



LOVE IS AN UNLOCKED DOOR: TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY FIRE

RCMUN XIII
FEBRUARY 3, 2024



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RCMUN Notices

Committee Content Warning

While RCMUN values the discussion and awareness of most topics and a delegate's obligation to accurately represent their assigned role, all participants who engage in any bigoted, racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, fatphobic, xenophobic, or other such comments or sentiments will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action at the discretion of RCMUN's Secretariat. Additionally, in all things, RCMUN pledges its Secretariat and staff to maintain approachability and inclusivity; if any participant has any questions, comments, or concerns they are encouraged to contact RCMUN's Secretariat or, in the case of delegates, its staff. If you have questions or concerns regarding this, please reach out to your committee's senior staff before conference weekend.

Red Cedar University Model United Nations (RCMUN) is committed to fostering a safe and secure environment for all delegates, staff, and advisors. In this, RCMUN operates with a zero-tolerance policy concerning any and all instances of harassment and discrimination. Further, RCMUN is committed to promoting the mental health of its participants and requires all participants to act with compassion, grace, and understanding. RCMUN encourages participants to step out of their committee room and/or speak with a trusted individual if they are feeling overwhelmed or are otherwise uncomfortable.

All participants should be aware that RCMUN's Secretariat and staff are designated mandatory reporters with MSU's Office of Institutional Equity while operating within their roles before and during the conference.

RCMUN Statement on Mental Health

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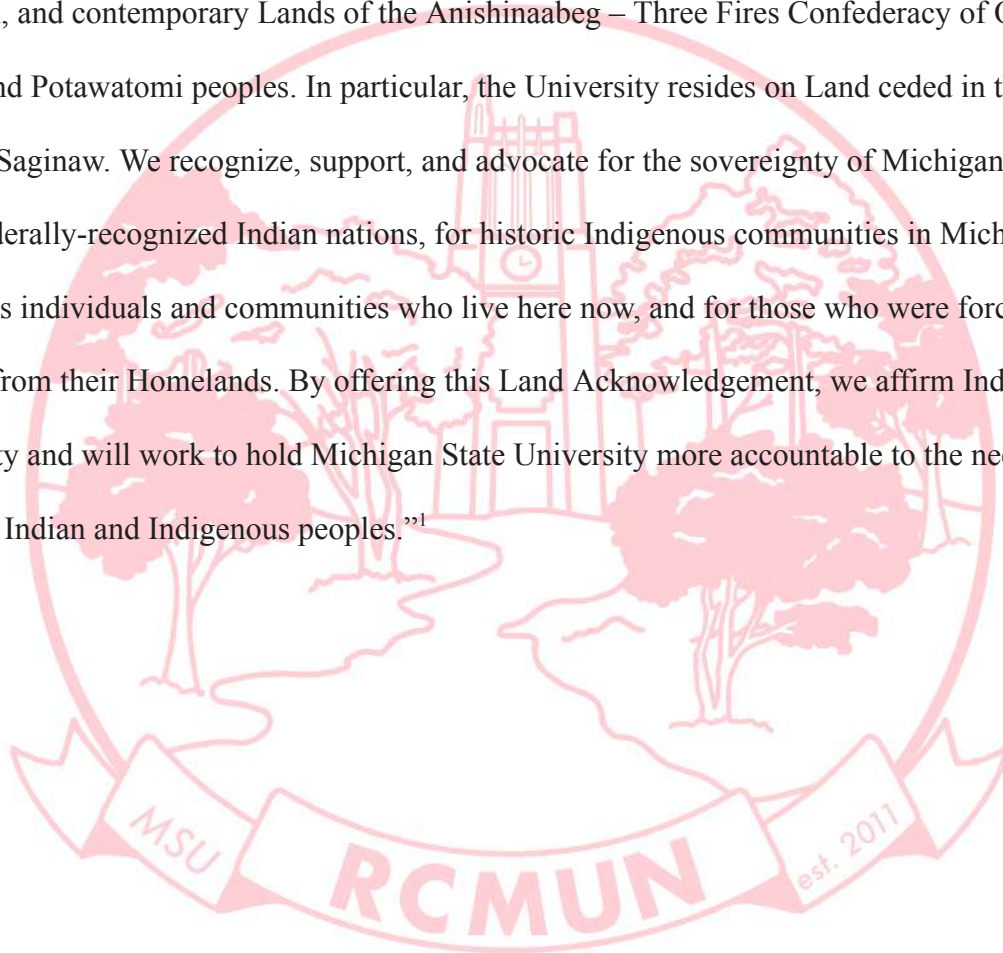
Moreover, RCMUN recognizes that some of its committees may include references to or discussions of sensitive topics. While RCMU values the discussion and awareness of these topics and a delegate's obligation to accurately represent their assigned role, all participants who engage in any bigoted, racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, or other such comments or sentiments will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action at the discretion of RCMUN's Secretariat. Additionally, in all things, RCMUN pledges its Secretariat and staff to maintain approachability and inclusivity; if any participant has any questions, comments, or concerns they are encouraged to contact RCMUN's Secretariat or, in the case of delegates, its staff.

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MSU Provisional Land Acknowledgement

“We collectively acknowledge that Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan’s twelve federally-recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold Michigan State University more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.”¹



¹ “Land Acknowledgement,” American Indian and Indigenous Studies, accessed December 5, 2021, <https://aiis.msu.edu/land/>.

Rules of Procedure

Article I: General Rules

1. Delegates are expected to adhere to all regular RCMUN XIII rules and standards of decorum.
2. In the event of a dispute over the Rules of Procedure, either those of RCMUN generally or Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath, the RCMUN Secretariat will be the ultimate authority of appeal.

Article II: Meetings

1. All of Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath's meetings shall be attended by all specified members of the committee, unless otherwise authorized by the RCMUN Secretariat.
2. Unless otherwise indicated by the RCMUN Secretariat or Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath staff, all meetings of the committee will be held in the specified Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath room as designated by RCMUN.
3. The Chair will be the moderator of debate, the Assistant Chairs will take notes, monitor delegates, and run committee technology. The roles of each Chair or Assistant Chair are likely to rotate based on the discretion of the Chair. The dias will not act with prejudice towards any proposal. The chair will simply be a neutral arbiter and seek to focus debate amongst delegates.

Article III: Agenda

1. Items for debate may be pulled from the background guide, but are not limited to what is explicitly mentioned. Staff would like to see well-rounded and well-researched delegates bring new and relevant topics to the table.
2. Any Committee member may make a motion to restrict debate to one topic. If this motion passes, debate shall be limited to the topic specified until such time as another motion is made to either change the topic under consideration or return to general debate.
3. The Agenda is to be set at the beginning of committee, formal debate on committee topics may not begin until the Agenda has been set.
4. A Speaker's List may be opened at any time when motions are being entertained. Additionally, a delegate may request to be added to the Speaker's List at any time. If the Chair is not actively calling for speakers to be added, a delegate may send a note to the dias.

Article IV: Conduct of Business

1. This committee will effectively operate as a Specialized committee. All resolutions must be developed as standard working papers. This will be the case for all topics that this committee will be debating. The passing of resolutions and working papers will require a simple majority vote. Motions made to enter voting procedure will require a simple majority.

2. Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath proceedings shall be conducted in the form of a permanent Moderated Caucus until such a time that a committee member makes a motion to change this.

Article V: Types of Proposals

1. Working Papers: When initially proposing solutions, delegates must first draft and present working papers to the committee. These documents will not be subject to a vote by committee, but are merely a presentation of ideas. These will then be adapted into resolutions, as described below.
2. Resolutions: A resolution requires only one sponsor, though it may have more. The amount of required signatories is up to the discretion of the Chair. A committee member need only move to introduce a resolution in order for it to be considered by the entire committee.

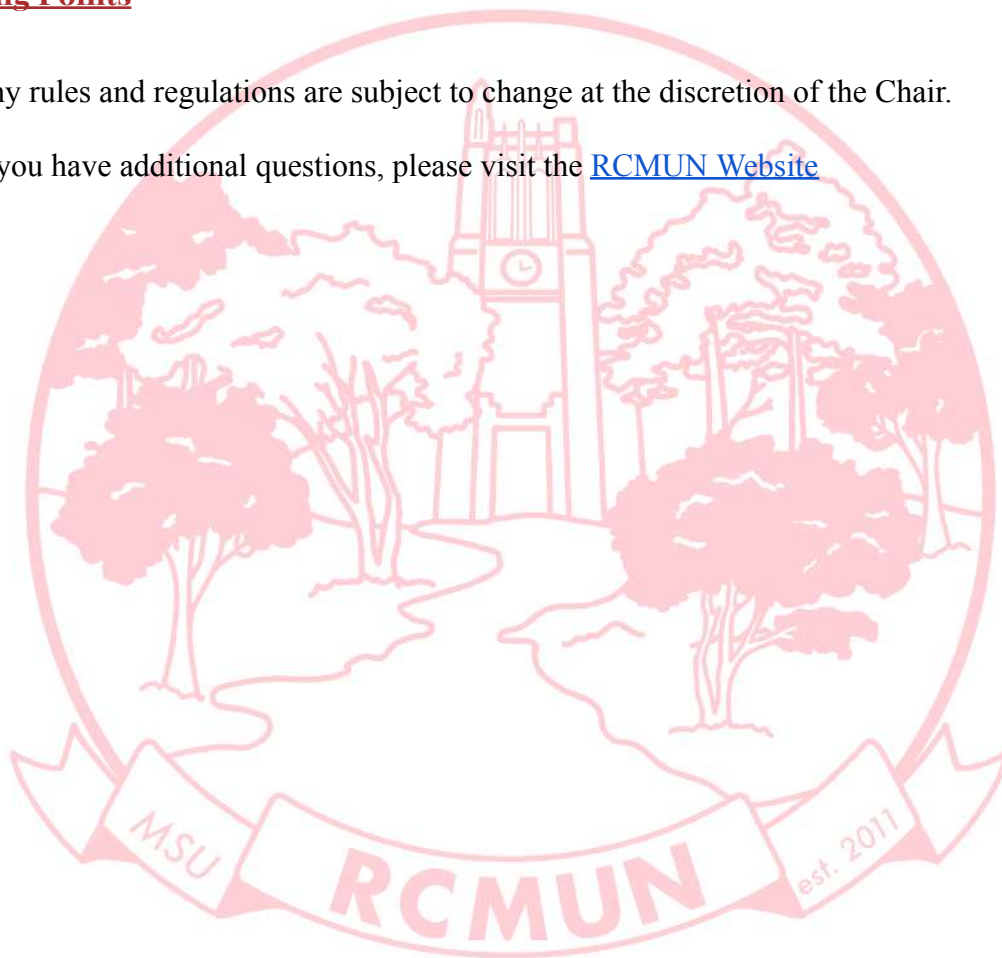
Article VI: Voting

1. Votes may be entered as For, Against, or Abstentions.
2. Any delegate who designates themselves as “Present and Voting” during roll call may not abstain on any matter.
3. Votes on non-substantive proposals or procedural matters will be passed by the affirmative vote of a simple majority of committee members. Abstentions are allowed on non-substantive proposals, but not procedural matters.

4. Votes on substantive matters will be passed by the affirmative vote of a simple majority of committee members.
5. In all cases, a simple majority constitutes more than half of the For and Against votes.

Remaining Points

1. Any rules and regulations are subject to change at the discretion of the Chair.
2. If you have additional questions, please visit the [RCMUN Website](#)



Letter from the Dias

Dear Delegates,

Howdy! I'm Max Levanduski, your Chair for this Committee. I am very excited to welcome you to the specialized committee *Love is an Unlocked Door* of RCMUN XIII. This is my second year doing both RCMUN and MUN in general. Last year I was a Junior Staffer for SpaceX, so I'm very thankful to be able to get the opportunity to chair my own committee. I chose this topic due to my passion for history and extreme interest in the fire from an early age. I'm sure you've seen the TikToks talking about how the Shirtwaist fire is the "Female equivalent to the Roman Empire" or was a childhood hyper-fixation for many, which is very accurate to me. I hope to see a lot of debate on what solutions can best be implemented to better the workplace and am excited to see how creative you get with your resolutions. Now, a little about me: I'm a Sophomore studying Anthropology with minors in Digital Cultural Heritage & History and Museum Studies. Outside of RCMUN, I work in MSU's Archaeology lab cataloging and analyzing lithics from Quebrada Jaguay, Peru. I also am an active member of MSUIRO, our competitive Model UN team, so feel free to ask me questions about competing on a collegiate level!

Hey everyone, I am Jasmine Jacobs. I am a junior at MSU studying Chemical Engineering with a concentration in Environmental Engineering. If you are interested in STEM feel free to ask me any questions you have, it is a great field with many opportunities. I have been doing Model United Nations since high school and I continue to love it to this day! In my free time I play video games including Fallout, Stardew Valley, Farcry and many more. I recently

got a cat ^-^ named Nacho. He is an orange tabby with lots of energy and a need to break all of my stuff.

Ahoy Delegates, I'm Isabelle Kapustka and I am a Sophomore here at MSU. I am studying Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy in the James Madison College and Teaching Education in the College of Education and I'm pursuing a career in law. This is my first year being in RCMUN (and MUN in general) and I'm so excited to experience this conference with you all. I am also a tour guide on campus so look out for me on your future visits! If you have any questions please let me know!! :)

Hi delegates! I'm Katie Yanoulakis and I am also a sophomore here at MSU. I am majoring in Social Relations and Policy in the James Madison college and Political Science Pre-Law. This is my second year in RCMUN and I have been involved in MUN since high school.

Regards,

Max Levanduski

Chair, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath

Jasmine Jacobs, Isabelle Kapustka, and Katie Yanoulakis

Assistant Chairs, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Aftermath

Sample Resolution/Working Paper

Keep It Sweet: Improving Candyland's Infrastructure

Sponsors: King Kandy, Lord Licorice, Frostine

Signatories: Lolly, Mr Mint, Gloopy, Grandma Nutt

Recognizing the faults in the current infrastructure of Candyland,

Noting with zest that the path to Candyland has fallen into disarray,

Emphasizing long-term solutions that can be implemented,

1. Allocates proportionally an additional 1.3 billion gumdrops to maintain the route to Candyland,
 - a. Suggest the implementation of a two-year project with the intent to repave the entire route to Candyland,
 - i. The path will be repaved in increments to ensure a majority of the path is still walkable,
 - ii. A detour will be provided to ensure passage to Candyland is still possible,
 - b. Establishes a routine clearing of foliage to reduce overgrowth on the path to Candyland,
2. Mandates a yearly analysis of the pipes that carry chocolate from the Chocolate Swamp to Candyland,
 - a. Hydrostatic testing is conducted to check for leaks in the pipeline,
 - b. Pipes will receive lead testing
 - i. If the lead levels of chocolate exceed $10 \mu\text{g/L}$, Candyland is required to replace the pipeline,
 - ii. An allocation of 45 million gumdrops will be set aside for the sole use of replacement pipes and testing.

Background and History

Early 1900s United States

The year being 1911, the United States economy was in flux. President William Taft had taken up the mantle in 1909 having defeated Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan. President Taft had decided to follow in the footsteps of fellow Republican President Theodore Roosevelt. As such, Taft urged his Attorney General to continue the enforcement of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. While the law had been on the books for a while Roosevelt and Taft had been the first to use its full power, a power the Supreme Court had agreed with. Roosevelt and Taft oversaw at least 70 lawsuits based on the Sherman Antitrust Act. This led to the Panic of 1910-1911.² The Panic was a minor economic depression that saw the US economy dip 26%. This enforcement of the Antitrust Act and monopoly busting led to the top American industrialists to seek other ways to increase their profits and lower costs. This led to the abuse of workers and extreme extraction of materials seen pre-Great Depression.

Triangle Shirtwaist Company

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company was founded in 1900, and its first shop was located on Wooster St, New York City. The factory owners, Max Blanck and Issac Harris, had combined their skills of entrepreneurship and tailorship to capitalize on the newly popular shirtwaist. As they had incorporated the new mechanical sewing machine into production, they could create

²Sutori, "History of Banking." *Sutori*, (Accessed November 28, 2023).
<https://www.sutori.com/en/item/1910-panic-of-1910-1911-the-panic-of-1910-11-was-a-slight-economic-depression>.

shirtwaists 5x faster than via old foot pedal machines. This switch was one of the many reasons why their business was a huge success.³ In 1902, the company moved into the 8th floor of the newly constructed Asch Building in Greenwich Village. The factory floor layout had been designed by Harris, who had intentionally placed sewing machines in an arrangement to limit conversation. The company, hitting \$1 million in sales, expanded to the 9th and 10th floor by 1808. They produced more than 1,000 shirtwaists a day, becoming the largest manufacturer of blouses in New York and earning the owners the title “Shirtwaist Kings”.⁴ The owners relished in the wealth they received from their business. They had brownstones in the Upper West Side, 4-5 servants, and would be chauffeured into work every day.⁵ These luxuries came at the expense of their workers, who earned meager wages and endured abysmal working conditions.

The Factory Fire

March 25, 1911, at 4:45 a fire broke out on the 8th floor of the Asch building. This was shortly before closing time and all workers were required to still be at their station. Despite the building itself being classified as fireproof and would remain largely intact, the interior was plagued with aggressive flames.⁶ The cause of the fire is unknown, though it started in a pile of cuttings on the 8th floor. The main theory is that a cigarette was discarded and lit the loose fabric. It was quite common for women to sneak cigarettes in, smoking them through the lapels of their shirts while they worked. Beneath each workbench was a basket meant to contain scrap

³PBS, 2011, “Shirtwaist Kings.” *PBS*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/shirtwaist-kings/>.

⁴United States Census Bureau, “The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911.” *Census Bureau*, March 25, 2016, https://www.census.gov/history/www/homepage_archive/2016/march_2016.html.

⁵PBS, “Shirtwaist Kings.”

⁶The New York Times, “New York Times Coverage of the Fire.” *PBS*, March 26, 1911, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/triangle-nyt/>.

fabric, which had not been tossed in two months resulting in an extreme excess of fabric.⁷The mixture would've caused the infamous fast-paced blaze that is associated with the factory fire. Water pails had been scattered throughout the factory to be used in case of fire, but were no help. An attempt to bring in a hose to quell the flames was in vain as no water could come through. The 10th floor was alerted to the fire, however, the 9th could not be phoned and would find out once the flames had reached them.⁸ Only one of the two service elevators was working that day, which increased the chaos as workers desperately piled in. Eventually, due to the intense heat from the flames, the elevator ceased to function. There were two stairways that employees could use to exit the building, Greene Street and Washington Place. However, during work hours the Washington Place stairway was locked to prevent theft and union organizers from entering. The Greene Street exit to the street was unusable as the flames quickly overwhelmed it, but for a short period, employees were able to take it to the roof where they could escape. The single exterior fire escape, which was cheaply constructed and not maintained, collapsed immediately and spilled workers out onto the pavement.⁹ When firefighters had arrived on the scene they could do little to help as their ladders only went to the 7th floor. A majority of help came from a neighboring building which had taken painter's ladders to aid in getting workers successfully out of the building.¹⁰

⁷ David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*, (New York City: Grove Press, 2004).

⁸ Douglas O Linder, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Trial: An Account." *Famous Trials*, (Accessed November 28, 2023). <https://www.famous-trials.com/trianglefire/964-home>.

⁹ Von Drehle, "Triangle: The Fire That Changed America" p. 118

¹⁰ Linder, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Trial: An Account".

The Trial

Two weeks after the fire, Blanck and Harris were indicted on seven counts of second-degree manslaughter due to the violation of the Labor Code that mandated doors being unlocked during working hours. The trial started December 4th and lasted 23 days.¹¹ In that time 103 witnesses were produced but only 52 gave testimony. Two notable witnesses, Kate Alterman and Kate Gartman, were used to prove that the doors had been locked and that had directly caused the death of Margaret Schwartz. During cross-examination, the defense had both Kates repeat their testimony over and over intending to prove that both girls had been fed what to say as the wording did not change. This defense tarnished the reputability of the testimonies from the survivors. December 27th the jury was tasked with deciding the verdict based on whether the fire door was locked and if so did the defendants know that at the time. The jury gave a non-guilty verdict, citing that the evidence did prove the door was locked but couldn't prove that the owners were aware. This verdict was extremely controversial. Even before the verdict, family members of the victims showed up to let their voices be heard. Extra police were called in due to the verbal hostility towards Harris and Blanck during the duration of the trial. Things did not improve after either. Immediately following the trial Harris and Blanck, guarded by policemen and led out a secret side exit, were chased and yelled at by a crowd of people.¹² The trial may have legally settled things, however, the public was still outraged and demanded justice.

¹¹Cornell University, "INVESTIGATION & TRIAL." *Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire*, (Accessed November 28, 2023). <https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/investigationTrial.html>.

¹²Linder, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Trial: An Account".

Main Topic: Workplace Standards

Employers vs Employees

During the 1900s women, children and men were in the workforce. Most jobs were completed by immigrants migrating from countries like Italy, Germany, and Great Britain. Immigrants came to the United States with limited resources. Some depended on income from all members of the family to survive, including children. Women had lower-paying light machinery jobs like sewing and cleaning. In contrast, men had slightly better-paying jobs with heavy machinery and extreme physical labor like working in the mines, and factories. Children were involved in a wide range of jobs. They were valued for their small size and naive demeanor. They were able to fit in smaller places, a useful skill for the mines as well as for fixing larger machines' inter-mechanics. Children were paid even less than adults but had the same working conditions. Education was a privilege many families could not afford, as children were needed to help provide income. Money was more valued than education, as you can't learn if you and your family are starving or homeless. There were no laws regarding school attendance or child labor till about the 1940s but even then employers found loopholes to continue exploiting children. Children were less likely to unionize or complain about conditions and could be paid even less so they were ideal for employers. Most women at the time had little to no education. They either dropped out to provide for their families or never enrolled in the first place. "Fewer than 2 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in an institution of higher education, and just

one-third of those were women”¹³ Education was not a priority and would only get in the way of providing for their family.

After the Industrial Revolution in the 1900s, many large companies were founded and some are still around today including Pepsi-Cola, General Motors, and Hershey. Large industrial companies relied on low-income, immigrant families, and minorities to run their company, and although they are the heart of the industries they were treated poorly. Employers had large pay gaps between them and their employees. The employers used their wealth to prevent unions, uprisings, and better conditions. Better conditions including safety regulations and better wages cost money that the employers were not willing to pay.

Many companies used their wealth to influence politicians, police officials, and officials to prevent the investigation into their employees' exploitation and prevent potential uprisings. If an employee was involved in an accident there was very little they could do to revive benefits to provide for their families after the fact. Accidents and deaths were easy to pay off if they received any money at all. In the case of the Triangle Shirtwaist, the owners had previously paid off fines when their factories were not up to code or incidents had occurred. Cases against employers were hard to fight as they were going against wealth and influence. “Surveys taken in the 1900s showed that only about half of all workers fatally injured recovered anything and their average compensation only amounted to about half a year’s pay” Employers were not concerned about safety due to how cheap “compensating”¹⁴ families were.

¹³ Janet L. Yellen, “The history of women's work and wages and how it has created success for us all | Brookings.” *Brookings Institution*, May, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-history-of-womens-work-and-wages-and-how-it-has-created-success-for-us-all/>.

¹⁴Mark Aldrich, “History of Workplace Safety in the United States, 1880-1970 – EH.net.” *EH.net Encyclopedia*, August 14, 2001, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/history-of-workplace-safety-in-the-united-states-1880-1970/>.

Upton Sinclair and Muckraking¹⁵

In the early 1900s, a new phenomenon of investigative journalism began to arise. This new phenomenon was coined “muck-raking” by President Roosevelt. One of the investigative journalists who led to this term being created was Upton Sinclair. A reporter for a progressive outlet called “Appeal to Reason,” Sinclair became famous for a news article turned novel titled *The Jungle*. While originally intending to promote sympathy for the predominantly immigrant workers, the article had a much wider effect. In addition to the insight provided on the conditions of the workers, it provided a clear view into the status and cleanliness of food packaging factories. This reporting created the necessary puncture into the defenses of big corporations that allowed for government regulations to be enacted and long-standing. Less than a year after publication, the reporting seen in *The Jungle* made way for the enactment of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 and the creation of the Food and Drug Administration.

Not everyone was happy with muckrakers. Without the reporting done by Sinclair, there would have been more than just ownership opposition to the Acts passed in its wake. Not all elected officials were entirely on board. President Roosevelt, who praised Sinclair, was not always a major fan of muckrakers but saw them as necessary evils. Sinclair would not be the only major “muckraker” but is by far one of the most well-known that we talk about today. Investigating journalism and muckraking is also not just for the food industry, and continues to be used in plenty of different industries to poke holes in the defenses of mega-corporations and

¹⁵Constitutional Rights Foundation, “Upton Sinclairs The Jungle: Muckraking the Meat-Packing Industry”, *Teach Democracy*, 2008, <https://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-24-1-b-upton-sinclairs-the-jungle-muckraking-the-meat-packing-industry.html>

the ultra-rich. With muckraking like Sinclairs, it boosted public awareness and made the public more outraged when incidents like the Shirtwaist fire occurred.

Corner Cutting Owners¹⁶

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, like many building factories, was a disaster waiting to happen. The factory had no working sprinklers, one damaged fire escape, and limited exits, many of which were locked. This was not the case for just Triangle Shirtwaist. Safety features, along with wages, and reasonable hiring ages were cut to maximize the amount of profit received by employers across New York and the United States. When strikes would occur, it would occasionally allow employers to hire even cheaper labor. In addition to the physical conditions which will be expanded upon below, many owners cut corners with their pocketbooks.

Most records were not accurately kept if they were not entirely false. Hours, wages, and overtime were often not tracked and thus were made up to make the company look good and to pay employees even less than their wages were already set. Creating these false narratives was made even easier by hiring managers and supervisors not based on ability but on their friendship with the owner. More often than not they received kickbacks more than their share of wages, which were actually paid, to lie and create these narratives to report back to the Government and the Press. Due to the lack of a federal or state minimum wage, many employers made their wages as small as possible. A workaround that many owners greenlit to offer even cheaper wages was through the use of child labor. The Triangle Shirtwaist factory was not immune to this practice, employing girls as young as 14.

¹⁶U.S Department of Labor, “Wages and the Fair Labor Standards Act.” *U.S. Department of Labor*, Accessed November 27, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa>.

Working Conditions

In addition to the lack of safety measures, the conditions of the factories were bare. The employees were mostly immigrant women, who spoke limited English, and who were around 14 to 20 years of age and worked in the factory. They worked for roughly 13-hour days and were not given breaks, including breaks to use the bathroom. The employers were strict and did not allow talking, singing, or general pauses in work. The workers were searched before leaving and many doors were locked to prevent stealing, creating a harsh, and distrustful working environment. The factory was overcrowded, and scraps of cloth littered the floor. In Triangle Shirtwaist, but as well in others, many of the doors and windows were locked to prevent theft and unsanctioned breaks from work. Aside from disasters, such as the factory fire, workplace deaths were not uncommon. “It is estimated that more than 100 workers died every day on the job around 1911”.¹⁷ The miserable conditions of factories, especially Triangle Shirtwaist, led to a rise in sympathy for the plight of women and child workers. At least in terms of the physical conditions they were working in. This sympathy grew even more so following the fire in New York. However, the calls for change to end child labor, and raise wages were still to come. In addition to all the conditions of the factory, there was one major flaw with the building. It was too tall. The fire department in New York could not reach the heights of the ten-story building that housed Triangle Shirtwaist. Leaving ownership an outlet for blame on how the fire could have been, instead of how bad it resulted in following the breaking of the elevators due to the heat.

¹⁷AFL-CIO, “Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.” *AFL-CIO*, Accessed November 27, 2023, <https://aflcio.org/about/history/labor-history-events/triangle-shirtwaist-fire>.

Questions to Consider

- Who stands to disadvantage from safety implementations and what are the repercussions of the implementations?
- What is the difference between short-term and long-term implementations, which is more beneficial?
- What factors need to be considered when renovating new safety implementations given technology advancements for the given time period, and social inequalities?
- How can you enforce new safety measures? How will older buildings be considered?
- What incentives can be used to encourage companies to implement and uphold these new standards?

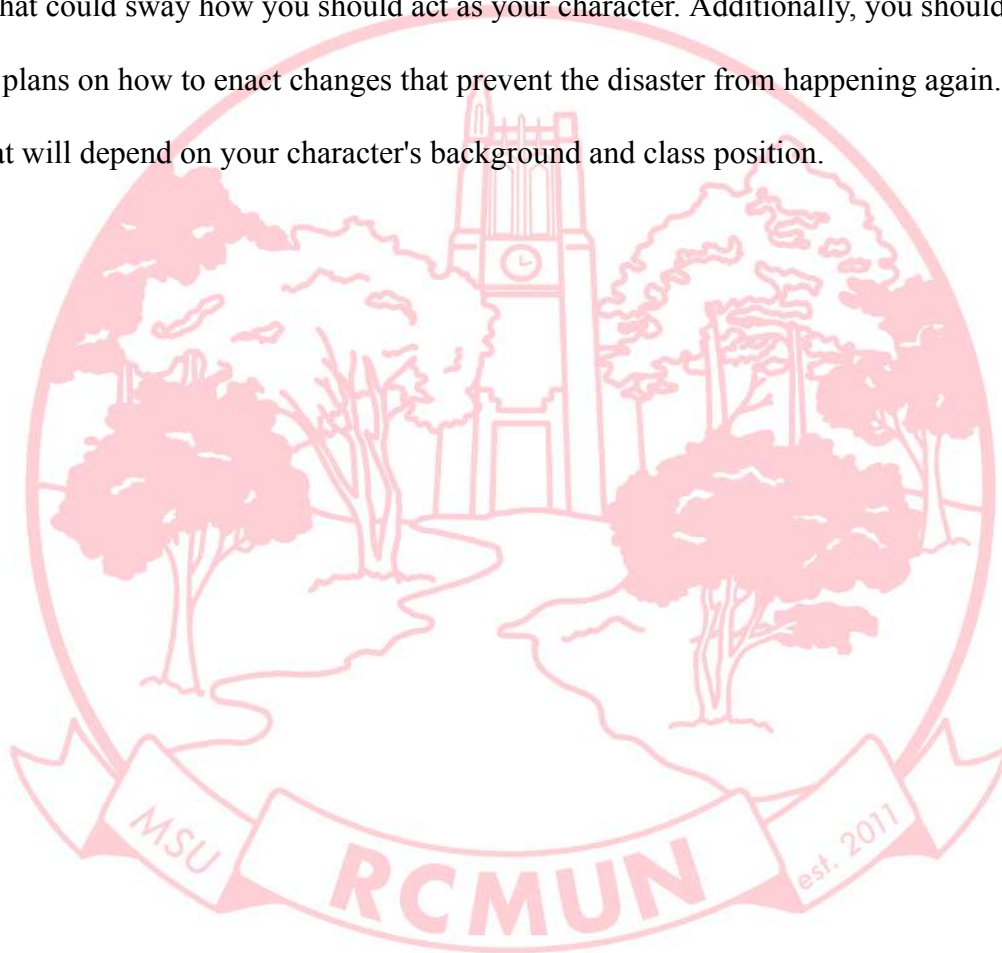
About Committee and How to Research

Setting: Committee will take place shortly after the Triangle Shirtwaist Company trial (December 27th, 1911). The public is still enraged and buzzing about the factory fire and the trial that has come after. There's a demand for change. You have been selected by the current Governor of New York John Alden Dix to convene and suggest possible solutions to improve the workforce.

What the Character Bio will give you: A brief history and overview of who your person is, what their job is, and their connection to the factory. Not all characters will be real people so your

ability to research your character will be dependent upon your placement. Fictional characters will be marked with an asterisk.

What to research: Goals, and objectives your character would have. Potential political and union alliances that could sway how you should act as your character. Additionally, you should formulate plans on how to enact changes that prevent the disaster from happening again. How you do that will depend on your character's background and class position.



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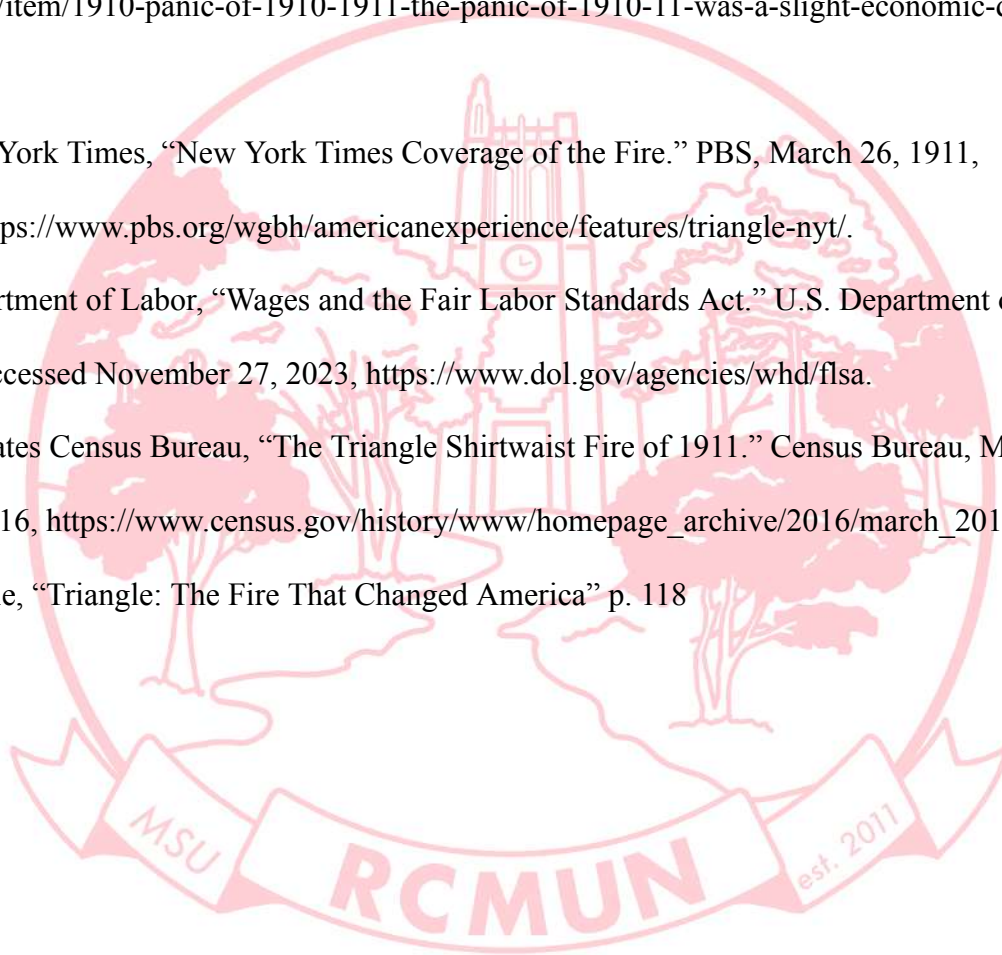
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Character List and Bios

Max Blanck (*company owner*)

One of the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, which he founded in 1900 with Issac Harris. They would become known as the “Shirtwaist Kings”. He was born in Russia and immigrated to the United States in the early 1890s. He quickly became a successful entrepreneur and businessman. By the end of the decade, Blanck and Harris had opened many more factories and were wealthy enough to afford lavish homes with servants and a chauffeur to take them to work each day. Both owners were accused of first and second-degree manslaughter but acquitted by the jury.

Issac Harris (*company owner*)

Like his business partner, Issac Harris was also born in Russia before immigrating to the United States in the early 1890s. He worked in immigrant sweatshops, becoming familiar with popular designs and fashions. In 1900 Harris combined his industry expertise with Max Blanck’s business experience to found the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. By the end of the decade, Blanck and Harris had opened many more factories and were wealthy enough to afford lavish homes with servants and a chauffeur to take them to work each day. Both owners were accused of first and second-degree manslaughter but acquitted by the jury.

Kate Alterman (factory worker)

A young immigrant factory worker who survived the fire. She was an important figure in the subsequent trial when she and other witnesses were accused of memorizing their statements, or even being told what to say by the prosecution. The defense argued that this memorization proved it was a rehearsed lie. She was asked to repeat her testimony numerous times, which she did without altering any of the key phrases.

Rose Freedman (factory worker)

Only two days away from her 18th birthday at the time of the fire, Rose Freedman was a worker at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Born in Austria, she came to New York City with her family in 1909. She survived by following the company owners to the roof of the building where they were able to be rescued. Enraged by the actions of company executives leading up to and following the Triangle Fire, she became very active in advocating for labor reform and workers' rights.

Mary Domsky-Abrams (factory worker)

Worked as a blouse operator in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory and was also one of four girls on the price committee, responsible for setting prices for different work. She escaped by leaving her machine a few minutes early to change out of work clothes. Abrams was one of the workers to notice the dangerous conditions of the factory, pointing out to a manager that the water buckets meant to douse a fire were left empty. She was called as a witness in the trial

following the fire. The tragedy inspired Abrams to dedicate herself to helping trade unions and libertarian-socialist movements.

Claire Zimmerman (factory worker)*

Working as a forewoman on the 9th floor of the factory, she was able to escape through a back staircase. She had almost jumped out a window, but had changed her mind last minute. Her sister, Mary Forresta, had perished in the fire. Pidone testified against Blanck and Harris, where she was on the stand for 2 ½ hours and was repeatedly asked how she opened the locked front door.

Helen Pomeroy (factory worker)*

Right up to the fire, Pomeroy was a dedicated employee to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. She is adamant that her coworkers should be grateful to have a job and shouldn't be asking for more. As she has a huge family to care for, she fears that by participating in strikes she will lose her job and be unable to get a sustainable income. She is an avid believer that by staying loyal to her bosses, that she will be rewarded.

Kathy Cuomo (factory worker)*

The term 'scab' had been thrown at Cuomo quite frequently in her places of employment. She has been vocally anti-union, going so far as to report workers who have discussed unionizing as well as alerting her bosses when strikes are forming. She is quite annoyed by all the politics that have invaded the workplace and the socialist ideals that have seem to run rampant.

Joseph Zito (elevator operator)

A 27-year-old Italian immigrant working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. When the fire broke out, Zito made as many trips up the building as he could to rescue the workers trapped on higher floors. The 9 by 6-foot elevator was only designed for 10 passengers, but up to 40 were crammed in trying to escape. Zito was repeatedly injured by the workers in their desperation to escape and further when the elevator cables snapped. Although he survived his health was seriously compromised. The *New York Times* credited him with saving roughly 100 girls from the fire.

Gaspar Mortillaro (elevator operator)

The second elevator operator at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory is credited with saving about 50 people. Gaspar Mortillaro was in his elevator car waiting for the end of the workday when the fire broke out. He and Joseph Zito worked to get as many people out as they could, however, the extreme heat of the fire damaged Mortillaro's elevator so he was only able to make a few trips. Along with Zito, Mortillaro is considered a hero by the workers and the public.

Rose Schneiderman (socialist/union activist)

One of the most prominent female labor union leaders of the time. She was born in Poland but immigrated to the United States, where she started working at only 13 and was organizing unions by 21. Schneiderman helped lead a strike of over 40,000 New York shirtwaist workers in 1909 and founded the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). At a

public meeting in the wake of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, Schneiderman called for all working people to take action.

Pauline M. Newman (*general organizer for Ladies Garment Workers Union*)

Born in Kaunas, in present-day Lithuania, and later emigrated to the United States, where she started working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory at age 11, although she was not working there at the time of the fire. Appalled by the working conditions, she joined the Socialist Literary Society at age 15 and organized after-work study groups at the factory. Newman was responsible for organizing many worker strikes, including the large 20,000-worker strike in 1909 that Rose Schneiderman was involved in. Following the strike she was appointed as the general organizer of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) where she continued to organize strikes and advocate for workers' rights.

Clara Lemlich (*strike leader*)

A 23-year-old Ukrainian immigrant who led the 1909 strike of 20,000 New York shirtwaist workers. Like many other Jewish immigrants, she began working in a shirtwaist factory as a teenager. The conditions she saw there led her to join the executive board of a chapter of the ILGWU where she led picket lines, wrote opinion pieces, and organized strikes. In addition to labor activism, Lemlich also became an active member of the Communist Party and fought for women's suffrage.

Leonora O'Reilly (union activist)

Born in New York City to Irish immigrant parents, Lenora O'Reilly began working in garment factories at a young age and quickly became involved in the labor rights movement. She became a prominent advocate for labor reform and co-founded the NYC chapter of the WTUL in 1903. O'Reilly was involved in the large 1909 strike of shirtwaist workers and was also active in the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women. She worked closely with Rose Schneiderman and other labor activists in the wake of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire.

Edith Garfunkel (humanitarian)*

Founder of the Henry Street Settlement in NYC, Wald believed that every citizen should be guaranteed equal and fair healthcare. This completely changed health care for NYC as it gave more focus on women and children. Outside of the settlement, she was involved in the labor movement. She founded the Women's Trade Union League and served as a member of the New York City League. Besides her focus on women's working conditions, she was a passionate opponent of child labor and was an early leader of the Child Labor Committee.

Nancy Simon (social reformer)*

A social and political reformer who was the pioneer of the term wage abolitionism, she worked for a higher minimum wage as well as eight-hour workdays. She also worked against sweatshops and fought for children's rights. Kelley served as the first general secretary of the National Consumers League as well as aided in the creation of the NAACP. Through the NCL she created a code of standards that workplaces had to abide by.

Anne Morgan (*philanthropist*)

The daughter of J.P. Morgan, Anne Morgan used her family's wealth and connections to aid the women's suffrage movement and improve working conditions for lower-class immigrant workers. She and other members of high society formed a committee under the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) to protect strikers from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. They helped fund the strike, draw press attention, and advocate for the strikers in court. Despite Morgan's advocacy for women's and worker's rights, she disagreed with what she viewed as the Socialist rhetoric of the unions and withdrew her support in 1910.

Elizabeth Zbytowski (*protest organizer*)*

After immigrating to the US as a young child, Zbytowski worked various jobs to provide an income for her family. Now equipped with firsthand experience and a fiery passion, she's been outspoken about the need to eliminate child labor. She has organized several protests, most recently a walk out for child employees of a steel mill.

Thelma Louise (*protest organizer*)*

Previously a prominent picketer and activist in NYC, Louise's reputation had been tarnished by a story coming to light about her accepting bribes from the corporations she swore to fight against. She had been applauded for her negotiation skills and effectiveness at working with higher ups, but now is seen less favorably by fellow activists.

Kat Yaniv (social activist)*

Interested in social justice from an early age, Yaniv had naturally gravitated towards the labor reform movement. After the factory fire, she became quite focused on letting others know how she felt. She had been part of the crowd who voiced their disappointment at the trials and wrote several disapproving letters to both factory owners.

Izzy Katch (labor activist)*

After losing her brother due to a workplace incident involving heavy machinery, Katch had become quickly outspoken about workplace safety. She garnered support from workers of the factory to sue the owner and win. Now with the uproar from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, she is more motivated than ever to jump in and be part of the fight.

William Jay Gaynor (New York City mayor)

Elected in 1909, Gaynor began serving as the 94th Mayor of New York city in 1910. Prior to his election as Mayor, Gaynor served as a member of the New York State Supreme Court in 1893 and served there until his election as Mayor. Gaynor was part of the Tammany Hall political machine in New York, they were often who nominated him for elections. However, Gaynor often disappointed Tammany Hall due to his political philosophy and strict enforcement (or enforcement attempts) of the Bill of Rights. In August of 1910, Gaynor was the target of an assassination attempt that he would recover from and live for another 3 years and continue to serve as Mayor.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (State Senator)

A rising star for the Democratic party, Roosevelt began his political career as a state senator for the state of New York. His districts covered Columbia, Dutchess, and Putnam county which was north of New York City. As state senator he led a group of Democrats who were opposed to the Tammany Hall machine, causing a prolonged deadlock in the 1911 Senate election.

Robert F Wagner (chairman of state commission)

In addition to being the Majority Leader for the New York State Senate, Robert F Wagner served as the chairman of the Factory Investigating Commission. This commission was created to investigate factory conditions and report legislation measures that could prevent future hazards or loss of life. They interviewed over 200 witnesses and produced 3,500 pages of testimony. Membership in this commission and the numerous labor regulation laws that came out of it gave Wagner and the other members reputations as progressive reformers with the plight of the working class in mind.

Alfred E Smith (vice chairman of the state commission)

Served on the New York State Assembly from 1904 until 1915 (as Majority Leader at the time of the fire) and joined the movement to improve factory conditions after being approached by Frances Perkins. He served as the vice chairman of the Factory Investigating Commission. This commission was created to investigate factory conditions and report legislation measures that could prevent future hazards or loss of life. They interviewed over 200 witnesses and

produced 3,500 pages of testimony. Membership in this commission and the numerous labor regulation laws that came out of it gave Smith and the other members reputations as progressive reformers with the plight of the working class in mind.

Charles M. Hamilton (*New York State Senator*)

Hamilton was a Republican politician serving in the New York State Senate from 1909 to 1912. He served the 51st Senate District which covered Chautauqua County. Charles Mann Hamilton was appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission by the President of the State Senate. A leader of his caucus, Hamilton would eventually become Majority Whip. Currently Hamilton serves in a 21-30 Republican Minority.

Edward D. Jackson (*State Assembly Member*)

A Democratic member of the New York State Assembly. Jackson represented the 4th district from Erie County. Erie County is home to Buffalo, NY which is both the largest city in the county and the county seat. Jackson was appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission by the Speaker of the Assembly. Jackson was a member of the 87-63 Democratic majority in the State Assembly. He would be re-elected the following year.

Cyrus W. Phillips (*State Assembly Member*)

A Republican member of the New York State Assembly, Phillips served the 4th District from Monroe County. Monroe County is located along Lake Ontario's southern shore. Cyrus W. Phillips was appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission by the speaker of the assembly.

He contributed to volume 6 of the *New York Annotated Cases*. Phillips served as a member of the minority in the State Assembly. He would be re-elected the following year.

Simon Brentano (commission member)

In addition to being the president of Brentano's, the leasing bookstore in New York at the time, Simon Brentano extensively studied fire control. In 1904 he published *The Control of Fire* which was translated into a variety of languages. He also designed and patented a fire hydrant design in 1892. Brentano was appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission by the New York governor.

Robert E. Dowling (commission member)

A factory Investigating Commission member appointed by the Governor and the founding director of the National Reserve Bank in NYC in 1909. Dowling focused on the cost of repairs, and improving the public works of New York City to recover and prevent the tragedy from happening again. Dowling would be the lead economist of the commission.

Samuel Gompers (union leader)

Best known for his help in founding the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, which would become the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886. Samuel Gompers was president of the AFL from 1886 until his death, except for 1895. He encouraged cooperation between labor unions and grew the AFL into the largest and most influential labor

federation in the world. His focus is largely on economic rather than political reform. Gompers was appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission appointed by the New York Governor.

Mary E. Dreier (*social reformer*)

Appointed to the Factory Investigating Commission appointed by the New York governor, Mary Elisabeth Dreier was a social reformer philanthropist who fought for women's rights and labor reform. Dreier was born in NYC to German immigrant parents. The business success of her father gave her a privileged education and made much of her later philanthropy work possible. She participated in the 1909 strike of shirtwaist factory workers and was president of the New York Women's Trade Union League (NYWTUL) from 1906 to 1914.

Dr. George M. Price (*physician*)

A Canadian creationist, George McCready Price was regarded as a well-standing physician in NYC and was chosen to be the expert in charge of inspection and sanitation for the Fire Investigating Commission. He had previous experience making similar investigations and wrote several books on sanitation. Immediately after joining the Commission, Price organized a corp of inspectors for fieldwork in the city.

Holbrook F. J. Porter (*mechanical engineer*)

Selected to be an advisory expert to the Fire Investigating Commission, H. F. J. Porter was a mechanical engineer from New York City with experience in fire safety issues. He had written many articles about it and was known to be an expert. Porter had been working with NYC factory buildings for many years and at the time of the fire was working at the Fifth

Avenue Association to institute fire drills in loft-style factories. He believed that improving working conditions was beneficial not only for the safety and morale of employees but also financially for the company.

John Kenlon (*New York City fire chief*)

Active in the investigation into workplace safety done by the Factory Investigating Commission after the fire. His department worked to investigate hundreds of other factories and found over 200 with conditions that could cause a fire similar to the one at the Triangle Factory. Kenlon was originally from Ireland and became the fire chief in 1911. He was regarded as a heroic firefighter and in addition to his activism following the Triangle Fire, he made numerous improvements to the NYC fire department, including a completely new alarm system.

Edward F. Croker (*former New York City fire chief*)

Serving in the New York Fire Department for 27 years, Edward F. Croker was the chief of the department before John Kenlon took over in 1911. He was respected as a credible and accomplished leader. Croker proposed various new strategies and ideas to improve fire safety, particularly in garment factories where the high number of immigrant workers created language barriers. Many of these ideas (radical for the time) made their way into the Fire Prevention Law of 1911. He testified before the New York State Factory Investigating Commission in the wake of the fire to call for immediate enforcement of new fire safety laws.

William Beers (New York City fire marshal)

As New York City fire marshal, William Beers was responsible for investigating the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory after the fire and testifying before the State Factory Investigating Commission. When questioned about the building's safety, he said the factory was overcrowded with people and machines and called the fire escape routes from the building entirely inadequate. Among other things, he argued for fire alarms and sprinkler systems within buildings, along with regular fire drills and improved education for all factory workers.

S. R. Merryman (part-time firefighter/lawyer)*

An employment and labor lawyer who, Merryman's eagerness to be in the middle of a hot topic has always served him well in court. He was particularly interested in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire due to his past as a firefighter. Working as a part time volunteer, he empathizes with and knows those who were there that day. He could also draw similarities between the survivors and previous clients of his.

Frances Perkins (eyewitness)

An eyewitness to the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, Frances Perkins was inspired to advocate for workers's rights and improved safety measures. In 1910 she became the executive secretary for the New York City Consumers League. This organization strove to improve working conditions, especially for women and children, including factory fire safety. Perkins helped form the Committee on Public Safety after the fire and was hired as the executive secretary for the Citizen's Committee on Safety. As a part of this committee she served as an expert eyewitness,

led legislators on inspections of factories and worksites, and worked with Al Smith of the Factory Investigating Commission.

William Gunn Shepherd (*eyewitness/reporter*)

The primary eyewitness through which the world heard about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. William Gunn Shepherd was a reporter for the United Press who happened to be in Washington Square and witnessed the fire; he phoned the details to Roy Howard, who then telegraphed the story to various national newspapers. Much of the public perception of the fire is based on Shepherd's gruesome retelling.

Josephine "Jacob" Jazz (*investigative journalist*)*

Reporting under the name Jacob, she's earned her reputation as an excellent muckraker via her thorough articles and dedication to finding the truth. After getting her start reporting on scandals with local politicians, she struck gold through her reporting of seedy behavior from greedy businessmen. Her most recent story exposed a button factory who had bribed activists to quell protests.

Harold Arthur (*business owner*)*

The owner of a thriving network of textile factories across the country, Arthur can barely remember how many factories he owns. Though reports have shown his factories are neglected and rife with hazards, he doesn't believe he should have to update them as they were under code

when they were first built. After all, if the product is still being produced why put money into the factories?

Glenn Armstrong (*business owner*)*

A notable and wealthy industrial figure, his Armstrong Steel Mill has seen tremendous success since the start of the 20th century. Despite the massive success, Armstrong worries that the rise in activism will threaten his salary. Especially as his factory has started to garner attention for the amount of children employed.

