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The Company's Voice in the Workplace:

Labor Spies, Propaganda, and Personnel Management, 1918-1920

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On July 31st, 1918, Oscar Elsas, President of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills (FBCM), hired an operative from the Sherman Service to work undercover in his Atlanta plant. At first glance, there is nothing surprising about this action. The use of private detectives to spy on unions and strikers was widespread among employers from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, generating extensive commentary at the time, and, beginning in the 1970s, drawing the attention of historians such as Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Charles Hyde, David Holter, Robert Weiss, and Robert Smith.¹ Since the discovery in 1985 of a cache of FBCM records that included hundreds of spy reports, historians have often used the company to illustrate their arguments. Clifford Kuhn, Gary Fink and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall have examined Elsas' use of undercover operatives to gather information on union activities during a strike in 1914-1915. Fink also looked beyond that event, to the period up to the end of 1918, when Elsas employed operatives to do "efficiency work," to watch "labor productivity while at the same time keeping an eye on shop floor supervisors and other low level management personnel."² But the work Elsas wanted done in July 1918 and the operative he hired fall outside that familiar story.

On this occasion Elsas sought an operative to undertake "propaganda work." This third form of labor spying practice appeared for the first time during World War One,

produced by the intersection of the emergence of propaganda with an increased interest in the ideas of personnel management. It was only during the war that the term propaganda gained currency in the United States, as Americans encountered efforts to direct opinion and emotion on a mass scale. The success of the Federal government's use of words and images inspired employers to utilize advertising to cultivate the morale of their workers. Another element of the government's propaganda apparatus, the Four Minute Men, who gave speeches articulating the arguments of the government, demonstrated that even individuals could manipulate opinion to serve particular interests. Unnoticed by scholars, detective agencies learned that lesson, and made propaganda work one of the services their operatives offered employers.³ Demand for that practice arose during the war, as employers, faced with labor shortages that made it increasingly difficult to retain workers and make them productive, developed a new interest in shaping their workers' attitude. This moment saw the birth of personnel management. Recognition that output from labor depended on the morale of workers led employers to attempt to maximize production by developing a sense of mutual interests and cooperation in their workforce. Histories of personnel management and public relations explore the workplace practices, such as job classification, internal promotion and employee representation, and the advertising and publications deployed in pursuit of that goal. Missing is the parallel, covert, propaganda work done by labor spies.⁴

Propaganda work differed from the labor spying practices discussed in existing scholarship. Where guarding against theft, anti-union work and efficiency work are primarily about surveillance, about being an employer's eyes and ears, propaganda work involved being the employer's voice. Labor spies were hardly entirely silent or passive when employed on other assignments. Anti-union work could include speaking against

or provoking strike action, disrupting union meetings, or provoking discord among union leaders. But none of that activity relied on repeating arguments drawn from management literature, or sought to change how workers thought about their relationship with their employer, to address the causes of their discontent rather than its symptoms. Propaganda work also required labor spies to develop friendships with employees sufficiently intimate that they would listen to arguments made to them, relationships not necessary to reporting on how efficiently they worked. Propaganda work was thus more tied to ideas about management and to economic circumstances, and more invasive of everyday life than the other practices of labor spies.

In addition to the operative hired for propaganda work in 1918, Elsas hired a second labor spy to provide this service in 1920. Looking at each in turn, this article explores the development of this form of labor spying and how the circumstances of war and peace affected its practice. Comparing the reports of the two operatives also highlights how gender shaped propaganda work. The first assignment required a female operative who was experienced in sewing bags and a white Southerner. Although all the major detective agencies had women on their payrolls, to cater for a sex-segregated workforce that created jobs and areas of the factory in which only women worked, aside from Fink's brief discussion of a woman employed earlier by Elsas, only male operatives appear in the scholarly literature.⁵ The male operative hired for the second assignment had the advantage of a job that allowed him to move around the factory, and to spread propaganda to a far more extensive group of workers than his female colleague, but he proved unable to address the attitude of women employees.

During a decade as President of FBCM, Oscar Elsas made extensive use of labor spies. Confronted with a strike at the Atlanta plant in 1914, only a few months after being passed control of the company by his father, one of his first actions was to employ operatives from the Railway Audit and Inspection Company (RAIC) to report on union activities both inside and outside the mill. By the time the strike fizzled out in May 1915, sixteen different operatives had supplied Elsas with reports. Those documents recorded discussions at union meetings, and described efforts to identify union members, influence the union's decision-making, and undermine and infiltrate its leadership. All those practices were staples of the anti-union work done by private detectives.⁶

Victory in the strike did not lead Elsas to abandon the use of spies. To the contrary, in subsequent years he sent a diverse group that included not just white men, but also a black man, an Italian man and several white women, into five different FBCM plants, on assignments that extended beyond anti-union work. In the nine years between the end of the strike in May 1915 and his sudden death in 1924, thirty-one spies worked in the company's main plant in Atlanta. While seven agents focused on unions, and two others investigated thefts, seventy percent did "efficiency work," submitting reports on the operations of the plant, on employees' attitude toward their work and supervisors, and on their "immorality," particularly instances of sexual impropriety and drinking. Elsas also sent nine spies into other FBCM plants with a similar variety of assignments. Three men in the St Louis factory in 1918 and 1919 checked for union activity. Four operatives worked in the Brooklyn plant, where two investigated thefts, one watched a supervisor, and one reported on workplace efficiency. The one operative sent to Dallas and New Orleans conducted workplace surveillance.⁷

Elsas' employment of spies to do efficiency work reflected his interest in scientific management.⁸ He had studied at MIT, before returning home to finish his degree at the newly founded Georgia Tech. That exposure to modern efficiency practices inspired systems of premiums and fines in the FBCM, as well as ideas that touched "practically every other aspect of company operations." In the aftermath of the strike, Elsas refined his approach, extending the company's welfare activities. By 1919, the Atlanta plant featured a concert band, a Men's Club building, a daily noon volleyball game, a company basketball team, an upgraded cafeteria, girls and boys clubs, and outings to parks.⁹ To restructure the workplace, Elsas turned to Frank Neely, a fellow graduate of Georgia Tech. Neely had already reorganized a Westinghouse factory in Pittsburgh and his father-in-law's candy and cracker factory in Atlanta when he joined the FBCM in 1915. In 1918 he became general manager, travelling around the company's five mills reorganizing production.¹⁰ Without supervisors trained in scientific management in the mills – it would be the end of the 1920s before such men became commonplace in textile plants – Neely's changes faced considerable opposition.¹¹ Labor spies employed to do efficiency work helped management counter that resistance by watching for workers or supervisors failing to adopt new practices, and for any other instances of inefficient production. Such surveillance had occurred before the years around World War One. The very first labor spies, railway spotters, initially employed to detect theft, by the 1890s also reported on how workers performed their jobs.¹² Their early-twentieth-century successors, who sought out labor activism in workplaces, continued to also record observations about the performance of workers and supervisors.¹³ What changed in the years around the war was that employers influenced by scientific management began to request such information.

Attention to new trends in management also led Elsas to hire operatives to do propaganda work. Whereas efficiency work had been concerned with the organization of labor, propaganda work focused on achieving the cooperation of employees in that scheme. On the contract he signed in July 1918, Elsas wrote,

The workers are careless and indifferent about working steady. This is the only trouble practically and [the] representative is to put forth [her] entire efforts to overcome this by using such arguments as will show the employees that it is a duty they owe to themselves as well as their employers and the country to work steady and do their best.¹⁴

Those instructions point to how the outbreak of war produced a crisis in the workplace, and prompted a turn to new ideas about labor management, and to a new means of deploying those ideas to resolve that upheaval. After the United States entered World War One, conscription and an end to immigration exacerbated a tight labor market and already high rates of labor turnover, developments that hit the FBCM particularly hard, as the company already experienced more difficulty retaining workers than its competitors. Plentiful jobs undermined the drive system on which employers relied to obtain production from their workers, removing the fear of unemployment that caused workers to accept close supervision, threats and abuse from supervisors and foremen. One result was the behavior that reduced productivity that Elsas reported, workers “careless and indifferent about working steady.” Absenteeism and tardiness exacerbated that trouble, strikes and union organizing spread, and the federal government began to interfere in employment practices.¹⁵

In seeking a solution to these problems that focused on his workers' motivations, Elsas joined other employers in becoming more responsive to new ideas associated with personnel management. This emerging body of thought emphasized the importance of the "human element," the psychological processes that distinguished labor from inputs such as coal and steel and determined that workers' level of performance was not fixed, like the amount of energy produced by coal, but contingent on morale. Maximizing output from labor in this model required the "cooperation" of workers, achieved through "positive" practices. Rather than the coercion of the drive system, management thinkers "looked for ways to align the interests of employers and workers, reduce sources of friction and create esprit de corps."¹⁶ Some promoted job classification and rationalized wage rates to remove the disparities and inequities that flowed from the foreman's control and the heavy use of incentive pay systems. Others championed internal promotion systems that provided incentives to motivate workers, and encouraged loyalty by rewarding them for staying in the plant. Welfare benefits, such as stock ownership plans, group insurance, pensions and paid vacations, had advocates as ways to strengthen the bond between firms and their employees.¹⁷ Proponents of work councils, employee representation plans and company unions likewise believed they offered the promise of a "working together" relationship between employers and workers.¹⁸

Elsas' instructions relied on a different method to encourage the form of cooperation he sought, "arguments" that would "show" employees a new way of thinking about their work. As it fell outside the realm of personnel managers and departments, this approach is absent from historical accounts of the emergence of personnel management. In labeling that practice "propaganda work," Elsas highlighted its origins in the means of shaping opinion deployed during WWI. Before the war, efforts to influence thinking in

employers' favor focused on public opinion and on the press. Publicity bureaus and press agents sought to influence newspaper coverage, producing and disseminating material for publication, and sometimes using advertising as lever to get favorable stories published. War saw efforts at mass persuasion expand beyond the printed page. The Federal government's Committee on Public Information (CPI) sold the war to Americans by mobilizing "an all-encompassing fabric of perception – every moment of human attention," by using "the printed word, the spoken word, motion pictures, the telegraph, the wireless, posters, signboards, and every possible, media..."¹⁹ More than scale and breadth characterized wartime public relations. It also assumed a new intensity and perceived effectiveness, recognized by the appearance of the term propaganda in common usage. What distinguished propaganda as a new force with an almost unlimited power to capture hearts and minds was "its ability to by-pass human reason and direct its attack to the vulnerable feelings, sentiments and emotions."²⁰

Government propaganda inspired employers to use advertising and the range of mediums employed by the CPI to address worker morale, as Roland Marchand has shown.²¹ The CPI also offered a model for how individuals could be a vehicle for delivering arguments in workers' everyday lives: the Four Minute Men, who articulated the government's message in speeches. Selected from volunteer community members, they spoke primarily in movie theatres, during the intermission while the projectionist changed the film reels, a timeframe that gave the organization its name. At those venues could be found "the silent ones who do not read or attend meetings but who must be reached."²² A precursor to this practice existed in AT&T's Information Bureau, one of the very few prewar corporate public relations departments, which arranged public debates, for which "pro-AT&T speakers -- drawn ideally from the community – were furnished with

debating kits, indexes of relevant issues, and other ammunition with which to mount an effective response. As never before, local forums of public discussion were being infused with scripted lines.”²³ The CPI did not provide the Four Minute Men with scripts, but shaped their words by distributing regular bulletins of short articles and outlines on the specific topics on which they spoke. In addressing a movie theatre audience that had paid admission to see a film not hear a speech, the Four Minute Men inserted themselves further into people’s daily lives than the speakers AT&T sent to public debates. To do so, they used the authority of the government, literally, speaking after a slide had been projected that stated they spoke “under the authority of the Committee on Public Information.”²⁴ At the same time, their persuasiveness appeared contingent on being volunteers, with reports of negative reactions when audience members mistook them for paid agents of the government.²⁵

The agency that Elsas employed to do propaganda work, the Sherman Service, appears to be one of the first to recognize that individual labor spies could operate much like the Four Minute Men. From its founding in 1917, when John Sherman rebranded his detective agency as “industrial conciliators,” using propaganda to manage workers provided the signature element of that agency’s work.²⁶ The Service did more than recognize the power of propaganda; it also adopted the language and ideas of personnel management. In touting itself to Elsas, the Service claimed that in contrast to other agencies, its work “does not consist of information and reports alone – it is harmonious, constructive and remedial action.”²⁷ Whereas surveillance allowed only for “indifferent and non-producers [to be] found out and discharged,” negative outcomes rendered less effective by wartime conditions, the agency’s positive action followed personnel management in focusing on workers’ attitudes, on the causes of their unproductivity.”²⁸

“The real basis of our work,” one Sherman operative wrote in 1919, involved teaching employees “to think right,” or as the agency’s “Preliminary Educational Instructions” put it, “The minds of those who are dissatisfied and disgruntled must be changed.”²⁹

Operatives would remedy those difficulties by making arguments to workers, to aid and assist them, to help them to build themselves up, to make them cheerful, to get them to respond to our efforts to increase productivity, and to bring them to realize that the employer is seriously anxious and willing to maintain harmonious, friendly and WORKING TOGETHER relationships with them.³⁰

This image of a transformed workforce with which the Service tantalized employers went beyond the attitude of cooperation that formed the focus of personnel management to promise also a change in workers’ mood and sense of self.

The Sherman Service supplied arguments to its operatives by the same means as the CPI, but labor spies delivered that propaganda in ways both more intrusive and more covert than movie theatre speechmaking. Like the Division of Four Minute Men, the Service distributed weekly bulletins, with one operative claiming in 1920 that they spent “about \$33,000 a month for literature, instructions and propaganda.”³¹ Such expenditure delivered two types of bulletins, one duplicating sections of the Educational Instructions given to new operatives, with additional examples of the Service’s approach, and a second that offered arguments relating to specific topics. To communicate those ideas, operatives fostered relationships with workers, reaching further into their everyday lives and privacy than did the Four Minute Men, who simply appeared before them. Having identified the “dissatisfied” workers, operatives were instructed to “cultivate their friendship and win their confidence and esteem, after which you can proceed to present

facts and arguments to them and will also be in a position to assume a leadership among them.” The Service directed them to also pick out some employees to make “fellow workers in our cause,” “by spending your spare or unemployed time with them, in the mornings around the plant before work begins, at noon time, or in the evenings about town, and cultivat[ing] those...whom you think...would be fitted to unconsciously absorb your principles and follow your example.” Operatives had to work covertly and avoid identifying the origins of their arguments even to the extent that the slide that preceded a Four Minute Man’s speech did, as being seen as “an advocate of the principles you represent for pay merely” would lead to being misunderstood and mistrusted. To avoid such problems, the Service required operatives to adopt the persona of someone working “for the welfare and wellbeing of all, ...naturally and without ostentation, as though you had been doing it all your life and that it was merely human nature which prompted your actions.” Such an identity allowed an operative to create circumstances in which workers might let down their guard and become receptive to the arguments made to them.³²

Workplace organization left Elsas no option but to employ a female operative to do the propaganda work he desired in 1918. The women workers whose attitudes he sought to change labored in a department in which the foreman was the only man present for any length of time, and kept together, apart from the male workers, before and after work, and in their lunch break.³³ To join their ranks, the Sherman Service dispatched Mrs. Grace Hammer, the thirty-three year-old daughter of an Atlanta saloon owner, who in 1918 was living in New York City.³⁴ She arrived by train in Atlanta on August 18, leaving her husband, a bricklayer, and their three children, aged from three to seven years, behind in New York City. For the six weeks she spent in Atlanta, Hammer lived in a room at the Fulton Inn, a boarding house “run exclusively for unattached female employees.”³⁵

Although Hammer told census takers that she had no occupation, this assignment was not her first undercover work. In later correspondence, she mentioned how, “in this line of business one has to travel and I have seen a good deal of the United States.”³⁶ In the time immediately surrounding her assignment for the FBCM, she did undercover work at the Riegel Bag Factory in Jersey City, in a collar factory in Troy, New York, and in a mill in Birmingham, Alabama.³⁷ As Fink has argued was typical of labor spies who did efficiency work, Hammer clearly felt herself superior to the subjects of her surveillance.³⁸ She described the work as arduous, requiring her to “to associate and adapt myself to the lowliest when working with the factory element.” So “revolting and disgusting” was the work, Hammer claimed, that few women would do it, instead limiting themselves to spying in department stores.³⁹

Notwithstanding those feelings, Hammer had to become intimate enough with her co-workers to be able to use the arguments provided by the Sherman Service to change their thinking. In line with the agency’s practice, her early reports emphasized cultivating the friendship of co-workers as a precondition to being able to appeal to them. By one measure, Hammer fell short of that goal. Only rarely did she find anyone willing to socialize with her outside working hours: Hammer spent just two of the six Sundays and five of the thirty-five evenings she was in Atlanta in the company of co-workers. Most evenings and Sundays saw her instead fruitlessly wandering the streets around the mill searching for her co-workers.⁴⁰ As a result, Hammer could only deliver her propaganda when she mingled with women before and after the day’s work, and during the lunch break. The one advantage that such conversations had was that they potentially reached more workers. During the war more than two thousand men and women worked in the Atlanta plant, a facility that included two cotton mills and a bag factory as well as a

multitude of departments that supported them, from shipping to carpentry.⁴¹ At the plant gate Hammer would have met workers different from those she encountered during the day in her department, but, as she was well aware, she would have been a stranger with whom they were unlikely to let down their guard.

In the reports Hammer wrote in her room at the end of each day, she repeated the arguments she made to her co-workers at length, effectively showing that she was following the script provided by the Sherman Service. Most of that material consisted of patriotic appeals. In a typical statement aimed at increasing productivity, Hammer argued, “Inasmuch as we work in an essential industry it is no more than our duty to turn out as much work as possible so that the boys over there will be properly supplied and in this manner be able to continue this war successfully.”⁴² Patriotism served equally well to pre-empt discontent. Hammer urged her co-workers to accept any problems with their working conditions as “slight sacrifices” to help “our boys,” whose own sacrifices were far greater.⁴³ Workers proposing to quit attracted a more critical tone. Hammer admonished one woman that quitting work to go to Alabama “she would be benefitting the Kaiser instead of trying to defeat the Kaiser.”⁴⁴ During wartime such arguments had more power to motivate workers than any of the appeals that the Sherman Service took from the personnel management literature. Elsas apparently recognized as much, having specifically asked the Service to convince “employees that it is a duty they owe to...the country to work steady and do their best.”⁴⁵ He was hardly alone in that approach. Endorsement letters the Sherman Service solicited in 1918 reveal operatives made patriotic arguments at other workplaces. In a typical statement, the factory manager of the Revere Rubber Company of Chelsea, Massachusetts, wrote, “They have enthused our workers with a spirit of patriotism and loyalty which has thus evidenced itself by our

output.” Other employers flew flags, displayed government posters, invited speakers, and held rallies to try to achieve that association of their cause with patriotism.⁴⁶

Hammer tailored her arguments for a specifically female audience in a way that distinguished her work from much of the propaganda circulating during the war. Just what the Division of Four Minute Men’s female speakers said to audiences of women is unclear, but other arms of the CPI addressed women as wives and mothers. Posters urged them to write cheerful letters to American soldiers, to keep men from overstaying their leave, to serve as nurses, and to extend their motherhood to support of the Red Cross.⁴⁷ The Sherman Service script echoed that approach in arguments that women should work to assist brothers, husbands, and sons away fighting.⁴⁸ But it also devoted far more attention to German atrocities against women and children, seeking to spur production by evoking both a sympathetic identification with the women of France and Belgium and a sense of sexual danger. Women workers needed to do their utmost to support American troops, Hammer opined in a characteristic statement, because “they are doing their utmost to prevent the Huns from putting in an appearance on these shores and pillaging and committing rapine, the same as they have in Belgium and the invaded parts of France. We are the ones who will suffer most as it is their only desire to enter new countries where they can maltreat women the same as they have done in the devastated lands Over There [sic].”⁴⁹ Workers would have been unlikely to hear such arguments from Four Minute Men. Only one of the thirty-six bulletins of material distributed to them included “illustrations of brutality,” none of which featured the rape of women, with speakers instead regularly admonished “not to arouse hatred, not to inflame passions, but to show facts, to inspire deeper convictions.”⁵⁰ Posters, particularly those promoting the Fourth Liberty Loan near the end of the war, did offer graphic evocations of “‘bloody boots,’

trampled children and mutilated women,” but their text explicitly addressed men.⁵¹

Clearly such propaganda also carried a message for American women about the threats Germans posed to them. However, whereas the posters evoked that threat indirectly, Hammer expressed it directly. Employing labor spies to deliver propaganda within private conversations thus appears to have enabled an appeal that drew on the gendered fears of women.⁵²

Elsas had also asked the Sherman Service to instill in his workers a sense they owed steady work not only to their country, but to their employer. Hammer devoted far less of her time to making such arguments, even though they represented the core of the Sherman Service materials. Only scattered statements in support of the company featured in her conversations. Claiming experience had convinced her that Elsas “will do everything in his power to make working conditions ideal for his workers so that they may be contented,” and pointing to housing provided by the company as an example, Hammer promoted hard work as a way for workers to show appreciation for their employer’s efforts on their behalf.⁵³ However, the wartime context offered little room – or need – for such arguments, as appeals to patriotism resonated with the large-scale propaganda campaign being waged in American society. As effective they might be in the short term, however, patriotic arguments delivered changes that would clearly last only for the duration of the war, and not bring the long-term transformation of the workplace promised by personnel management.

Whether even short-term changes occurred in workers’ attitudes is hard to assess given that Hammer’s reports are dominated by recitations of arguments – so much so that it is hard not to see her conversation with fellow workers as so contrived that it must have

clearly identified her as speaking for the company. Indeed, she reported a group of girls responding to her urgings that they increase production by asking, “why was I so interested.” Hammer answered that everyone should be patriotic in a time of war, with it being her, and their, duty to impress on friends the need to “work harder than ever before.” She then noted, in a trope employed throughout her reports, that the girls concurred with her thinking and committed themselves to hard work.⁵⁴ On another occasion, she reported a group of women workers as remarking “that they were pleased to listen to arguments of this sort as it enlightened them as to what was going on in the old world.”⁵⁵ That morning “the conversation dwelt on war topics,” so Hammer did not raise the issue herself. In fact, it seems likely that workers frequently talked about the war, even if Hammer rarely specifically mentioned that context, and so her utterances were not so out of place as they appear in her reports.

Ultimately, Hammer’s effectiveness as a propagandist proved beside the point to Elsas and Neely. They clearly considered her reports credible, and interpreted them as indicating that workers in the Atlanta plant were “attending to their duties all day long in such a regular manner” that she could do little to improve the workforce. As a result, after four weeks on the job, Neely started her “along other lines,” questioning her about the how far work was being done the way the company wanted it, or more precisely, the way that he directed it be done.⁵⁶ For the next two weeks Hammer thus did efficiency work, until a severe illness forced her to return to New York City, bringing her assignment to an abrupt end. Although at odds with the Sherman Service’s public rejection of such spying, Hammer’s efficiency work falls short of substantiating the claims of critics that the agency’s identity as industrial conciliators was merely a front, to attract employers and cover up its undercover work. Reports by other Service operatives

show the same emphasis on propaganda as Hammer's reports. But in practice, that focus clearly did not preclude performing whatever other tasks an employer requested.⁵⁷ Back in New York, Hammer sided with Elsas against the Sherman Service in a dispute over the charges for her services, with the result that she eventually had to quit the agency.⁵⁸ She did, however, work for the FBCM again, in 1920, in the Brooklyn plant, not spreading propaganda but gathering information on the plant superintendent. That opportunity came because the work again required a female operative, and, as on several other occasions, the RAIC could not provide one, circumstances that indicate that undercover work continued to attract few women.⁵⁹

By 1920, no such shortage of operatives able to do propaganda work existed. When Elsas hired a second operative for that task, on this occasion in the Brooklyn plant, he did not employ the Sherman Service, but gave the job to the RAIC. His dispute with the Service over the bill for Hammer's work would certainly have made him wary of again employing them. So too would the scandal that enveloped the agency in 1919.

Instructions to operatives working for the steel industry to stir up "racial hatred" between Serbians and Italians were widely reprinted in the press, and later provided the basis for attacks on the Service in the Interchurch World Movement Commission of Inquiry into the 1919 Steel Strike, and subsequent publications by Sidney Howard and Robert Dunn.⁶⁰ But Elsas's decision also reflected how propaganda work had become part of the practice of labor spying rather than the specialization of a particular agency. In 1921, after supervising an investigation of "under-cover men" for the Interchurch Commission of Inquiry, Heber Blankenhorn, co-director of the Bureau of Industrial Research, and a wartime military propagandist, concluded that "modern concerns" had learned that "up-to-date war relies heavily on propaganda," and, showing "more brains" than old-

fashioned agencies, employed operatives who “are trained propagandists and are so offered for hire.”⁶¹ More so than the Sherman Service had a few years earlier, postwar agencies promoted the advantages of having a fellow worker deliver propaganda. Issues like the open shop movement, the RAIC asserted, “could be explained thoroughly to the workmen if a man were placed in the plant as an ordinary workman, but who would present the employer’s side.” As the Burns Agency argued more elaborately in a form letter used in 1933 to solicit business, “it is a simple, but none the less true fact, that all individuals are more readily and thoroughly convinced of the justice of a position taken on a controversial subject if the arguments advanced emanate from a sympathetic source; in this instance, from a fellow employee.”⁶²

Marketing material that emphasized the labor spy’s relative persuasiveness responded to a moment awash in various forms of employer propaganda. The success of wartime propaganda stirred a widespread interest among corporations in using advertising to cultivate worker loyalty and morale. Business leaders turned their corporate public relations inward, disseminating images of their enterprises as an army and a family.⁶³ When Seattle employers launched a coordinated, citywide open-shop campaign in October 1919, an early salvo in what would grow into a national movement against union organizing, their propaganda campaign included not just a succession of fifteen full-page newspaper advertisements, and sympathetic editorials, but also placards in streetcars. As other employers took up the campaign, they distributed millions of pieces of literature, and company magazines proliferated between 1917 and 1920, “to spread our propaganda.”⁶⁴ Yet employers feared that printed material might not be read or viewed, particularly as consciousness of propaganda and suspicion of its presence grew in postwar America. Employing a labor spy, agencies promised, provided a more certain

means of communicating with their workers. And what workers heard from labor spies echoed the range of employer propaganda circulating after the war. Blankenhorn's investigation revealed that detective agencies took "their ideas – or at least their patter – from modern employment managers, from civic federations, from the spokesmen of the 'open shop.' Their preachments contain texts on optimistic "getting together" and on "getting on" and "thrift" and self-made "success.""⁶⁵ Agencies such the Corporations Auxiliary Company promoted propaganda as "one of the greatest forces" to "preserve peace and harmony in industry, to prevent and avoid troubles, strikes, disputes and help everybody get a square deal."⁶⁶ The RAIC, following this trend in a more modest manner, marketed its operatives as a way to counter union propaganda.⁶⁷

As the RAIC does not appear to have employed bulletins to provide its operatives with arguments, as the Sherman Service did, the effectiveness of its propaganda work became more contingent on the abilities and knowledge of individual operatives. Elsas was fortunate in that regard. C. E. Rogers, like Grace Hammer, had experience as an undercover operative prior to being assigned to work in the Brooklyn plant. He had risen to a management position in the RAIC's Chicago office, but in 1919 opted to return to work in the field.⁶⁸ His first assignments were anti-union and efficiency work for the FBCM in St Louis, Atlanta and Dallas. Oscar Elsas offered uncharacteristic praise for that work, writing, "I do not remember getting reports from any man, of all that we have worked with for many years, who seemed to be so practical and give such good results."⁶⁹ Reflecting the new place of propaganda in the practice of postwar labor spies, incidental to his assignments Rogers showed himself, as Neely put it, "a good deal of a propagandist and makes it his business to discourage any discontent when he comes in contact with it."⁷⁰ His aptitude for such work likely contributed to Elsas's decision to employ him to

change the attitude of workers in the FBCM's Brooklyn plant. Elsas certainly felt confident enough in Rogers to give him only general instructions, noting "We believe with your experience at our other plants not much more need be said."⁷¹

The instructions Elsas did give Rogers focused more narrowly on the ideas of personnel management than those he gave Hammer. Whereas the female operative had been told to cultivate a sense of duty to both country and employer among the employees, Elsas instructed Rogers, "The main thing we would like you to do is to try to create a new spirit in the workers with whom you may come into contact, -- that is, loyalty, steady work etc."⁷² The goal of establishing a spirit, an esprit de corps, among workers, evident also in corporate advertising, signaled Elsas' concern with their morale and motivations.

Loyalty, "the employee's devoted, enthusiastic participation with the employer in a common endeavor," was the quality with which personnel management sought to replace the hostility and distrust of class struggle. The appearance of both the army and the family as metaphors for the corporation in company advertising reflected their power as images of the cooperation and service that personnel management placed at the heart of labor relations.⁷³

Although peace dispelled the patriotism that Elsas and Hammer had relied on to motivate workers, the postwar moment offered other appeals with which Rogers could supplement his arguments. The labor shortage ended with the war, creating anxieties about job security that the operative sought to exploit.⁷⁴ Admonished by a co-worker for working "too steady," Rogers countered, "when the slack time comes those who had always done their duty would be kept on the payroll and the time killers were always the first to be laid off."⁷⁵ He also linked productivity to the issue that provoked the most complaints

from mill staff, the rising cost of living. Joining in a discussion among employees waiting for the plant to open, he argued that workers were to blame for prices being so high: as long as they did not give a good day's work for their salary, their employer could not reduce costs and make a reasonable profit. A few workers responded, "that they had heard that said before, by well to do Business Men," indicating that such statements amplified other employer propaganda.⁷⁶

More often than he invoked the postwar economy, Rogers articulated arguments drawn from the literature of personnel management. To promote the sense of shared interest between employer and worker crucial to loyalty, he made the case that the FBCM's good treatment of its workers warranted them working hard. In a conversation about how he had done a job in half the time taken by a team of two co-workers, Rogers argued, "I could not understand why anybody working there would want to kill any time as I was satisfied that the Firm was a good one to work for, and the help was all treated far better than any place I knew."⁷⁷ Another staple element of Rogers' propaganda consisted of emphasizing that steady work had benefits for workers, in the form of the opportunity for promotion and better income. In a departure from his practice of reporting exchanges with specific workers, Rogers concluded a report on June 13 with,

one of the arguments I have been using in the past few weeks with the help I have come into contact with from various departments. Don't you know that promotions are being made whenever possible, begin to fit yourself for a better place. Make every effort to keep bright your department records for punctuality, loyalty and satisfactory handling of the work you are assigned to do. Every workman is being watched by somebody in the performance of his duties, in order to get at his capacity for a better job.⁷⁸

Such arguments represented an adjunct to the internal promotion systems promoted in the management literature. Promotion also provided the tacit incentive when Rogers urged specific workers to be more productive in order to develop “a better record” with the company and show themselves to be leaders.⁷⁹ Also left unspoken in Rogers’ reports is what benefit would result from the “harmony” between workers and the FBCM that he urged several employees to pursue. So central to personnel management was the notion of “mutual benefits and mutual interests” that he likely felt it unnecessary to spell out to Neely and Elsas the argument that “giving maximum cooperation yields benefits to the employee,” as a Sherman Service official put it.⁸⁰

Rogers found outlets for his propaganda that Hammer had not. As the result of being a “first class mechanic” who could be employed in positions that took him around the plant, he made the acquaintance of a much wider range of workers than Hammer, making him more able to deliver propaganda in conversations at the factory gate before work. Rogers also inserted himself into workers’ leisure in a way that Hammer had been unable to do. As well as generally leaving the plant with co-workers, a time when he often gleaned some conversation worth reporting, Rogers also spent all his Sundays off with male workers, both colleagues from the machine shop and men who worked in other departments.⁸¹ He wrote an article for the plant’s monthly journal, entitled “Have Courage,” urging employees to make suggestions that would benefit the firm despite the jeers of co-workers.⁸² Most significantly, he convinced other workers to take up and spread his arguments. After arguing “[not] until everybody makes up their minds to give their employer a good day’s work will the prices come down,” Rogers had urged the other men in the machine shop to “spread that around the factory and see if it will do any good.” The next day two co-workers reported that they had used his arguments with other

men, who agreed he was right. Just before Rogers left Brooklyn, a carpenter he had befriended also reported talking up working hard to people killing time.⁸³

However, Rogers did not have Hammer's success in delivering propaganda to women workers. While he spent enough time in the departments staffed by women to note numerous instances of women workers fooling, reading and sleeping in the sewing room on the fifth floor, all of which he included in his reports, Rogers had no impact on those workers' attitudes. Instead, largely fruitless confrontations marked his encounters with women. An Italian girl named Mary employed on the fifth floor attracted regular attention from Rogers, who "pointed out to her what damage might occur though her neglecting her work from two to three times a week, but she has disregarded everything I have said to her and continues to read right along." Rogers formed no friendships with women either inside or outside the plant, thanks to the gendered nature of the workforce, but that situation was not entirely responsible for his failure with Mary and her co-workers. Rogers proved equally ineffective when he confronted male employees. Clashes set him apart from his co-workers rather than identifying him as one of them. When he told them to return to work or stop smoking, Rogers sounded like a manager. Even when he instead offered arguments, telling one boy that the feeders needed him to work if they were to get their bonus, and admonished others that they were being paid to work, and leisure belonged outside the plant, by involving himself in their work, he was acting like a manager. Effective propaganda work resulted from "taking the opportunity" to offer arguments that came when co-workers spoke to him, or joining conversations. It was in those circumstances that Rogers reported finding receptive audiences. Confrontations, by contrast, discouraged the conversation and friendship that might change workers' attitudes – and did not even change their behavior.⁸⁴

Having a labor spy succeed in conversing with workers was not without its dangers. During his assignment at the FBCM plant in St Louis, Rogers initiated discussion of working hours that Neely feared had stirred discontent among employees. Acting on instructions to find out what workers found desirable about a union, Rogers asked co-workers whether the working week should be reduced to forty-eight hours. So many times did he report asking that question that Neely feared “too much is being said to employees about it,” raising the possibility that workers might develop a “sentiment” for a change in working hours that the company had not actually decided to make.⁸⁵ In this instance, Rogers had given voice to ideas that the company did not want in its employees’ minds.

No such incidents occurred during Rogers’ assignment in Brooklyn, which the FBCM brought to an end after eight weeks. Haywood, the Brooklyn manager, praised Rogers as delivering “propaganda for good,” but his superiors clearly felt that was not an ongoing task. Neely had pointed out to Haywood the repetition in the operative’s reports two weeks prior to Rogers’ departure, concluding that, “We feel that from now on the reports...will have a great deal of sameness about them and that it is only a matter of a short time before you can dispense with his services.” Just over a week later, Neely felt his prediction had been fulfilled, and recommended that Rogers be let go. Neely did still have concerns about conditions in the Brooklyn plant, but he sought answers not from Rogers, but from the operative’s wife. Concerned about “stabilizing and interesting new women workers,” he wanted to know “the impression [women workers] get when they come to work for us, both from your Instructor, Forelady and Superintendent.” Rogers’ wife appealed to Neely as able to offer an “intelligent worker’s point of view,” an

assumption that likely stemmed in part from her husband's skill with both machines and words.⁸⁶ The managers at the Brooklyn plant thought rather less highly of female labor spies. A woman in the sewing room, in their opinion, "would hear little but idle gossip," information that would not warrant the expenditure. As a result, Mrs. Rogers never joined her husband undercover.⁸⁷

C. E. Rogers did go on to other assignments as a labor spy, including at the FBCM plant in New Orleans. However, he did not do propaganda work there. In subsequent years, changing economic conditions could have severely limited such assignments. After 1920, personnel management fell out of favor as a depression drove up unemployment, causing labor turnover to plummet, workers became more docile, and unions and the ideas they promoted ceased to be a threat. Elsas' longstanding interest in modern management practices might have made him one of the minority of employers who held to those ideas, but his sudden death in 1924 foreclosed that possibility. No records survive to indicate whether his successors at FBCM employed labor spies in propaganda work or any other capacity. The Sherman Service did survive into the 1920s, but took a new name, the Sherman Corporation, in 1926, and began advertising themselves as engineers. Critics saw that branding as merely a front for labor spying and a way to attract the attention of employers, although, as Robert Dunn noted, the agency did turn out "stacks of bulletins, confidential reports and special studies on Americanization Steps, Slogans to Stimulate Production, Open Shop Gains, Thrift Plans, Unions in Specific Industries. Sherman himself writes for journals like *Printers Ink*, *Industrial Management*, *Manufacturers Record*, *Textile World*, while his spat-wearing salesmen speak at Mass. Institute of Technology, Case Business College, etc."⁸⁸ However, for all that activity it is also noteworthy that the means by which the education programs that the Service promoted

would be delivered remained somewhat obscure. Rejecting both “seats in a room in the factory, employees called in, and lessons given them by a teacher,” and “education from the executive down to the men,” the Service promoted “an education that comes to the men in their own language – an education *by* the men, *for* the men.”⁸⁹ But it never said exactly by which men. The role looked very much like that played by labor spies doing propaganda work.

Both personnel management and propaganda work underwent a resurgence in the 1930s, albeit in a slightly different form. Unionization not declining productivity or labor turnover prompted that revival. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, by establishing workers right to organize and bargain collectively, prohibiting a range of unfair labor practices, and establishing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to enforce those rights, fostered new loyalties to organized labor and government among workers. Employers responded by redoubling their advertising and public relations campaigns to sell Americans on the benefits of free enterprise and the dangers of government regulation, and making a renewed commitment to human relations personnel management. In the 1930s and subsequent decades, the job of building relationships between workers and the company went to newly created personnel departments, who augmented the printed material used in the past with awards, Christmas and birthday cards, direct mailing, films, social gatherings, occasional lectures and formal courses, backed up by advertising in local newspapers, radio and television. To ensure workers listened to the company’s message, postwar personnel executives turned not to labor spies but to annual reports presented as phonograph recordings or in movies, shown at company-sponsored theater parties, and quizzes and other contests requiring knowledge of the company complete with elaborate prizes.⁹⁰

At the same time, companies called on outside organizations to deliver propaganda against unions specifically targeted at having workers vote no in the elections that formed the focal point of organizing under the NLRA. In the late 1930s, the NLRB found propaganda against unions was, next to discrimination against union members, “the most common form of interference with self-organization engaged in by employers.”⁹¹ What caught the attention of the Senate Subcommittee that investigated labor espionage in the wake of the NLRB’s report was not workplace propaganda of the kind that took place in the plants of the FBCM. Instead, they focused on what they called “missionary work,” spreading “antiunion or antistrike propaganda in the general neighborhood of the plant and particularly among the wives of workers.”⁹² These practices sought to influence how workers thought, but not with “positive” arguments about the mutual interests of workers and employers drawn from personnel management. A common argument contended that, “unions and union organizers serve ulterior purposes and are not at all interested in the welfare of workers,” but only in using the union for their personal gain. Behind such efforts at persuasion lay the willingness of employers to discharge union members, leading the NLRB to conclude that, “most of this propaganda, even when it contains no direct or indirect threat, is aimed at the worker’s fear of loss of his job.”⁹³

Initially, labor spies delivered that propaganda, but the public reaction generated by the Senate investigation quickly led employers to abandon using them.⁹⁴ An alternative better suited to the conditions created by the New Deal quickly appeared. Beginning with Nathan Shefferman’s Labor Relations Associates, founded in 1939, firms of labor relations consultants offered themselves for hire to battle unions on behalf of employers, using a variety of tactics including propaganda. Working largely behind the scenes, they

drafted letters for management to send to workers, and provided pamphlets, leaflets, posters, and later film and video, ‘vote no’ t-shirts, buttons, and hats. Supervisors played a key role in spreading that propaganda, with consultants “supply[ing] the facts, in the form of twice weekly letters signed by the general manager to be distributed by foremen to the workers,” and “supply[ing] the methodology, teaching the foremen at group meetings and at individual sessions how to approach their crewmen and track each worker’s union sentiment” – to not ask “Did you read the latest letter?”, but “to point out something interesting in the letter and to make a benign comment such as “Hey, I didn’t know unions could fine their members and take people to trial, did you?”.”⁹⁵ In 1957, the United States Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in Labor and Management (the McClellan Committee) exposed the activities of Labor Relations Associates, which by then had at least 300 clients. Subsequent legislation, the Landrum-Griffin Act, required consultants to report the terms and conditions of their contracts, but within a few years they had found a loophole that allowed them to avoid those potentially crippling disclosures so long as they did not speak directly to employees, only to supervisors and management. Labor relations consultants, later known as ‘union avoidance’ or ‘preventive labor relations’ experts, proliferated in the 1970s, in a pro-business climate that saw little effort to regulate their activities, and in which they enjoyed overwhelming success in defeating unionization efforts. Now a multi-million dollar industry, the work of these firms continues to include anti-union propaganda, some still delivered by supervisors trained and scripted in much the same way as Grace Hammer and C.E. Rogers.⁹⁶

NOTES

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- ¹ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, "Profit Over Class: A Study in American Industrial Espionage," *Journal of American Studies* 6 (1972): 233-48; Charles Hyde, "Undercover and Underground: Labor Spies and Mine Management in the Early Twentieth Century," *Business History Review* 60 (Spring 1986): 1-27; Darryl Holler, "Labor Spies and Union Busting in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 243 (1985): 243-65; Robert Weiss, "Private Detective Agencies and Labour Discipline in the United States, 1855-1946," *Historical Journal* 29, 1 (1986): 87-107; and Robert Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the US* (Columbus, 2003).
- ² Gary Fink, "Efficiency and Control: Labor Espionage in Southern Textiles," in *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville, 1991), 13-34; Gary Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill Strike of 1914-1915* (Ithaca, 1993); Clifford Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill, 2001); and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Private Eyes, Public Women: Images of Class and Sex in the Urban South, Atlanta, Georgia, 1913-1915," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, 1991), 243-72.
- ³ J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999); Barry Marks, "The Idea of Propaganda in America," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1957; Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Alfred Cornebsie, *War As Advertised: The Four Minute Men and America's Crusade 1917-1918*

(Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984); Lisa Mastrangelo, "World War 1, Public Intellectuals and the Four Minute Men: Convergent Ideas of Public Speaking and Civic Participation," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 12, 4 (2009): 607-633.

⁴ Richard Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979); Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Marchand; Bruce Kaufman, *Managing the Human Factor: The Early Years of Human Resource Management in American Industry* (Ithaca: ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 2008); Stuart Ewen *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

⁵ Fink, "Efficiency and Control," 23-24. Female labor spies are mentioned in the major investigation of labor spying undertaken in 1936 and 1937 by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor – better known as the La Follette Committee -- and several women appear on the lists of operatives included in the published evidence collected by the Committee. See Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor: Industrial Espionage*. 75th Cong., 2d sess., 1937, S. Rep 46, pt 3, 49-50.

⁶ Fink *Strike*; Kuhn.

⁷ Reports from these spies can be found in Series 3: Operative reports, 1913-1922, Boxes 10-17, Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill Records, Archives, Library and Information Center, Georgia Institute of Technology (FBCMR). For the women operatives, other than Grace Hammer, who is discussed below, see f7-8, Box 13; f9-11, Box 13; f17, Box 15. For the African American operative, see f23-24, Box 14. For the Italian operative, see f4-7, Box 16.

None of the studies based on this collection discuss reports from the years after 1918 or dealing with plants other than the one in Atlanta.

⁸ For the concern with efficiency and the rise of scientific management in cotton mills, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al, *Like a Family: The making of a Southern cotton mill world* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 195-212. More generally, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5-7, 178-79, 214-256.

⁹ Kuhn, 81, 226.

¹⁰ “Biography,” Inventory of the Frank Neely papers, at <http://www.library.gatech.edu/archives/FindingAids/?/MS088/full>. Neely’s major innovation was to put in place a bonus system to encourage production.

¹¹ Hall, et al, 210-11.

¹² Jennifer Luff, “Surrogate Supervisors: Railway Spotters and the Origins of Workplace Surveillance,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 5, 1 (2008): 61.

¹³ Hyde; Holler.

¹⁴ Remarks, Sherman Service Contract, July 31, 1918, f13, Box 13, FBCMR.

¹⁵ Jacoby, 133-36; Kaufman, 24-25; Joseph McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2-3, 7-8, 49. On the situation in the FBCM, see Kuhn, 60-61; and Fink, *Strike*, 27-28, 38.

¹⁶ Kaufman, 69

¹⁷ Jacoby, 150-163, 196-200

¹⁸ Kaufman, 175-183; Marchand, 114-118

¹⁹ Ewen 112, 127. For overviews of the work of the CPI, see also Vaughn and Axelrod.

²⁰ Marks, vi-vii, xi, 51-52, 65, 95

²¹ Marchand, 88-129.

²² Bertram Nelson, Associate Director of the Four Minute Men, cited in James Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 130. On the significance of speaking in movie theatres, see also Cornebie, 2; and Bert Moses, "Uncle Sam's Tabloid Talkers," Division of Four Minute Men Press Release, February 25, 1918 <<http://libcucl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/606vcz>> On the origins of the Four Minute Men, see *The Four Minute Men of Chicago* (Chicago, 1919), 9-13. The name also appealed due to its evocation of the Minute Men of the Revolutionary war.

²³ Ewen, 98.

²⁴ For a reproduction of the slide, see George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harpers, 1920), 85.

²⁵ Cornebie, 53-55; Vaughn, 122; Axelrod, 122.

²⁶ A promotional pamphlet the Service published in 1917 framed such work as a "Preventive Strike Service," but by 1918 its publications had forgone references to strikes in favor of the other problems that plagued employers in the years around WW1, labor turnover and low productivity. The accounts of its work during WW1 provided by former operatives indicate that it concentrated on distributing propaganda. See *Industry, Society and the Human Element* (Boston: Sherman Detective Agency, 1917), 19, Box 56, Papers of Richard Clark Cabot, Harvard University Archives; National Mutual Service [arm of the Sherman Service], "Preliminary Educational Instructions," f45, Box 8, Series VII, Labor Research Association Records (LRA) (Tamiment Library); [Leon Paradis], "The Sherman Service in Books and Bulletin;" Interview with MacDonald, November 23, 1920; and Interview with Sydney Garner, January 13, 1921, f44, Box 8, LRA.

²⁷ A. R. MacDonald, Manager, Sherman Service, to Oscar Elsas, August 5, 1918, f13, Box 13, FBCMR.

²⁸ Shorland Fannon [of the Sherman Corporation, Engineers], *Seventy-Five Cent Dollar* (address given at MIT, 1926), 14, f45, Box 8, LRA.

²⁹ “What is Sherman Service?” *Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 1919, A14; “Preliminary Educational Instructions,” 13, f45, box 8, LRA..

³⁰ “Preliminary Educational Instructions,” 52; see also 4, 13, 15, f45, box 8, LRA.

³¹ Interview with MacDonald; “The Sherman Service in Books and Bulletins,” and Interview with Garner, f44, Box 8, LRA. In at least one case, officials from Sherman Services offices supplemented those documents with visits to operatives in the field, meeting with them in hotel rooms to provide them with further arguments.

³² “Preliminary Educational Instructions,” 11, 15-16, 30-31, 52-53, f45, Box 8, LRA.

³³ For accounts of women mill workers guarding their privacy and sitting apart from men in their lunch breaks, see Hall, et al, 87. The Four Minute Men too organized female speakers for settings dominated by women, establishing Women’s Divisions to speak at matinee performances, and women’s clubs. See *Four Minute Men News*, E, (Washington, D.C: GPO, October 1, 1918), 9 < <http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/a7771k>>; and Axelrod, 124.

³⁴ Sherman Service Contract, July 31, 1918; Frank Neely, “Interview with No. 52 Tuesday Morning, October First, 1918,” f13, Box 13, FBCMR; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Bronx, New York, ED 440, 17A, Ancestry.com, at <http://www.ancestry.com>.

³⁵ Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Bronx, New York, ED 440, 17A, Ancestry.com, at <http://www.ancestry.com>; Oscar Elsas to Sherman Service, October 2, 1918, f13, Box 13, FBCMR.

³⁶ Hammer to Oscar Elsas, no date [c February 14, 1920], f9, Box 16, FBCMR.

³⁷ Hammer to Neely, November 14, 1918, f27, Box 1; Hammer to Neely, February 21, 1920, f9, Box 16, FBCMR.

³⁸ Fink, "Efficiency and Control," 30

³⁹ Hammer to Neely, February 21, 1920, f9, Box 16, FBCMR. For women store detectives, see Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go-A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters and the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Women vice investigators also worked in department stores. See Val Marie Johnson, "'The Rest Can Go to the Devil: Macy's Workers Negotiate Gender, Sex, and Class in the Progressive Era,'" *Journal of Women's History* 19, 1 (2007): 32-57; and Val Marie Johnson, "'Look for the Moral and Sex Sides of the Problem': Investigating Jewishness, Desire and Discipline at Macy's Department Store, New York City, 1913," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18, 3 (September 2009): 457-85.

⁴⁰ Hammer spent a dozen evenings and three Sundays in fruitless searches for other workers.

⁴¹ Fink, *Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill Strike*, 20; Kuhn, 74,

⁴² September 25, 1918, f16, Box 13, FBCMR. See also September 7, 1918; September 8, 1918; September 9, 1918, f14, Box 13; and September 13, 1918; September 10, 1918; September 16, 1918; September 17, 1918; September 18, 1918, f15, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁴³ September 7, 1918, f14, Box 13; September 16, September 17, 1918, f15, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁴⁴ September 4, 1918, f14, Box 13, FBCMR. See also September 19, 1918, f15, Box 13; and September 24, 1918; September 30, 1918, f16, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁴⁵ Remarks, Sherman Service Contract, July 31, 1918, f13, Box 13, FBCMR

⁴⁶ E. H. Scribner (Factory Manager, Revere Rubber Company) to Major General E. H. Crowder, Provost General, September 24, 1918, f45, LRA; McCartin, 104-5, 107; Stephen Meyer, "Red Scare in the Factory: Shop Militants and Factory Spies at Ford 1917-1920,"

Detroit in Perspective 6 (Fall 1982): 28-9; Howell John Harris, *Bloodless Victories: The Rise and Fall of the Open Shop in the Philadelphia Metal Trades, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216, 226-7. For examples of posters that the Department of Labor distributed to factories, see Division of Four Minute Men, "Mobilizing America's Man Power," Bulletin No. 34 (July 29, 1918) <<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/2qf2yt>>. The CPI wanted no part of that debate. Only once did they charge the Four Minute Men with speaking about labor, to promote the Department of Labor's Employment Service. The accompanying bulletin stressed that speakers must not "take sides," but instead emphasize the need for cooperation and sacrifices by both employers and workers. However, it also contained an assessment of the "Present Industrial Situation" that echoed the arguments offered by Hammer in emphasizing the "absolute need of maximum production," to be achieved by ending "idling." See *Ibid*, 3-6, 8, 22-23; and Axelrod, 169-74.

⁴⁷ Vaughn, 189-90.

⁴⁸ September 21, 1918, f16, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁴⁹ September 10, 1918, f15, Box 13, FBCMR. See also August 26, 1918; August 30, 1918; September 2, 1918; September 4, 1918; September 7, 1918, f14, Box 13, FBCMR; and September 10, 1918, f15, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁵⁰ The Division distributed a total of 46 bulletins, but 10 dealt with organizational matters; see Mock and Larson, 120-21. For the bulletin that included material on atrocities, see Division of Four Minute Men, "War Saving Stamps," Bulletin No. 21 (January 2, 1918), 9 <<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/w3qihf>>. For discussions of that bulletin, see Corneise, 75-76; Vaughn, 125-26; and Axelrod, 130. For warnings against inflaming passion, see "Four Minute Men News," Edition A (1917), 2 <<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/siel4y>>; Edition B (1918), 1-2

<<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/y5mpw6>>; “Four Minute Men News,” Edition D (June 29, 1918), 15 (which included contrasting passages that “May light the Fires of Passion and Unreason” and “May Inspire to Highest Action and Noble Sacrifice” on p. 17) <<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/0kp312>>; “Four Minute Men News,” Edition E (October 1, 1918), 13 <<http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/a7771k>>. Obviously, the regularity of such warnings suggests that at least some Four Minute Men probably did deliver speeches composed more of emotive propaganda than facts.

⁵¹ Creel, cited in Vaughn, 157

⁵² The same gender dynamic allowed Hammer to fight labor turnover by gleaning information on women workers’ personal lives that they would have been unlikely to share with a male operative. Answering Hammer’s admonition that in quitting “she would be benefitting the Kaiser instead of trying to defeat the Kaiser,” one woman admitted “that the law was on her at this time, and she had to get a divorce.” Sufficient stigma attached to divorce, and to the adultery that provided grounds for the action, that it is hard to imagine a woman making such a revelation to a male co-worker, especially given that at other times the company discharged such women as a danger to their co-workers’ morality and a deterrent to girls of good character joining the workforce. But in the context of the wartime labor shortage Hammer’s task was “to influence them at all times to remain at the client’s plant and to discontinue this mode of living,” a task requiring a relationship more intimate than a male worker could likely achieve. See September 4, 1918, f14, Box 13, FBCMR.

⁵³ August 31, September 1, f14, Box 13, FBCMR

⁵⁴ September 8, 1918, f14, Box 13, FBCMR

⁵⁵ September 10, 1918, f15, Box 13, FBCMR

⁵⁶ Neely to Oscar Elsas, September 5, 1918, f13, Box 13, FBCMR

⁵⁷ For claims that the Service merely presented a front, see Leon Paradis, “Confessions of an Industrial Spy,” *Boston Advertiser* (January 30, 1921), 1, f44, LRA; Robert Dunn, “The Spy Industry,” *The New Leader*, August 28, 1926, and the annotation on the cover of Fanon, *Seventy-Five Cent Dollar*, f45, LRA. For other Sherman Service operatives reporting the emphasis on propaganda work, see A M Donohue affidavit – interview August 10, 1924, and Interview with Sidney Garner, f45, LRA.

⁵⁸ Hammer to Neely, October 11, 1918, f27, Box 1; Hammer to Oscar Elsas, October 23, 1918, f28, Box 1, FBCMR.

⁵⁹ Neely to Louis Elsas, January 12, 1920, f7, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁶⁰ Federated Press Eastern Bureau, Sheet 1 No. 1832, April 20, 1932, f45, LRA; “Seven Held in ‘Plot to Break Steel Strike’”, *Chicago Tribune* November 2, 1919, 5; “Accused as Enemy Agency,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1919, 2; *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike: Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1921), 57-70; Sidney Howard, *The Labor Spy* (NY: Republic Publishing, 1921), 17-21; Sidney Howard, with Robert Dunn, *The Labor Spy* (NY: Republic Publishing, 1924), 15, 42.

⁶¹ *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike*, 5.

⁶² Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, Part 8*, 75th Cong., 2d sess., March 8, 9, 1937, 3094.

⁶³ Marchand, 88-91, 98-114

⁶⁴ Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 97-101; Marchand, 108-113; Chad Pearson, “Making the ‘city of prosperity’: Engineers, open-shoppers,

Americanizers and propagandists in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1900-1925,” *Labor History* 45, 1 (2004): 24-25.

⁶⁵ *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

⁶⁷ F. W. Stockmar, District Manager, RAIC, to C. E. White, Manager, FCBM, St Louis, April 21, 1921, f24, Box 1, FBCMR

⁶⁸ F. W. Stockmar, District Manager, RAIC to Oscar Elsas, April 10, 1919, f23, Box 1.

⁶⁹ Oscar Elsas to White, C. E. White, Manager, FCBM, St Louis, April 21, 1919, f12, Box 17, FBCMR

⁷⁰ Neely to Hayward, April 15, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR

⁷¹ Oscar Elsas to Rogers, April 14, 1920, f24, Box 1, FBCMR.

⁷² *Ibid*. In writing to inform Hayward, the Brooklyn manager, of Rogers’ assignment, Neely referred to it as developing “morale” (Neely to Hayward, April 15, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR). That term had particular meaning in the industrial context, defined by Harvard economist Sumner Slichter as, “the degree of cooperation extended by the employees of an enterprise to the management in the course of their work, the interest they manifest in their work, ...and their willingness to assume a share of the responsibility that their work is properly and expeditiously done (Kaufman, 216).”

⁷³ Marchand, 105, 391 n. 60; Kaufman, 214-17.

⁷⁴ Jacoby, 167, 177; Kaufman, 214.

⁷⁵ May 18, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR. On another occasion, when a co-worker advised him that he need not work as steady as he did, since others did only what they had to do, Rogers responded, “it had always been my Policy to give the Firm a good days work for the Salary I was being paid and for that reason I could always come back any time for a job and

get it.” (May 15, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR). See also May 31, 1920, f12, Box 16 and June 13, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁷⁶ June 11, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR. See also May 15, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR

⁷⁷ June 15, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR. See also June 16, f11, Box 16, FBCMR. When someone disagreed with the premise that the FBCM treated its staff well, Rogers sought to marginalize that position, responding, “I was perfectly satisfied with my job and had heard a good many of the fellows say the same things, and was sure the Firm was good to their help, as I heard most of them had been there a good long time (June 25, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR).” For similar arguments, see June 28, 1920, f11; and June 30, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁷⁸ June 13, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁷⁹ May 20, 1920, f12; May 31, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸⁰ June 6, 1920, f10; June 27, f11, Box 16, FBCMR; Fannon, *Seventy-Five Cent Dollar*, 16, f45, LRA.

⁸¹ May 9, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR; May 16, 1920; May 23, 1920; May 30, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR; June 6, 1920, June 13, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR; June 20, 1920; June 27, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸² June 8, 1920, f10, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸³ May 15, 1920; May 16, 1920, f12, Box 16; June 27, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR. See also May 18, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸⁴ For fooling on the 5th floor, see May 10, 1920, f11, Box 16; May 13, May 14, May 17, May 19, 1920, f12, Box 16, FBCMR. For Mary, the Italian girl, see June 1, June 7, June 8, June 10, June 11, 1920, f10, box 16; June 15, June 17, June 21, 1920, f11, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸⁵ Neely to Stockmar, May 3, 1919, f12, Box 17, FBCMR

⁸⁶ Neely to Haywood, June 14, f10, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸⁷ Haywood to Neely, June 16, f10, Box 16, FBCMR.

⁸⁸ Dunn, "The Spy Industry," f45, LRA.

⁸⁹ Fannon, *Seventy-Five Cent Dollar*, 16, f45, LRA.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 67-107; Howell John Harris, *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 184-99; James F. Tracy, "Smile While I Cut Your Throat": Mass Media, Myth, and the Contested "Harmonization" of the Working Class," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 25, 3 (2001): 298-325; Jacoby, 166-178; Kaufman, 263-279; Marchand, 214-29, 235-45.

⁹¹ National Labor Relations Board, *First Annual Report of the National Labor Relations Board* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1936), 73.

⁹² Senate Committee, *Industrial Espionage*, 75th Cong., 2d sess., 1937, S. Rep 46, pt 3, iv; Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, Part 1*, 74th Cong., 2d sess., August 21 and September 22, 22, 1936, 190, 200-201.

⁹³ National Labor Relations Board, *First Annual Report*, 73-74. See also Smith, 88-89.

⁹⁴ Even had they been prepared to risk the bad publicity, employers would have found it difficult to find operatives to do the work. Although Congress did not enact legislation against labor spying, state legislatures in New York and Massachusetts amended their licensing laws to prohibit detective agencies from undertaking undercover or propaganda work for employers, and revoked the licenses of several agencies, including the Railway Audit and Inspection Company, shown to have done such work (*Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1937*, chapter 437 (Boston: Secretary of the Commonwealth, 1937), 598-600,

<<http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/actsResolves/1937/1937acts0437.pdf>>; “Press Curb Denied In Licensing Bill,” *New York Times (NYT)* March 31, 1938, 21; “Detective Agency Accused in Report,” *NYT* August 23, 1938, 38; “License Denied to Agency,” *NYT* December 1, 1938, 21). The Pinkerton Detective Agency walked away from labor spying, announcing in 1937 that it would no longer “furnish information to anyone concerning the lawful attempts of labor unions or employees to organize and bargain collectively.” The Corporations Auxiliary followed suit the next year (Smith, 93-96).

⁹⁵ Martin Jay Levitt, *Confessions of a Union Buster* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 19, 26; Jules Bernstein, “Union-Busting: From Benign Neglect to Malignant Growth,” *U. C. Davis Law Review* 14, 1 (Fall 1980): 1-78; Charles Joyce, “Union Busters and Front-Line Supervisors: Restricting and Regulating the Use of Supervisory Employees by Management Consultants during Union Representation Election Campaigns,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 135, 2 (January 1987): 453-93

⁹⁶ Levitt, 33-43; Smith, 97-117; Stephen Norwood, *Strike-Breaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 235-41; John Logan, “The Union Avoidance Industry in the United States,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 44, 4 (December 2006): 651-75.