinted in the *E.-J. Workers' Review*, characterized the corporation's workers in these terms:

And what a smug, contented lot I learned these thousands of wage slaves are, no more thinking of themselves as slaves than honey bees. Do they not have the most munificent wages now paid in the labor market, so that every family has its own car, dresses in the finest and is "prosperous" beyond any proletarian dream that never could come true? Do they not go to work when they please and quit when they like? One woman said to me, with a smile of the most placid satisfaction: "It's pretty nice to work as few or as many hours as you like, good pay for the work, and have a nice little bonus of \$250 or more at the end of the year."¹¹

Was welfare capitalism as effective in winning the hearts and minds of American workers, and specifically Endicott Johnson workers, as these critics' concerns suggest? Recent historians are not as certain. Stuart Brandes, in a survey of American welfare capitalism, asked whether workers "genuinely embraced" corporate paternalism and concluded that although some workers "appreciated" welfare programs, many more were dissatisfied and lashed out against industrial welfare practices.¹² Irving Bernstein, in his epic study of labor in the 1920s, reached a very similar conclusion. While acknowledging that new management reforms contributed to improvements in working conditions and to the enhancement of labor's long-term bargaining position, he nevertheless portrayed industrial welfarism as unstable, inherently demeaning, and temporary. "Welfare capitalism," he wrote, "stripped of the verbiage of industrial democracy, was precisely what its critics called it: paternalism. At best it could be no more than an unstable system for both employer and employee. . . ."¹³

At the root of both Brandes's and Bernstein's portrayal of the response of workers to paternalism were assumptions about the natural course of worker consciousness in America, assumptions characteristic of progressive labor historiography since the days of John R. Commons and Selig Perlman. American workers, it was held, were destined to express their interests and power in institutional forms that reflected their unique and particular needs—in other words, in trade unions.¹⁴ Welfare capitalism was merely a temporary obstacle

in their quest for power. Bernstein wrote: "The central purpose of welfare capitalism—avoidance of trade unionism—could only be achieved temporarily because paternalism failed to come to grips with the main issue: a system of shop government placed in the climate of political democracy and universal suffrage."¹⁵

Other scholars have been far less certain of the intrinsic failure of welfare capitalism. Daniel Nelson, for example, in his monograph on the emergence of the modern factory system, viewed the welfare movement as part of a broad effort by management to rationalize production and bring under more immediate control the factory work force—a generally successful effort.¹⁶ David Brody argued even more forcefully for the effectiveness of corporate paternalism in generating worker loyalty. According to Brody the Great Depression had a severely crushing impact on corporate welfarism by forcing managers to take drastic cost-cutting measures that undermined workers' confidence in corporate paternalism. This in turn led to widespread worker rebellions. Unlike Brandes and Bernstein, Brody suggested that welfare capitalism did manage to win the hearts and minds of American workers. The rapid decline of union membership in the 1920s, as well as the muting of labor militancy, reinforced his conclusions. He attacked the prevailing viewpoint of progressive labor historians who were comforted by the thought that "welfare capitalism never was a success, never persuaded workingmen that they were best off as wards of the employer, and never took deep root in the American industrial order."¹⁷ Instead, he argued:

It is mistaken to assume, as most of us do, that American workers were not really captive to the paternalism of the 1920s, and that they would inevitably have turned to some form of independent labor organization. There is no solid evidence to support that liberal article of faith. On the contrary, I would argue that, had not the Depression shattered the prevailing assumptions of welfare capitalism, the open shop might well have remained a permanent feature of American industrialism.¹⁸

In asserting that paternalism may well have been acceptable to millions of American workers, Brody differentiated himself from historians who took pains to emphasize workers' instinctive rejection of welfare capitalism. Yet, while Brody came to a different conclusion over the "success" of welfarism from that reached by Brandes and Bernstein, all three historians failed to take into consideration an important dimension of corporate life. Their interpretation of welfare capitalism as either successful or unsuccessful in maintaining labor loyalty failed to come to grips with actual shop floor relations under welfarism or with how the workers felt about it. As a result they missed the complex ways in which workers translated and transformed managerial projections, in the form of welfare ideology and practices, for their own ends. A

close look at the relationship between workers and managers at Endicott Johnson may suggest that our understanding of workers and welfare capitalism needs revision.

II

The 1920–21 depression hit the Endicott Johnson corporation hard. Slack business led to the stockpiling of both leather and shoes, a practice that the firm had engaged in during former recessions and depressions to sustain production and maintain employment. But the continuation of the depression forced company managers to make difficult decisions—welfare programs would have to be cut. Available surplus earnings for profit sharing declined from five million dollars in 1919 to one million dollars in 1920. The bonus checks sent out to the workers in early 1921 amounted to only one-sixth of the previous year's amount. Along with a cut in the bonus came the elimination of the firm's recreation programs. Vacations with pay and holiday pay, products of World War I, were also soon stopped. Corporate contributions to community charities and civic institutions were reduced or halted. The employee magazine ceased publication. "It was not that we lost faith in recreational activities, in the employees' magazine, in the libraries, or in the hundred and one facilities that were provided," wrote George F. Johnson in 1921, "it was a case of doing what we had to do."¹⁹

The firm's financial retrenchment was partially effective. Close to three million dollars a year were saved. But, apparently, it was still not enough. Strict time accounting was instituted throughout the factories, and all employees, including upper management, were required to punch time clocks.²⁰ Time off was docked for all workers, the work week was reduced to five days from six, and work sharing was initiated. But the most painful act was reserved for April 1921 when management cut wages by 20 percent. "There was a lot of grumblin' about that," recalled one cutter, "because a lot of 'em felt that 10 percent woulda' been enough."²¹ Management tried to prepare the workers for this long in advance, in open letters appearing in the *Workers' Review*, and hoped that the reduction would be "accepted loyally by the workers."²²

Elsewhere in the country other firms were instituting similar wage reductions. Some had done it earlier, others later, than Endicott Johnson. At the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in Manchester, New Hampshire, another welfare firm, the 20 percent reduction came in February 1922 and precipitated a nine-month strike that destroyed that firm's "paternalistic balance."²³

Endicott Johnson managers had never faced a real test of their corporate paternalism. Their recently adopted welfare programs, which they were now forced to curtail, had raised their workers' expectations. How would the workers react to the firm's actions? The answer was not long in coming. In

mid-May, George F. Johnson wrote to a friend that the wage cut was "accepted very loyally by the Help, and we are very proud indeed, of their good will, so much in evidence."²⁴ The workers' loyalty held. There was no rebellion. This was neither the first nor the last test of Endicott Johnson's policies, but it was one of the more dramatic demonstrations of the "success" of welfarism at Endicott Johnson.

Throughout the 1920s Endicott Johnson managers never disguised that their labor policies were designed to maintain worker docility and to retain managerial control over the work force. They merely asserted that liberal welfare policies were a far more effective means of control than was repression. Most workers could plainly see management motives of labor control in the firm's policies, yet they could equally appreciate that employment at Endicott Johnson offered substantial benefits. The labor loyalty at Endicott Johnson, both praised and cursed, existed within the context of both real personal benefits and corporate control. The workers' recognition of these two aspects of their work lives led to a far more contradictory form of corporate loyalty than previous writers—critics and laudators, contemporaries and historians—have recognized.²⁵

Welfare capitalism at Endicott Johnson existed as a compact between management and labor, one built on mutual loyalties. To maintain that compact, expectations and obligations needed to be met, particularly by management. Workers developed formal and informal strategies for extracting, sustaining, and expanding these obligations. Although they expressed loyalty to the corporation and its management, they repeatedly demonstrated that their loyalty had limits. Within the confines of two dozen shoe factories and tanneries, labor and management pulled and tugged at each other, both with and without outright coercion—each attempting to extract from the other a maximum return on its "loyalty." Ultimately, the loyalty was a negotiated allegiance, whose real meaning must be discovered in the behavior of workers, not merely in the proclamations of management.

First of all, the ideology of the "Square Deal" was transformed in the workers' minds. It became an autonomous reference point for laborers, allowing them to judge corporate policies and actions by appealing to rights and obligations that management itself had first vaguely defined. George F. Johnson recognized the transformation of the "Square Deal" from a projected corporate ideology into an independent code of just behavior, one that entrapped management. He wrote to his son in 1930: "It has come to a point where no man may without great risk to the business, change the fundamental ideas which have controlled, and which have been thoroughly accepted and adopted by the workers themselves. I should feel very sorry for the leader of E.J. who attempted to make serious changes in management and control."²⁶

William Inglis, in his company-sponsored biography of Johnson, suggests something of how the "Square Deal" ideology was actually translated by the

workers. Dan Sargent (actually a pseudonym) was an E.J. worker who lost his sight while in the employ of the firm. Although not eligible for compensation because the accident that led to his sight loss did not occur during working hours, he was nevertheless cared for by the company and continued to receive a regular payroll check. During the financial slump of the post-World War I period, the following conversation reportedly took place between Sargent and George F. Johnson:

"You know, George F., these times are something awful. We go on living through force of habit." "Yes, times are bad," said Mr. Johnson, "but we've lived through worse, and we'll live through this." "True for you," said Dan. "But I've had a heavy load on my mind lately. The price of food and clothes, the price of everything, has gone up so high in the last few months that we've been pressed very hard. It's that bad, I think I ought to have a raise in my wages. What do you think, George?" "Well, to tell you the truth, Dan," said Mr. Johnson, "I haven't been thinking of it at all. But I see your point. Tell you what I'll do—I'll speak to the payroll folks about it and see what they can do." "No fear but they'll do right, with yourself jogging them," said Dan gaily.²⁷

What is significant in this overstylized account is the strategy that Sargent employed in extracting benefits from the corporation. The expectation of additional compensation was an expression of the transformation of corporate-defined privileges into worker-defined obligations. Trapped within the logic of the worker's expectations, Johnson could either give in or deny him a "Square Deal." He gave in; Sargent received his raise.

While doing research in preparation for his biography, Inglis interviewed several of the company's employees. He found that older workers had been able to maintain their self-respect in Endicott Johnson's paternalistic system because, although "they were receiving help . . . they felt they were entitled to it, had worked for it."²⁸ For these workers as for Sargent, what mattered was more than merely maintaining self-respect; they wanted what they had earned, what they were owed. Another old-timer, an Italian worker, expressed this point quite forcefully to George F. Johnson's son, George W. Johnson, in 1934:

Mister George, what's the matter with E.J. not have it square deal anymore. I come for this company 15 year. Every time I take it the free medicine, all family too. Every day go for the 15 cent meal. My wife now got it five kids from Mr. George F., no cost nothing. This time come from me old country three brother and wife. Powell [the employment manager] no give it job. Powell no good for E.J. Just good for tricks. Better he find the trick for give everybody job. What's matter no can. My brother he like it too for Mr. George F. be their father and he give it their wife free baby just same like me.²⁹

Several months earlier, responding to similar expectations, Johnson voiced his indignation over escalating worker demands: "Given privileges that did not belong to them [the workers], they soon acquired a sense of ownership, and resent any effort to deprive them of something . . . to which they had no right."³⁰

Sometimes, workers' extractive strategies could be quite ingenious. In 1935, following the printing of an open letter by George F. Johnson advocating the publication of wage scales by corporations, a worker approached his superintendent with a request for an increase in wages. He was refused and told that his wages were already quite high. "He agreed his wages were very good and indeed satisfactory, but that some other fellow was getting more. The superintendent asked how he knew this and he said he had taken pains to find out; wasn't George F. advocating 'why keep wages secret?'"³¹ A frustrated George F. Johnson declared: "We have drifted into the wrong idea of treating labor, while we were seeking the right way. Everything we give them for nothing makes them a little bit lazier, and a little harder to deal with, and more prone to find fault."³²

As the "Square Deal" ideology was transformed by workers in their assertions of corporate obligations, so, too, was it transformed on the shop floor. More than anything else, the experience of work itself limited the effectiveness of the firm's liberal welfare policies. If benevolent paternalism and the concrete benefits of the company's welfare system produced loyalty, the daily experiences of workers in the factories produced just the opposite result. The classless ideal may have been in evidence in social clubs and athletic events, in low turnover, and in an absence of militancy and trade union consciousness; on the shop floor class feelings were alive and well.

Not only did workers recall their experiences of work with a vocabulary that reflected social distance and class—their use of the term *boss* rather than *director* being an obvious example—but in their behavior on the shop floor, they demonstrated their recognition that their interests and those of the corporation diverged. While Endicott Johnson employees never achieved a generalized class consciousness, one that acknowledged common interests with an American working class, they nonetheless did exemplify a class consciousness of a more inchoate kind, one characterized by behavior and language that reflected their distance from capitalists and managers who controlled the corporation for which they worked. Furthermore, under certain circumstances groups of workers at Endicott Johnson demonstrated a proclivity to band together to challenge corporate interests. The incompleteness of the workers' attempts to unite and confront management attests to the effectiveness of welfarism, although certainly other factors were at work. But their efforts—even that they made them at all—attest to the limited success of the firm's policies.

Accessibility to top management, a central tenet of the corporation's "Square Deal" policy, gave workers leverage in shop floor negotiations. Decisions of supervisors were open to revision. In one instance, in 1927, a committee of workers approached management about the firing of a well-liked foreman by their factory superintendent. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., George F. Johnson's nephew and a general manager at the time, investigated the matter and reversed the decision; the foreman was reinstated and later replaced the superintendent who had fired him.³³

Occasionally, workers might even overthrow supervisors. Workers in the Victory Factory in Johnson City went on strike in the winter of 1931 after appeals for the removal of a hated foreman were ignored by management. The strike began in the cutting room but soon spread to the whole factory. George W. Johnson, at this time the president of the corporation, described the events that precipitated the strike.

The difficulty in Johnson City was all Leo Sullivan. As you know, for a long time we had been hearing that he was a tyrant with help. Last winter I had three or four anonymous letters, about which I spoke to you. This fellow warned us that we would have plenty of trouble if we did not move Sullivan. . . . He did a great many little things that the help termed underhanded, and not in accordance with the Company's policy. It made them mad. They lost confidence in him, and finally their respect, and actually demanded a change.³⁴

Leo Sullivan was removed and shifted to another factory, where he worked as an upper leather cutter. The workers had effectively exercised their power.³⁵

Keeping the workers satisfied was a compulsion for the corporation's management, one that continually undermined the authority of shop floor supervisors, as when firing decisions were periodically appealed and reversed. The corporation's official policy concerning discharges was outlined by George F. Johnson in 1919 in these terms:

A position with this company is worth too much to be treated flippantly. "Hiring and firing" is played out. . . . That is why we have taken from the Directors [foremen and foreladies] the authority to discharge Workers. We have substituted simply the right of *suspension*, by Directors. There is always the right of appeal and the right to reinstatement, and the right to another chance—for those who really want it. And when they make their appeal to me, they generally get another chance.³⁶

Indeed, appeals were made and, as notes appended to employment records demonstrate, decisions of employment officers were reversed. The experiences of various workers further suggest that this policy was not mere rhetoric. An appeal by a laid-off worker with several family dependents led to his reinstatement and the chastisement of the company official responsible for his firing. A seventeen-year veteran of the company, complaining about being laid

off on account of his age, elicited the following curt reminder from George F. Johnson to his nephew: "Perhaps you will find that there are rights under our well advertised 'Square Deal Policy', that have been denied this Mr. Warner."³⁷

"Directors" responded in a variety of ways to such limitations on their authority. Frustration was a typical reaction, as one supervisor's testimony illustrates: "If I had a worker who was disgusted and he went to Charlie, nine times out of ten, I'm the one who'd get yelled at, not the worker. He'd [Charlie] come back and bawl me out. . . ." ³⁸ A finishing room foreman similarly recalled: "I was foreman for five years, and the company wouldn't want you to fire a man. That was one bad feature for a boss. They wanted you to get out the shoes and get the work out right. If you don't and a man don't do his work like he ought to, and you fire him, they go over and report to George F. or Charlie, whichever one was there, and they'd send them back and make a fool out of the boss."³⁹

The elimination of "hiring and firing" and upper management's responsiveness to employee complaints eroded the fortresses of shop floor supervisors. Some foremen and foreladies passively accepted this erosion of authority, swallowing their frustrations and submerging their resentment of upper management. Others dug in and defended their domains quite forcefully.

I made my mind up to one thing. And I got all my help together. I had something like twenty-five workers [and] I got 'em all together down in the stockroom. "Now," I says, "I understand that the company gave me the job of running this room." And I says, "There's one thing I want straightened out, and I want every one of ya to know it. The company tells me to run this room. *I'm gonna run it!* If anybody comes in here—Jess Jones [Leather Department manager], Charlie Johnson . . . [and] if he tells a worker in here to do somethin', and that don't—that turns out wrong, he's or she's fired. Nobody takes any orders in this room from anybody but me. . . . I've seen a lotta wishy-washy foremen around through the factories, that had these guys comin' in from the main office . . . runnin' 'em ragged and everything else." I says, "Nobody's gonna run me ragged. . . . I'm gonna run this room the way I think it oughta be run." I says, "If that ain't right, they can always fire me." So that was understood and I never had no troubles.⁴⁰

Yet foremen who asserted their authority this vehemently might cause upper management no end of aggravation.

The uneven adherence of lower-level management to the firm's labor policies and ideology yielded a substantial amount of intramanagerial conflict. Foremen and forewomen who took the company's ideal of a corporate family seriously sometimes sided with workers against upper management, to the displeasure of the latter. Foremen like Frank Tuthill would go out of their way

to satisfy their workers. Tuthill met with his men to talk out problems. If disagreements over prices occurred, he would approach the superintendent on their behalf. If that did not resolve the matter, he would recommend to his workers to get a committee together to approach upper management.⁴¹

Occasionally, factory supervisors identified more closely with their workers than with upper management. Foremen and superintendents might even warn workers to hold back their piece coupons or else their rates would be cut.⁴² Such close identification of interests between workers and supervisors, of course, posed problems for upper management. When a particularly well-liked Victory Factory superintendent was removed in 1930, the Johnsons were faced with many angry employees circulating petitions for his reinstatement.⁴³ The workers' frustration at finding their petitions ignored set the stage for the 1931 strike in the Victory Factory.

Lower-level managers who protected workers' interests yielded one sort of challenge to upper management. Shop floor supervisors callously concerned about preserving their autonomy and guarding their authority, on the other hand, often violated the compact that sustained labor peace in the corporation and hence also posed problems for management. As George F. Johnson admitted to a worker:

Several hundred hired lieutenants, who are not all infallible—in fact, many are ignorant and prejudiced, and understand, themselves, very little of the meaning of the “square deal”—presents difficulties. . . . It has been described in this way: the Head of a business desires everyone to have a “square deal,” but between the “Head of the business” and “everyone,” there is a lot of “static”—misunderstanding, ignorance, prejudice, and innumerable difficulties.⁴⁴

Yet whether or not supervisors took the “Square Deal” too much to heart, becoming true “partners” with the workers, or ignored it, the firm's labor policies allowed workers both to widen and exploit divisions within management that such conditions created.

The firm's reliance on labor loyalty and the expectations that its welfare policies and ideology had fostered among the workers placed company officers in a particularly vulnerable and uncomfortable position. Management found that workers sometimes bargained with their “loyalty” in order to obtain wage concessions. Such behavior suggests that the workers' understanding of loyalty may have differed strongly from management's and was predicated on management's continued willingness to compromise on important shop issues. This is vividly demonstrated in the following account of a wage negotiation:

I'll never forget this meeting we had over prices. We voted on it three different times. The third time I voted, and I went out. “I'm not voting any more.” It was a ridiculous thing, it only applied to one pattern and

they wouldn't give in and we wouldn't give in. It finally come down after I left. But before that, this man named G——, he was a really outspoken man, and he knew Charlie [Johnson] very well, and they was always talking about loyalty to the company, loyalty to the company. . . . You got this and you got to be loyal to the company. So this man . . . he said to Charlie, "Now Charlie I've worked here probably 35 years now. That's pretty damned loyal, ain't it Charlie?" and Charlie said, "Yeah, that's pretty damned loyal." "I always done good work. Ain't that pretty loyal, Charlie?" Charlie says, "Yeah, that's pretty loyal." He says, "Damn it, when you come to stick your hand in my pocket, I ain't going to be so loyal any more!"⁴⁵

Loyalty was by no means a reflexive reaction. It required a return. Individually and collectively, workers developed strategies to extract this return.

Individuals dissatisfied with their wages could look for an opening in another department and transfer. Internal movement within and between the factories was constant and pervasive. Such movement was both a safety valve and a form of power since workers could vote on wages and personnel with their feet, without sacrificing the security of their jobs. By voting in this way, they could sometimes win concessions from management. One worker, Richard J. Murphy, recalled an instance of unfair pricing on a bed lasting job. The lasters were not able to win a price adjustment from the factory superintendent, so Murphy transferred to another department. Later approached by Charles F. Johnson, Jr., and asked why he left his position, Murphy replied that the price on the job had been unfairly set at twenty cents a dozen when it should have been more like twenty-three cents. The price was raised.⁴⁶

Piece rates were a central shop floor concern for workers. Rates were set by the pricing departments of the company.⁴⁷ Whenever a new pattern was introduced or adjustments in old rates were to be made, factory superintendents would call in for a job timer. "He'd go around and sneak up and time you," one worker recalled. "They'd time the fastest man."⁴⁸ Workers typically slowed down when timers were present. As another worker recalled: "Even the faster worker, he'd slow down. The minute they knew they was comin' or anybody found out that there was anybody in there timing, then you'd see everybody slowin' down."⁴⁹ When it came to piece rates, the lines between workers and managers were drawn quite rigidly—hardly attesting to the existence of an industrial partnership. Corporate managers naturally sought to keep rates down, workers to maintain or increase them. The tug-of-war between the two sometimes came out in favor of the workers, sometimes in favor of management, and sometimes in Pyrrhic victories:

He had the timer sent to me. He figured well, "Mary's fast. She's a good operator." They won't have to give us much if anything. Well, when the timer came, I did a whole case of shoes; and he went back to the head boss, and he showed him how long it took me. So he says, "Give her

another case." So he came with another case to see if my speed would go up on it. It didn't. So he went back. The head boss came himself and sat down at my machine because he was very good, he was a terrific operator. For a man, he was a terrific stitcher. He sat down. I don't think he did more than three shoes. Not a word, and up and away he went. We didn't get no more money. Nothing was said. That pattern never came back to our department. They gave it to another department, where they probably were doing it for the same price. . . . That's one thing that in later years we found out, that instead of giving more money for some patterns, they would try to push it on another department. And if those workers didn't complain, it stood that way.⁵⁰

Rate variations on similar work were widespread and a cause of much resentment. Workers developed a feel for the just value of a new job. They would compare it with the effort expended on previous jobs and to piece rates available in other departments or factories. Their perceptions often differed radically from the rates set by the pricing department. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, workers frequently organized committees to meet with foremen to settle price disputes. If unsuccessful, they might demand an audience with the superintendent or one of the Johnsons. If satisfaction was still not forthcoming, some resorted to more coercive measures. "We had no problem with that," one worker said, "cause if they wouldn't give it to us, nobody'd go to work, what the hell, we left the work right there, till we did get a result from it."⁵¹

The ability to affect a change in rates depended on many factors, the most important being the bargaining power that came with a particular skill. Low-skilled workers, like rack pushers, sorters, lacers, and stitchers, had less power than higher-skilled lasters, upper leather cutters, and edge trimmers. High-skilled workers were not easily replaceable and hence had far more negotiating power over wages and shop conditions than other employees. Furthermore, the common job pride and strong work culture that characterized such workers promoted collective rather than individual responses to grievances. Not surprisingly, groups of skilled and semiskilled workers were often the best organized and most militant within the shoe factories. Consistently, from the 1890s through the middle of the twentieth century, edge trimmers, Goodyear stitchers, lasters, and cutters actively resisted wage reductions and organized themselves on the shop floor to protect their interests better against encroachments by management.

In 1927, for example, a growing militancy among the edge trimmers of Endicott and Johnson City caused the Johnsons no end of consternation. In September of that year, a meeting was held between George F. Johnson and Endicott edge trimmers, in an attempt to resolve a walkout by the men over pricing policies. The proceedings of the meeting were recorded by a stenographer. In reading over the transcript, one is struck by the extremely emotional

and defensive reaction that the edge stitchers' walkout elicited from Johnson. He viewed it solely as an attack on the "Square Deal":

You are *determined* to have trouble. You don't want harmony and peace. You want to destroy the work of many lifetimes. You mean that you want to go into struggle that will mean a great deal, to a great many innocent people. . . . All this is contrary to the old E.J. spirit, I have never met with it before. I am mystified. . . . Let's keep this Valley for the world to see, as a place where friendly human relations may exist, and the best Industrial conditions be made possible, and peace and harmony prevail.⁵²

Johnson's charges of disloyalty and rebellion were denied by the workers, who argued instead that the company had let them down, had betrayed the "Square Deal."

We have no prejudice against Mr. George F. Johnson. There is no friendship broken off. He has made mistakes and we have made mistakes. Mr. Johnson, we all understand that you don't know everything. This has been going on. This thing has not arisen in a day. It has not arisen in a week or two. It has been going on for a long time. We have spoken of going to see Mr. George F. We have been told different things: "It would be all right"—"Never mind." I have said since I have been here (17 years) that we could get a square deal from Mr. George F. Johnson.⁵³

The theme of the meeting became loyalty—loyalty to company, loyalty to Johnson. And there was no question in Johnson's mind that a crisis of loyalty existed among the men, that some more than emotional gesture would be needed to bring the men back into the fold. Halfway through the meeting Johnson offered a carrot to the workers: "I want to say that I believe that a better day is dawning. I think that times are not going to be so hard. We will have a better year. I believe I see possible vacations again." Further into the meeting Johnson made another peace offering to the men. "I want to say for your encouragement, that I believe, as it looks now, things will be a little better than last year. There will be a little more of that intangible thing called 'bonus.'"⁵⁴

The meeting between Johnson and the edge trimmers seemed to have settled the matter—at least for the moment. The tensions reflected in the closing remarks, however, hinted that the final resolution was still distant. One of the worker committee leaders ended his statement by saying: "We don't want to have any trouble in the future, but would like to have things adjusted, so we will know what we are working for, and have our employers understand it that way, also." It sounded a bit too belligerent for Johnson to let it go by. He immediately took offense at the committeeman's choice of words and reminded the workers that "I want you to understand—you can't get

anywhere by *demanding* a thing, when you want to discuss it."⁵⁵ The resolution of this power struggle had yet to be achieved.

When amicable settlement of important issues could not be achieved, workers took up more confrontational strategies, as the edge trimmers did in the months following the meeting with Johnson. The September session did not resolve the issues that led to the trimmers' job action. Feeling betrayed by management, they continued to organize their fellow workers. In November 1927 the Endicott edge trimmers began to organize their Johnson City counterparts. A meeting was held on November 14, 1927, with the intended purpose of forcing "certain things in connection with working hours and working conditions." Charles F. Johnson, Jr., reported to his uncle on the meeting, seemingly unperturbed by the workers' actions. "Our thought is to simply let the matter go along and see what develops. If there are any demands made we will meet those demands at that time. . . ."⁵⁶ George F. Johnson was far more concerned. No doubt still hurting from the encounter with these "rebels" back in September, he wrote his nephew:

The question of the organization of Edge Trimmers, is one that must be faced. . . . They must be told frankly—If they are not satisfied with the present E.J. policy respecting labor, they must immediately resign—there can be but *one* organization under our plan—that's the "E.J. Workers"—All the other[s] proposed like the Edge Trimmers will be considered unfriendly to the "E.J. Workers" as a whole. . . . Call the loyal workers to stand out and the disloyal ones to get out. The best way is to discharge the "ring leaders" after you've told them what you propose to do. We have nursed these kind of people into a fairly healthy crowd, and they will soon be in shape to make us a lot of trouble—It is a good time of year to have it out—They won't like the taste of snowballs—no work, and no bonus, so let's get at it.⁵⁷

Two days later management began approaching individual edge trimmers in both Johnson City and Endicott. "It was explained to them that we were not willing to go along with the Edge Trimmer's Union, it was not in keeping with the Company's policy." The workers were offered an ultimatum, "either give up their organization and continue along or else get through." Most of them gave in. Three leaders, however, were fired.⁵⁸ Charles Johnson explained to his uncle that most of the men were merely misled by their leaders. Yet both uncle and nephew realized that they would have to get "closer to the people" in the future. They would have to "be more careful, and have a better knowledge of what our help are thinking and doing."⁵⁹ Plans were made to restore peace and harmony. A meeting was arranged between management and the edge trimmers: "Upon your return [I] think it would be a splendid idea for us to get together all of the edge trimmers and as many other workers as possible for a meeting in one of the diners to show our appreciation for the

way the workers accepted our ultimatum, and to promote a more friendly feeling."⁶⁰ Thus ended the trimmers' organizing efforts.

In their failed attempt to build up their own shop union, the edge trimmers demonstrated that they perceived their interests to be in conflict with those of corporate officers. They were not willing to go along with the fiction of industrial partnership, and they recognized that organization for self-protection was necessary. Although the edge trimmers' behavior constituted an extreme reaction on the part of Endicott Johnson workers, albeit short of trade unionism, other workers also banded together for self-protection and, in so doing, belied the existence of a "corporate family."

Goodyear stitchers, like edge trimmers, were also highly skilled and among the best paid workers. Although they were a relatively small group in each factory, their valued skills gave them a sense of pride as well as some power over their work and remuneration. They exhibited a laudatory cooperative spirit in work, as we have seen, aiding each other if machines experienced a breakdown—often sacrificing precious pay coupons in the process. When disagreements over rates arose, they would get together and appoint a spokesman to represent their interests and to approach management. A Goodyear stitcher in the Fair Play Factory in West Endicott recalled how he and fellow stitchers typically resolved disputes:

We always figured it like this. We probably had ten, twelve men on the job. Maybe the oldest man on the job—we'd tell him what we want and he'd represent us. We wouldn't all have to shut down. We'd keep right on working, and he'd go and see Charlie Johnson and some of those guys and—them big shots. And he'd really come back with a pretty good settlement. . . . All the years I worked there, we only had one strike, I guess. Well, you couldn't really call it a strike. We just shut down. Well, Charlie Johnson come down. We changed the shoe price, we went on a cheaper shoe, but they weren't the same quality. The boss wanted the same quality on the cheaper shoe as on the higher-priced shoe. We didn't think that was fair. So we called him down, and we said we didn't think it was fair. He said, "Naturally it ain't fair. You can't expect to make a cheaper shoe and put the same quality in it as you do on a higher-priced shoe. You boys go ahead and let your stitches out."⁶¹

The effectiveness of such informal grievance procedures among the Goodyear stitchers prevented a search for more formal institutions such as trade unions.

Other groups of relatively skilled factory workers also confronted management periodically. In 1932 Pioneer Factory lasters joined together and refused to accept a price reduction on their work. Unable to convince the lasters, the company transferred their work to a new factory in Binghamton. Charles Johnson wrote his uncle: "The Pioneer factory lasters, as a group, have not showed a disposition to be willing to meet the situation, show a spirit of

cooperation and accept the inevitable."⁶² While management's response was hardly a victory for the lasters, it did demonstrate that they were more than willing to fight management, at some cost to themselves.

Cutters were an especially well-organized group. As one former foreman recalled: "Most every cutting room had their own little group. They stuck together."⁶³ In the Men's McKay Factory, cutters effectively prevented the repricing and shifting of work to other factories. Pioneer Factory cutters joined the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union en masse in 1939.⁶⁴ Scout Factory cutters created a democratic shop floor organization with rotating officers that, in the late 1930s, was quite effective in negotiating adjustments of piece rates. One Scout cutter recalled their strength:

We in the Scout Factory were the highest paid people in the industry. . . . We were organized. I don't mean union. I mean cutters. We had a lot to say. We were seventy-five—eighty cutters in that room, and we were powerful. We told them what we wanted, see, and the way we proved it to them—we had three to four men on the job and [we told them] "we will cut a new pattern and we will decide then what that shoe is worth." Not what *they* said! And this is what we did.⁶⁵

When the Scout cutters felt that the price of a new eight-inch shoe was too low, and the firm made no adjustment, the men ceased work until Charles F. Johnson, Jr., the firm's vice president, arrived. They explained the reasons for their job action, and Johnson immediately adjusted the rate.⁶⁶

The organization formed by the Scout cutters provided them with a potent force for extracting just settlements from the firm. They were not "disloyal" to Endicott Johnson, and they did not view themselves as such. Unlike the Pioneer cutters, few of them chose to join a union when the opportunity was available in the late 1930s.⁶⁷ But their loyalty did not mean accepting the corporation's definition of the term. In their organization the Scout cutters demonstrated that the corporate ideal of industrial harmony could coexist with industrial conflict.

Conflict on the shop floor could extend to more central issues than rates. At times committees might protest the very system of setting prices on jobs, as was the case when a new piece rate system was instituted in the upper leather cutting departments of the firm in the mid-1920s. The system involved crediting and debiting workers for "gained" or "lost" leather. It had a profound impact on workers, as one cutter recalled:

A fella came into E.J.'s from Boston, and he had a system for measuring the areas of the dies to arrive at the allowances. . . . He had pluses and minuses and I don't know . . . how the dies fit, how they would lay, how close they would cut together. That was the worst time I ever had at E.J.'s, and it wasn't me so much, it was my sympathy for other men because your allowances were figured pretty damn accurate. . . . Then this fella topped the whole caboodle off by saying, "Now the men to gain the most

leather are the ones that are entitled to the most money, and the only way we can do that is, we will pay you at the end of each month so much a foot for every foot you've gained, or you pay so much a foot for every foot you lost." . . . It started makin' thieves out of 'em. In other words, some of the men that were inclined to be a little crooked anyway was stealing the leather off other men's jobs, see.⁶⁸

In response to the new system, the cutters in the Pioneer Factory organized a committee and arranged a meeting with the Johnsons. Thomas Chubbuck's account of the meeting follows:

Charlie was a son-of-a-gun to meet on a committee. And . . . it turned out the committee elected me chairman. Boy, I was sittin' on the hot seat 'cause I had to produce for the men—they put me in there, and I had to be fair with the company too. Well, we had our meeting down there and we had it. . . . They were meetings! I'm telling you, everybody talked plain English, and when you wanted to emphasize it, you hit the darned desk. They were a knockdown, drag out battle . . . and old George F. come in. "What is this all"—he talked with a down east accent—"What's this all about?" So Mr. Charlie come over to us and says, tell him. So we told him. "Well, by God, he says, then throw the damned thing out!" He says, "You men always want to remember how you can get any damned thing you want if you'll only stick together." Now he told us, his workers, that.⁶⁹

Skilled factory workers were not the only groups who could stand up to management. Tannery workers, both skilled and unskilled, exemplified a collective consciousness that often led to group resistance. In their work behaviors they demonstrated that there was no question as to whom they served. It was not the corporation, as one tannery manager discovered:

There was five people in this unit. And as the leather was finished they would put the leather on sticks and hang them up through a long, long dryer. This thing was moving slowly. We caught them cheating on their count. We had a bell inside, and as it hit the stick it would knock it over and count them. So we knew there was something wrong, and as I recall, I remember calling them together, just warning them that I know what was going on. "So if you're smart, you'd quit it!" . . . They kept it up, and up, and then I had to finally go to Mr. Johnson, George W. Johnson.⁷⁰

Even though the workers were fired, they still stuck together. They were unwilling to confess to Johnson or to the tannery superintendent who among the group was responsible for the cheating. Ultimately, the tanners were offered their jobs back. All, except for one who had left the area, returned.⁷¹

Rollers, the elite of the tanneries, also showed a proclivity for self-organization comparable to cutters. While their jousts with management did not always yield successful results, their very tendency to engage in confronta-

tions with upper management and to demand higher wages for their work demonstrated the limits of welfarism's success at Endicott Johnson. It was no wonder that when the International Fur and Leather Workers Union first began to organize tannery workers in the early 1940s, its most energetic organizers were drawn from the rollers.⁷² And it was also no surprise that tannery workers, both skilled and unskilled, were among the few groups of Endicott Johnson workers ever to be unionized.⁷³

Clearly, for both individuals and groups, loyalty to the corporation did not mean passive acceptance of management policies. Being "fair with the company" had its limits. Workers who were a bit too fair were disciplined by fellow workers, as was the case with one stitching room worker who had approached management with a suggestion for improving efficiency within her room. She recommended that certain "unnecessary" day workers be eliminated. Coming in the depths of the Depression, in 1932, such a proposal may have been loyal to management but hardly loyal to coworkers who would be left out in the cold, jobless. Although women stitching room workers generally showed a far lesser tendency to band together to protect their interests than the higher-skilled male workers, in this case their collective antipathy unified them. Both fellow workers and her forelady turned against the "loyal" stitcher. Even though she had been promised protection "as far as possible from getting in wrong with her forelady or fellow workers," the firm was unable to fulfill that promise. "She has had more or less of an unhappy experience since then," Charles F. Johnson, Jr., wrote his uncle.⁷⁴

Women rarely demonstrated the sort of group resistance to management that men did. As one stitcher admitted, men had committees, "us women, we just went along day by day."⁷⁵ Yet as individuals they clearly recognized that they shared a common interest with fellow workers. Despite the competition that was so prevalent in the stitching rooms, women could rise above it:

I had a friend who worked and she was very fast and . . . she felt as if she was so fast on the lining and she knew what the other girls were making, that she felt she'd cut their rate if she turned hers [coupons] in because then they'd expect them to bring up to it, so she'd turn in, you know, reasonable in relation to the other workers. When she left EJ, she had a large surplus of money. They didn't want to pay her, but there was a law about it, they had to pay her. She had a lot of coupons that she held back. Every week she'd turn in some of her old coupons but she couldn't turn them all in, so she had quite a lot.⁷⁶

In hundreds of ways men and women, low-skilled workers and high, expressed their distance from the corporation. Cutters, like the stitcher above, withheld coupons or held back leather so as not to "show up the other fellows."⁷⁷ Rather than accepting wage reductions, workers might refuse certain jobs if they felt they were poorly priced. They would join together to restrict output. They criticized and isolated fast workers whose pursuit of

individual gain threatened the collective interests of coworkers. They loafed on the job, gambled, talked back to supervisors, refused to work on unpleasant jobs, engaged in acts of individual sabotage, or simply walked out of the factory, never to return, for any number of reasons. If one considers the reactions of the thousands upon thousands of workers who came to work for the firm, stayed only a short time, and left Endicott Johnson, never identifying with the firm at all, then the case presented in this chapter becomes even stronger. For such workers, whose employment careers in the firm lasted only a matter of days, or weeks, or even months, the sour realities of work far outweighed the benefits of welfare capitalism. For them the "Square Deal" never did and never would exist.⁷⁸

Workers resisted job changes, the introduction of new technology, or the institution of work arrangements that threatened them. While the firm tried to introduce new machines by first bringing in a single machine and an outside worker to familiarize employees slowly with the new device and to convince them to accept it, machine and work changes were sometimes actively fought. As individuals, workers might simply withdraw their labor. Collectively, of course, they had more power. In the Ideal Factory in Endicott, for example, workers resisted a speedup brought about by the introduction of a new system that had each bed laster operate two machines at once. The system was eventually abandoned by the firm. In the Sole Leather Tannery, a new device perfected by an employee in the Mechanical Department to replace the rolling machine met with stiff opposition from the rollers. Both its inherent flaws and worker sabotage led to its failure and rejection by management.⁷⁹ In short, anything that aided management and hurt workers would be viewed suspiciously, demonstrating that the "industrial partnership" that Endicott Johnson's corporate welfarism attempted to create was never quite realized.

And yet Endicott Johnson workers were loyal workers. Many of them stayed with the firm for years, working alongside husbands, wives, children, and other relatives. The vast majority of them repeatedly rejected unionization. Prolonged strikes were unheard of. By the criteria of unionists, radical critics, and labor historians, then, welfarism at Endicott Johnson was a success, creating and sustaining a labor loyalty to the corporation that endured even the Depression.

To ignore the price of success or its uneven manifestation, however, would be wrong. Even within this most paternalistic of industrial settings, where collective identification with the corporation was carefully cultivated, a substantial reservoir of autonomous behavior and sentiment existed and provided a source of strength in the negotiation of service and wage concessions from the corporation. Although the gulf between managers and workers was somewhat narrowed by welfarism, it was not bridged. Workers never quite viewed their loyalty in the terms that management defined it. They were never "captive" to paternalism.

NOTES

1. *E-J Workers Magazine* 1 (Dec. 1922). The poem appeared in *Forbes Magazine* and is credited to Edmund Leamy. Date and issue are not specified.
2. For example, Guy Whiting Beardsley, "He Heard Opportunity's Knock," *American Magazine* 81 (May 1916): 50-51; Frederick M. Davenport, "The Path to Industrial Peace," *Outlook* 124 (Apr. 14, 1920): 644-50; George Mortimer, "George F. Johnson and His 'Square-Deal Towns': The Story of a Big Manufacturer Who Has Interesting Ideas," *American Magazine* 91 (Jan. 1921): 36-37; Rose C. Feld, "An Industrial Democrat Points the Way," *New York Times Magazine*, June 3, 1934, 6-7; "Our Friend George F.," *Time* 32 (Dec. 5, 1938): 12.
3. *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1919.
4. James S. Gibbons, "Has George F. Johnson Found Key to Industrial Problems?" *Manufacturers Journal* 16 (July 1937): 8.
5. The *American Federationist*, published by the AFL, constantly took aim at welfare policies of various major firms. Through the 1920s the journal came to devote more and more of its pages to criticism of welfare capitalism. See, for example, *American Federationist* 30 (Sept. 1923): 760-61; or *ibid.* 32 (May 1925): 355. The *Shoe Workers' Journal*, as well as other union journals, also continually criticized various welfare schemes. See *Shoe Workers' Journal* 21 (Jan. 1920): 25; *ibid.* 24 (Nov. 1923): 7-8; *ibid.* 27 (Dec. 1926): 6-8. For other critical perspectives, see Mina Weisenberg's "Labor's Defense against Employers' Welfare Tactics," *New York Times Current History Magazine* 25 (Mar. 1927): 803-8; and occasional articles that appeared in the *New Republic* during the 1920s.
6. Robert W. Dunn, "The Industrial Welfare Offensive," in *The Shaping of the American Tradition*, ed. Louis Hacker (New York, 1947), 1071. Dunn's essay originally appeared in J. B. S. Hardman, ed., *American Labor Dynamics* (New York, 1928).
7. The original appeared in *Masses* about 1913 but became part of labor's public domain soon after. The version cited above was published in *Shoe Workers' Journal* 15 (Feb. 1914): 3. A slightly different version was revived during the Endicott Johnson union campaigns of the late 1930s. See *E-J Union News*, Oct. 23, 1939, 5.
8. Harry W. Laidler and Norman Thomas, eds., *New Tactics in Social Conflict* (New York, 1926), 98. The League for Industrial Democracy, originally the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, was the intellectual arm of the Socialist party. It promoted academic discussion of socialist ideas and ideals among intellectuals and professionals.
9. Abraham Epstein, "Industrial Welfare Movement Sapping American Trade Unions," *New York Times Current History Magazine* 24 (July 1926): 516.
10. *Shoe Workers' Journal* 29 (Aug. 1928): 13. See also *ibid.* 21 (May 1920): 12; and *ibid.* 28 (June 1927): 1.
11. Nancy Dawson, "'To Laugh, That We May Not Weep,'" *E.-J. Workers' Review* 2 (Nov. 1920): 36. The article is reprinted from the *New York Call* of Sept. 18, 1920.
12. Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago, 1976), 140.

13. Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston, 1960), 186.
14. Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1928), is the seminal statement of this view.
15. Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, 187.
16. Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison, Wis., 1975), chap. 6. For a critique of Nelson, see Jeremy Brecher et al., "Uncovering the Hidden History of the American Workplace," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 10 (Winter 1978): 3. Nelson, however, also suggested that "control over the factory worker" was not as easily or as mechanically achieved, although this was hardly his emphasis, and the impression he leaves is just the opposite. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that "welfare work probably had a greater impact on the evolution of business administration than on the worker's attitude toward his supervisor, the firm, or his obligations to his employer" (p. 120).
17. David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York, 1980), 78. On the "paralysis of the labor movement" in the 1920s, see Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, chap. 2; Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 63-66; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York, 1929): sec. 1. Trade union membership in the 1920s declined from over five million in 1920 to three and a half million in 1929. Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, 84.
18. Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 134.
19. George F. Johnson, "What I've Learned about Business since 1920," *System* 40 (Dec. 1921): 681.
20. *Ibid.*, 680. Of course, for upper management this was merely symbolic, as the photo in Johnson's article illustrates.
21. Thomas K. Chubbuck, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, June 29, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
22. See *E.-J. Workers' Review* 3 (Mar. 1921): 3; and *ibid.* (Apr. 1921): 3. George F. Johnson to the *Syracuse Herald*, Apr. 23, 1921, box 6, George F. Johnson Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N. Y.
23. Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York, 1982), chaps. 11 and 12.
24. George F. Johnson to A. L. Kinsey, May 13, 1921, box 6, George F. Johnson Papers.
25. Historians who have written about Endicott Johnson and George F. Johnson, mainly in theses and dissertations, are as guilty of neglecting workers' perspectives as are the students of the more general welfare movement cited previously. See William Patrick Burns, "A Study of Personnel Policies, Employee Opinion and Labor Turnover (1930-1946) at the Endicott Johnson Corporation" (Master's thesis, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1947); William Wilson Shear, "Industrial Relations in the Endicott Johnson Corporation: A Case Study of Welfare Capitalism in the 1920s" (Master's thesis,

- S.U.N.Y. at Binghamton, 1978); Richard S. Saul, "An Industrial Entrepreneur: George F. Johnson" (D.S.S. diss., Syracuse University, 1966); and G. Ralph Smith, *The Endicott Johnson Corporation* (New Orleans, 1959). Although Burns surveyed employee opinion, it was a superficial survey at best.
26. George F. Johnson to George W. Johnson, Nov. 22, 1930, box 11, George F. Johnson Papers.
 27. William Inglis, *George F. Johnson and His Industrial Democracy* (New York, 1935), 240-41.
 28. *Ibid.*, 245.
 29. "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page," *Binghamton Sun*, Feb. 10, 1934.
 30. George F. Johnson to James Thomson, Sept. 7, 1933, box 13, George F. Johnson Papers.
 31. George W. Johnson to George F. Johnson, Mar. 5, 1935, box 13, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.
 32. George F. Johnson to George W. Johnson, Mar. 8, 1935, box 11, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 33. Frank Tuthill, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Nov. 30, 1979, tape recording (personal possession). A conversation with Jack Hobbie on Dec. 12, 1979, confirmed Tuthill's account. See also Harry L. Gruver to George F. Johnson, Apr. 27, 1927; and George F. Johnson to Harry L. Gruver, May 2, 1927, in box 8, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 34. George W. Johnson to George F. Johnson, Dec. 7, 1931, box 12, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 35. Thomas K. Chubbuck, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 2, July 2, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Norman W. Councilman, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 5, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). Several interviews by David Nielson further corroborate this event. See V—, and L—, interview by David Nielson, July 23, 1976; tape recording; R—, interview by David Nielson, July 10, 1974, transcript, 284; D—, interview by David Nielson, June 25, 1974, transcript, 245.
 36. *E.-J. Workers' Review* 1 (Sept. 1919): 32-A. Johnson used the term "directors" because he felt it was more "democratic." Workers, however, generally stuck to "foremen" and "foreladies."
 37. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.; George F. Johnson to Herbert C. Clarke, June 28, 1925, box 8, George F. Johnson Papers; George F. Johnson to Charles F. Johnson, Jr., July 25, 1929, box 9, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 38. Paul R. Eckelberger, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 26, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
 39. F—, interview by David Nielson, Aug. 3, 1973, transcript, 107. For another example, see Paul R. Knickerbocker, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, June 10, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
 40. Chubbuck, interview, session 1. For more on the issue of shop floor authority and

- the various responses of individual foremen, see Knickerbocker, interview, session 1; Richard J. Murphy, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). For a general discussion of the forces eroding the authority of shop floor supervisors in the early decades of the century, see Nelson, *Managers and Workers*, chap. 3 and *passim*.
41. Tuthill, interview.
 42. S——, interview by David Nielson, July 22, 1976, tape recording.
 43. George F. Johnson to George F. Reilly, Sept. 9, Sept. 17, 1930, box 11, George F. Johnson Papers.
 44. George F. Johnson to Harold R. Pettit, Nov. 4, 1933, box 13, George F. Johnson Papers.
 45. C——, interview by David Nielson, July 26, 1973, transcript, 79. Unfortunately, the outcome of this exchange is not recalled in the interview.
 46. Murphy, interview.
 47. For a discussion of wage policies in Endicott Johnson, see Burns, "A Study of Personnel Policies," 69–74.
 48. James W. Lupole, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
 49. Owen J. Ryall, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Apr. 30, 1982, tape recording (personal possession). See also Lupole, interview; and Mary Seversky, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 22, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
 50. Seversky, interview. Many workers complained about work being taken from them, repriced and shifted to other factories. Union propaganda in the late 1930s and in the 1940s (to be treated in later chapters) focused on unfair pricing methods. See also Amy King, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Nov. 30, 1979, tape recording (personal possession). The company explained away price differences on similar work as due to "varying conditions" in the different factories. Burns, "A Study of Personnel Policies," 71.
 51. Murphy, interview.
 52. "Report of Meeting of Edge Trimmers," Sept. 1, 1927, pp. 2–3, box 19, George F. Johnson Papers. Emphasis in original.
 53. *Ibid.*, 4.
 54. *Ibid.*, 5, 7–8. Vacations with pay had been discontinued a few years earlier, and the bonus for the previous year had amounted to only thirty-one dollars.
 55. *Ibid.*, 11–12. Emphasis in original.
 56. About 40 of the approximately 100 Johnson City edge trimmers attended, according to Charles F. Johnson, Jr. Clearly, management had an informant among the 40 who attended. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Nov. 15, 1927, box 28, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 57. George F. Johnson to Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Nov. 18, 1927, box 8, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers. The edge trimmers' actions deeply affected George F. Johnson. See, for example, George F. Johnson to Don C. Morgan, Dec. 27, 1927, box 9; and George F. Johnson to Jewett Neiley, Mar. 14, 1928, box 9, George F. Johnson Papers.
 58. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Nov. 22, 1927, box 28, ser. 1,

- Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers. Two of the three leaders later asked for their jobs back and were apparently rehired. The third, Felix C. McQueen, a forty-five-year-old, self-proclaimed "roughneck," was not rehired. His employment card simply read "Q11-22-27 Dissatisfied." See Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Nov. 23, 1927, box 28, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers; Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
59. George F. Johnson to Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Nov. 24, 1927, box 8, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 60. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Nov. 23, 1927, box 28, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 61. Kenneth E. Compton, interview by Gerald Zahavi, May 5, 1982, tape recording (personal possession). "Letting the stitches out" refers to the setting on the machines that determined the number of stitches per inch (a normal setting was eight stitches per inch). Fewer stitches per inch required less time to accomplish and thus increased the income of the stitchers.
 62. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Mar. 25, 1932, box 29, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers. See also George F. Johnson to Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Mar. 21, 1932, box 10; George W. Johnson to George F. Johnson, Mar. 21, 1932, box 13; Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Mar. 17, 1932, box 29, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 63. Ralph V. Russell, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, May 27, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
 64. *E-J Union News*, Nov. 13, 1939, 1. An analysis of union pledge cards in the BSWU archives uncovered a disproportionate number of Pioneer Factory cutters. Local 42 Pledge Cards, BSWU Records, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
 65. John Kovak [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). A second interview with Kovak [pseud.] conducted a year later elicited more details on the cutters' organization. See John Kovak [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, session 2, Aug. 27, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
 66. Kovak [pseud.], interviews, sessions 1 and 2.
 67. Only one BSWU pledge card in over 2,000 cards located in the union archive was signed by a Scout Factory cutter! Local 42 Pledge Cards, BSWU Records.
 68. Chubbuck, interview, session 1.
 69. *Ibid.* Johnson had received several complaints from workers about the system. See George F. Johnson to P. Lewington, Jan. 30, 1925, box 7, George F. Johnson Papers.
 70. Knickerbocker, interview, session 1. An Upper Leather Tannery foreman confessed that one of his major duties was to watch for cheating, particularly among the lower-paid tannery workers: "There could be a lot of cheating if you didn't watch them." Russell, interview.
 71. Knickerbocker, interview, session 1.
 72. Knickerbocker, interviews, sessions 1 and 2.
 73. Their unionization is the subject of chap. 7.
 74. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., to George F. Johnson, Feb. 8, 1932, box 29, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.
 75. Seversky, interview.

76. H——, interview by David Nielson, June 23, 1973, transcript, 20.
77. During the Depression Charles F. Johnson, Jr., learned that upper leather cutters "were making so much money that they did not dare turn it all in, but were holding back coupons so that if they went on short time, they could draw full pay for sometime in the future." He ordered the superintendents of all the factories to prevent such actions. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., "To the Superintendents of All Factories" (notice), Dec. 18, 1936, box 31, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers. Kovak [pseud.], interview, session 1.
78. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records; Paul Coletti [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 13, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Kovak [pseud.], interviews, sessions 1 and 2; Murphy, interview. See also David Nielson's interviews and *Labor News*, July 3, 1940, 3.
79. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records; Knickerbocker, interview, session 2.