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The Rise and Fall of Boomtowns: Remington-UMC in Bridgeport during the First World War

Cole Simons¹

Bridgeport, Connecticut, rose to prominence as a ‘boomtown’ spearheaded by a thriving manufacturing mecca, once playing to its greatest strengths in proactive unionization, providing necessary representation so the working-class everyman can thrive. A ‘war-boom town,’ or ‘boomtown,’ is described as a settlement that experiences rapid growth due to its war production industry. Bridgeport is a shining example of a twentieth-century boomtown. At its peak, as a key supplier for the European theater during the First World War, Bridgeport contributed nearly a third of all munitions and supplies to the Allied powers and was an important symbol to Nutmeggers and Americans alike for its valiant patriotic efforts. However, these achievements did not come without their challenges, as reflected in the desolate, littered brownfields and attempts at gentrification to generate urban renewal projects in a modern city vastly different from its past self. The heartbeat of Bridgeport during this era was emblematic of the contributions at the Remington-UMC Plant, part of the larger Remington Arms Corporation, whose headquarters and manufacturing facilities were on the East Side, defining the landscape during its heyday. Presently, only its iconic shot tower, a sumptuous Italianate structure meant to encapsulate the city’s charm, remains amongst barren plots of asphalt, concrete, and rubble.

On a personal note, I discovered the remnants of Remington-UMC during my freshman year of high school, traveling on a Metro-North train as I was peering out the windows from the air-conditioned vessel on elevated tracks, bound for Milford from Fairfield after the end of the school day at my high school alma mater, Fairfield Prep. I first noticed the site on a humid summer day in August of 2014, during one of its many notorious blazes, with its fierce flames desperately trying to escape its confines through broken windows and ashy plumes rising into the skyline for miles. After witnessing the spectacle of multiple fire brigades hastily dousing the flames, I remember exploring Google Maps and the WTNH local news website to get a sense of what once stood amid the wreckage.

While I would not dive deeper into exploring the site for another decade, I witnessed years of gradual decay and demolition, leaving few remaining fixtures of what had become a familiar and ‘friendly’ site for me over my high school and undergrad years (sans a global pandemic). Its iconic ‘Shot Tower’ was an amicable face in an otherwise sparse skyline, and what lay behind its industrial brick

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exterior was often a rabbit hole my imagination would scurry down. From what was once a quaint curiosity, I finally found the inspiration to explore this topic more deeply on another Metro-North train ride, this time bound for the University of Connecticut's Stamford campus, as I tried to decide what topic to choose for my senior seminar research. Having never taken a class focusing on US labor history, I consulted with two of my professors, Dr. Robert Macieski and Dr. Mars Plater, and found that my fascination with this 'mysterious acquaintance' reemerged, and its story became my muse for my final semester of undergrad.

By retelling the story of the rise and fall of Remington-UMC and its growth into an East Coast powerhouse, a grander tapestry unfurls of a fight for better union benefits, a better way of life for immigrants, the rise of women in the workplace, and a cautionary tale for the burgeoning military-industrial complex. Specifically, this research compilation aims to provide a broader context and insight by examining the diverse demographics that emerged during Bridgeport's boomtown era, the relationship between Remington Arms Corp. and various labor unions, labor strikes, and the social outcomes that followed the end of the First World War in Bridgeport. The power and prominence of a facility that meant so much to workers, families, communities, and onlookers alike, outlined the city skyline for decades, abandoned and left to rot, still echoes along the train tracks and streets of a recovering city, and is a history that should inspire its bounce back.

Historical Context

The Union Metallic Cartridge Company was founded shortly after the Civil War in 1867. Out the gate, 'UMC' managed to be one of the only companies to garner steady wages throughout the US financial 'Panic of 1873,' thanks in no small part to its emblematic patriotism, and its early connection to courting Russian contracts with then-Russian Grand Duke Alexis (lasting through the end of the Romanov Dynasty).² UMC would then be acquired by the newly formed Remington Arms group in 1888, and from there it grew with the city into the twentieth century as a burgeoning manufacturing industry led to new facilities and increased urbanization. The only notable blip during that time was an accident in 1906 when sixteen tons of gunpowder exploded, but miraculously, there were no injuries reported.³ The incident did, however, lead to the acquisition of what is now known as Remington Woods so that munitions can be tested more safely on a larger parcel of land away from civilians.⁴ It

² Remington Arms-Union Metallic Cartridge Co, *A New Chapter in an Old Story Being an Interesting Account of the Strange Steps by Which a Great Modern Business Has Grown out of Ancient Conditions, Together with a Look into the Future* (New York, Remington Arms-Union Metallic Cartridge Co., 1912), pp. 43-4.

³ "Magazine Explosion Mistaken for a Quake; When Bridgeport Plant Went up Central Connecticut Shook," *The New York Times*, 1906, p. 5.

⁴ Elsie Nicholas Danenberg, *The Story of Bridgeport*, (The Bridgeport Centennial Inc., 1936), p.131.

was also during this period that the iconic ‘Shot Tower’ was completed in 1909, not only adding an ornamental fixture to the Bridgeport skyline but also enabling the use of gravity to produce lead balls for use as bullets.

By 1912, with the First World War on the horizon, UMC and its parent company, Remington, officially merged into ‘Remington-UMC’ to form a single company (the moniker ‘Remington-UMC’ was used for marketing as early as 1911, and the merger was not completed until 1916). This not only allowed for more direct control by its parent company, Remington, but also led to other ‘wartime expansions’ that other corporations initiated to accommodate maximum facilities for government contracts once the Great War broke out, which saw an immediate shortage of rifles. Remington-UMC already had strategic connections with several allied nations before the start of the First World War, positioning it as one of the United States’ most reliable munitions manufacturers and suppliers throughout the war effort. Remington-UMC earned two major contracts as early as 1911 and had as many as eight major contracts being put to production between 1914 and 1915.⁵

To accommodate US government contracts and those from allied nations such as Great Britain, France, and Belgium, as well as those from Czar Nicholas II, a second Remington facility was built on Boston Avenue, near the existing Remington-UMC complex, to manufacture rifles. At this time, the Remington Boston Ave facility was the largest manufacturing facility ever built in five months, with haste the impetus so that replenishments could be sent to the war front as soon as possible. This would be the largest expansion of Remington-UMC, which would expand its footprint in Bridgeport throughout the Great War as well as the Second World War.⁶ Ironically, the contract that the facility was built for, to supply the Russian Romanovs with 1.5 million rifles, only saw about 750,000 weapons produced before the Bolshevik Revolution began.⁷ Machinists and other factory workers were not keen on Russian soldiers stationed to ‘test’ their rifles either.

Workforce Demographics (Gender, Immigration, & Race)

With a hefty workload and sky-high demand to replenish supply lines for the war effort, Remington-UMC would become the largest employer in Bridgeport during the First World War era. At the end of the First World War, one-third of all munitions and two-thirds of all small arms would be manufactured in Bridgeport for the war effort.⁸ Because of its massive operation, few stones remained

⁵ Luke Mercaldo, *Remington’s Allied Rifle Contracts during WWI* (Remington Collector’s Journal, 2012), pp. 22-7.

⁶ Cecelia F. Bucki, “Dilution and Craft Tradition: Bridgeport, Connecticut, Munitions Workers, 1915-1919” *Social Science History*, 4:1 (1980): p. 107.

⁷ Cecelia F. Bucki, “Connecticut Business and Labor in the World War I Era: The Bridgeport Case,” *Connecticut History*, 56:1 (2017): p. 9.

⁸ Cecelia F. Bucki, *Bridgeport’s Socialist New Deal, 1915-36*, (University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 21.

unturnd in seeking laborers and machinists to increase production. While the United States was initially reluctant to send young men off to the front lines, their entrance into the European theater was inevitable, and with their absence in the workplace a new labor source was needed, thus reflecting elements of the national trend towards an increase in immigrant labor, the emergence of women in the workplace, and the ‘Great Migration’ of African Americans from the south to work in northern-US factories. Macieski states, “The population in Bridgeport swelled from 102,000 to more than 150,000 in 1915 alone, ultimately rising to an estimated 170,000 by 1918. The number of wage workers, native and foreign born, grew by one-third.”⁹

Immigration accounted for the largest population surge in Bridgeport. With its proximity to New York City, Bridgeport has, since the late nineteenth century, attracted new immigrants seeking work. Ahead of the First World War, Bridgeport already had a strong and thriving community of immigrants who established their own neighborhoods and ethnic associations for public welfare and representation in the city. Moret recounts, “By 1910, 30 percent of the state’s population was foreign-born. Italians, Austro-Hungarians, and Russians flooded the expanding industrial cities of New Haven and Bridgeport, driving the population figure over the 100,000 mark.”¹⁰ As a byproduct of the war, there was an uptick of Jewish, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian immigrants, amongst other Europeans fleeing warfare.

Organizations like the American Federation of Labor (AFL), International Association of Machinists (IAM), Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or better known as the ‘Wobblies’), and other workers’ unions or socialist-focused organizations found success with these communities based on their strong ethnic within their Bridgeport neighborhood settlements, often time convalescing with other ‘old stock’ groups and organizations (such as the Polish National Alliance, brought to Bridgeport from its Polonia origins), through which the working class of Bridgeport was drastically mobilized and transformed with a mentality of “Americanism from the bottom-up.”¹¹ Many immigrants who traveled to Bridgeport for work, often finding it easy to travel by train from New York City, would find a second home in immigrant enclaves and workers’ unions, bringing a sense of familiarity from their far-off homelands to the United States.

In addition to immigrant labor, the war effort would not have been possible without women’s work. Bridgeport and Connecticut in general were notably progressive during this era. Remington-UMC became the largest employer of women in Connecticut during the First World War,

⁹ Robert Macieski, “The Home of the Workingman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy”: Housing Reform in Wartime Bridgeport, *Journal of Urban History*, 26:6 (2000): p. 721.

¹⁰ Marta Moret, *A Brief History of the Connecticut Labor Movement* (Storrs, University of Connecticut, 1982), p. 26.

¹¹ Cecelia F. Bucki, “Workers and Politics in the Immigrant City in the Early Twentieth-Century United States,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 48 (1995): pp. 31-2, 34-5.

employing around 4,000 women in 1916.¹² While women stepped up to serve their country at a time when it was most important, it did not come without its challenges and pushbacks. After joining other striking machinists and laborers in 1915 (which will be discussed in greater detail later), women secured their rights in the workplace. Most of these women were between the ages of 18-24, single/unmarried or newlywed, often undertrained, exposed to workplace hazards, and had to put up with other workplace inadequacies (long hours, low wage, poor first aid, patronizing supervisors, and unclean bathrooms, to name a few) before going home and caring for a household and children or siblings. This workplace experience stoked early feminist sentiments, with many women taking part in union meetings and self-advocating shortly before the nineteenth constitutional amendment would be passed and suffrage would be granted in 1920.¹³

The role of African Americans was also important in Bridgeport. However, while women in the workplace came with their pushbacks, and there was sometimes infighting between different immigrant groups for jobs and community resources, African Americans faced the most hurdles to finding employment in Bridgeport due to racism and practiced segregation, despite the wartime effort. This is reflected in the relatively stagnant growth of African American residents in Bridgeport throughout the decade. Bridgeport had a very small but noted population of African Americans at the start of the twentieth century, who likely found their way to the city through the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad. But the number of African Americans in Bridgeport only increased by about 1,000 people between 1910 and 1920, or an increase from 1.3% to 1.6% of the population of Bridgeport.¹⁴ That said, African Americans secured positions in menial jobs at large employers like Remington-UMC but struggled to gain a voice in the city until the interwar years.

Despite the diverse diaspora of folks who would occupy the Remington-UMC facilities, there were common goals and issues shared by everyone: fair working conditions, a living wage, and a place to live. Throughout the First World War, these core tenets led to the creation or strengthening of unions and to massive strike efforts in Bridgeport. But before that, it cannot be overstated that the massive population boom for the war effort brought a massive housing crisis. According to Danenberg, “The war boom struck Bridgeport early in 1915. Prior to this, Bridgeport had been a rather slow-paced city of 115,000. In less than a year, 50,000 men and women were added to its population.”¹⁵ This led Remington-UMC, among other companies at the time, to either construct their own worker housing or to coordinate facilities with the Bridgeport Housing Company.¹⁶ When those efforts proved to be insufficient, the Bridgeport Housing Company was handed over to the newly-formed US Housing

¹² Bucki, “Dilution and Craft Tradition,” p. 109.

¹³ Moret, *A Brief History of the Connecticut Labor Movement*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁴ Bucki, *Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Danenberg, *The Story of Bridgeport*, p. 112.

¹⁶ Macieski, “The Home of the Workman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy,” p. 723.

Corporation, which tried to facilitate the better interests between tenants and corporations in corporate-owned settlements like that of Remington City.¹⁷ Throughout the war effort, there was constant tension between workers and corporations as the hierarchy destabilized, culminating in several protests.

Labor Conditions & Challenges

Before progress for worker protections could continue through the First World War, one would be remiss without making a brief mention of the Strike of 1907 and the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1910. The 1907 strike against the American Tube and Stamping Company was waged for shorter daily working hours without affecting their wage and spearheaded by the IWW, seeing 100 workers from both machinist and unskilled working backgrounds (mostly of Hungarian descent) successfully reach an agreement after a month.¹⁸ The Workman's Compensation Act of 1910, spearheaded by the AFL and bargained with the Connecticut Federation of Labor (CFL) by socialist, trade-unionist, and future mayor Jasper McLeavy, essentially provided union protections for workers as well as set a legislative precedent for future 'New Deal-esque' legislation that would create minimum wage, protections for women in the workplace, health insurance, and old age pensions.¹⁹ But, most importantly, it demonstrated the power of strikes and unions, and set the stage for what was yet to come.

While Bridgeport had the necessary facilities and the means to amply supply the Allied front at the dawn of the Great War, the demand for labor and the surge of population were completely unprecedented. Remington-UMC recognized early the need to scale up facilities, with the hasty construction of its Boston Ave plant in 1915 in time for the start of the Great War. This made for an interesting showdown throughout the entire war effort. Montgomery sets the scene,

Bridgeport, Connecticut, where some 120 local firms subcontracted for the Remington Arms Company, which directly employed 18,000 men and women in a 21-building plant erected in the first eight months of 1915, was a seething cauldron of such conflicts from the summer of 1915 onward. Strikes for the eight-hour day, wage increases, and overtime pay, abolition of premiums, equal pay regardless of sex on all jobs where women were substituted for craftsmen, an end to discrimination and intimidation against union members, secure draft deferments, and recognition of shop committees were endemic to this boom town.²⁰

¹⁷ Macieski, "The Home of the Workingman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy," p. 724.

¹⁸ "Labor's Substantial Victory," *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, 22 July 1915.

¹⁹ Moret, *A Brief History of the Connecticut Labor Movement*, p. 25.

²⁰ David Montgomery, *"The 'New Unionism' and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness in America, 1909-22 (1974)"* (University of Illinois Press, 2024), p. 233.

As laid out, these were very progressive ideas for the era, seeking to redefine the ‘American experience’ for citizens old and new in exchange for a wartime commitment to the nation. Moreover, this reflects modern standards often taken for granted, sans the ‘eight-hour day’ at the time, implying a forty-eight-hour workweek, since the five-day workweek was not commonplace until Henry Ford’s implementation, setting the industry standard decades later. But what was most remarkable about this strike, which would be its greatest strength in subsequent strikes, was the coordination of so many different workers for a simultaneous walkout.

While there were rumblings of unrest earlier in the year, the first strikes to break out in the summer of 1915 were led by Lodge 30 of IAM (including 500 men from Remington-UMC) and the AFL before being temporarily appeased when Remington-UMC brokered an agreement for shorter hours effective August 1. That, however, set off a chain reaction that led to other machinists striking across Bridgeport. By 16 August 1915, spurred by a spontaneous protest at the Corset Factory in the South End involving 1,000 female workers, Bridgeport was at a near-standstill. This time, there was a broader coalition of unionized and non-unionized skilled laborers (craftsmen, machinists, tradespeople, etc.) and ‘unskilled’ (general) workers who walked out of factories in protest. In total, there were approximately 14,000 workers who walked out of factories across the city, with at least 2,500 of those being machinists and over 11,000 general laborers striking alongside them.²¹ This was highly unusual for strikes during this era since it was more common for skilled laborers to go on strike and win strikes with union protections, versus general laborers often without union protections who had the most to lose during a walkout, and no prior attempts were made on this massive scale.²²

With so many on strike, unions took the opportunity to cater to non-unionized strikers seeking similar reforms. This led to a hike in memberships for groups like the Wobblies (who would play a more prominent role in subsequent strikes), as well as the creation of new unions such as IAM Women’s Lodge 1196 aimed to support female workers at the original UMC plant (which employed women since 1912), and later Boston Ave rifle plant (where women would work interchangeably after a women’s department was created in 1917), helped by support from IAM Lodge 30 and others.²³ This strike, calling back to the strike from 1907, encouraged united community support from ethnic immigrant communities, most notably with Italian-American strikers marching in downtown Bridgeport, displaying both flags of the United States and Italy.²⁴ This strike also saw little violence, with exceptions for scabs crossing picket lines to the chagrin of strikers, or hotheadedness, which

²¹ Bucki, “Connecticut Business and Labor in the World War I Era,” pp. 13-5.

²² Cecelia F. Bucki, “Strikes for the Eight-Hour Day in Summer 1915 Bridgeport,” (CT Digital Archive, 2015), p. 2.

²³ Bucki, “Connecticut Business and Labor in the World War I Era,” pp. 30-1.

²⁴ Bucki, “Workers and Politics in the Immigrant City in the Early Twentieth-Century United States,” p. 37.

Bucki²⁵ accounts for, and a Report from the Connecticut Bureau of Labor²⁶ corroborates. While the 1915 strike brought the major victory of the eight-hour workday (forty-eight-hour workweek), which the IAM would adopt as a foundational policy for its national platform the following year, it would be far from the last strike of the decade.

While there were smaller-scale strikes involving Remington-UMC and other corporations in Bridgeport that happened in 1916 and 1917 (the Bridgeport war production period from 1915-1919 is generally considered chaotic for the numerous strikes, union efforts, violence, and other conflicts, such as those outlined by the Bridgeport Vice Commission), the next pivotal strike came in 1918. In the meantime, unions bolstered themselves for the fight ahead, with the charge led by Samuel Lavit (a Wobbly ally) of Lodge 55 of the IAM, since there was an added wrinkle once the United States officially deployed troops to the European theater in 1917. Because of the US's entry into the war, corporations like Remington-UMC, like other national manufacturing corporations, sought government intervention to impose stricter regulations at the cost of workers' rights and wages. This came to a head in the spring of 1918, when the National War Labor Board (utilized as an 'umpire' between Bridgeport employers and unions) could no longer mitigate a stable work relationship that was already rocky between disgruntled employees and the war production machine. As Bucki wrote, "When the War Department announced its decision in favor of the machinists, Bridgeport employers refused to accept it. Enraged by the employers' intransigence, over 7,000 machinists ignored appeals to their patriotism and downed their tools by the end of June."²⁷ This included over 700 men from the Remington-UMC toolroom and would quickly spread to other sectors of the plant's operations.

This especially struck a chord with the women working at Remington-UMC, who already had to endure their own standoff with other men vying for their jobs upon entering the workplace. Companies like Remington-UMC seized the opportunity to pay women less than skilled machinists, due to their lack of workplace experience. While Remington-UMC paid higher rates than 'traditional women's industries' of the era, it was still significantly less than comparable men's wages, and difficult to live off of for some of these women who served as the sole breadwinner for their families or households.²⁸ The incendiary actions of Remington-UMC and other government-contract-awarded companies, unafraid of the NWLB's ruling, spurred women to meaningfully organize in protest, signing union cards. This led to what was essentially the only positive outcome of the strike in 1918: the creation of Women's Lodge 1196 of the IAM.²⁹

²⁵ Bucki, "Connecticut Business and Labor in the World War I Era," p.14.

²⁶ Connecticut Bureau of Labor, Report No. 23, *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Bureau of Labor: for the Two Years Ended November 30, 1916*, 1916, Hartford, Connecticut: State of Connecticut, p. 9.

²⁷ Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition," p. 114.

²⁸ Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition," p. 118.

²⁹ Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition," p. 119.

With both sides at a stalemate, Remington-UMC and other employers of Bridgeport sought government intervention because the work stoppage was hurting the war effort in the European theater and ‘anti-patriotism.’ This eventually escalated to the point that President Woodrow Wilson intervened. The statement from President Wilson reads,

My attention has been called to the fact that several thousand machinists and other employees are connected with war industries in Bridgeport, Conn. Engaged in a strike to obtain further concessions, because they were not satisfied with the decision rendered by the umpire appointed under the authority conferred upon the National War Labor Board. On the 13th inst. I communicated with the workmen engaged in the strike, demanding that they accept the decision of the arbitrator and return to work, and stated the penalties which would be imposed if they refused to do so.³⁰

Those consequences included being barred from factory employment for a year, which for men would make draft deferral an ineligibility.³¹ Also different from previous strikes was the heightened presence of the military and police throughout the city, for better or worse. As Bucki chronicled, “Bridgeport by this time had taken on the appearance of a military camp. Pacifist demonstrations had early been quashed, and alien residents systematically harassed. State militia units had been deployed and agents...engaged in plant surveillance in the city.”³² While the United States did not go to the lengths that other nations had to directly seize operations of factories so that all focus of manufacturing would be for the war effort (like the United Kingdom), there was still a vested interest to try to quell civilian unrest and minimize work stoppages as much as possible. There were also concerns for national security, with the rise of the ‘red scare’ and suspicions of sympathies for Axis powers or immigrant spies collecting intel for enemy lines. Any action against the war effort, fairly or not, was an act of transgression and could be proclaimed as anti-patriotic by opponents. This strike marked a shift toward disrupting hierarchical power that favored the working class and protected the strength of unions.

The final strike of note came following the armistice that ended the Great War. Struck on 11 November 1918, nearly two months after President Wilson’s statement ended the prior strike, the immediate concern for all unions in the city was the demilitarization that would follow the war effort. Because Bridgeport was a ‘war boom town,’ meaning its population explosion and prominence were driven by workers who relocated to manufacture supplies for the front lines, the next great fear was

³⁰ “Reinstate Strikers, President Demands; Wilson Insists That Bridgeport Concerns Employ Men He Ordered Back. Labor Leaders Complain Assert Three Factories Are Barring Workers, but Managements Deny Charges” (*The New York Times*, 18 September 1918).

³¹ Montgomery, “*The ‘New Unionism’ and the Transformation of Workers’ Consciousness in America*,” p. 233.

³² Bucki, “Dilution and Craft Tradition,” p. 116.

mass layoffs when the war ended. Sure enough, in March of 1919, “all government contracts were cancelled, the wartime government apparatus was dismantled, and the Bridgeport office of the NWLB closed its doors.”³³ This strike was instead struck by the non-munitions side of the industry, totaling 10,000 skilled and unskilled workers across Bridgeport, including those working for Remington’s typewriter manufacturing division, sponsored by the IAM.³⁴ To make matters worse, there was a fissure that emerged among the once-powerful Bridgeport members of the IAM between the ‘old guard’ who resented figures like Lavit and the surge of new membership into their union, and questioned the loyalties of members suspected to be communists (often Eastern European immigrants). Union leaders like Lavit also recognized the dangers of moving ‘too far left’ with their labor condition demands, since they had lost considerable leverage with the conclusion of the war and could be accused of being sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. Moret states,

In December 1919, federal agents stormed into Connecticut, arresting dozens of ‘alleged anarchists’...Bridgeport brought in the largest catch, with 67 radicals arrested. Some languished in Connecticut prisons for months, while others were freed immediately but with their reputations irreparably tarnished. Subsequent raids yielded scores of suspected Communists - all were aliens, either Lithuanians or Russians. Hundreds of foreign-born workers crowded Hartford’s jails waiting for transfers to Deer Island, Massachusetts, from where many would be deported.³⁵

Unions like the IWW often faced arrests or jail time for touting ‘anti-capitalist philosophies,’ and the clashes with enforcement agencies were effective tools of fearmongering for immigrant and native workers alike, trying to ‘tread water’ and avoid layoffs.

Broader Social Impact

The aftermath of the 1919 strike had an interesting impact on Bridgeport and the workers at Remington-UMC. While the entire period from 1915-1919 marked gradual progress for factory workers and improvements for hours, wages, and working conditions, it also demonstrated that organized workers, immigrants, and locals were a force to be reckoned with.³⁶ Employers took notice, which, coupled with the rising cost of living following the conclusion of the war, led to the effective targeting and elimination of union leaders, and mass layoffs, destroying the forward progress of ‘one big union for all members’ that the Wobblies would proudly tout as their slogan of power in numbers.

³³ Bucki, “Dilution and Craft Tradition,” p. 119.

³⁴ Bucki, “Connecticut Business and Labor in the World War I Era,” p. 32.

³⁵ Moret, *A Brief History of the Connecticut Labor Movement*, p. 31.

³⁶ Montgomery, “*The ‘New Unionism’ and the Transformation of Workers’ Consciousness in America*,” p. 234.

Bridgeport's population had also hit its all-time high at an estimated 170,000 people calling the city home, up 20,000 people from 1915.³⁷

Another major issue was the control over housing that Remington-UMC exerted over a large share of its workers. Following the strikes of 1918 and 1919, on the coattails of armistice, both the US Housing Corporation and Bridgeport Housing Company recognized the housing crisis and the rising cost of living that emerged and was seeking all options to address it, with Levitt of the IAM hounding Remington-UMC personnel on the housing crisis that they had a hand in on account of the population surge being a side effect of their demand for a larger workforce for the war effort.³⁸ Furthermore, following the war, Remington-UMC and other companies sought to separate their 'factory cities' away from their corporate interests (to sever the residential sector from the commercial sector) by targeting leases for demographics outside of the manufacturing sector, such as clergymen, newlyweds, and schoolteachers.³⁹

Perhaps the biggest tragedy to emerge from the entire effort was the ripple effect it would have on the specialized workers' industry. Craftsmen, machinists, and other specialized workers saw their manufacturing processes or technologies advance for the war effort, rendering their formerly esteemed positions less powerful or obsolete. This was a major controversy with women entering the scene first at the Remington-UMC plant, and later the Remington plant on Boston Avenue. While women were able to get their start in the workplace at a time when immense sacrifices were made to replenish US and allied troops for the war effort, craftsmen were alarmed by the impact they had on the workplace. As Bucki remarks, "The contrast between machinists' activity during the war, with its emphasis on the defense of craft, and the activity of skilled and unskilled men and women in the non-munitions industries after the war highlights the primacy of the dilution question in creating the splits within workers' ranks."⁴⁰

This, of course, is the age-old dilemma as a part of the human condition. Tracing back to the dawn of industrialization, the human challenge has been balancing simplification with preserving the livelihoods and skills humans have enjoyed for centuries. But as that trend has continually shown, the simplification of manufacturing and related industrial sectors results in a loss of skill among working-class individuals, which in turn grants less power to working folks and a larger power gap for employers and corporate administrations.

Conclusion

³⁷ Macieski, "The Home of the Workingman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy," p. 721.

³⁸ Macieski, "The Home of the Workingman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy," p. 729.

³⁹ Macieski, "The Home of the Workingman is the Balance Wheel of Democracy," p. 732.

⁴⁰ Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition," p. 121.

The legacy of Remington-UMC is a complicated one that both built Bridgeport, Connecticut, into a war boom town of prominence once renowned worldwide and actively worked to disrupt its workers' unionization, leaving the city when the economic tides shifted decades later, with its bastions of brick and mortar left to ruin. This shift was not immediate; the Great War did not turn out to be the 'war to end all wars' after all! Remington-UMC and similar industries would also play a vital role in the global theater during the Second World War, with a new generation of workers orchestrating notable strikes within their own right, and a similar decline following the conclusion of that war that busted unions. That said, Bridgeport did experience a unique 'renaissance' of socialist ideas and progressive policy from the Great Depression through the Postwar era, led by arguably the city's most successful mayor, Jasper McLeavy, whose humble beginnings as an immigrant business owner who brokered agreements for union rights. Still, Bridgeport was not immune to the fate that many other war boom towns and former industrial sectors of the United States experienced from the 1970s through the 1990s, as on top of the 'white flight' to surrounding suburbs from cities, Remington-UMC gradually restructured its company and relocated manufacturing facilities to Alabama, then its business headquarters to Delaware.

That said, the people of Bridgeport have always proven resilient in the face of the most imposing adversaries and challenges. At the turn of the century, environmental cleanup initiatives commenced, and a revival of downtown Bridgeport commenced. At the time of writing, there has been a resurgence of urban renewal efforts, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, to remediate and repurpose plots that once housed war machines, with the aim of rebuilding communities. The very factories pivotal to Remington-UMC's success have been torn down throughout the 2010s, with only the iconic 'Shot Tower' remaining on the site of the former UMC factory lot as of 2024. The people of Bridgeport have endured great hardship over the past century, but hope is being amply supplied for the future.