

## Child Labor Reforms and the National Child Labor Committee

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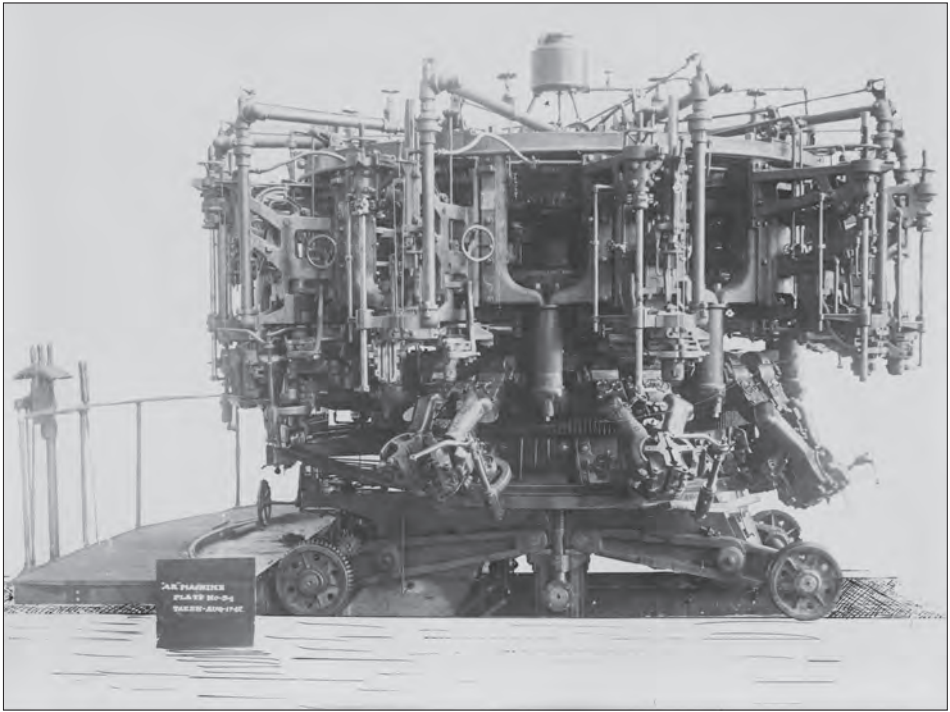


*I shall never forget my first visit to a glass factory at night. It was a big wooden structure, so loosely built that it afforded little protection from draughts, surrounded by a high fence with several rows of barbed wire stretched across the top. I went with the foreman of the factory and he explained to me the reasons for the stockade-like fence. "It keeps the young imps inside once we've got 'em in for the night shift," he said. The "young imps" were, of course, the boys employed, about forty in number, at least ten of whom were less than twelve years of age. It was a cheap bottle factory and . . . [c]heapness and child labor go together. . . . The hours of labor for the night shift were from 5.30 P.M. to 3.30 A.M. . . . That night, for the first time, I realized the tragic significance of cheap bottles.*

John Spargo

I<sup>N</sup> 1913, MICHAEL J. OWENS, a principal figure in the American glass industry, received an unsolicited letter from a “special agent” of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). The contents were startling. The NCLC had, since its founding nearly ten years earlier, devoted itself almost exclusively to ending industrial child labor in America and had achieved remarkable success in that arena. Further, the NCLC had focused special attention on the nation’s glass-bottle industry, which, with its longstanding practice of employing thousands of children—the so-called glass house boys—had one of the most egregious records of child employment in the country. Yet, notwithstanding these efforts, this letter thanked Owens for accomplishing what the NCLC admitted it had been unable to do: virtually ending the use of child labor in the nation’s glass-bottle factories, especially the practice of night labor, for which the glass houses were infamous and which the committee considered particularly odious.<sup>1</sup> The letter Owens received is especially remarkable because he was no progressive reformer. He was the son of a West Virginia coal miner and was himself a former union glass worker who had become one of the leading industrial glass men in the country. What Owens did to generate the letter and earn the praise and respect of the NCLC was to invent, patent, and market the world’s first fully automated glass-bottle blowing machine, what came to be known as the “Owens Automatic.” Until that time, because of the intricacies of the production process, glass bottles were almost universally made by hand. The Owens Automatic marked the end of a method of glass production that had held sway for thousands of years and had shaped nearly every aspect of the American glass bottle industry.

Yet the triumph heralded by the NCLC letter was not quite complete. Hidden in the shadows of this apparent victory lay one particularly unusual and instructive anomaly. At the time of this correspondence, although the use of child labor in most of the nation’s glass houses had been all but eliminated, the glass house boys remained hard at work in one segment of the industry. They continued their unabated toil, day and night, in the glass-bottle factories of western Pennsylvania. This remnant of the centuries-old practice of using child labor in the making of glass would not be eliminated until 1915. The story of Progressive Era efforts to remove these particular child workers from these particular glass-bottle plants is



“Ten Arm Owens Automatic Bottle Machine.  
Courtesy of Owen’s [sic] Automatic Bottle Machine Co.” Toledo, Ohio, ca. 1913

a story of reform that was repeatedly stymied by a unique combination of forces, *sui generis* to Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh glass houses. It is a story of reform held hostage.

The Pennsylvania legislature had created the “glass house exception” for the use of child labor in 1905, at the same time it enacted a sweeping ban on night work for children under the age of sixteen in virtually all industrial, manufacturing, and mercantile employments. Exceptions to regulatory reforms were not uncommon in the Progressive Era nor are they unheard of today. This particular exception was unusual, however, because it was the only night-work exception created by the Pennsylvania state legislators, it affected only the state’s glass industry, and within that industry it applied only to the glass-bottle plants in and around Pittsburgh. The Pennsylvania

glass house exception was anathema to the progressive child labor reformers who spent nearly a decade trying to undo it.

Why was the western Pennsylvania glass industry granted this unique legislative dispensation in 1905 and how was it able to rebuff repeated progressive challenges to the glass house exception over the next ten years? Understanding the struggles over the glass house exception requires an analysis of the actions and interactions of several key groups: the glass house boys and their families, the Progressive Era social reformers, the glass manufacturers, the adult glass workers and their union, and the state legislature. Each of these groups had a long history of involvement in the Pittsburgh glass industry, and each had vital, and often competing, interests in this particular child labor issue. Because of these interests, each of these groups played an important and sometimes unique role in the child labor debate, especially when compared with similar reform efforts elsewhere in the country during the early decades of the twentieth century. The particular complex of intersecting, interacting, and overlapping forces—social, political, cultural, economic, and technological—that underpinned the actions of these groups in Pennsylvania gave shape to a child labor struggle that was singular in the annals of Progressive Era reform.

For most of the nation's earlier history, the benefits of employing children, even at a very young age, had been almost universally acknowledged. Not only was it assumed that children needed to learn a useful trade and in the process add to their family's income, but the idleness of unemployed children was thought to lead to "devilment." Child labor was seen as a benefit not only for the child but for the family economy and the larger community as well.<sup>2</sup> During the nineteenth century this view began to change, and by the early twentieth century, the cultural momentum was shifting in favor of the ideal of a more "sheltered" childhood for all children. Under this view, children were seen as being in need of protection and nurturing. It also held that children should not be forced, or even allowed, to enter the adult world of work too early. But what "too early" meant was a subject of much debate.

Progressive Era social reformers embraced the ideal of sheltered childhood and worked tirelessly both to restrict the practice of industrial child labor and to increase the availability of public education. The effect was pronounced. In 1912, the NCLC reported that all forty-eight states plus

the District of Columbia had some child labor and/or compulsory education legislation.<sup>3</sup> The number of child workers in the nation peaked in 1910 at nearly 2 million, an increase of almost 20 percent from ten years earlier. After 1910, however, the number steadily dropped until by 1930 it stood at just under 700,000.<sup>4</sup> Sheltered childhood was becoming a reality.

In the country's glass industry, the shift away from child labor (or the "small help," as the children were sometimes called) came even sooner. Official figures show that the number of children under sixteen working in the nation's glass houses peaked fully ten years before the 1910 high-water mark for child labor in industrial employment. In 1880, 5,658 children under the age of sixteen worked in the glass industry. That number peaked in 1899 at 7,116 and then began to fall: to 6,435 in 1904; 3,561 in 1909; and 1,413 in 1919.<sup>5</sup>

But these numbers are deceptive. They obscure at least three important factors related to the Pittsburgh glass house boys. First, because of intense competitive pressures and perhaps a growing sensitivity to the subject of child labor, the Pittsburgh glass-bottle firms had a history of underreporting their child employment. Take, for example, the 1886 federal census publication, *Report on the Statistics of Wages in Manufacturing Industries*, issued under the direction of Joseph D. Weeks. Weeks was a "special agent and expert" for the Census Office. His report addressed the full range of American industry, including glassmaking, at the height of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>6</sup> For his analysis of the nation's glass factories, Weeks studied the four primary manufacturing sectors in the industry: crystal glass, window glass, plate glass, and hand-blown bottles and tumblers. He sent out forty questionnaires to selected glass factories across the country, including several bottle plants in western Pennsylvania. Seventeen of these glass factories returned completed forms, but not a single Pittsburgh glass-bottle manufacturer was among them. This is particularly noteworthy because, at the time, the glass houses of western Pennsylvania made more bottles, and employed more glass house boys, than did plants in any other region of the country.<sup>7</sup>

Second, while the total numbers of children working in all glass factories may well have decreased after 1899, the use of child workers was not uniform across all sectors of the industry. The production processes used in the hand-blown bottle factories required a much higher proportion of "boy

help” than did any of the other industry sectors. Further, because the non-bottle sectors required less skilled work than the bottle industry did, the non-bottle factories were more easily adaptable to mechanized techniques. Therefore, when labor-saving technologies began appearing in the industry by the late nineteenth century, they had a far greater impact on reducing all forms of labor (including child labor) in the non-bottle plants, thereby further accentuating the bottle sector’s relative reliance on child labor.

Finally, industry-wide child labor employment figures tend to hide geographic differences. Within the bottle-making sector of the glass industry, geography became an increasingly important indicator for the use of child labor by the early twentieth century. As glass-making machines, such as the Owens Automatic, were introduced into these factories, the overall need for labor tended to decrease, thus affecting both the adult glass workers and the glass house boys. However, because the glass workers’ union was particularly strong in Pittsburgh, the introduction of these new bottle-making machines to plants in that region took longer than in other areas of the country. Thus, the Pittsburgh glass houses continued to use child labor while the glass house boys were being phased out elsewhere.

As bottle makers in other parts of the country converted to the more efficient automated production technologies, the competitive pressures on the handmade-glass houses in Pittsburgh intensified. In order to survive, the Pittsburgh glass-bottle makers increased production by running their factories both day and night, and they reduced costs by increasing their reliance on cheap child labor. Because younger children tended to work more cheaply than older ones, they also received some hiring preference. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the modal age among *all* glass workers nationally in the bottle sector, for example, was sixteen. In Pennsylvania, it was only fourteen.<sup>8</sup> Thus, early-twentieth-century bottles made in Pittsburgh, more so than anywhere else in the country, continued to be made by hand, and a greater proportion of those hands belonged to young children—the glass house boys of Pittsburgh.

The work of the glass house boys was demanding. In Pittsburgh, the typical handmade-bottle plant was organized around numerous small teams of workers, or shops, who operated simultaneously on the furnace-room floor. The normal shop consisted of two or three skilled adult workers and three or four boys to serve as helpers. The specific jobs for the adult workers



“A midnight scene in More-Jonas Glass Works, Bridgeton, N.J. Four small boys are to be seen in this photo.” November 1909

included the “gatherer,” the “blower,” and the “finisher.” The gatherer dipped the blowpipe into the mixture of molten glass. In a series of intricate maneuvers, the master blower then blew into the pipe and began to form the bottle, either free hand or, more frequently, with the use of a mold. During this process the bottle might need to be reheated in the furnace several times before it began to take final shape. When the body of the bottle was formed, it was broken off the blowpipe so that the finisher could complete the neck and top. Then the finished bottle, still very hot, was cooled slowly in a special device called a “lehr oven” to prevent it from splintering. The men were usually equally skilled at each job so that two or three could function as a team and they could switch jobs during the shift.<sup>9</sup>

The glass house boy positions in the typical Pittsburgh bottle shop might include the “snapping-up” boy, who transported the glass-loaded blowpipe



“Glass Works.” West Virginia, October 1908

from the gatherer to the blower; the “mold-holding” boy, who stooped at the feet of the blower and repeatedly opened and closed the various metal molds used to give the bottles a uniform shape; the “carrying-in” (or “carrying-off”) boy, who transported the bottles back and forth between the blower and the “glory hole” of the reheating furnace, from the blower to the finisher, and then from the finisher to the cooling lehr for the annealing process; and finally the “cleaning-off” boy, who used a small iron tool much like a file to clean off the end of the blowpipe between uses. If the boys were equally skilled at each task, they, like the men, might cover more than one job at a time and they could also trade jobs either during or between shifts.<sup>10</sup> While the men normally remained at their work stations while they performed a particular job, the boys, except for the mold-holding boy (who had to remain at the feet of the master glass blower), scurried around constantly.

Although the work of the glass house boys was difficult and complicated,



and although the young workers were key to the industrial production process for glass bottles, the boys were almost universally regarded as unskilled labor. This perception undervalued their abilities. In Pittsburgh, as the intensity of the work escalated, the boys had to negotiate an increasingly cramped and dangerous factory space. They needed to know how to operate quickly the many molds used. They had to carry the partly completed glass objects to the “glory hole” of the furnace to reheat them for final finishing, returning them only when they were hot enough to rework. When the finishing work was done, they had to carry the items to the lehr for cooling. They were expected to perform all of these tasks without breaking the glass or running into the perhaps dozens of other boys scurrying around the furnace floor doing the same things. If a boy got injured, the production process slowed. If a boy stumbled and broke some glass, the factory’s output was reduced and the blower, who was paid by the piece, lost a part of his wage. Having skilled, experienced boys was clearly important, yet it was customary for the boys to be poorly treated by the men with whom they worked and poorly paid by the owners who hired them. Even so, in Pittsburgh at least, there was rarely a shortage of boys willing to work in the glass houses.

### The Spirit of Reform

Reformers of the Progressive Era focused on reducing an ever-broadening array of social, economic, and political problems linked to the rise of industrialization and the dramatic shifts in economic and political power associated with it. The legacy of reform attributable to progressivism includes the passage of health and safety laws, the creation of settlement houses, and labor and educational improvements, as well as the expansion of voting rights, all of which were intended “to improve the conditions of life and labor and to create as much social stability as possible.”<sup>11</sup> Reflecting the breadth of these concerns, the reformers of the period represented many diverse interests, with the reform proposals they advanced addressing an equally broad range of important issues. Because of this diversity, many historians have observed that there was no unified progressive movement. Rather, both the reforms and the reformers of the period were a varied and often contradictory lot. Underscoring their diversity, Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick have observed that “each group of progressives

had its own definitions of improvement and stability.”<sup>12</sup> And yet, for all the differences within the progressive movement, industrial child labor was a paramount concern. The specter of the glass house boys, hard at work in front of the searing heat of the nation’s glass house furnaces, kindled particularly strong fires under the progressive reformers. Given the breadth of the progressive movement, it is all the more significant that eradication of child labor in the glass industry was such an important goal.

Many progressives were members of the rapidly expanding urban middle class. While some of their reform efforts involved large-scale direct action, such as labor agitation or the development of settlement houses, many of their reform programs focused on ameliorating specific problems rather than undertaking more radical systemic change. In particular, they sought to leverage specific social change through the legal system, relying on legislative action to foster particular reforms. Because Americans of the late nineteenth century were just beginning to use federal law to advance reform, most progressive legislative proposals centered on state governmental action.<sup>13</sup> Similar to shifts in the women’s suffrage movement, in the early twentieth century differences emerged among child labor reformers about how best to proceed and, in particular, whether to devote more time to individual state-level reforms or to seek a national solution. These differences caused rifts in some progressive organizations and weakened the reform effort.

Significantly, many women were leaders in the fight for progressive causes, including the elimination of industrial child labor. As Nancy S. Dye observes, these female reformers were concerned with “such issues as clean food and pure milk, maternal and infant welfare, industrial pollution, [or] inadequate and highly politicized school systems,” and they saw their efforts as having the potential to improve the quality of life not only of the poor but of the whole population.<sup>14</sup> To effect these changes, the female progressives understood that they had to find ways to influence law-based reform. This era was, of course, a period of fundamental changes in the gendered allocation of formal political power and suffrage in the United States. These changes had consequences not only for electoral politics but also for the way men and women jointly inhabited the public sphere. Even though women had been largely denied access to the formal institutions of public governmental as well as private corporate power, they were not excluded from the public sphere. They had historically influenced public and social policy in

a variety of ways, perhaps especially through membership in voluntary associations. These associations, however, were also often gender segregated. Kathryn Kish Sklar notes that “although examples to the contrary abound—including churches, trade unions, and schools—sex-segregated socializing and gatherings in which numbers of one gender greatly outnumbered the other were far more common in the lives of nineteenth-century women than were groups that included men and women in similar proportions.”<sup>15</sup> This associational activity continued, and if anything increased, during the Progressive Era as women created or joined groups of other social reformers to effect change.

These groups included charities, local and national welfare organizations, single-issue reform movements, and settlement houses. As historians of the Progressive Era have made clear, the settlement houses are important sites from which to view progressive reform generally and the role of female progressives in child labor reform in particular. Not only were many settlement house workers female, and not only did these workers tend to be strong advocates for child labor reform, but many of the houses themselves were operated by women, most prominently Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago and Lillian Wald at the Henry Street settlement in New York. While many female progressives might well have grown up in middle-class households, and as such might be expected to approach reform from the limiting perspective of social class, their lived experience in founding and operating settlement houses complicates any simple, class-based analysis. These women lived and worked on a day-to-day basis in the settlement houses, alongside poor, working-class, often immigrant friends, residents, and neighbors, and from this position they not only organized the activities and programs of the settlement houses but also undertook the active advocacy of a complex social reform agenda. This very active political work was in contrast to the female progressives’ lack of official, formal political power, and their lack of such power also caused them to be the object of ridicule and derision directed at them by some who opposed reform. The settlement houses were thus places of refuge not only for the poor but also for some of the female activists as well, providing both a safe haven and an excellent base from which they could develop the skills needed to pursue progressive change. Within this context, the elimination of industrial child labor became one of the principal goals of women progressives.<sup>16</sup>

The female progressives approached child labor reform as a crusade, the intensity of which was similar to that of the antebellum abolitionist movement.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on a cultural valuation of domesticity and motherhood, women could claim a special authority both to speak on social and humanitarian issues affecting working-class women and children and to criticize the indifference of the American political institutions to their plight. Because of their limited access to the official avenues of legal and legislative power, however, their demands could be discounted in the halls of state legislatures as well as in other venues of public discourse, regardless of the strength of their arguments, the precision of their analysis, or the power of their rhetoric. In response to this double positioning, female progressives had to develop less direct means of achieving their ends. One way to do so was to join forces with a variety of male-dominated progressive groups to help push for reform. As a result, female progressives became expert at building broad-based reform coalitions as well as in passionately arguing for reforms and energetically lobbying for related legislative changes.

The effectiveness of such coalitions depended on the actions and contributions of all members, so these groups were not without their own set of pitfalls. Two such difficulties made progressive child labor reform particularly problematic in regard to the Pittsburgh glass houses. First, many of the most successful coalitions forged by progressives around the country to fight for child labor reform involved the active participation of labor unions. These coalitions between unions and progressive activists were based on a symmetry of interests, given the fact that virtually all major unions of the day, either out of economic self-interest or altruism, supported child labor reform. In many instances, labor union assistance in efforts to lobby state legislatures for change was invaluable. In Pennsylvania, however, the progressives were unable to establish this particular alignment of interests for child labor reforms regarding the Pittsburgh glass-bottle plants. Second, some of the male progressives and the male-dominated progressive groups approached reform from a very different perspective from that of the female reformers with whom they had joined forces. Many male progressives preferred to assume the role of the “rational” and “objective” observer when describing or evaluating the social, political, or economic problems associated with industrialization, and they preferred to remain on the political sidelines rather than to get involved in the nitty-gritty process of lawmak-

ing that was a prerequisite for actual social change. These differences in the approach to reform hampered efforts to end child labor in the glass industry in Pittsburgh. The intersection of these several factors came into play in the halls of the Pennsylvania legislature between 1905 and 1915 as the proposals to end night work by children in the Pittsburgh glass houses were repeatedly blocked.

### Progressivism Working across/against Gender

Three examples of how gender factored into Progressive Era reform efforts illustrate the complexity of the interactions. The first relates to a pair of related Chicago civic organizations, the second, to two national reform groups based in New York, and the third, to a ground-breaking research survey conducted in Pittsburgh. In her analysis of the two Progressive Era civic reform groups in Chicago, Maureen A. Flanagan identifies significant gender-related differences in the approaches of two organizations. These differences serve to highlight the problems female social reformers of the period experienced in their work with coalitions. Flanagan's study found that the male and female reform organizations in question, although concerned with identical political and public policy questions, generated substantially different proposals for solving those problems. The all-male City Club of Chicago and its female counterpart, the Women's City Club of Chicago, were very similar groups. They were each founded as municipal reform organizations, the men's club in 1903 and the women's, in 1910, on the principle that "the citizens of the city were responsible for the welfare of the community in which they lived."<sup>18</sup> Each club generally drew its membership from the city's white upper-middle-class residents. The members of the City Club tended to work in business and the professions. The members of the Women's City Club, on the other hand, tended to be a bit more diverse. While many, if not most, of its members were the wives and daughters of that same class of business and professional men who peopled the City Club, a significant percentage were also unmarried professional women, including some settlement house staffers and other social workers. As Flanagan points out, however, there is no evidence that the women from these latter organizations "wielded a disproportionate influence over the policies of the club."<sup>19</sup>

On several occasions, these two groups addressed many of the same public or municipal issues. Despite the similarity in their membership, however, they consistently took different, often opposing positions on which reform program should be implemented to address a particular problem. On issues as varied as municipal sanitation, public education, and police activity during labor strikes, the City Club typically advocated reforms that stressed the interests of private business, profit, and limited governmental power. The Women's City Club, on the other hand, consistently supported reform programs that focused on improving the social, environmental, and economic conditions of the city's residents, especially those most directly affected by the municipal issue in question.

In terms of waste management, for example, the City Club supported retaining the existing system of private collection contractors and the system of solid waste "reduction," a process that yielded an oil product, worth up to \$150,000 per year, derived from the trash and given to the private contractors. The Women's City Club, on the other hand, advocated municipal ownership of the waste collection process and incineration rather than "reduction" because the former would produce not only electricity but also an inert residue usable in road construction and virtually (it was assumed at the time) no emissions, all of which would have, they reasoned, positive environmental and social attributes.

In terms of educational reforms, while both groups supported instituting a type of vocational education in the public schools, the City Club did so because it would "create a dependable industrial work force" and would therefore increase the "financial reward for business." The Women's City Club supported a vocational education program because its members were concerned about the individual child in school. They wanted to "keep children in school beyond age fourteen . . . in order to educate and prepare them for better-paying jobs" and "to provide advice and guidance to school children once they were ready to leave school and seek work."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the men of the City Club had a vision of Chicago consistent with what might be termed "trickle-down" economics. That is, they saw the city primarily as a place within which private business functioned for the benefit of business leaders and related professionals. Further, they believed, if those business activities were allowed to prosper, then the rest of the city's inhabitants would ultimately prosper as well. The male City Club designed

its reform proposals to benefit business first, with the expectation that benefits to the larger citizenry would follow. The urban vision of the Women's City Club started with the well-being of the people who actually made up the city's populace. The solutions they proposed were uniformly intended to maximize direct benefits to city residents, regardless of the immediate economic impact on the city's businesses. Espousing what might be called a "trickle-up" model, they argued that if the general population of the Chicago prospered, then its businesses would eventually prosper as well.<sup>21</sup>

A similar situation regarding the differences in approach taken by male and female groups existed in regard to two progressive reform organizations more closely tied to the child labor issue: the National Consumers' League (NCL), headed by Florence Kelley, and the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), headed by John R. Commons. Both Kelley and Commons had superlative progressive credentials, and the similarities between the two groups are striking, but so too were the differences in their approaches to reform. The two organizations were formed within less than a decade of each other, and they each sought the passage of reform labor legislation as one of their primary goals. Both also drew their membership largely from the middle class, each had national offices, and both relied on professional expertise to advance their programs for progressive reform.

The NCL was organized first, in 1898, by a small group of already active local consumers' organizations. Both the local organizations and the NCL were overwhelmingly female in membership, and, under Kelley's leadership, the NCL strove, in her words, to "moralize" consumer purchasing decisions made by women by providing them with "knowledge" so that the purchasing "decision when made shall be a righteous one."<sup>22</sup> Kelley worked tirelessly to build up the grassroots basis of the organization. In 1901, the NCL had 30 local chapters, and by 1906, it had 63. This growth continued, and by 1913, individual memberships, virtually all with local chapter affiliations, had grown to more than 30,000. The NCL also worked to build alliances with other groups. In 1903, for example, to broaden the influence and extend the reach of the NCL, Kelley chaired the child labor committees for both the National Congress of Mothers and the National American Women's Suffrage Association. For specific legislative programs, the NCL worked with local labor and other progressive organizations. Kelley also affiliated the NCL with the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which,

in 1900, had more than 2,675 local groups and a membership list that exceeded 155,000 names.<sup>23</sup>

The AALL, on the other hand, was formed in 1906, not as the outgrowth of local labor reform groups but as the American branch of the International Association for Labor Legislation, headquartered in Paris. The AALL membership, while middle class, was almost entirely male, and the group approached reform from what might be characterized as a respectful distance. According to Sklar, the “AALL leaders treated knowledge as professional, not personal.” That is, they “exercised power through the prestige of their position and expertise, not through [the organization’s] members.” Further, “rather than seeing government as a democratic extension of the popular will, the AALL viewed the state as a vehicle of enlightened administration.” In keeping with this general philosophy, the AALL eschewed organizing or affiliating with local chapters. It also exhibited few populist tendencies; its general membership remained at about two hundred through 1909 and barely topped three thousand in 1913. It considered itself an elite organization of experts rather than a broadly based group of activists, generally seeing its political role as one of advising others on matters of labor law and expecting that those others would “carry their advice forward into the political arena.”<sup>24</sup> When it came to specific labor legislation, such as the fight to enact state-level minimum wage laws, the NCL actively and directly lobbied for these measures in several states while the AALL declined to enter the fray. Remaining cautious and reserved, the AALL refused to give direct, public support to such efforts because it believed that, if new, progressive laws were challenged in court, the judges of the day would probably strike down the legislation.<sup>25</sup>

As an activist, politically astute, largely female organization that engaged in extensive coalition building to support direct political action, the NCL established local, grassroots organizations with links to labor and other progressive groups to actively lobby for reform. The AALL, on the other hand, saw itself as a detached, intellectual association of rational elites, disdaining local affiliates and preferring to comment on, rather than to endorse, specific legislative reforms. It generally refused to become involved in the messy business of state lawmaking. These two reform organizations exemplified the dilemma facing many female progressives. Whereas the women reformers might take on the role of political and legislative activists, their



efforts could be limited, or at least not furthered, by their associated male reformers who preferred to be distant and disinterested legislative observers. To be sure, not all male progressives were cut from the same cloth as those of the City Club of Chicago or the AALL, but the danger in forming coalitions with male-dominated groups was clear. If the activist women wanted the help of male progressives in their battles for reform before the state legislatures, they needed to construct their coalitions with care.<sup>26</sup>

Kelley and Commons worked together on another major Progressive Era project that focused directly on the glass house boys of Pittsburgh and reflected, to an even more acute degree, the political limitations of an effort centered on these gender-based differences in approaching reform. Kelley and Commons were among a group of prominent progressives who were principal investigators for *The Pittsburgh Survey*, one of the first large-scale urban studies in the country. The *Survey* began in June 1906 when Alice B. Montgomery, the chief probation officer in the Allegheny County Juvenile Court in Pittsburgh, wrote a letter to Paul Kellogg at the Charity Organization Society in New York. In the letter Montgomery asked Kellogg if his organization could conduct an investigation into social conditions in and around Pittsburgh. Kellogg agreed and, with the financial support of the newly formed Russell Sage Foundation, the project was launched.<sup>27</sup> Kellogg was named the *Survey's* general editor, Lewis W. Hine was enlisted to take documentary photographs, and Commons, Kelley, and Elizabeth Beardsley Butler were among those asked to conduct research. As Margo Anderson and Maurine W. Greenwald have noted, the *Survey* was “one of the most extensive social research and reform efforts of the twentieth century. In all, over seventy researchers—a veritable who’s who of early twentieth-century Progressive thought—lent their efforts and expertise. . . . The reform proposals listed in the pages of the Pittsburgh Survey reports provided much of the blueprint for reforming urban industrial society—including introduction of workers’ compensation systems, pollution controls, civic reform, protective legislation, and a shorter work week.”<sup>28</sup> The *Survey's* impact on the nascent field of urban sociology, as well as its effect on some of its contributors, was dramatic. After Paul Kellogg, Margaret Byington, John Fitch, Crystal Eastman, Butler, and other researchers for the *Survey* finished their fieldwork, “[t]hey set off immediately not only to write articles . . . and book-length studies of what they had discovered

and learned in Pittsburgh, but also to continue their work of Progressive reform in journalism, in university teaching and research, on public commissions, and in state and national politics.”<sup>29</sup> The research was published in six volumes that analyzed and found substantial fault with the city’s economic, labor, health, housing, and educational systems.

Despite its descriptions of social, political, and environmental degradation in Pittsburgh, a city at the very heart of industrial America, the *Survey* had very little immediate or practical effect. After the findings were made public, they were roundly criticized by local politicians, business leaders, and Pittsburgh newspapers and then largely ignored or dismissed. Under a banner headline, “The Pittsburgh Survey’s Appalling Disclosures,” the city’s leading general circulation newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, featured on its front page a large cartoon mocking what it portrayed as the exaggerated claims offered by the *Survey*. The cartoon shows pages from a report falling to the floor at the feet of a gentleman dressed in colonial garb—the personification of the city—each page indicting the city for some alleged failure: “Labor Conditions, Bad; Charity Work, Bad; Housing, Bad; Just About Everything, Bad.” The bewigged figure scratches his chin and muses, “Who’d a Think I Was Such a Sick Man?”<sup>30</sup> In the 1909 mayoral election, conducted just after the first installments of the *Survey* were issued, the progressive reform candidate William Stevenson was defeated by Republican William Magee, but neither candidate even mentioned the *Survey*’s results during the campaign. To provide some research support for an official rebuttal to the *Survey*, the Pittsburgh City Council and the local chamber of commerce sponsored a cursory economic review in 1911 in order to emphasize the “good side of Pittsburgh life.” The report that followed noted blandly that if any reforms were needed, they were not pressing and would come in due time. In short, “the Survey failed to arouse Pittsburghers—either influential citizens or the middle class—to improve everyday life for workers in Pittsburgh, solve environmental problems of the area, or meet the immediate ‘needs of the poor’ at the time.” Although Pittsburgh did have some local progressive organizations, such as the Civic Club (discussed in chapter 3), in the early twentieth century it was still largely a working-class city, and not many residents or leaders found any part of the Progressive Era reform agenda appealing.<sup>31</sup>

Two key factors seemed to have played a part in the failure of the *Survey*

to directly effect reform. Although initiated by an inquiry from a local public official, the study had no local sponsorship, and virtually all of the work was done by principal researchers drawn from places other than western Pennsylvania. It was, therefore, not inaccurately perceived to be the work of “outsiders.” But insularity and suspicion of outsiders was only part of the problem. The approach taken by the researchers themselves also seems to have been a factor. Although the tradition of muckraking and investigative journalism was fairly well established by 1907, Paul Kellogg, the *Survey*’s principal editor, feared, ironically as it turns out, that if the researchers took that sort of approach, they might very well anger and alienate the civic leaders of Pittsburgh. He wanted to avoid negative and hostile reactions from local officials. He hoped to use the researchers’ status as “unbiased” outside observers to “elevate their research to a scientific, if reform-minded, stance.” The result was consciously intended to be more academic than polemical, and this focus, it was hoped, would be more likely to persuade local decision makers of the need for reform. Thus, while the rhetoric used in the reports and monographs that constituted the *Survey* was by no means disinterested, it was characterized by a more methodical, research-based style. The authors and editors sought to paint a portrait of the social and environmental decay that they saw amid substantial industrial power and wealth by using intense and thorough description rather than words of anger and outrage. This rhetorical attitude was emblematic of the male-oriented progressive organizational approach that, in Pittsburgh at least, failed to produce the desired political results.<sup>32</sup>

These examples—the City Club and the Women’s City Club of Chicago, the National Consumers’ League and the American Association for Labor Legislation, and *The Pittsburgh Survey*—suggest some differences between male and female reform groups and how those differences influenced the content of reform proposals, modes of persuasion, political tactics employed, and the results obtained by progressives in the early twentieth century. Although the political climate of the time may have limited the ability of female progressives to directly effect social change, it did not dampen their desire for and efforts to effect reform. The work of Florence Kelley, within the child labor reform movement generally and regarding the Pittsburgh glass house boys in particular, exemplifies the resilience and determination of the progressive reformers.

## Florence Kelley and Child Labor

Florence Kelley was perhaps the most prominent, vocal, and determined social activist advocating for the rights of American children during the period. Her actions and accomplishments also serve to complicate any easy categorization of the reformers, their motives, their power, and their effectiveness. Although middle class by birth, she did not fully fit the cultural expectations for women of her class. Neither in her life nor in her political commitments can she be easily read as a domesticated or domesticating reformer. She was college educated, with graduate education in law. She studied and lived in Europe, where she was an active member of the Socialist Party. She returned to the United States, where, as a divorced woman with children, she became actively engaged in progressive politics while maintaining her ties to socialist friends, including a decades-long correspondence with Frederick Engels. As one of her biographers notes, "In the long history of the struggle against child labor in America, the person who made the most consistent and effective contributions was Florence Kelley."<sup>33</sup>

Kelley worked diligently not only to establish the legal scaffolding needed to eliminate children's factory employment and expand their educational opportunities but also to change the public's view on the subject of reform because she realized that public opinion, and not law alone, was key for effective social change. As her work with the National Consumers' League attests, Kelley was by no means a disinterested social observer and commentator. She was an active, passionate force in legislative lobbying; she was the first female chief factory inspector in the country; and she worked for numerous private social service as well as state and federal administrative agencies. She was an active member of such progressive organizations as the NCL and the National American Women's Suffrage Association. She was also a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and, central to this study, the National Child Labor Committee.

Because her life and work stand at the center of child labor reform in the United States during the period of its most fervent activity, she provides a particularly useful case for considering the complex questions surrounding reform and the glass industry in western Pennsylvania. Kelley's back-

ground and activism are especially instructive because, even though she devoted considerable energy to the national child labor problem and gave special attention to the situation in Pennsylvania, her efforts to remove the thousands of child workers from the state's worst offending industry, the glass-bottle factories of the Pittsburgh district, were only partly effective. Considering the strength of Kelley's record and the evidence of her effectiveness elsewhere in the field, the failure to more decisively effect change in Pennsylvania, especially in the creation and enforcement of regulatory legislation, stands as a disquieting testament to the limits of progressive reform and the indifference to reform of early-twentieth-century Pennsylvania legislators.

Born in 1859, Florence Kelley grew up in a politically active Philadelphia family, within a solid reformist tradition. Her great-aunt, Sara Pugh, and her father, William Darrah Kelley, were especially powerful models of active, progressive, and effective political involvement. Florence Kelley's mother, Catherine Bonsall, had been orphaned in 1838 and adopted by Isaac and Elizabeth Kay Pugh, Quakers of Germantown, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. Florence considered them her grandparents. Sarah Pugh, Isaac's sister, lived with her brother and his family and had considerable influence over Kelley as a young girl. A Quaker schoolteacher, Sarah was active in the Female Anti-Slavery Society, founded by her close friend, Lucretia Mott. Representing the Pennsylvania branch of the society at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, Sarah, together with the other female delegates, was forced to sit in a gender-segregated gallery, to be joined in protest later by an angry William Lloyd Garrison. Like many other abolitionist women, Sarah Pugh was also a supporter of women's rights and a friend of Susan B. Anthony. As late as her seventy-fourth year, she led a successful petition drive to persuade the Pennsylvania state legislature not to legalize prostitution. Florence Kelley's longstanding support of women's suffrage and her membership in the NAACP can be understood in part as reflections of her great-aunt's influence.<sup>34</sup>

Florence Kelley's father provided her with another model for progressive reform. William Kelley's life is something of a rags-to-riches story. Shortly after he was born in 1814, his father died, forcing William's mother to open a boardinghouse to support the family. As in many families that could not afford to have their children continue formal education, Wil-

liam quit school at the age of eleven to apprentice as a jeweler, following in his father's footsteps. After practicing his trade in Boston, he returned to Philadelphia and began a career in politics. He read law, was admitted to the bar in 1841, and became increasingly active in local Democratic Party politics. By 1844, he was appointed a local prosecutor, and by 1847, he was a local trial judge. In 1854, he left the Democratic Party in protest over its support of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which he and many others saw as a sellout to the interests of slavery. He returned briefly to the practice of law and soon became actively involved in the newly formed Republican Party. In 1860, as a strong supporter of Abraham Lincoln's bid for the presidency, he ran for and was elected to Congress. He served there for the next thirty years, championing many progressive causes.<sup>35</sup>

Florence Kelley took a formative trip with her father in 1871. That autumn, William Kelley took his then twelve-year-old daughter with him to the Alleghenies in western Pennsylvania to introduce Florence "to the romance of industrialization as manifested in the iron and steel industry." He took her first to see the newly introduced Bessemer steel-making process in action. She later recounted that they arrived at the mill at "nearly two o'clock in the morning, the first time I had ever consciously been awake at that hour, when the steel was turned out into the molds." She found this to be a "terrifying sight" replete with the "presence and activity of boys smaller than myself—and I was barely twelve years old"—darting about in the fitful light and flaming heat, "carrying heavy pails of water and tin dippers, from which the men drank eagerly." She vividly recalled that the focus of everyone else's attention was on industrial production and that "the little boys were not more important than so many grains of sand in the molds."<sup>36</sup>

A few weeks later, her father took her to visit a glass factory near Pittsburgh. Again, this was a night visit, and "[t]he only light was the glare from the furnaces."<sup>37</sup> While the two industrial processes she had viewed seemed similar to the twelve-year-old, she was struck by the fact that the number of boys in the glass factory was far greater than in the steel mill. In front of each furnace stood a glass blower with his long blowpipe, and around each blower were his "dogs," as Kelley remembered the boys were called. She later described how the mold-holding boy sitting right in front of the blower had to take "the blower's mold the instant the bottle or tumbler was



"Blower and Mold Boy, Seneca Glass Works." Morgantown,  
West Virginia, October 1908

removed from it, scrape it and replace it perfectly smooth and clean for the next bottle or tumbler which the blower was already shaping in his pipe.” This visit confirmed her “astonished impression of the utter unimportance of children compared with products, in the minds of the people whom I am among.”<sup>38</sup> These images of the small glass house boys working at night in Pittsburgh would stay with Kelley for the rest of her life.

By providing the young Kelley with a firsthand, unvarnished glimpse of late-nineteenth-century American industrial power, William Kelley gave his daughter, perhaps inadvertently, a core of material experiences around which to focus what would become a burning, lifelong desire for social change. He also provided her with the power to act on that desire by encouraging her to go to college. Such an education was seen as crucial for middle-class men and women concerned about the course of social change. Education increased their ability to influence public policy, to process new forms of information, to create new modes of communication, and to devise new answers to social problems. With such tools, they might hope to counterbalance the fact that they lacked control of an economy dominated by industrial capitalists, were unable to directly master chaotic urban growth, or were often stymied by a legislative process dominated by male voters, by male politicians, and by male-controlled party machines. With her father’s encouragement, Kelley matriculated in 1876 to Cornell University, where she excelled. Her senior thesis, “On Some Changes in the Legal Status of the Child since Blackstone,” was both a reflection of her maturing social conscience and a sign of her interest in the role of law in shaping the lived experience of childhood. After graduating in 1882, with honors, she applied to the University of Pennsylvania for graduate school, intending to study law. The university, however, felt differently and denied her application because, as it told her in the rejection letter, it found the prospect of men and women taking classes together “abhorrent.”<sup>39</sup>

Rejected by the University of Pennsylvania, Kelley began her turn to activism, joining the Philadelphia New Century Club, a women’s organization founded in 1877 by a family friend. The club, formed by women who had been active in the antebellum antislavery movement, attracted many middle-class women to its social activist program. Kelley established a very successful evening school for working girls and women under the club’s auspices and taught there for two years. In addition, she established the





“Night Scene[,] Cumberland Glass Works.” Bridgeton, New Jersey, November 1909

New Century Working Women’s Guild, which proved to be “one of the most progressive societies for women in the United States in the 1880s.” But her budding activism was cut short when her older brother, Will, became ill in 1884, and the family called on Florence to accompany him to Europe to try to nurse him back to health. The strategy worked, and he began to stabilize and recover. Within a year, Florence had enrolled in the University of Zurich to begin graduate study in government. There, her politics took a somewhat more radical turn. Most of the female students at the university were in the medical school, and many of them were Russian. She cultivated friendships among this group of women, who introduced her to German socialism. She met and married Lazare Wischnewetsky, a Russian medical student who also attended the university and, with Lazare, joined the Socialist Party of Zurich. They had their first child and Florence began an

English translation of Frederick Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844. Her translation, completed in 1887, remained the only English version of the work until 1958. While she worked on the translation, she began what would become nearly a lifelong correspondence with Engels.<sup>40</sup>

In 1886, Florence, Lazare, and their son moved to New York City, where they had two more children as Lazare tried to establish a medical practice, without success. In financial trouble and with three small children, Florence continually sought help, financial and otherwise, from her own family. But mounting money troubles led to conflicts, and the marriage began to fall apart. As Sklar notes, by "early January 1891, the couple's quarrels had erupted into physical violence."<sup>41</sup> Florence took the three children with her to Chicago, in a state that had more liberal divorce laws than New York, and succeeded in formally ending the marriage. In Chicago she and her children took up residence in Jane Addams's Hull House, where she would later recall being "welcomed as if [she] had been invited." She remained a resident at Hull House for "seven, happy, active years."<sup>42</sup>

While living in Chicago, Kelley was able to focus her commitment to social justice, especially for women and children, into an effective, practical political ideology. Working with the newly elected reform governor of Illinois, John Altgeld, she helped develop the most progressive child labor law in the state's history and one of the most progressive in the country. She was buoyed by the fact that it passed into law with "suspiciously little opposition in the press or the legislature."<sup>43</sup> The law included as one of its principal features the creation of the position of factory inspector. With the law's enactment in 1893, Kelley accepted Governor Altgeld's offer to be the state's first chief factory inspector, a position she would hold for nearly four years. In the midst of this activity, Kelley earned her law degree from Northwestern University in 1894, crediting her accomplishment to "my reading law with Father in Washington in 1882, my study in Zurich, [in addition to the] one year in the senior class in Chicago." Rather conscientiously, she also noted that because the law lectures were given in the evening, they did not interfere with her administrative work as chief factory inspector.<sup>44</sup>

During her tenure as the Illinois factory inspector, Kelley "unrelentingly prosecuted employers of child labor, obtaining convictions against tailors, bakers, meatpackers, and makers of cigars, candy, shoes, pails, pickles, rat-

tan items, electrical machinery, paper boxes, cutlery, baking powder, chemicals, sewing machines, and chairs." In 1895, Kelley launched an attack on the child labor practices of the Illinois Glass Company in Alton, Illinois, then the "state's single largest employer of children." In her 1895 assessment of the glass industry, she remarked, "The sustained speed required of the children and the heated atmosphere rendered continuous trotting most exhausting . . . but these little lads trotted hour after hour, day after day, month after month in the heat and dust." Sklar notes that "chronic illness, frequent night work, serious burns, and illiteracy prevented the glass house boys from being self-supporting in later life, ruining them (as Kelley reported) 'in body and mind before they entered upon the long adolescence known to happier children.'"<sup>45</sup> Because of this campaign, a local Alton newspaper castigated her in language that highlighted the way industrial interests and their apologists condescended to female reformers. The newspaper complained that "Mrs. Florence Kelley . . . seems to be as arbitrary and unreasoning as any other woman with an alleged mission." During her tenure as chief factory inspector, she sued many employers in court, prosecuting 542 violations of the child labor law in 1895 and another 520 in 1896. In November 1896, however, the Republicans swept the state elections. Governor Altgeld lost to an opponent of reform, and Kelley was quickly replaced as the state's factory inspector. The new inspector was a man who had been on the payroll of the Illinois Glass Company for twenty-seven years.<sup>46</sup>

In 1899, Florence Kelley and her children moved to New York, where she became the general secretary for the newly created National Consumers' League. Under her leadership, the NCL would become one of the premiere progressive organizations in the nation, active in the fight to improve the political and economic rights of women and children. While in New York, she took up residence in Lillian D. Wald's Henry Street settlement house, and she and Wald became lifelong friends and allies in progressive causes. Kelley's NCL office was in the Charities Building at Twenty-second Street and Fourth Avenue, the same building that would house a number of other progressive agencies over the next several years, including the Charity Organization Society (which spearheaded *The Pittsburgh Survey*), headed by Edward T. Devine; the National Child Labor Committee, which Kelley helped found and which would be headed by Samuel McCune Lindsay and Owen Lovejoy; the New York Child Labor Committee led by George

Hall; the publication *Charities*, edited by Arthur Kellogg and Paul Kellogg; and the American Association for Labor Legislation, with John R. Commons at the helm.

This was an intensely synergistic environment, and Kelley both influenced and was influenced by each of these other progressive organizations. The progressives with whom Kelley came into contact had many interests, but chief among them were the problems associated with industrial child labor. Kelley's motivations as a reformer were multilayered, and she was particularly effective in gathering others together in coalitions to work on a wide range of progressive concerns. This talent was perhaps most evident in her work with the National Child Labor Committee.

### The National Child Labor Committee

The National Child Labor Committee did not spring to life ab initio in 1904. Rather, much like the National Consumers' League, with which it was closely associated, the NCLC could trace its origins to the efforts of numerous other reform organizations and countless child labor advocates who had been hard at work around the country over the previous several decades. Although the NCLC did not start the work of child labor reform, the organization came into being in order to provide that effort with a national focus and national leadership. Perhaps the earliest groups to speak out against the practice of industrial child labor, although not initially in conversation with each other, were the voluntary women's associations and the male-dominated industrial trade and craft unions in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the second half of the century, as national unions began to emerge, virtually all of them included "provisions calling for the abolition of child labor" as part of their agendas.<sup>47</sup> These unions were invaluable in working with other progressive groups to realize many child labor reforms, but because they could be seen as having a direct economic interest in the issue, they typically remained in the background, working behind the scenes when legislative or other policy changes were sought. Social welfare and other reform organizations thus took the lead in public for the battle to abolish child labor.

Under Florence Kelley, the National Consumers' League became a leading force in child labor reform. In the spring of 1902, Kelley, as the general

secretary for the NCL, worked with her friend, Lillian Wald, as well as with several other progressive activists, including Mary K. Simkovitch, Pauline Goldmark, and Robert Hunter, to form the New York Child Labor Committee to lead the efforts on behalf of child labor reform in the New York area. In addition to these reformers, the charter members of the New York group included such well-established male civic leaders as Felix Adler of Columbia University; James G. Phelps Stokes of the Hartly House Settlement; William H. Baldwin, president of the Long Island Railroad; V. Everit Macy, director of the Title Guarantee & Trust Company; and Paul M. Warburg and Jacob A. Schiff of Kuhn, Loeb, an investment banking company. The New York Child Labor Committee was the second such organization in the country created specifically to advance child labor reform, the first having been organized the prior year in Alabama under the direction of Edgar Gardner Murphy, an Episcopal rector from Montgomery.<sup>48</sup>

Soon after starting the New York Child Labor Committee, Adler, Baldwin, Kelley, and Murphy began work to form a national committee to provide further organization to the growing number of state-level child labor initiatives. On April 15, 1904, they convened the first general meeting of the National Child Labor Committee at Carnegie Hall in New York. Adler presided, explaining to the gathering that the purpose of the NCLC would be to act as “a great moral force for the protection of children.” He asserted that the organization’s goal was to “combat the danger in which childhood is placed by greed and rapacity.” Specifically, Adler contended that because “[c]heap labor means child labor[,] consequently there results a holocaust of the children—a condition which is intolerable.” The organizers wished to develop “enlightened public opinion” on the issue of child labor and to work for the passage of state child labor laws.<sup>49</sup> The initial executive committee consisted of several members from the already established New York committee, including Adler, Baldwin, Kelley, Macy, and Warburg, together with Murphy, attorney Robert W. de Forest, Edward T. Devine of the Charity Organization Society, John S. Huyler of the Huyler Candy Company, investment banker Isaac N. Seligman, and John W. Wood. Dr. Samuel McCune Lindsay, a native of Pittsburgh and a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, was chosen as the permanent general secretary, and two ministers, Owen R. Lovejoy and Alexander J. McKelway, were selected as assistant secretaries.

Thus, although a set of strong, able women with reform experience, including Lillian Wald, Florence Kelley, Pauline Goldmark, and Jane Addams, were key to the formation of the NCLC, the visible leadership was almost entirely male. Further, the men selected to head up the NCLC came disproportionately from the academic, business, and professional ranks rather than from the activist ranks such as settlement house workers. This was undoubtedly a conscious decision on the part of Kelley and the other founders because they knew from the start that the NCLC was going to be heavily involved in both public persuasion and political lobbying. They were clearly trying to create an official profile that would maximize the organization's credibility and effectiveness. Florence Kelley was, as we have seen, a seasoned veteran of numerous battles to push for progressive labor reform, and she undoubtedly knew the value of having a cadre of prominent men in the high-profile front ranks of any reform organization advocating for change. Whatever the motives, the body of work the NCLC generated during the Progressive Era was formidable. As part of its educative mission, the committee published hundreds of handbills, pamphlets, bulletins, investigative reports, books, and articles as well as numerous speeches and presentations from its annual meetings. Virtually all of these texts addressed problems associated with industrial child labor, and many dealt specifically with the problem of children in the nation's glass houses, especially the bottle factories in western Pennsylvania.

By the spring of 1905, the NCLC was fully operational, with offices in lower Manhattan. Its goals and direction were reaffirmed at its second annual meeting, held in Washington, DC, December 8–9, 1905. The Honorable B. F. Macfarland, a commissioner of the District of Columbia, greeted the gathering and told them that their work was particularly valuable and would benefit not only the country's children but also the nation as a whole. Speaking on behalf of the entire membership and indicating that the emerging notions of sheltered childhood were being fully embraced by the NCLC, he said, "We want the child to have a full childhood." Referring to a theme familiar to most reformers, he asserted that premature entry into factory work had serious negative developmental consequences for the child: "Stunted children make stunted citizens . . . [a]nd stunted citizens make a stunted state." Thus, he continued, "[a]ll our material wealth would be dearly purchased at the price of the labor of the children."<sup>50</sup>

Felix Adler addressed the gathering next. He was in many ways characteristic of the articulate, thoughtful, and rhetorically passionate advocates who worked for the early NCLC. In words chosen more to speak to the faithful than to convert the skeptics, he noted that child labor was still on the rise: "It is no luke warm, tepid interest, that brings us here, it is a feeling that we have to strangle a snake that is coiling around the neck of the young child, that we have to abolish a new kind of slavery, that we have got to take action, not only to check a retreating evil, a retreating and diminishing force, but we have got to use every power at our command to prevent the steady increase, the steady and ominous increase of this disastrous and dangerous thing." He concluded that if they were going to succeed, the NCLC needed to make plain to the nation "the necessity of the abolition, the total abolition, of child labor."<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Lindsay, the agency's general secretary, then addressed the group and alluded to the gendered nature of the reform movement for child labor. While he may have recognized the irony of being the male figurehead of a newly formed organization whose board was dominated by other males but that owed much of its existence to the tireless work of numerous women activists, he did not mention it. Nor did he directly state that both he and the other men stood on the shoulders of these female social reformers. He did acknowledge those women by noting that "[b]efore there was a National Child Labor Committee, or any state child labor committees, before there were any committees . . . the women of the country took [up] the matter and throughout most of our states in their numerous organizations we found looming up gradually child labor committees."<sup>52</sup> Implicit in his speech was the assumption that he felt there was something very "natural" about the country's women rising up to defend children and something equally "natural" about the country's men leading that fight when it assumed a national character. Lindsay observed, but did not dwell on, the foundational work of women activists because it was simply an assumed social and political reality, one that could remain hidden in plain view: while women had a certain moral authority to work on behalf of children, men were expected to lead the child-centered progressive organizations.

A different problem, however, confronted the NCLC from the start. All of the principals agreed that one of the committee's main goals would be to fight for child labor legislation, but they did not at all agree on the

proper forum, state or federal, where those battles should take place. In 1906, the issue came to a head when a U.S. senator from Indiana, Albert Beveridge, was preparing to introduce federal legislation to ban the interstate shipment of goods produced by child labor. Beveridge naturally asked for the endorsement of the NCLC, but the executive board was deeply split. While many members, including Kelley, Baldwin, Lovejoy, and Adler, were willing to embrace a larger, national approach to eradicating industrial child labor, others, most notably Edgar Murphy, saw a federally imposed cure as potentially worse than the disease. When, after a bitter series of debates, the board voted to support Beveridge's legislation, Murphy, a founding member, quit the NCLC along with several of his southern colleagues. This split reflected deep-seated differences in regionally acceptable approaches to government-sponsored reform.

Initially, this split was more symbolic than actual because for the next several years the NCLC worked almost exclusively on state-level child labor solutions. But as the difficulty in obtaining uniformity among the several states on the issue of child labor reform became more evident, and as Beveridge's efforts began to take legislative shape in the U.S. Congress in the form of the Keatings-Owens Child Labor Bill, the NCLC placed more and more effort into lobbying for a federal solution. As early as 1907, for instance, Jane Addams said that she found it "difficult . . . to understand that the federal government should be willing to spend time and money to establish and maintain departments related to the breeding . . . of cattle, sheep and hogs, and that as yet the federal government has done nothing to see to it that the children are properly protected."<sup>53</sup> The effort to find a national solution to ending child labor, however, was frustrated for some thirty years by the Supreme Court of the United States, until *United States v. Darby Lumber Co.*, when, after the Court had reversed its longstanding narrow interpretation of the U.S. Constitution's "commerce clause," it allowed for federal child labor regulations.<sup>54</sup> In that case, the Court unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which included a federal child labor provision. However, because federal action on the child labor issue was effectively unavailable throughout the Progressive Era, the energy expended by the NCLC and other reform organizations seeking national legislative solutions to the problem of child labor was energy diverted from, and therefore a weakening of, state reform efforts.<sup>55</sup>



Internal conflicts notwithstanding, the NCLC recognized that it would have a difficult time eradicating industrial child labor. From a legislative point of view, the state laws were complex and locally specific. There were questions about what minimum age to establish, how it could be certified, which occupations to cover, how to coordinate with the compulsory education laws (and if there were none, how to enact them), how to limit night work, and whether girls and boys should be treated the same. Then, even if a good, progressive law was successfully enacted, it could easily become a dead letter if there were no means established for its effective enforcement. Aside from technical, statutory details, the NCLC realized that any effective ban on child labor also had to be supported by the general public. To address this latter challenge, the NCLC saw a tremendous need to educate the American people about the evils of child labor in order to enlist the political power of their support in the cause. In fact, at least as much of the energy of the NCLC in its first several decades was devoted to educating the public as it was toward direct legislative lobbying. To this end, the NCLC prepared pamphlets, reports, and other documents that focused on the glass industry in general and the western Pennsylvania factories in particular. These publications, discussed in chapter 2, were designed to describe the nature of child labor in the state's factories and to expose the extent to which the state's factory inspectors failed to uncover and prosecute child labor violations.

The NCLC, as the premiere organization fighting for child labor reform during the Progressive Era, brought together a diverse and largely effective coalition of male and female reformers who played important roles in many progressive, state-level, child labor legislative reforms. As we shall see, however, effecting these reforms for the glass house boys of Pittsburgh proved uniquely difficult.