



**Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report**

**Labor and unions in  
North Carolina textile mills**

# **Chapter 2**



Photo courtesy of the Greensboro News & Record

The workplace is and has long been a central battlefield of economic, political and social conflict, woven through with tensions of class, race and power. The conditions, relationships and cultures established in the workplace influence all of our lives. The actions and aims of the Workers Viewpoint Organization leading up to Nov. 3, 1979, cannot be understood outside the broader history of labor in North Carolina and throughout the southeastern United States. This chapter looks at that history – at what issues propelled and influenced work and labor and union activism, what reactions organizers encountered from managers and workers, and, more specifically, the actions and history of the WVO's union campaigns and how workers, the mills, other institutions and the broader community reacted to these campaigns.

### Labor organizing in the American South

Despite its reputation as a region hostile to unions, the American South has seen some of the most persistent and creative organizing activities in the United States. For more than a century, West Virginia mine workers, the Industrial Workers of the World (known as the Wobblies) in Louisiana's timber groves, tenant farmers and North Carolina's textile workers have all established landmarks for union organizing that benefited American workers as a whole.

In some cases, both whites and blacks were members and union officers. By 1920, over a quarter of the 420,000 textile workers in the United States belonged to unions, roughly half of them in the South.<sup>1</sup> Far from a homogenous collection of passive, racially divided workers, Southern workers united across gender and racial lines to confront some of the most powerful industries in the region, even in defeat gaining crucial advances in pay and working conditions.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, some of America's most devastating anti-union violence has taken place in the South. As labor historian Bryant Simon points out, while proportionately fewer southerners than northerners joined unions, there is a clear history of Southern craft and industrial unionism, albeit with a dramatically different track record on strikes. "In the South (as opposed to the north), strike after strike in the biggest industries failed, and workers in these areas had trouble setting up permanent, strong unions."<sup>3</sup>

This apparent contradiction is reflected in the fact that the South is home to both America's most unionized state and one of its least unionized states. "The most unionized state in the United States is always West Virginia," organizer Si Kahn told the GTRC, "and the least organized – the least unionized – state in the United States is always either North Carolina or South Carolina, depending on what day it is."<sup>4</sup>

As a category, textile mills make up a "classic southern industry" for Simon: low-wage, manufacturing low-cost goods and depending on low-skilled labor. "The slightest increase in overall costs was sure to raise the price of the final product, and in the competitive jungle of the textile industry, there was always a company ready to undersell a firm that had given its workers a raise or slowed down one of its machines," Simon contends. "In addition, when orders ran low mill officials could easily afford a strike. A work stoppage might, as a matter of fact, save them money... All of these factors fueled southern mill owners' antiunion sentiments."<sup>5</sup>

Another factor hostile to unions included the ready pool of poor whites willing to cross a picket line. Unlike the north, where industry depended on immigrants and African Americans to break strikes, in the South, mills didn't dare stir simmering racial tensions by recruiting blacks. In any case, Simon notes, they rarely had to. "Usually, there were plenty of poor whites willing to cross the picket lines. As a result, southern strikebreakers tended to be indistinguishable from strikers... Mill workers went down to defeat again and again between 1900 and 1950, the same years that powerful unions grew in other industries in other places."<sup>6</sup>

These contradictions and intricacies remain the subject of continued scholarship and debate.<sup>7</sup> However, for the purposes of this report, it is clearly true that the South's unruly relationship to unions, workers and the pressures of race and class are integral parts of the story of what led up to and shaped the events of Nov. 3, 1979.

## Textile mills and unions

The economic and political power wielded by textile mills in North Carolina have made them crucial to workers' economic survival and given them tremendous influence over community life outside the workplace. Some labor historians point to the particular relationship between Piedmont textile mills and the communities in which they operated as a prime factor in the failure of unions to penetrate. They argue that, in much of the Piedmont, mills had strong ties to local powerbrokers like elected officials, ministers<sup>8</sup> and businesspeople. Union organizers, especially outsiders, could appear as threats not only to business, but to the community itself. "As a defensive measure, early textile unions and later the AFL (American Federation of Labor) were forced to adopt a 'cooperationist' approach emphasizing their desire to aid the industry rather than fight it."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the context of economic and political power, mills operated in the dominant cultural context of race, gender and economic divisions so central to life in the southeast United States. According to Kahn, the Southern textile mill was a "rigidly segregated institution" until the mid-1960s, like so much of Southern life outside the mill gates. Mill workers were predominately white. The few blacks hired received low-level jobs like janitor or maid. Poorly educated and coming from a failing mountain economy, white workers came to depend on the mill for everything in exchange for work and obedience. A key way anti-union forces attacked unionizing efforts was by exploiting this racial divide. To the GTRC, Kahn noted that the issue of race in the southern textile mills was "so much more deep and so much more held to the core than (it was) up north in the auto plants."<sup>10</sup>

Historian Simon describes Cone Mills as one of the most "paternalistic" of the South's mills, where workers took these material benefits and in exchange obediently accepted low wages and often poor working conditions. In part, this was made possible by the very structure of the mill. Until the 1950s, for example, Cone Mills built segregated housing and schools, a dairy, shops, playgrounds, a health service, basketball courts and even a YMCA.<sup>11</sup> As long as workers remained docile, owners Moses and Caesar Cone would stroll through their villages, ask after children and host elaborate July 4 picnics.<sup>12</sup>

But when workers did protest, they risked losing everything: job, home, church and community. In the late 1920s, workers resisted the "stretch-out," which required them to work longer for no increase in pay, meant to boost production during economic hard times. The union found fertile ground for organizing, and a battle ensued. The Cones retaliated by firing workers and evicting their families from mill houses. Union leaders were mercilessly lampooned in cartoons published by the Cone-friendly *Greensboro Daily News*.<sup>13</sup> As former Cone Mills worker Lacy Wright recalled, when workers at Cone started organizing, they were fired:

*They fired I don't know how many of them, take their furniture and set it out in the streets, out of the mill houses and out in the streets. Wouldn't even let people have time to find them another house and move into it. They had their own constables.<sup>14</sup>*

But ultimately, the union organizing effort failed, as most workers chose the Cones' "Christmas ham," a symbol of the old paternalism, over the unfulfilled promise of the union.<sup>15</sup> By the end of World War II, the Cones had abandoned the paternalistic model, selling off the mill homes, cutting off benefits for sick workers and implementing a more industrial system of labor control.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Loray Mill and the influence of the Communist Party**

Communist-inspired trade unionism has a long genealogy in Southern labor history. Perhaps the most well-known organizing effort by a Communist-led union was in 1929 at Gastonia's Loray Mill. As Elizabeth Wheaton noted in "Codename Greenkil," this strike "pitted the same forces that collided fifty years later in Greensboro: militant labor organizers, the police, and anti-Communist vigilantes."<sup>17</sup>

In Gastonia, the strike was led by the National Textile Workers' Union (NTWU), formed in Massachusetts the year before and looking to make its first mark by organizing a North Carolina textile mill. Organizers believed that a successful strike would provoke a wave of union activity across the state. At the time, the textile industry was changing rapidly in the wake of World War I. Many locally-owned mills were being sold to northern companies who were greatly expanding spinning capacity. Gaston County, for example, called itself the "Combed Yarn Capital" of the South, and had the most spinning capacity in the state, ranking third nationwide.<sup>18</sup>

The NTWU found Loray attractive because the mill combined some of the worst working conditions in the South with a series of recent layoffs that had drastically reduced the number of jobs available to locals. Loray was also the largest mill in the state and one of the first to host an experiment in new "scientific management" techniques meant to wring the most possible work from the South's cheap labor force. Another, less advanced technique used at Loray was the "stretch-out," increasing the workload assigned to each individual employee without any increase in pay.<sup>19</sup>

The strike was met with harsh action. Gov. O. Max Gardner called in the state militia. Local courts swiftly issued injunctions against union activity. When some strikers refused to obey, they were beaten and jailed. In the words of the local paper, the *Gastonia Gazette*, the union organizers were "negro lovers, against America, free love, northern agitators, Russian Reds."<sup>20</sup>

After the chief of police was killed, sixteen union organizers were arrested; seven were eventually found guilty after highly questionable proceedings. In a rally held in September, three months after the police chief's murder, Ella May Wiggins, a popular singer known for her pro-union songs, was shot and killed. While some believed the Loray strike was an honest attempt to improve workers' conditions, others saw it as a dangerous plot by Communists from the north to infiltrate the South and develop a political campaign. One of the groups opposing the strike was the AFL, which saw the organizing effort as dangerous competition.<sup>21</sup>

The NTWU never organized another mill and was soon torn apart by internal battles emanating from Moscow.<sup>22</sup>

## The General Strike of 1934: Legacies of the Backlash

The next explosion among textile workers took place in 1934. What came to be known as the “General Strike” was a “cataclysmic and heartbreaking event,” according to contemporary labor historians.<sup>23</sup>

The General Strike had its roots in the passage, in 1933, of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Under this legislation, meant to fight the Depression, the newly formed Cotton Textile Board was charged with enforcing a code of fair competition for the industry. Although the code's purpose was to limit destructive price competition among manufacturers, prevent the over-production of textile goods and guarantee mill hands a minimum wage, in practice the mill owners who ran it sought to turn these regulations into another way to keep wages low. From the worker's perspective, the mill owners turned the board-mandated minimum wage into the maximum that most workers could earn and laid off thousands of additional hands.<sup>24</sup>

Older mill hands who could not keep up with the “stretch-out” were fired; even hands with jobs could not afford to feed their families. On July 14, 1934, a wildcat strike began in Guntersville, Ala., that eventually drew 20,000 workers out of the state's mills. When mill hands in North Carolina threatened to do the same, the United Textile Workers (UTW) called a convention and delegates there presented resolutions calling for a general strike. On Sept. 1, the AFL's United Textile Workers called a strike. Within two weeks, an estimated 400,000 textile workers had walked off their jobs, making the General Strike the largest single labor conflict in American history.<sup>25</sup>

Roosevelt depended on the votes of Southern Democrats to pass his New Deal, and couldn't afford to alienate them by confronting the mill owners. After three weeks, workers began returning to their spinners. Within two months of the first walkout in Guntersville, the UTW formally cancelled the protest. Many strikers were fired and evicted from their mill homes. Others were blacklisted – barred from getting jobs anywhere in the South.<sup>26</sup>

The violence of the backlash instilled fear of strikes that reverberated decades later in the minds of workers. Si Kahn told the GTRC that 29 textile workers were killed and more than 10,000 blacklisted in the wake of the General Strike, which he called “the Great Uprising.”

*There were machine guns on the roofs of mills all over the south. The National Guard was mobilized in every single southern state and government and established power came down hard on the side of the mill owners and operators. And although that history and that memory was driven underground it was never forgotten and when you scratched the surface in conversations about the union with people who would say, “I don't need none of that union stuff,” it came down to what happened in 1934.<sup>27</sup>*

In 1935, the U.S. Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act, called by labor historians “the single most important legal development affecting labor in this century.”<sup>28</sup> Among other things, the Act established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an independent federal agency meant to administer laws governing relations between unions and employers in the private sector. On paper, the statute guarantees the right of employees to organize and to bargain collectively with their employers. The NLRB oversees all employers involved in interstate commerce – other than airlines, railroads, agriculture and government – and is meant to ensure free choice in the selection of union representation and encourage collective bargaining as a means of maintaining industrial peace.<sup>29</sup>

However, in practice, laws meant to protect workers and the freedom of association have been criticized as being too weak and plagued by gaps. Even today, independent monitors have described government agencies like the NLRB as having failed “to enforce effectively those laws that do purport to protect



workers' rights."<sup>30</sup>

The Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO) launched "Operation Dixie" in 1946, hoping to revitalize organizing in the South in the wake of World War II and the memory of the Great Uprising. Focusing first on Cannon Mills in Kannapolis, N.C., the effort was backed by substantial resources and a post-war sense of optimism about the possibilities for union expansion. Unionism was at an all-time high in the 1940s, spurred by war production and the demand for skilled labor.

But the drive failed miserably. For historian James Hodges, its failure was due to multiple factors: "the failure to overcome the debilitating effect of racial division in the South, the failure to create a regionally targeted drive with a southern face for southern workers, and the inability to assault the South with enough resources. Above all, Operation Dixie failed to organize textiles."<sup>31</sup>

The ramifications for the South were devastating. Instead of leaving much of the work to the civil rights movement two decades later, a successful drive would inevitably have fostered integration. As Michael Goldfield has written, the failed union drive "left southern Dixiecrats and the system of white supremacy with complete social, political, and economic hegemony intact in much of the South."<sup>32</sup>

In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which made sweeping changes to the NLRB, among them a provision allowing individual states to pass "right-to-work" laws. Currently, 22 states – half in the South, including North Carolina – are right-to-work states.<sup>33</sup>

Congress amended the Act again in 1959, enacting new restrictions outlawing "hot cargo agreements," which require an employer to cease doing business with other employers in some circumstances, and limiting unions' ability to use "recognitional picketing," which is designed to force employers to recognize or bargain with a particular union, without going through an NLRB-conducted election. While unions have made repeated efforts over the past 50 years to eliminate right-to-work provisions, none have succeeded.

### **Anti-communism and North Carolina unions**

The Loray Mill strike was an early harbinger of what was to come in the complex interplay between Communism, trade unionism and the South. Like other American institutions, from the State Department to Hollywood, some unions responded to the so-called Red Scare by purging their ranks of radicals or professed Communists and severing ties to international unions led or influenced by Communists. The Taft-Hartley Act denied the facilities of the NLRB to unions that failed to file affidavits avowing that their officers were not Communists. In 1949-50, the CIO expelled unions that were still dominated by Communists.

In the South, however, racism played a distinctive role. As in the Loray Mill example, anti-communism was often interwoven with the racism and hostility to outsiders endemic to Southern small town life. Anti-communism ran deep in the so-called "law and order leagues" formed with local business leaders, lawyers and politicians, and these leagues could overlap with the Ku Klux Klan, Councils for Defense, chambers of commerce and other groups with local membership.<sup>34</sup>

During World War I and lasting through World War II, states organized volunteers into Councils for Defense at the county or town level. Volunteers, usually local businesspeople, public servants and lawyers, coordinated with state officials to boost productivity in war time. In North Carolina, wealthy citizens helped fund councils to do charitable work, providing food and other assistance to the needy. These councils would also compile lists of local laborers who had not been drafted or were not serving in other, essential jobs. The Councils could call the workers to present themselves, and would assign them to tasks that served the community interest. As was true at the time of other groups made up of

local whites, councils for defense could be strongly anticommunist and racist, particularly when faced with Communist organizing efforts that threatened work stoppages or drops in production rates at industries linked to the war effort.<sup>35</sup>

Historian Jeffrey Woods told the GTRC during our first public hearing that the South “experienced its own unique red scare in the 1950s and 1960s, ignited not just by Cold War anxiety but by conflict resulting from the black civil rights struggle.” Those opposed to civil rights could attack its supporters indirectly, by calling them Communists, thus undermining the movement’s legitimacy before an overwhelmingly anti-Communist audience.” In perhaps the most well-known example of this at the national level, in 1963 U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy authorized wiretaps on the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s telephones. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) argued that King was hiding Communist ties between the civil rights movement and the Communists. Their suspicions rested on Stanley Levison, who the government believed was a top-level member of the American Communist Party.<sup>36</sup>

Levison, a lawyer who was one of King’s trusted friends and advisers, had been a member of the CPUSA in the 1950s. However, as Taylor Branch writes in “Pillar of Fire,” the second volume of his comprehensive history of the civil rights movement, Levison never acted as anything other than a counselor hoping for the success of the civil rights movement as its own exclusive agenda.<sup>37</sup>

National leaders were not the only ones targeted in this manner. For example, in the case of Don West, a founder of the Highlander Folk School and later editor of a pro-union newspaper in Dalton, Georgia, opponents got information from the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to scare local leaders of the TWUA into breaking ties to him. “As the CIO became increasingly centrist, its avidly anti-Communist leaders sometimes collaborated with the HUAC in smearing their radical union rivals,” historian Douglas Flamming concludes.<sup>38</sup>

In practice, anti-unionists could oppose the union by pulling the Communist card, without ever having to go after the union itself. Woods called this approach “Southern Nationalism, a shared sense of cultural values and traditions that promoted an idealized ‘Southern way of life,’ a way of life that found community, stability and order in a commitment to a Protestant Christian god, states rights, and, above all, white racial supremacy. Historically this commitment propelled defensive Southern reactions to outside forces of change, ranging from ‘abolitionists’ and ‘carpetbaggers,’ to ‘civil rights agitators,’ and ‘Communists.’” For Woods, the Ku Klux Klan was one example of an extreme “Southern Nationalist” group that could deploy this rhetoric against unions.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, “Southern nationalist” organizations could include some pro-union, white workers. For example, in Birmingham, Ala., the location of rubber, steel and paper plants, three-quarters of the members of Citizen Councils were white union men. When Autherine Lucy, a black woman, attempted to register as a student at the University of Alabama, union members were the ones who stormed the campus in protest.<sup>40</sup>

In his study of the impact of McCarthyism on organizing efforts in the South, historian Douglas Flamming has described how pro-union Southerners could be targeted by local power-brokers for their supposedly “Communitic” ties. While labor leaders were fully aware that Communists had helped generate and shape the union movement prior to World War II, many recognized that times had fundamentally changed.

## “Preventative labor relations”

The purge of communist-allied unions and supposed communist sympathizers dovetailed with a

second development that impeded the unionization of the South. After World War II, mills developed a new strategy for opposing organizing activities that historian Bruce Raynor calls “preventative labor relations.” Pioneered by J.P. Stevens Corporation, among others, this strategy paired political power with race-baiting and other illegal practices to break the few successful unions in the region or prevent unions from taking hold.

As civil rights attorney James Ferguson told the GTRC in an interview:

*We got a very determined response from J.P. Stevens that they were going to have none of it and they were going to do whatever they could to bust the unions and they did. And there were efforts on the part of the mill owners in conjunction with local politicians around to resist in every way possible the organizing efforts that took place around the textile industry. And they were pretty largely successful in resisting that effort. For the longest (time), J.P. Stevens resisted the effort. And for the longest (time), when it started with Cannon Mills, they resisted the effort. So that even today North Carolina remains a right to work state and there is very little organized labor within North Carolina today.”<sup>41</sup>*

Political clout was perhaps the most pervasive, effective tool. Raynor cites the case of the Harriet-Henderson Cotton Mill strike to show how this worked. This North Carolina strike began in 1958 over the company’s decision to attempt to break the union by insisting on eliminating its right to arbitrate grievances. The Textile Workers’ Union of America (TWUA), formed in 1939, had no choice but to call for a walk out. Despite tremendous pressure, the union remained united until, in Raynor’s words, “the company framed TWUA’s vice president and seven strike leaders for conspiring to dynamite company property. Despite appeals to the Supreme Court, these eight men were sentenced to terms of imprisonment from between two to 10 years. The company broke the strike in 1960 and the union disappeared from Henderson, North Carolina.”<sup>42</sup>

Companies also deployed tactics that were clearly illegal. Although repeatedly sanctioned by the NLRB, companies like J.P. Stevens preferred to engage the union’s lawyers in handling grievances, eventually paying millions in fines and compensation to wrongly discharged workers, rather than risk a unionized work force. Among the many illegal practices the company used were efforts to convince workers that the unionization of mills would lead to the mills’ closures. Other tactics included exploiting racism by, among other things, posting news reports on mill bulletin boards about the Zebra killings, a series of random murders of whites by members of an extremist sect of the Nation of Islam in the 1970s.<sup>43</sup>

In a 1975 speech on the floor of Congress, Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) concluded, “when big business chooses to obstruct the process of unionization, the present law of this country may be inadequate to compel business to the bargaining table.”<sup>44</sup>

### **“A union man, a black, and a mad dog”: Racism and Labor**

Labor played a complex role in the civil rights movement in the South, where pro-labor communities could also be virulently racist. Though many organizing efforts attempted to eliminate the racial gap, it remained virtually unbridgeable throughout the South, including in North Carolina. Instead, unions took on the conventions of the culture, segregating along racial lines.

According to Thomas Knight, the then secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi chapter of the AFL-CIO, “there were three things that were in the same category and the same danger: a union representative, a black, and a mad dog. A person with a gun in his hands would look at the three just about alike.”<sup>45</sup>



As labor historian Robert S. McElvaine has noted, “Many labor leaders ... found themselves caught between conflicting forces: on the one side were the courts and the federal government, pushing for integration; on the other was the local segregated society in which their unions had to operate. The national unions were generally pushing for racial justice, while the membership of most local unions reflected prevailing southern white beliefs that resisted such integration.”<sup>46</sup>

For anti-union forces, including many mill owners, segregation provided a way to divide and weaken the labor force. In one Mississippi plant, for example, black workers were told that if they unionized, the Klan would take over; in a parallel fashion, white workers were told that the NAACP would be in charge if the union won.<sup>47</sup>

The passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts in 1964 and 1965, respectively, began to erode not only segregation, but also the union color line. Forced to accede to what were now federal laws, black workers began to swell union ranks. In 1964, the AFL-CIO began a drive to recruit black textile workers. Within 10 years, close to 30 percent of the textile workers affiliated with them were black.<sup>48</sup>

For the GTRC, civil rights attorney James Ferguson recalled:

*There was a good deal of effort being made during that time to organize workers around the state...And that movement was an effort to organize workers in the textile industry, a number of whom were African American. And out of that organizing effort grew some efforts to bridge the racial gap at the worker level in the community. But that also brought to reality the fact that the labor unions themselves had been a part of the whole structure of segregation. So they had to look to themselves and begin changing some of their own internal practices in order to be able to address issues of race in the textile industry and throughout the community. And I think those efforts helped to lift the level of awareness of people throughout the community – of how race played out in the workplace.<sup>49</sup>*

While some white workers supported integrated unions, others were passionately opposed. The fact that some unions were linked to Communists also hurt union drives, in the opinion of whites like Virgil Griffin. In his testimony at the GTRC's first public hearing, Griffin, a Klan leader and a textile mill worker, described his reaction this way:

*I belonged to the union one time.... Sure as hell wasn't no Communists comin' in there with us. Not then. I thought the union ... I liked it pretty good under the union. I tried to organize it in the mill. I tried to organize J.P. Stevens. I asked the communist – the union rep to come down there. You sure you not in with the Communist Party? I said no, I don't wanna be in no Communist Party. They had better benefits. I don't have a thing against the union.<sup>50</sup>*

However, Gorrell Pierce, former grand dragon of the Federated Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was much more pointed about the links between trade unionism, Communism and matters of race in the documentary film “Resurgence,”

*Times are getting bad. What are we going to do, when Ford folds when GM folds? How we going to bail them out? We're not. How are we going to bail out the textile worker in this state, the furniture worker? There IS no way. We're all going to be unemployed one of these days, people. When you're unemployed, what are you going to do then? I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. You're going to see me going down the street-- After the son of gun that caused it: Africans,*

*blacks, coloreds, niggers, negroes, or whatever you call 'em. I call them black ... (from the crowd: How about porch monkeys?) that's OK, porch monkeys is OK. You can find 'em in almost any union . And probably some of you here belong to a union. And unions have been good organization one time. But they've done gotten so big and powerful they're plumb out of the hands. Even the union employees. Now the Teamsters is trying to do away with shop stewards – they gonna appoint 'em, you don't elect 'em no more. And I know why they wanna do that. They are going to elect you the finest little Communist, get in there and work in your union, he's gonna get you and your black brother all hugged up, and you're gonna talk about equality and fair pay, fair pay, and you're going to be going up and down the street marching together. And the next you know you're a Communist. And that's where they start. And they mean to physically overthrow this country! The Ku Klux Klan has never overthrew the government. We overthrew the Reconstruction government and replaced it with what it was supposed to be. And that what we are here today to do.<sup>51</sup>*

In an interview in the documentary, Milano Caudle, a Nazi who owned the blue Ford Fairlane that carried the guns used to kill the marchers at Morningside Homes on Nov. 3, 1979, boasts in an interview that the Klan “destroyed the damn union” with its action against the marchers. “The Communists will never get another foothold in it again, praise God,” he vowed.<sup>52</sup>

The WVO members have said their anti-Klan campaign sprung in part from the fact that the Klan was a threat to their trade union work because the Klan discouraged multiracial cooperation. In their testimony at the GTRC’s hearings, Jim Wrenn and Paul and Sally Bermanzohn all referred specifically to an election to determine if Fiber Industries, a large textile mill near China Grove, would allow a union. The union lost the election, which was later overturned by the NLRB on the basis of unfair labor practices.

One of the union’s claims was based on a phonographic record that was mailed to all company employees that depicted a dramatization of a strike that involved violent attacks by union members on non-union laborers who wished to work. Rumors had spread that the union workers all had identifiably black voices while the non-union workers were white, thus playing on the fears of racist white workers.

We found this particular allegation regarding the phonographic was unfounded and we mention it here only because it has been used widely and specifically as evidence of racism in union busting and as justification for the China Grove action both by the Klan and the WVO. The GTRC obtained through a FOIA request a copy of the records from this case, including the phonographic recording.<sup>53</sup> On the recording, which is indeed plainly an attempt to scare workers away from voting for a union, violent union workers with both identifiably black and white voices set upon non-union workers with stereotyped black voices.

This is not to say that the allegation of race used as a union busting technique was unfounded. Indeed, one of the NLRB attorneys who assisted in obtaining the records for the GTRC had been in the Winston-Salem office since the early 1970s. He commented that in his experience it was “commonplace” at that time for management to use race as a means of dividing workers and discouraging unions. However, we have not been able to verify it in the case of Fiber Industries.

However, there is other evidence of the role of race in the workplace. As Si Kahn told the GTRC, thousands of black workers began to find work in the mills in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a direct result of the civil rights movement. By 1979, blacks held a quarter of all production jobs in the southern

textile industry, an unprecedented and astonishing transformation.

Between 1960 and 1970, the labor market for the textile industry in North Carolina increased 42 percent. More than half of these additional jobs were taken by blacks who textile mills recruited to fill the low-wage jobs that white workers were increasingly reluctant to take. While blacks had once been limited to low-skill work like cleaning, in this period, they were hired for the increasingly complex tasks required by modern textile work.<sup>54</sup> In Greensboro, white workers took about half of the new jobs created; black workers took roughly 40 percent of the new jobs; and other minorities, 10 percent.<sup>55</sup> “Some of the mills become 30, 40, 50, 60 percent African-American. And this changes the possibility for unionization and for labor activism,” Kahn noted.<sup>56</sup>

Predictably, this transformation was not easy or without setbacks. Minchin notes that every major textile company operating in the South was sued for alleged racial discrimination, including Greensboro's Cone Mills. Some of the suits were dismissed, others went into arbitration and others resulted in judgments against the mills, including Cone, to reform labor practices. In other words, Cone was neither free of allegations of discriminatory behavior nor was it considered among the worst of the mills. That last distinction probably belonged to J.P. Stevens, which used race as one of many tools to promote division among its workers. Clearly, racial discrimination was not unique to the mills. But as a deeply rooted element of Southern culture, either barely hidden or in plain view, racism was a potent and easily deployed force that worked in the mill owners' favor.<sup>57</sup>

## Cone Mills in the 1970s

By the 1970s, North Carolina led the nation in textile manufacturing, with over 400,000 jobs directly related to the industry.<sup>58</sup> One of the leading companies in the state was Cone Mills, at the time one of the largest manufacturers of textile fabrics and largest users of cotton in the United States. The company employed 16,000 people in plants in Alabama and North and South Carolina and manufactured denim, corduroy and flannel, among other things.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the decades-long difficulties in unionizing at Cone, by the early 1970s, the TWUA represented about 5,000 Cone workers at the eight plants in and around Greensboro. According to historian Raynor, the local union leadership was made up of “very dedicated older union stalwarts who are veterans of many battles against Cone.” The membership was quite passive, however. A union leader complained to Raynor that workers complained about conditions, but were unwilling “to do anything about it.”<sup>60</sup>

In 1976, the TWUA merged with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWU), an attempt to join forces with a rival shop in order to revitalize the organizing campaign. Textiles were facing difficult times. An economic recession was pressuring the industry. Hard times created fertile recruiting opportunities for a resurgence of the Klan, growing after years of decline.<sup>61</sup>

The decade of the 1970s was also one of growing workers' rights violations in the United States, according to a Human Rights Watch report. Many studies document this rising volume of violations, which prompted congressional hearings to look into extensive employer violations and ineffective enforcement of laws supposed to protect workers' rights. While some of this increase may be due to better reporting, the high incidence and severity of violations clearly shows that workers' faced significant obstacles in the effort to defend their rights. According to Prof. Theodore St. Antoine, former dean of the University of Michigan School of Law and president of the National Academy of Arbitrators, the nation's leading organization of labor-management neutrals, “(T)he intensity of opposition to unionization which is exhibited by American employers has no parallel in the western industrial world.” While the numbers of workers fired for exercising these rights during the 1950s was measured in hundreds each year, by the 1980s thousands suffered such discrimination annually.

Reviewing NLRB records, Prof. Paul Weiler at Harvard Law School found that unfair labor practice charges against employers increased by 750 percent between 1957 and 1980.<sup>62</sup>

Organizing efforts began to see success in formerly impregnable mills, among them J. P. Stevens. At the merger convention, the unions announced their first-ever boycott of J. P. Stevens, a tactic that was later joined by pressure on members of the board of directors and shareholders. With the release of the movie “Norma Rae” in 1979, a fictionalized account of the effort to form a J. P. Stevens union, the campaign reached its zenith. Eventually, the ACTWU settled with J. P. Stevens and claimed a partial victory; but the union never parlayed its success into a broader campaign.<sup>63</sup>

As Si Kahn, who worked as an organizer with the TWUA and then the ACTWU, told the GTRC:

*There was great hope in the textile worker’s union and throughout the labor union that (the J.P. Stevens campaign) could be the moment in which we broke through with unionizing the South. The dream of organizing the South has been a dream for a long time, well over a hundred years, because the South has, in terms of labor, but also in other areas, been that drain in the bathtub through which progressive movements just kind of drain away... And because this seemed so much like a breakthrough, the entire labor movement, and much of the civil rights movement, and the women’s movement, and other progressive movements mobilized behind this.*

*It was, in Roanoke Rapids, also a multiracial labor movement; the mills were about 40 percent African-American, the union was very conscious and deliberate to always have a multiracial leadership group. Again I’m not saying that there weren’t racial divisions, I’m not saying there weren’t racism and discrimination, but the union had a very strong practical and I think principled commitment to building a multiracial workforce and union and understood that was the only way to win. The calculation we always – the companies always thought you had to keep the number of African-American workers below one third. And we always thought they were right because we could get – we being the union – we could get anywhere from a third to a half of the white votes. But no matter what else we did we couldn’t break through that last half, whereas you could almost always count on ninety to ninety five percent of the African-American workers to vote for the union. So it’s pretty simple: once you’ve got the forty, fifty percent African-American in the average mill, that mill was going to go union.*

*It took the companies a little while to figure that out and the labor union picked up a number of work places before they dropped it back to one third. So that became – it was both a symbolic and a very real campaign, and the thinking was that if the union could get a contract in Roanoke Rapids, that would open up the rest of the South. And extraordinary resources went into this. And they were resources not just on the part of the labor movement, but faith leaders, community leaders, women’s movement leaders, African-American leaders, Hispanic leaders, student leaders, and people who weren’t leaders – people who were the salt of the earth, who were great followers. People all over this country... in Europe. I remember that we had picket lines in South Africa in support of this campaign.*

*And in some ways it was a turning point and in some ways it wasn’t. It’s a historic victory, but what so many people had hoped would happen was that it would move from Roanoke Rapids, it would move from the J.P. Stevens mills and sweep across the South, something like the campaigns of the 1930s. That proved not to be true.*

*And I think it proved not to be true because of the absolute resistance of the mill corporations to unionization, and so yes, we won a stunning victory in Roanoke Rapids in 1974, but it was 1980, six years, to get a union contract, and by that time a lot of other mills had decided that's just too long to wait.<sup>64</sup>*

## Radicalized Duke students in labor movements

As the largest private educational institution in the region, Duke University had a central role in these events. Northerners drawn to the university as students either brought their politics with them to North Carolina or became radicalized by the conditions they experienced in and outside academia. Southerners found new inspirations in innovative scholarship on the past, reshaping the way we see events, including the history of trade unionism. With the Vietnam war and opposition to it high, activism drew together students from different backgrounds and convinced many that their work could ignite real change.

One magnet of leftist activism was the effort to unionize Duke University. In the 1950s, black workers were still required to call students Miss or Mister, and could be penalized for failing to do so. Although Durham itself was one of the most heavily unionized cities in the South, the university existed as if in a separate world.

Oliver Harvey was a janitor and one of the first black workers to organize at Duke and, in the words of the magazine *Southern Exposure*, “kept the fires of unionism smoldering through the long, lonely years of apathy and fear” at Duke. “In addition to low wages, we had hardly any fringe benefits at all,” Harvey told *Southern Exposure* in 1978. “No holidays, no sick leave. You got sick, you starved, ’cause you only got paid for the days you worked, no matter what.”<sup>65</sup>

In the hospital, Harvey said, there was also a color line between workers. “All the nurse’s aides were white and all the nurse’s maids were black. They did the same work, but the nurse’s aides were much better paid.” Until 1974, all workers in private, non-profit hospitals like the one run by Duke were denied the protections of the National Labor Relations Act. In practice, this meant that workers could be fired for supporting a union and had no right to a vote for union representation.<sup>66</sup>

The first organizing campaign at Duke, supported by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), began in 1965. Three years later, hospital workers spontaneously walked out for two days. A planned strike later that year came on the heels of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Workers were out for 13 days and students maintained an open-air vigil in support, while also calling for better race relations on campus and with the community. Finally, the university offered to make a collective bargaining agreement and set up an “Employees Council” to resolve grievances. In 1972, the union won the first election.<sup>67</sup>

In the fall of 1974, Durham activist Howard Fuller was hired as the union’s business manager. Known also by his second name, Owusu Sadukai, Fuller had worked with Nelson Johnson’s Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU) in Greensboro in the late 1960s. In 1969, Fuller formed Malcolm X Liberation University as a way of providing black students with a revolutionary alternative to mainstream black colleges. Fuller also led the all-black Revolutionary Workers League (RWL), a Maoist group with a strong current of black nationalism.<sup>68</sup>

Though the RWL did not allow whites as members, Fuller found willing allies among whites doing political work in Durham; among them were Paul Bermanzohn, Sally Avery and Jim Waller. Bermanzohn and Waller were in Duke Medical School. Avery, a former Duke student married to Duke doctor Michael Nathan, was a Durham-based activist. Duke graduate Cesar Cauce was also part of this group. Cauce gave up a scholarship for graduate work at the University of California-Berkeley to work as a Duke



data terminal operator and continue organizing for AFSCME. All four belonged to the Communist Workers Committee, a predominately white group.<sup>69</sup> Michael Nathan, who was not a member of a Communist-linked party at the time of his death, had worked with Bermanzohn on the Duke-based Medical Committee for Human Rights, which was passionately anti-war.<sup>70</sup>

Some found the Duke culture of privilege limiting if not insufferable. Paul Bermanzohn told journalist Elizabeth Wheaton that Duke “was filled with these upper-class kids. Some of them were kind of caricatures of themselves. I would always ask things like, ‘What do you want to do when you get out of medical school – when you grow up?’ And this one guy said, ‘I want to earn six figures.’ I thought, where are these people coming from?”<sup>71</sup>

On July 15, 2005, Bermanzohn told the GTRC:

*In medical school at Duke University, I became more radical. You are supposed to get conservative in medical school; I became more radical as I saw how poor people were treated. How no expense was spared in taking care of upper class people and how if you were poor, and especially if you were poor and black you were treated as a lesser creature. I was shocked to hear poor black people routinely called “teaching material” in the clinics. Poor white folks weren’t treated much better. When I took a year off from medical school to work in Durham’s anti-poverty program as a health specialist, it was no surprise that the black community called Duke Hospital the “Plantation.” My father got sick when I was a medical student and he got about the same treatment in NYC teaching hospitals as was given to poor folks at Duke. It wasn’t just a Southern thing or a black thing. By the time I graduated from medical school in 1974, I was on my way to becoming a revolutionary.<sup>72</sup>*

A similar experience shaped Jim Waller’s decision to leave Duke and take a job as a Cone Mills textile worker. Immediately, he translated his political views into action, helping to organize Local 1113T at the Granite Finishing Plant in Haw River.<sup>73</sup>

In part, this search for political relevance was strongly shaped by what were perceived as defeats, among them the 1972 elections of Richard Nixon as president and Jesse Helms as U.S. senator from North Carolina, and the continuing war in Vietnam. To Elizabeth Wheaton, Sally Avery said, “That’s what really opened me up to studying communism... it took quite a bit of experience for me to realize that there is a need for revolution and there is a science for making revolution, and that I ought to start looking into it.”<sup>74</sup>

Signe Waller described her conversion to communism during the first GTRC public hearing:

*I began to see the injustices in society more clearly and I think that the appeal of the Workers’ Viewpoint was that there was a very, very keen analysis of the social structure. Of power in society, social relationships, who held the power. Of the racism in society. There were things I had wondered about. I had wondered about racism and there was an explanation that rang true to me and so I gradually committed myself to a higher level of activity.<sup>75</sup>*

Several people within this group gave up their professional careers to work in low wage jobs in order to better organize workers. Cauce, like Bermanzohn and Waller, was inspired by his organizing work at Duke and chose not to get a Master’s degree or a Ph.D., but devote himself full time to organizing, his widow told the GTRC.

*He wanted prestige of another sort, he wanted to personally know that he was doing something that would be part of a solution, and not to simply continue to be part of a problem. Cesar and all of us were doing very real, significant and effective work doing community organizing and worker organizing in Durham, in Greensboro and across the state. ... Cesar became one of the most successful advocates for (Duke) campus workers. He represented many workers in grievance hearings and successfully argued many cases. He was readily regarded as the go-to person for grievance representation. This success and growing recognition amongst the workers as someone who could make widespread change in their working conditions gave him a mini-platform to help in their union efforts. Duke had a lot of separate unions and they were all small and weak. He was working to try and combine them into one stronger union.<sup>76</sup>*

The 1972 union victory at Duke was short-lived. A well-known union-busting firm, Modern Management Methods, from Chicago hired by Duke conducted interviews, seminars and focus groups among supervisors that were meant to reverse the victory. As Karen Brodtkin Sacks has written in her history of the drive, Duke set out to “impede and if possible, defeat union efforts to obtain a showing of interest (signed authorization cards from 30 percent of the employees in an appropriate unit),” while also preparing for a union election.<sup>77</sup>

Modern Management Methods, or 3M, taught supervisors how to create doubt in workers’ minds about the benefits of unions, raise anti-union issues and tell workers that the union harmed their interests.<sup>78</sup> In one interview with Southern Exposure, a worker explained that supervisors “told the people that if they went with the union they might lose their jobs whenever someone with more seniority wanted it. They were told that the first thing the union will do is go on strike, and you’ll never get another job, and you won’t get unemployment, and you won’t get food stamps. People were scared to death.”<sup>79</sup>

Even Duke President Terry Sanford joined in, writing a letter to faculty urging them to oppose the union because wage increases for hospital workers might compete with faculty salaries.<sup>80</sup> On February 16, 1979, hospital workers voted 995 to 761 to reject AFSCME.<sup>81</sup>

### **The emergence of the Workers’ Viewpoint Organization**

The history of communism in the United States is long, tangled, sometimes comical, often uplifting and ultimately frustrated. As early as 1921, there were already enough groups operating within the country to prompt Lenin and the Third (Communist) International, or Comintern, to order them to unite into a single organization, called the Communist Party of America. The Comintern also forced a change away from revolutionary militancy to working through established labor organizations and developing a mass following.<sup>82</sup>

The appeal of Communism was as varied as the people who espoused the ideology. For some, social idealism was the magnet, since Communism held the promise of a society without poverty or inequalities. Others saw it as a powerful tool to fight colonial powers and establish independent nations. American Communists embraced the rhetoric as a way to combat national ills, including racism. Gus Hall, a founder of the United Steelworkers of America and the long-time general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States, was recruited by his father and, like many Americans who experienced the Great Depression, became convinced that capitalism was doomed and ripe for overthrow.<sup>83</sup>

World War II and the advent of the Cold War brought sweeping change to the followers of Communism. The witch hunts of the McCarthy hearings were paired with laws barring Communists or Communist sympathizers from employment. All Communist and Communist-dominated organizations had to

provide the federal government with the names of all members and contributors, and Communist-dominated unions could not engage in collective bargaining.

But there were also huge changes within the Communist movement elsewhere. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's excesses, along with the Russian suppression of the Hungarian revolt in that same year, created new schisms around the world. Many young people were drawn to the Chinese example set by Mao Tse-Tung, chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China from 1945 until his death in 1976. Unlike previous leaders like Lenin, Mao believed that agrarian societies were ripe for revolution. Societies with large peasant populations didn't have to wait for an industrial working class before pursuing Communism. Also, Mao emphasized that revolution had to be made at every level of society, and that revolutionaries had to make common cause across race and gender boundaries.

In the United States, this doctrine inspired young Communists to direct their energy at new categories of converts, among them immigrants, African Americans and workers associated with rural-based industries, including North Carolina's cotton mills. Several United States-based Maoist parties were formed in the 1960s, among them the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), a faction of the Students for a Democratic Society, and the Progressive Labor Party, which split from the CPUSA after concluding that the Soviet Union had betrayed communism and had become revisionist and state capitalist.<sup>84</sup>

By 1974, a host of communist-inspired groups, some large and others with only a handful of members, operated in the United States. Called the "New Communists," these groups were an alphabet soup of factions, tendencies and influences, from resolutely pro-Soviet to ones inspired by the revolutionary movements then underway across the globe.<sup>85</sup>

Among them was the Workers' Viewpoint Organization (WVO). Initially formed around issues related to the Vietnam War, the WVO shared the belief that the CPUSA had lost relevance because of an outmoded interpretation of Communist doctrine.

Jean Chapman, a former WVO member, told the GTRC that the WVO was formed in New York by "Chinese-Americans and African-American comrades. So from the very beginning, you can say the WVO was started by what we would call minority people who are in fact the majority in this world... (These new groups) saw the old Communist party as defunct. The Soviet Union was being looked at as a traitor to true Socialism and China was the new rising star on the horizon."<sup>86</sup>

In her memoir, Signe Waller described the powerful appeal of the WVO's analysis of race in particular:

*The WVO sought the roots of racism in the development of capitalism and the role played by slavery in economic development. The African American people, the WVO said, constituted an oppressed nation within the United States, concentrated in the South... the concept of national oppression as applied to blacks in the United States made sense to me in explaining the systemic and endemic character of racism in this country. It was very unifying in allowing black and white activists to come together and work together in that period, sharing a common scientific understanding of the problem.*<sup>87</sup>

The core of radicals who came to represent the WVO in North Carolina were concentrated in the Piedmont and at Duke University, where they "learned that the party can only evolve from study, discussion, action based on the study and discussion, criticism and self-criticism of the action, repeating the process again and again to develop 'the correct line.'" The reason for these internal debates lies

in Maoism itself, which demands that adherents constantly criticize themselves and each other for possible middle class or “revisionary” sentiments.<sup>88</sup>

At its peak, Signe Waller estimates, the WVO had between 800 and 1,000 members in 20 American cities.<sup>89</sup> In the weeks before Nov. 3, 1979, the group made a transition to what she described as a “political party:”

*So the Workers' Viewpoint Organization, WVO, and the Communist Workers Party, CWP, is one and the same. It is like when a woman gets married and she takes her husband's name, she does not become a different person, I hope. So this was really just an organization that had developed to the point where it felt that it could step out as a political party. The elaboration of its structure and its plans and its understanding and strategy got to that point. And actually that point was shortly before November 3rd. In October of 1979, there was a founding congress for the Communist Workers Party. Who was at that congress was Workers Viewpoint Organization. So people were not carved up into I'm a labor organizer today and I'm a Communist tomorrow. You know. Then I was a Communist and then I was a mother and today I am a grandmother and I've always been a woman. And we can be many different things at one time.<sup>90</sup>*

Max Elbaum, a journalist and former Student for a Democratic Society (SDS) member, wrote in his history of the New Communist movement that the emergence of these groups was due to at least three major influences: an appetite for a disciplined, Leninist-style revolutionary vanguard party that would lead what was by then a mish-mash of student groups and personalities; the strong influence of the Black Panther Party, a centralized and highly disciplined group; and the irrelevance of the CPUSA, which failed to attract a new generation of young activists disillusioned with its rote defense of the Soviet Union.<sup>91</sup>

Like other groups of this period, the WVO could be extreme on issues. In the 1970s, the Workers' Viewpoint, a newspaper, launched sustained attacks on Cuba's Fidel Castro, who they described as a “professional liar.” For them, Jesse Jackson was a “preacher pimp” and Pol Pot, the leader of Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge, was a misunderstood genius, whose people were starving not because of political extremism but because of the “Vietnamese/Soviet revisionist dogs” and their campaign to prevent Cambodians from farming. Also dismissed by the WVO were church-based civil rights leaders like C.T. Vivian and the Rev. Joseph Lowery.<sup>92</sup>

In turn civil rights leaders were concerned that this aggressive style would win over younger black activists frustrated with the amount of work still to be done on civil rights. After the Nov. 3, 1979, killings, the New York Times reported that some civil rights leaders worried that the groups like the WVO “complicate the whole civil rights stance and the thrust for human rights – we have enough problems as blacks and we don't need to provoke any more.” The killings, they feared, would increase the appeal of this type of rhetoric.<sup>93</sup>

Certainly, students of the time firmly locate the WVO as emblematic not only of the New Communist Movement's strengths, but also the weaknesses that had marginalized them by the mid-1980s. As Elbaum noted, “most of the movement gave little attention to – or actually opposed – the development of forms reflecting bottom-up initiative and working-class self-organization outside party control,” among them the organization of strong unions independent of party control. Some outsiders correctly perceived that the WVO's aims were not to strengthen the unions, but to use them as vehicles to achieve their ultimate goal: revolution and the triumph of communism over capitalism. WVO member Jim Waller was direct about the WVO's interest in unions: “**We will struggle against any tendency to raise building this**

**union as the principal goal, to elevate it above building the Party to prepare for revolution.”<sup>94</sup>**

Bob Hall, Southern Exposure’s founding editor, told the GTRC that the WVO was not an “organic product” of either the South’s existing labor, community or civil rights movement:

*So (the WVO) was not embraced by either the labor movement or the civil rights movement veterans. It was seen as a group of white, academic, super leftists who were not very skilled when it came to tactics. They may have had an intellectually sophisticated analysis, but when it came to trying to work with people on a practical level they were challenged. Some of them overcame those challenges. Some of them did quite well as doctors in providing services or even as shop stewards in a plant. But...the labor movement resented them being the image of what a labor organizer was. They had enough problems organizing in the South without these guys, generally guys, trying to establish what you do as a labor organizer. You talk about Mao Tse Tung or the Red Book or something...or you take on the Klan. Challenge them to come duke it out. It is not a very sensible tactic...But that doesn’t mean they should be killed.”<sup>95</sup>*

By 1975, the group was calling itself the Communist Workers Committee and was led by Paul Bermanzohn, Jim Waller and Sally Avery. Fuller was their link to the RWL, Greensboro and the work of people like Nelson Johnson and Sandi Smith. Eventually, they were joined by Cesar Cauce and Martha Arthur, later to marry Mike Nathan.<sup>96</sup>

Paul Bermanzohn described the next steps these activists took:

*Over time our group began to seek a national organization to build a revolutionary party. We hooked up with the New York City based Workers Viewpoint Organization, which was a multiracial group. In the process of making this connection our Durham group encountered a group of black revolutionaries in Greensboro which was led by Nelson Johnson, who had been working by this time for decades among Greensboro’s poor people. The Greensboro group was developing along similar lines to ours. Our merger was an electric event. It strengthened the progressive movement by forming a multiracial core of experienced leaders.<sup>97</sup>*

For Joyce Johnson, the alliance was attractive because of the group’s early emphasis on equality across language and race:

*We in the CWP were black, we were white, we were Chicano, we were Asian. We were recent immigrants, we were native-born Americans, we were native Hawaiians. Some of us had a little money and were rich; some of us were poor. Most of us were young intellectuals who brought our communities together. Our national meetings were held in several languages; this was before 1980. We didn’t realize how powerful we were.<sup>98</sup>*

Several people who came to form part of the North Carolina WVO went through what one local leader called “a Communist conversion experience.”<sup>99</sup> This prompted many to leave the professions they had spent years preparing for, including medicine, to work in the mills and dedicate themselves full-time to organizing. In his statement at the GTRC’s first public hearing, Chapel Hill resident Yonni Chapman, who worked at North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill, described his reasons for joining:

*I became acquainted with members of the Workers Viewpoint Organization. This organization attracted me for several reasons. In North Carolina, the WVO was vibrant and growing. While its members advocated for a radical transformation*



*of society, they were not a sect of talking heads, like so many groups on the left. The organization was doing effective and significant organizing work in North Carolina's most important mills and hospitals, in rural communities, and in the black neighborhoods of Greensboro and Durham. Moreover, the WVO had an impressive national presence and a deep connection to liberation movements in Africa and around the world. Unlike many groups on the left, moreover, the WVO recruited working class activists and its leadership in North Carolina included people like Nelson Johnson and Sandi Smith who had years of experience in the Black Freedom Movement. Of critical importance for me, the WVO was a truly multinational organization, made up predominantly of comrades who were Asian, Latino, and African American. The organization truly reflected the diversity of America and the leadership of the most oppressed groups in society. The organization inspired and offered hope. I believed it had the potential to lead a fundamental transformation of society.<sup>100</sup>*

For WVO members as well as outside observers, a critical moment was May 30, 1976, when the RWL, CWC and others invited WVO representative Jerry Tung to town to help them “struggle” over their differences, according to Signe Waller. Tung was a New York-based Communist who had met Mao and would go on to become the General Secretary of the Communist Workers’ Party, which the WVO was renamed just before Nov. 3, 1979. For the RWL, Howard Fuller spoke. The objective of the meeting was to see if the CWC and RWL would merge into the WVO or continue to operate separately.

As Waller wrote, “You could almost assemble the China Grove and November Third rallies of 1979 from the people that went to that meeting,” among them Jim and Signe Waller, Sally Avery, César Cauce, Nelson Johnson and Paul Bermanzohn.<sup>101</sup>

Most accounts of the meeting conclude that Tung scored a rhetorical victory over Fuller, strengthening the role of the WVO in the state. The CWC and its white members became part of the WVO. Eventually, the RWL disintegrated and former members, among them Sandi Smith and Nelson and Joyce Johnson, ended up joining the WVO.<sup>102</sup>

But others were not convinced by the increasingly strident Communist rhetoric. Tim McGloin, a young professor at North Carolina Central University, worked with Paul Bermanzohn on the campaign to protest Durham’s plans to build a new hospital in predominately white northern Durham instead of where he believed it was more needed – in black and poor Durham. The effort was unsuccessful, and, as McGloin told the GTRC, people became “fractured along ideological lines.”<sup>103</sup>

### **Brown Lung disease**

In the 1970s, as union activity was increasing, a separate issue emerged: brown lung disease. Byssinosis, called brown lung in the United States, was first discovered among European textile workers in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>104</sup> Byssinosis occurs when cotton dust blocks the airways in the lungs, making it progressively more difficult for its victims to breathe. Eventually, the disease is irreversible and brown lung victims suffocate to death.

At a time when there was mounting medical evidence of this malady in the United States, textile companies disputed the seriousness of brown lung, arguing that workers’ breathing problems were due to bronchitis, emphysema and excessive smoking. Hundreds of claims by sick workers were denied. In doing so, mills – doing an annual business of over \$17 billion – sought to evade paying compensation and increased insurance rates or investing in the kind of technology needed to filter cotton dust from the air within plants.<sup>105</sup>

Only in the late 1970s did U.S. officials and manufacturers acknowledge the problem. In 1977, OSHA estimated that 230,000 American textile workers were exposed to levels of cotton dust that could cause brown lung. Seventy percent of those workers lived in North and South Carolina, where less than 10 percent of those workers were unionized.<sup>106</sup>

In part, the recognition that brown lung was caused by work conditions was due to the work of the Carolina Brown Lung Association. Starting in 1975 with grants from the churches and the AFL-CIO, among others, the association first organized in Columbia, S.C., with chapters quickly following in Greensboro, among other places.<sup>107</sup>

In November 1975, about 40 workers met in Raleigh with the state legislature's Industrial Commission, to press for workmen's compensation for victims of brown lung.<sup>108</sup> At that time, according to government figures, at least 18,000 workers in North and South Carolina suffered from the disease.<sup>109</sup>

One of the most effective spokespeople was Lacy Wright, a former Cone Mills worker who suffered from the disease. Like many other textile workers, Wright was not initially diagnosed with brown lung, but with emphysema and bronchitis. In 1975, Wright told interviewers with the Southern Oral History Program that he started work at twelve after quitting school. For 44 years, he did virtually every manual job available. But by the end of his career, he could hardly breathe or even see.<sup>110</sup>

Wright was a union man, a former president of his TWUA local. Even U.S. senators known for their support of the textile mills were moved by the hundreds of stories the association collected. When Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) introduced legislation to require the federal government to compensate brown lung victims, he termed the mill attitudes as a "conspiracy of neglect which has victimized textile workers for decades."<sup>111</sup>

The Carolina Brown Lung Association adopted as its organizational culture a deeply collective strategy, depending on group decision-making and with a decentralized structure that reflected differences in location and the personalities involved. While some of those involved may have had what historian Robert E. Botsch calls "quite a radical vision for the future, most were "clearly well within the American populist tradition."<sup>112</sup>

That approach clashed both with the existing unions and the more radical Communist-led groups, including the WVO. The unions were either lukewarm or openly hostile to the association, because it was made up largely of outside organizers and retired workers, some of whom had opposed unionization. As long-time health activist Len Stanley told the GTRC, "Our efforts were geared toward cleaning up the mills and prevention of brown lung. We initially wished to be pro-union but quickly realized that the unions did not help the situation."<sup>113</sup>

In contrast, some former brown lung organizers told the GTRC that they believed the WVO saw the group as a mere stepping stone to greater class consciousness and eventual communism. Jim Waller, already deeply engaged in the study of Marxism, attended one of the first meetings of the Carolina Brown Lung Association. Another early supporter was Paul Bermanzohn.<sup>114</sup>

Len Stanley recognized that the WVO wanted to take part in the brown lung campaign, but "they could not be trusted because they were too zealous about their own cause. They always had their own agenda." She described them as "naïve and opportunistic."

*They were rich kids going to med school who didn't understand what the real dynamics were like. They were so far removed from the victims of brown lung that they really*

*couldn't understand what was happening.*"<sup>115</sup>

As Botsch writes in his history of the association, "a few of the doctors who volunteered their help at screening clinics were not so careful. One of them castigated those who attended a clinic for not being Communists, saying that he was speaking for the association. The organizers responded as quickly as they could: 'We pulled him aside quickly and told him if he ever did that again we'd ... break his knees.'" Though Botsch did not name the doctors involved, the Charlotte Observer identified the doctor as Paul Bermanzohn.<sup>116</sup> Signe Waller also told the Commission that Jim Waller helped screen possible brown lung victims.<sup>117</sup>

By 1981, the Brown Lung Association reached its peak, with 17 chapters in four states, including North Carolina, and more than 5,000 members.

However, within a few years, the association was seriously weakened, victim to lack of funding, some positive changes within the industry and a federal audit that seemed more intent on exterminating the organization than uncovering any wrongdoing.<sup>118</sup>

## The WVO and unions

As was noted earlier, the WVO saw union organizing as a promising avenue to generating worker activism and solidarity, with the ultimate goal of creating a movement powerful enough to challenge American democracy, provoking a fundamental transformation of society that would culminate in Communism.

As former WVO members tell it, their union organizing in the state's textile mills was not only growing, but was having significant success. Paul Bermanzohn described a wide range of activities, from work in the unions to activism on education, as a way of making the case that the WVO "was growing in numbers and sophistication. In every case we educated people on the root problem underlying the abuses we were fighting, like racial injustice, or educational policies that discriminated against poor white and black kids. That underlying these problems was the system of capitalism. It was a lesson more and more people were learning. We were becoming a statewide force with revolutionary potential."<sup>119</sup>

Nelson Johnson recalled:

*The first union meeting I went to when I worked at Proximity Print Works...seemed to be about seven or eight, maybe ten people in the meeting, all male and all white, and all looked like they were over 60... We got that thing up to 50 and sometimes to 90 people per meeting. That's the way it was growing. And that's one plant and I can bear witness to that one because I worked there.*<sup>120</sup>

Neither the work nor the organizing was easy for the WVO. In their book on the Greensboro killings, Paul and Sally Bermanzohn recount how tirelessly Jim Waller reminded himself about the real purpose of his presence in the mills and how hard it was to recruit adherents:

*Jim was frustrated. His first year at Haw River, from late summer of 1976 to the summer of 1977, was the hardest. He found that kidding around was the only way he could relate to his fellow workers. But his task was to bring communism to the workers. Every night as he drove the 30 miles to work, he would repeat to himself, 'I must immediately and universally prepare people for worker's rule.' Every chance he got he talked to people about revolution. One time, a worker asked him why the union bureaucrats were such sell outs. Jim went on and on, tracing centuries of*

*social development of capitalism. “I hadn’t even gotten to the history of the trade unions,” Jim told us, “when I looked up and the guy was halfway out of the room.”<sup>121</sup>*

In terms of the union work, Signe Waller described it this way:

*Jim was at Granite Finishing. Sandi was at Revolution, not by the time she was killed, she had been at Cannon Mills, but she had done work at Revolution trying to get a union there. Bill Sampson was at White Oak in Greensboro, so two of the mills in Greensboro, one in Haw River. People were doing significant work in the labor movement. Either building up unions that existed but were very weak or else trying to get a union into the factory.<sup>122</sup>*

To the Commissioners, former WVO member Jim Wrenn listed a number of WVO-inspired union campaigns prior to Nov. 3, 1979, most led by its Trade Union Education League (TUEL):

*(The TUEL) was formed by strong rank and file workers committees at four Cone Mills plants and Duke University Hospital in March of 1978. In addition to gaining leadership in several local unions, the TUEL organized strike support for six labor strikes across North Carolina in the summer of 1978 and four in 1979. These include the dock workers’ strike at the state port of Morehead City, North Carolina; the Traders Chevrolet mechanic’s strike here in Greensboro, that was IUV Local 475, Goldkist poultry, in Durham, meat cutters Local 525 Rocky Mountain Sanitation Workers Strike, Cone Mills Granite Plant strike in Haw River ACTWU Local 1113-T, led by Jim Waller who was then elected president. That was in ’78. In 1979, there were strikes across the state which were going on and some of which TUEL members and others were involved in supporting.<sup>123</sup>*

The WVO was not the only Communist group organizing in the state. Indeed, many who spoke with the GTRC were not even aware of the WVO or TUEL. At Cone alone, there were the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Revolutionary Worker’s League, among other groups. One worker who asked for anonymity worked at Cone’s East White Oak Plant in the 1970s. As a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, the worker recalled that many grievances were going unaddressed, among them firing without cause, increases in workload without compensation and not giving workers their seniority. “Most of the workers were afraid of the union then. They weren’t afraid of the Communist label that we had but more afraid of the company.”<sup>124</sup>

At that time, the worker recalled, the majority of union members were black. Most whites were not interested in the union or too afraid of losing their jobs to join. Nevertheless, the worker did not come across issues related to the Klan. This worker remembered Sampson as a “very good organizer.”

*We all knew each other because we were the Communists, the revolutionaries. The Communists really had their work cut out for them in the mills. There was the constant struggle against the company but there were also problems with the leaders or management of the union. Union management didn’t like the Communists because we exposed the ones who we thought had sold out in the best interest of the company.*

<sup>125</sup>

For some workers, political differences between workers were unimportant. Dennis Cox was a shop steward at Cone’s White Oak plant in the 1970s. He told the Commission that he didn’t know who the Communists were. What he did pay attention to was who was an “outsider” and who actually worked

in the mill. One of his co-workers was Bill Sampson, who he gave rides to work. Sampson got a job in the dye house in June 1977.<sup>126</sup> But Cox and Sampson “didn’t talk about the union in the car.”<sup>127</sup>

Virginia Turner, who also worked at White Oak, knew the WVO was organizing, and thought it was a good thing. “We did not look at it as being Communist,” she told the GTRC. “Even if that’s what it was, that was a harsh word to say. I think it was just about unions looking for justification and labor. Justification, people being treated right. Equal opportunities for people ... (The idea) has been planted in our minds that communism is not good.”<sup>128</sup>

### The WVO and the Klan

Among all of the groups organizing in the mills, the WVO stands out as emphasizing a link to an anti-Klan campaign. The WVO rationale was articulated by Paul Bermanzohn in an interview with the FBI after Nov. 3, 1979. He told agents that “racism and anti-black propaganda, which was spread by the KKK, was used to ‘throw dust in people’s eyes.’ And that whites believed that if unions were accepted, blacks would be taking the jobs from the whites.”<sup>129</sup>

Signe Waller put it this way: “The Klan, they just were following union organizers and, you know, using racism as a way to divide workers. So it was something that worked very well with the same intention that the managers and owners of the mills had, which was to keep the workers divided and essentially impotent. We were aware of that and our anti-Klan campaign was a campaign for worker empowerment. We were saying “workers unite” and the Klan was saying ‘workers divide according to race.’”<sup>130</sup>

In an interview with the FBI on Oct. 23, 1980, another unnamed WVO member who was present at the Nov. 3, 1979, march claimed that the Klan had attempted to “disrupt their union organizing efforts and that she had heard that Klan leaflets had been passed out in the plant.” However, she had not seen the leaflets.<sup>131</sup>

Some workers were suspicious of the WVO and its focus on the Klan, which was deeply embedded in their organizing strategy. This was in stark contrast to the strategies adopted by other union-based groups. In its 1979 “Sketch of Tactical Plan for Independent Union,” for instance, the WVO described the fight against the Klan as “the key, the heart and soul of the (organizing) campaign... (the Klan has) to be beat back physically by the people.”

The WVO literature suggests they expected the “bourgeoisie” to counterattack for their anti-racist work:

*We need to get into the basic analysis but most importantly we want to go into the role we expect the city politicians and the black reformist misleadrs (sic) to play. We should draw out that they will attack us and what question they are likely to attack us on – violence, communism, etc.*<sup>132</sup>

As Paul Bermanzohn told the FBI after Nov. 3, 1979, the WVO held its first press conference and distributed flyers announcing the “Death to the Klan” march in front of Cannon Mills in Kannapolis, N.C.<sup>133</sup> The poster was designed by Signe Waller, another WVO member. In her public testimony, Waller told the GTRC, “We wanted people to see the Klan in relation to forces within the textile industry where we were organizing workers into unions and building up existing unions.”<sup>134</sup>

In a confidential GTRC interview with former mill workers, a former worker at Cone’s Print Works plant, saw the WVO members as anti-Christian and warned co-workers that the Communists would be targeted by the Klan if they stirred things up. He saw the WVO as instigating heightened tensions.<sup>135</sup>



Durham organizer Ray Eurquart echoed concerns about the WVO style, adding that the group's insistence on targeting the Klan was naive. They had "embarrassed" the Klan at China Grove, and he felt the Klan had it in for the WVO. The group was, in his words, "a little 'green' when it came to their dealings with the Klan."

*What stood out in my mind about the WVO at that point was they were, some people would say they were militant about this Death to the Klan, but I would say they were a little adventurous and off-target. The Klan was prominent in that period all across the state. They were having marches and other kind of activities. So folks felt that they needed to be confronted. And CWP confronted them on a regular basis. And I think about China Grove, some people would say that they really embarrassed them and the Klan really had it in for them after that."*

For him, the WVO tactics were "for the short haul... (they) wanted instant results. I didn't see them as having a vision for the long-term. They were more of a hit and run type group as opposed to that of the PLP. I didn't get the feeling that they were very entrenched in the areas in which they were fighting for change... They'll go here and do a little work and then that peters out and they go there... When you talk about going to Greensboro and Morningside, you have to ask yourself, "What you are seeing in Durham, is that the same thing that is going on in Greensboro?" How deep are they in that community?"<sup>136</sup>

But even within the tightly knit WVO, there was disagreement and concern over their directions and tactics, including the challenge to the Klan symbolized by China Grove.

Floris Weston, in retrospect, said the WVO adhered to what she viewed as "fringe" ideology. But she emphasized that locally they did have ties to the community where they worked the issues that concerned them:

*If you got all of us together across the United States, I don't think there were more than one thousand of us, maybe two. That is a fringe group, an insignificant number of people ascribing to one political philosophy or organization. I don't know about the Klan, I think they're a fringe group too, but they're a terrorist organization that's been around for a long time. They intimidate, they kill, and they've been doing it for years, but nobody's been saying anything about that. I think everything that we were doing was honorable and good. Okay, not everything, but most of what we were doing was honorable and good. We were integrated into the community. I say that we were a fringe because I believe that the CWP across the country was a fringe group. In Greensboro, in Durham, we were integrated into our various communities, so in that manner we were not a fringe. We knew people, we had meetings, we had people who study with us and talk about what was going on at work. We got involved with the work struggle, especially the competency test, issues that were important to people. So, within our individual communities we were not a fringe group.<sup>137</sup>*

Sally Bermanzohn said at the GTRC's second public hearing that "we did make mistakes."

*I was, for example, very frightened by our confrontation with the Klan at China Grove. I raised this with Jerry Tung, the national CWP leader, and I didn't like the way he responded to my concerns. I also had differences with local leaders, particularly with Paul Bermanzohn, my husband. We did have arguments about*

*this. That's the truth. I also disagreed with the decision to change the name of our organization from Workers Viewpoint Organization to Communist Workers Party. And that change took place just two weeks before November 3, 1979. I had been the WVO's Southern Regional Secretary, the administrative person in communication with the leadership in New York. I'd been that for about eight months. And two weeks before the massacre, when we changed the name to the Communist Workers Party, I was replaced by Jim Waller, who was killed two weeks later.*<sup>138</sup>

Unfortunately, the hierarchical, largely male leadership dismissed her concerns, insisting that the Party's (rather oxymoronic) principles of "democratic centrism" commanded members to "unite and don't split." In her book "Through Survivors Eyes," Bermanzohn recalls how Party leader Jerry Tung reacted when she raised her concerns about the strategy to confront the Klan, "(He) immediately launched into heavy criticism of me. There was no discussion of tactics, of dangers – just my inadequacies... Rather than address the issue of danger, Jerry said that the China Grove confrontation was a 'shining example' of struggles that WVO should be taking up"<sup>139</sup>

### Union In-fighting

Conflict within the mills between unions and among Communist groups working in the mills was intense and at least once came to blows. Early on, the WVO challenged existing unions and attempted to take over their shops. Signe Waller recalled that the WVO spent "at least as much time and energy" struggling against the ACTWU as Cone Mills itself.<sup>140</sup> In her memoir, Waller recounted a 1976 visit to the J. P. Stevens plant in Roanoke Rapids on behalf of one of the groups that preceded the formation of the WVO in North Carolina:

*The target of (our) polemics was the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA). Looking back on our tactics, particularly early on, some were unproductive or even damaging to the workers' cause. At Roanoke Rapids, we were like a bull out of the gate. Though lacking in experience with trade unions at that point, we were, in effect, saying to established union organizers, 'Hey, we've read the book by Marx, and you guys are doing this all wrong!' ... We were positively messianic.*<sup>141</sup>

In 1978, Bob Sheldon, a Cone Mills worker, member of the rival RCP and later founder of Chapel Hill's Internationalist Books, claimed he was forced out of the ACTWU because he had been critical of union leaders and was a Communist. Sheldon was especially critical of ACTWU organizer Bob Freeman, who he claimed was not aggressive enough in protecting workers' rights. In an open letter to fellow workers at Cone Mills' Eno Plant workers dated February 14, 1978, Sheldon wrote:

*Cone Mills raises the Red scare to break the unity of the union drive and force strong fighters out of the drive. I am a Communist, but I am not fighting for a "Communist union" or a "Communist-controlled union." I am fighting for a rank and file (worker) controlled union.*<sup>142</sup>

That summer, Jim Waller led Local 1113-T on a 12-day strike, as Granite workers demanded higher pay, more vacation days, medical insurance and increased pensions. His widow, Signe Waller, described his work there:

*In 1978, there was a wave of strikes in North Carolina. And Jim was then vice president of his union local (ACTWU). He led a strike of workers at Granite Finishing. The union grew from about a dozen paying members to over 200. By that*

*time he was no longer being teased, he was beloved by that time by his co-workers. They nicknamed him “Blackbeard” and they rallied to his side after Cone Mills fired him in the summer of 1978, shortly after the end of the strike; he was fired ostensibly because he failed to mention his medical background on his job application. One worker commented, “As bad as conditions in this mill are, they ought to be glad to have a doctor on the premises.” The workers felt that Jim’s leadership of the union and his leadership of the strike was the real reason he was fired. They continued to support him. And Jim continued to educate and train workers at Granite to be leaders and to carry on their union struggle. They put out a newsletter together. And when Jim appealed the firing and tried to get his job in the mill back, workers went to hearings and testified for him.<sup>143</sup>*

By 1979, the WVO claimed a presence in four mills in North Carolina, all belonging to the Cone Corporation: White Oak and Proximity in Greensboro, Granite Finishing in Haw River and Edna in Reidsville. Overall, union membership was miniscule. According to one WVO analysis prepared in the late 1970s, in a bargaining unit of 2,200 workers, only about 12 workers were “in the union – ½ us and ½ reactionaries.”<sup>144</sup>

Nevertheless, the group set itself an ambitious goal: to “assume leadership and build an independent union at Cone and throughout textiles.” They would do so, the analysis noted, by gathering the support of so-called “advanced” workers – a worker respected by his or her colleagues, a leader for rights within the workplace and someone who is open to socialism<sup>145</sup> – and “train(ing) them to the party nucleus.” The advanced workers would gather enough signatures to decertify the ACTWU.<sup>146</sup>

There was some truth to the allegation that the ACTWU did not aggressively represent workers. Some workers felt that shop stewards didn’t pursue claims of safe working conditions and greater democracy within the union itself.<sup>147</sup> One WVO newsletter from 1976 lists a number of infractions at Cone’s Print Works plant. For instance, the company was repainting the facilities and supervisors were pulling employees out to do it. Employees were asked to work more hours, but were paid for “extra labor” at a lower rate than they would have been paid for painting.<sup>148</sup>

For his part, Bill Sampson led an effort at Cone’s largest plant, White Oak, to decertify the ACTWU and replace it with a WVO-controlled union. As the union steward for the card room, where cotton fibers are separated, cleaned and laid parallel, Sampson often accompanied workers who wanted to file grievances about working conditions. The WVO-controlled White Oak Organizing Committee charged that workers were being asked to do more work for no extra pay.<sup>149</sup>

But on Feb. 14, 1979, one month before a scheduled union election, the ACTWU placed all five of the Cone locals into administratorship and cancelled the vote. At the time, both Sampson and Waller were WVO candidates. Administratorship means that control of the locals was placed in the hands of the ACTWU’s national leaders, who could then designate shop leaders and prevent unauthorized union meetings. The move, Signe Waller believed, was meant to stop the WVO’s momentum and keep its leaders from taking over the union. The old shop stewards returned to their posts. At Granite, workers defied the ACTWU by electing Jim Waller, who no longer worked at the plant, to lead Local 1113-T.<sup>150</sup>

That spring, plans were made to launch an independent textile union in the South. By September, the WVO-led White Oak Organizing Committee was circulating a “Sketch of Tactical Plan for Independent Union,” explicitly targeting the ACTWU, calling its leaders “tums” and the workers who support the ACTWU “reactionaries.”<sup>151</sup>

One of the first times this competition came to blows was in the spring of 1979, between the WVO and the RCP, another Maoist Communist group. As Signe Waller recounted in her memoir, she was selling the Workers Viewpoint newspaper outside Cone's White Oak plant when she noticed a man selling copies of the RCP newspaper, *Revolutionary Worker*. A Vietnam vet, the man began to argue with her. Then "a shoving match developed. Then the vet brought around the full force of his fist and punched me squarely in my right eye." Waller alerted Bill Sampson and others just then on a shift change, and a fight ensued between the WVO, the RCP member and his comrades. Over the next weeks, a series of scuffles took place between the groups in Greensboro and Durham, but with no real casualties.<sup>152</sup>

### The Greensboro Police Department and Cone Mills

In Greensboro, there is abundant evidence of a close coordination between the mills and the police years before the events of 1979. Repeatedly, Cone's security chiefs called on police to investigate suspected union organizers or even be present when mill managers suspended workers or dealt with protests in front of the mills.

Although undoubtedly on-going, the first record the GTRC has of this relationship dates from 1976. According to a police report, Mack Fulp, Cone's security chief at the White Oak plant, provided the organized crime division with the names of three associates of Nelson Johnson, all employees of the Revolution Plant, including Sandi Smith. Fulp apparently provided these names after police ran the license plate numbers Fulp noted as belonging to the cars used by individuals handing out pro-union leaflets in front of the plant.<sup>153</sup>

Signe Waller described in her memoir how the Greensboro police would attend demonstrations at Cone buildings that were aimed at establishing unions. At Cone's Greensboro headquarters, a Carolina Peacemaker photographer who was shooting a pro-union demonstration confronted plainclothes police who were taking pictures of WVO member Sandi Smith. According to Waller, he was told that the pictures "would be studied for future efforts at crowd control."<sup>154</sup>

One incident took place in October 1977, when Fulp asked police to be present when the company suspended a worker for a "violation of company policies." Fulp told police that Krumperman had "stated on several occasions that should he ever be suspended or fired that the supervisor in his department, John Allen, was his and he did not care who he had to go over to get to him." Fulp's request was routed through the Special Investigations section, which sent an officer and two patrolmen to meet Fulp at the plant. But Krumperman, according to the report, had already been advised of the suspension. Without further incident, Krumperman was allowed to collect his things and leave the plant.

Fulp called on police the next day when he learned of a planned protest of the suspension outside Revolution's main office. Again, police responded, this time with one officer from Special Investigations and a detective. The detective observed the protest from a third floor office while the Special Investigations officer watched from a parked car. The report noted that a group of "between ten and fifteen people" marched in an orderly "although boisterous" display. Nelson Johnson joined Krumperman in the Revolution office when he entered to file a grievance. But there was no violence, and within an hour both the demonstrators and police were gone.<sup>155</sup>

By the spring of 1979, Cone had created a new security team to deal with organizers. They communicated not only with the police, but also between mills about the union organizers' identities and activities. Lt. Shelton and Capt. Steele in the patrol division (Field Operations) were Cone's main contacts. For instance, Herman Graham Dail, in charge of personnel and safety at Cone Mills, knew of the worker's dismissal and that Sandi Smith was on the Revolution Organizing Committee.<sup>156</sup> Dail reported that WVO members were leafleting outside the gates during shift changes, demonstrating in front of the

mills and creating “traffic obstructions.”<sup>157</sup>

Before a grand jury on August 26, 1982, Capt. B.L. Thomas admitted that the police had been monitoring demonstrations at Cone for some months prior to Nov. 3, 1979,<sup>158</sup> yet police statements maintain that they had “no one doing civil intelligence after 1978.”<sup>159</sup> On at least one occasion, Dail asked Lt. Shelton and Capt. Steele and the sheriff’s department to identify union organizers using the license plates of their cars.<sup>160</sup>

That October, Cone again contacted the police in relation to leafleting outside a plant. In a police staff meeting on Oct. 17, Major Wade briefed Chief Swing on Cone’s concerns, and added that the “Worker’s group and Communist’s party” had fought each other in a “free for all” in front of the plant. This was a different incident from the one recounted by Signe Waller, which took place in the spring of the same year. Because of this fall incident, Cone specifically requested a police officer be present during the shift changes. In the same meeting, Col. Burch informed Chief Swing about the “Klan march planned for November 3<sup>rd</sup>,” and told Swing that he already had men assigned to the event “so we know what is going on.”<sup>161</sup>

### Conclusion

Some former textile workers have told us they felt lucky to have a job and that life in the tightly knit mill villages were a fond memory.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, a parallel history of unhealthy working conditions, racial and gender discrimination and the resistance to organizers who worked to address these problems cannot be denied. The history of the labor movement nationally and, more specifically in North Carolina, to counter these problems provides an important backdrop for the events that led to Nov. 3, 1979.

The Workers Viewpoint Organization was but one group working in the state’s textile plants as part of a larger effort to change society in a way they believed would bring equality and justice to working class Americans, black and white. The WVO’s history and key personalities are critical layers to the story of what brought demonstrators to the march in Greensboro on Nov. 3, 1979. With the data available to us, we are unable to make a firm assessment on its size, or on its effectiveness in raising union membership or making changes in the workplace. However, it is clear that Cone management was concerned about the WVO’s activities and communicated with other Cone Mills and with the police about these concerns.

The key players in the Southern Regional chapter of the WVO came to the Communist Workers Party out of broader concern for the liberation of oppressed people (see also chapter on “From Black Power to Multiracial Organizing”). Trade union work was but one aspect of that larger revolutionary agenda. Their Maoist brand of organizing came with a hierarchical leadership style and hard-line sectarian ideology that often put them at odds even with groups that would have been natural allies, sometimes including even working people themselves. In addition, this revolutionary communist ideology also raised concerns in government and law enforcement agencies, which will be explored in later chapters.

### FINDINGS

The South’s relationship to unions, workers and the pressures of race and class are integral parts of the story of what led up to and shaped the events of Nov. 3, 1979.



In the 1970s, union organizers were working to address conditions in the mills that were harmful to workers' health and security.

There is historical evidence of mill management collaboration with police and government officials to undermine unions. Red-baiting of organizers was a common tactic of union busting.

In the late 1970s, there is substantial evidence that security personnel in Cone Mills were concerned about efforts to organize in their plants, and were communicating between plants about specific union leaders.

There is substantial evidence that security personnel at Cone communicated these concerns to the Special Intelligence detectives at GPD, who assisted in identifying union organizers by running the license tags of those handing out leaflets at the mill gates.

Groups attempting to organize in the textile unions were highly fractured and competitive in attempts to win over the support of workers.

The WVO's aggressive tactics and hard-line communist ideology made it difficult to collaborate with other groups working to unionize the workers and may have kept supporters away that would have otherwise shared their agenda.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dennis R. Noland and Donald E. Jones, "Textile Unionism in the Piedmont, 1901-1932," in *Essays in Southern Labor History: Selected Papers, Southern Labor History Conference, 1976*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 48-79.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Green, "The Brotherhood," in Mark Miller ed, *Working Lives: The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 22-39.

<sup>3</sup> Bryant Simon, "Rethinking Why There Are So Few Unions in the South," *Georgia Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 465-484.

<sup>4</sup> Si Kahn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Simon, "Rethinking Unions in the South," 465-484.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-484.

<sup>7</sup> Important works of recent scholarship include: Jacqueline Dowd Hall et. al., *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jeffrey Leiter et al, *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1991); and Robert Rodgers Korstad. *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> John R. Earle, Dean D. Knudsen and Donald W. Shriver, Jr., *Spindles and Spires: a Re-Study of Religion and Social Change in Gastonia* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1966), 200-202. "The Cherryville Incident" February 1953, refers to an open letter written by seven ministers of Cherryville expressing their great concern over the parishioners joining a union, that "it would be greatly to your disadvantage to have the Union represent you. Many of the benefits and special favors which you have had would no longer be yours under the Union." This letter was in response to a call to mill employees to vote in a union organizing campaign of the TWUA in an NLRB-supervised election in Cherryville, Gaston County.

<sup>9</sup> Noland and Jones, "Textile Unionism in the Piedmont, 1901-1932," 48-79.

<sup>10</sup> At Cone, black workers lived in East White Oak. Si Kahn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005; Don Patterson, "The Giant in Denim," *Greensboro News and Record*, 24 April 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Don Patterson, "The Giant in Denim," *Greensboro News and Record*, 24 April 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Bryant Simon, "Choosing between Ham and the Union: Paternalism in the Cone Mills of Greensboro, 1925-1930," in Jeffrey Leiter et. al., *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1991), 81-100.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> "Interview with Lacy Wright," with Bill Finger and Chip Hughes, March 10, 1975, transcribed by Patricia Crowley, *Southern Oral History Program*, University of North Carolina, 1978.

<sup>15</sup> Simon, "Choosing between Ham and the Union," 81-100.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Vera Buch Weisbord, "Gastonia, 1929: Strike at the Loray Mill," *Southern Exposure* 1, no. 3, and 4, (winter 1974). The article is available on line at <http://www.weisbord.org/Gastonia.htm> (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* See also "June 1929: Strike at Loray Mill," *University of North Carolina Collection*, available at [www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jun2004/](http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jun2004/) (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Noland and Jones, "Textile Unionism in the Piedmont, 1901-1932," 48-79.

<sup>21</sup> There are a number of books, dissertations, oral histories and articles on the Loray Mill strike, including John A. Salmond, *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*; Robert L. Williams, *The Thirteenth Juror: The Story of the 1929 Loray Strike*; Robin Hood, *The Loray Mill Strike*, (thesis, University of North Carolina, 1932); and "June 29: Strike at Loray Mill" at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jun2004/index.html> (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Noland and Jones, "Textile Unionism in the Piedmont, 1901-1932," 48-79.

<sup>23</sup> Dowd Hall et. al., *Like a Family*, the afterword to the new edition is available on-line at [http://uncpress.unc.edu/chapters/hall\\_like.html](http://uncpress.unc.edu/chapters/hall_like.html) (accessed on 15 May 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Bill Finger, "Looms, Loans and Lockouts," *Southern Exposure* 3, no.4 (Winter 1976): 54-65.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> For additional material on the General Strike, see Dowd Hall et. al., *Like A Family*.

<sup>27</sup> Si Kahn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005

<sup>28</sup> Deborah A. Ballam, "The Impact of the National Labor Relations Act on the U.S. Labor Movement," in *American Business Law Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 447-479. Bottom of Form

<sup>29</sup> Information and practices available online at <http://www.nlrb.gov/nlrb/home/default.asp>, *National Labor Relations Board* (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>30</sup> One recent report that examines the U.S meatpacking industry, including the North Carolina-based Smithfield Foods, is Human Rights Watch, "Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants," *Human Rights Watch* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005). The report is available online at <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/usa0105/> (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>31</sup> James A. Hodges, "J.P. Stevens and the Union," in *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 53-64; and "Pioneering 'Norma Rae' factory to close in N.C.," *Associated Press*, 26 April 2003, [http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1051392053285\\_7/](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1051392053285_7/) (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Goldfield, "The Failure of Operation Dixie: A Critical Turning Point in American Political Development?" in *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 166-189.

<sup>33</sup> Taft-Hartley required unions and employers to give sixty days' notice before one could may undertake strikes or other forms of economic action; gave the President authority to intervene in strikes or potential strikes that create a national emergency; excluded supervisors from coverage under the Act; required special treatment for professional employees and guards; codified the Supreme Court's earlier ruling that employers have a constitutional right to express their opposition to unions; gave employers the right to file a petition asking the Board to determine if a union represents a majority of its employees; and allowed employees to petition to oust their union or to invalidate the union security provisions of any existing collective bargaining agreement. A fuller description is available online at <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ta/TaftHart.html> (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Jim Green, "The Brotherhood," in *Working Lives: The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South*, ed. Mark Miller (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 22-39.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Sistrom, "North Carolinians and the Great War," and "Documenting the American South," *University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/homeintro.html> (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>36</sup> For an interview on this with former FBI officials and leaders of the civil rights movement as well as King's own response to the accusation of Communism, see "Citizen King," an American Experience production, *Public*

*Broadcasting Service*, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/filmmore/pt.html> (accessed on 15 May 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> See Douglas Flamming, "Christian Radicalism, McCarthyism, and the Dilemma of Organized Labor in Dixie," in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds, *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 190-211.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey Woods, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 16 July 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Draper, "George Wallace, Civil Rights, and the Alabama AFL-CIO," in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds, *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 212-229.

<sup>41</sup> James Ferguson, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 3 June 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Raynor, "Unionism in the Southern Textile Industry," in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds, *Essays in Southern Labor History: Selected Papers, Southern Labor History Conference, 1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 80-99.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Robert S. McElvaine, "Claude Ramsay, Organized Labor, and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1959-1966," in *Southern Workers and their Unions, 1880-1975: Selected Papers, The Second Southern Labor History Conference, 1978*, eds. Merl E. Reed, Leslie S. Hough and Gary M. Fink, eds, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 110-137.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> E.T. "Al" Kehrer, Southern Director, AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, comment in Merl E. Reed, Leslie S. Hough and Gary M. Fink, eds, *Southern Workers and their Unions, 1880-1975: Selected Papers, The Second Southern Labor History Conference, 1978* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 138-139.

<sup>49</sup> James Ferguson, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 3 June 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Virgil Griffin, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 16 July 2005.

<sup>51</sup> *Resurgence: The Movement for Equality Vs. The Ku Klux Klan*, a documentary directed by Pamela Yates, 1981. Pierce is shown speaking at a Klan-Nazi rally in Benson, NC.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "A Message to FII Employees and Their Families," phonographic record released by Fiber Industries, Inc. to their employees, Summer 1979, sound recording on file at GTRC.

<sup>54</sup> John Gaventa and Barbara Ellen Smith, "The Deindustrialization of the Textile South: A Case Study," in Jeffrey Leiter et al, *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1991), 181-196.

<sup>55</sup> Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census Data: 1960, 1970, and 1980*, Vol. 35 (Washington, D.C.).

<sup>56</sup> Si Kahn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 15 July 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> "All About Textiles: an Economic and Sociological Profile of America's First Great Industry," *American Textile Manufacturers Institute* brochure (July 1976), in Bob Sheldon Papers, 1968-1990, Duke University Special Collections Library.

<sup>59</sup> "The Story of Cone Mills," *Cone Mills Corporation*, Greensboro, NC (1977) in Bob Sheldon Papers, 1968-1990, Duke University Special Collections Library.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce Raynor, "Unionism in the Southern Textile Industry," in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed eds, *Essays in Southern Labor History: Selected Papers, Southern Labor History Conference, 1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 80-99.

<sup>61</sup> Bob Hall, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 26 September 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States under International Human Rights Standards* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2000), available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor/> (accessed on 15 May 2006).

<sup>63</sup> In 2003, J.P. Stevens announced that it would close the Roanoke Rapids mill that was the focus of the organizing effort. See Hodges, "J.P. Stevens and the Union," 53-64; and "Pioneering 'Norma Rae' factory to close in N.C.," *Associated Press*, 26 April 2003, <http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/>

CTVNews/1051392053285\_7// (accessed on 1 May 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Si Kahn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Ed McConville, "Oliver Harvey: 'Got to take some risks'," *Southern Exposure* 6, no.2 (Summer 1978): 24-28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> McConville, "Oliver Harvey," 24-28; and Kevin Bailey, "Bad Blood on the Ward: A Study of the Politics of Labor Organizing at Duke Hospital, 1974-1976," (unpublished honors thesis, Duke University, April 1991).

<sup>68</sup> The Duke administration inadvertently helped Fuller gain adherents for the union in 1974 by announcing that they would switch the delivery of pay checks from even to odd weeks, meaning that workers would be caught short of money before Christmas. See Bailey, "Bad Blood on the Ward."

<sup>69</sup> Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*.

<sup>70</sup> Signe Waller, *Love and Revolution: A Political Memoir* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002), 66.

<sup>71</sup> Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Bermanzohn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.

<sup>76</sup> Floris Caton Cauce Weston, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 26 August 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Karen Brodtkin Sacks, *Caring by the Hour: Women, Work, and Organizing at Duke Medical Center* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>78</sup> Bailey, "Bad Blood on the Ward."

<sup>79</sup> Tony Dunbar and Bob Hall, "Union busters," *Southern Exposure*, 8, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 53-69.

<sup>80</sup> Tony Dunbar, "The Old South Triumphs at Duke," *Southern Changes* (June, 1979).

<sup>81</sup> Dunbar and Hall, "Union busters," 53-69.

<sup>82</sup> For a history that addresses Communism in the United States, see David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Lenin feared a resurgence of the socialism in the wake of the Russian Revolution, so established the Comintern to consolidate leadership and develop a clear "party line."

<sup>83</sup> Hall died on October 13, 2000, at the age of 90. For a summary of his life, see Sam Tanenhaus, "Gus Hall, Unreconstructed American Communist of 7 Decades, Dies at 90," *New York Times*, 17 October 2000.

<sup>84</sup> Its founder also felt that the CPUSA was adopting reformist positions, such as turning to electoral politics and hiding Communist politics behind a veneer of reform-oriented causes. Their web site is available at <http://www.plp.org/> (accessed on 1 May 2006). For more, see Ron Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Wheaton provides a short list of groups active in the South, including the October League; its predecessor, the Georgia Communist League, which was predominately white; the Revolutionary Workers' League, an all-black group; the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Organization; and the Asian Study Group, which eventually converted into the WVO. Elizabeth Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 21.

<sup>86</sup> Jean Chapman, interview with the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 14 May 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 32.

<sup>90</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Ron Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>92</sup> *Workers Viewpoint Organization*, "Castro: Professional Liar in Action," 15 October 1979, on file at Beloved Community Center archives.

<sup>93</sup> "Rights Leaders Troubled by Prospect of Leftist Gains among Blacks," *New York Times*, 18 November 1979.

<sup>94</sup> Paul and Sally Bermanzohn, *The True Story of the Greensboro Massacre* (New York: Cesar Cauce Pub & Dist., 1980).

<sup>95</sup> Bob Hall, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 26 September 2005.

<sup>96</sup> Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*, 34-35.



- <sup>97</sup> Paul Bermanzohn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>98</sup> Joyce Johnson, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 26 August 2005.
- <sup>99</sup> Bailey, "Bad Blood on the Ward."
- <sup>100</sup> John Kenyon Chapman, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 16 July 2005.
- <sup>101</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 81-83.
- <sup>102</sup> This view is shared by many of the individuals who eventually took part in the events of November 3, including Sally Avery, Paul Bermanzohn and Signe Waller. An account of the meeting also appears in Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL*, 39-40.
- <sup>103</sup> Tim McGloin, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 23 September 2005.
- <sup>104</sup> The term brown lung was coined by consumer advocate Ralph Nader in 1969. However, unlike black lung, suffered by miners who inhale coal dust, the disease does not turn the lung brown.
- <sup>105</sup> Margot Hornblower, "'Brown-Lung' Protection Urged," *Washington Post*, 28 April 1977, in Bob Sheldon Papers, 1968-1990, Duke University Special Collections Library.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> Robert E. Botsch, *Organizing the Breathless: Cotton Dust, Southern Politics, and the Brown Lung Association* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993).
- <sup>108</sup> "Brown Lungers Ride to Arouse Interest," *Greensboro Daily News*, 13 November 1975 in Bob Sheldon Papers, 1968-1990, Duke University Special Collections Library.
- <sup>109</sup> "Brown Lung: A Case of Deadly Neglect," a series published in the *Charlotte Observer*, February 3-February 10, 1980.
- <sup>110</sup> "Interview with Lacy Wright," with Bill Finger and Chip Hughes, March 10, 1975, transcribed by Patricia Crowley, *Southern Oral History Program*, University of North Carolina, 1978.
- <sup>111</sup> "Brown Lung Blues," Newsletter of the North Carolina chapters of the *Carolina Brown Lung Association* 1, no. 5 (22 February 1978).
- <sup>112</sup> Robert E. Botsch, *Organizing the Breathless*, 69.
- <sup>113</sup> Ellen (Len) Stanley, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 28 September 2005.
- <sup>114</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 76-77.
- <sup>115</sup> In his public statement before the Commission on July 15, Bermanzohn claimed that he and Jim Waller "helped to found the Carolina Brown Lung Association." But that is disputed by former members and is not reflected in any of the available histories of the association. See also Ellen (Len) Stanley, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 28 September 2005.
- <sup>116</sup> Botsch, *Organizing the Breathless*, 69; and "Brown Lung: A Case of Deadly Neglect," *Charlotte Observer*, February 3-February 10, 1980.
- <sup>117</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>118</sup> Botsch, *Organizing the Breathless*, 146-149.
- <sup>119</sup> Paul Bermanzohn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>120</sup> Nelson Johnson, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 12 August 2005.
- <sup>121</sup> Paul and Sally Bermanzohn, *The True Story of the Greensboro Massacre* (New York: Cesar Cauce Pub & Dist., 1980).
- <sup>122</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>123</sup> Jim Wrenn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 27 August 2005.
- <sup>124</sup> Confidential statement, *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 1 June 2005.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>126</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 141.
- <sup>127</sup> Dennis Cox, interview with the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 19 May 2005.
- <sup>128</sup> Virginia Turner, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 26 August 2005.
- <sup>129</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Subject: Paul Bermanzohn," Charlotte Field Office (CE 44-3527 – Sub. A, Vol. 3), in GRTC files.



- <sup>130</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>131</sup> FBI, “Subject: Paul Bermanzohn,” Charlotte Field Office (CE 44-3527 – Sub. A, Vol. 3), GTRC files.
- <sup>132</sup> “Sketch of Tactical Plan for Independent Union,” *Workers Viewpoint Organization*, 1979.
- <sup>133</sup> FBI, “Subject: Paul Bermanzohn,” Charlotte Field Office (CE 44-3527, Sub. A, Vol. 3), GTRC files.
- <sup>134</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005.
- <sup>135</sup> Former textile mill workers, confidential interview with *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 8 June 2005.
- <sup>136</sup> Ray Eurquart, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 30 June 2005.
- <sup>137</sup> Floris Weston, interview with the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 26 August 2005.
- <sup>138</sup> Sally Bermanzohn, statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 26 August 2005.
- <sup>139</sup> Sally Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors’ Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press), 190.
- <sup>140</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 101.
- <sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.
- <sup>142</sup> “Letter to Eno Workers,” February 14, 1978, in Bob Sheldon Papers, 1968-1990, Duke University Special Collections Library.
- <sup>143</sup> Signe Waller, statement to the *Greensboro Truth & Reconciliation Commission*, Public Hearing, 15 July 2005; and Sally Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors’ Eyes*, 155-159.
- <sup>144</sup> “Sketch of Tactical Plan for Independent Union,” *White Oak Organizing Committee*, 30 September 1979, GTRC files.
- <sup>145</sup> “Communist Politics and Anarcho-Socialist Politics,” Beloved Community Center archives (no date).
- <sup>146</sup> “Plan for Independent Union,” *White Oak Organizing Committee*.
- <sup>147</sup> One worker’s account, though redacted, is available in an FBI file compiled on the activities of Paul Bermanzohn, one of the WVO members wounded on November 3. “Subject: Paul Bermanzohn,” Charlotte Field Office File (CE, 44-3527 – Sub A, Vol. 6), 23-27. On file in the Commission archives.
- <sup>148</sup> *Workers Viewpoint Organization*, Newsletter (Print Works, 1976).
- <sup>149</sup> “Cone jacks up work load, cuts pay rates in the card room,” No. 30, *White Oak Organizing Committee*, 9 September 1979, in GTRC files.
- <sup>150</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 179-180; Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors’ Eyes*, 148-159.
- <sup>151</sup> “Plan for Independent Union,” *White Oak Organizing Committee*.
- <sup>152</sup> Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 186-188.
- <sup>153</sup> Sgt JW Campbell, “Investigator’s Report, Re: Associates of Nelson N. Johnson at Cone Mills Company,” Greensboro Police Department (3 May 1976).
- <sup>154</sup> Waller identified the photographer as Wayne Lottinville. The *Carolina Peacemaker* published his photographs with the story headlined, “Workers Rally at Cone as Police Cameras Click.” See Waller, *Love and Revolution*, 106.
- <sup>155</sup> Officer GD Payne and Officer JH Cooper, “Investigator’s Report, Re: Labor Problems at cone Mills corporation, Revolution Plant and Possibility of Violence Will Occur,” Greensboro Police Department (31 October 1977), 3-4.
- <sup>156</sup> Herman Dail Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich*, (12 October 1984), 21-22.
- <sup>157</sup> Dail Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich* (12 October 1984), 13-14, 29; Robert L. Talbott Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich* (1 November 1984), 22, 31; Sylvester Daughtry Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich*, (16 August 1984), 129.
- <sup>158</sup> BL Thomas Grand Jury Testimony (26 August 1982), 33.
- <sup>159</sup> Maurice Cawn Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich* (14 August 1984), 8-9; Daughtry Deposition, *Waller* (16 August 1984), 140; Herb Belvin Grand Jury Testimony (24 August 1982), 9.
- <sup>160</sup> Dail Deposition, *Waller v. Butkovich* (12 October 1984), 31.
- <sup>161</sup> “Meeting Minutes of Chief’s Staff Conference,” Chief Swing to Staff Burch, Colvard, Wynn, Wade (17 October 1979).
- <sup>162</sup> Don Patterson, “The Giant in Denim. Celebrating 100 Years at White Oak,” *Greensboro News & Record*, 24 April 2005, A-1; information on historical preservation of mill life, see *The Bobbin and Shuttle*, a publication of the *Textile Heritage Initiative*, <http://www.textileheritage.org/news/BandS2.htm>. (accessed on 16 May 2006).