



SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 1911 — FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2011
TRIANGLE FIRE CENTENNIAL SHABBAT

Timeline & History: Rising from the Ashes



1881-1918

2 million Eastern European Jews immigrate to the United States.

Many of them work in sweatshop factories in New York City. Many of these factories are crammed into the attics and basements of tenement buildings, the same kind of buildings in which these workers lived. Tenements were cramped, poorly ventilated and sooty; cold in the winter, sweltering in the summer. Workdays lasted for up to 15 hours. Workers were paid by the piece, so time off for rest was a luxury. Wage workers made as little as 3 dollars a week.

1900

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) is founded in New York City.

1902

The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott: In May of 1902, Kosher meat, controlled by the Meat Trust monopoly soared in price from 12 cents to 18 cents a pound. Retail Kosher butchers attempted to strike against the monopoly by refusing to sell meat for a week. The butchers' strike ended with no reduction in meat prices. Jewish housewives came out in force with a boycott. They picketed butchers and held mass demonstrations of over 20,000 people who wound up in pitched battles with police. The women went to the synagogues, invoking the custom of bringing grievances before the community during the Torah service. Many Orthodox leaders joined the boycott. When it was settled, the price of meat was rolled back to 14 cents. Union leaders learn from the boycott.

1909

Uprising of the 20,000:

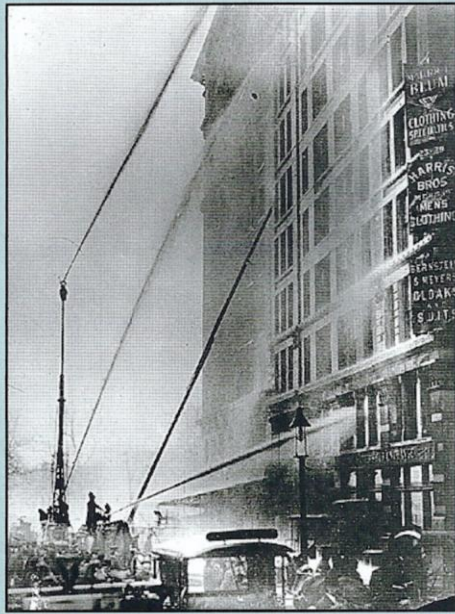
Garment workers all over New York City go on strike for higher wages, safer workplaces, reduced hours and—most important—the right to organize into unions without reprisal and bargain collectively with management for better working conditions. Union women were beaten by hired thugs and the police, but they held firm. Middle class and wealthy women came out to support the union women with funds and public endorsements.



Within a year, many shops settled with the union, agreeing to higher wages and improved conditions. While most employers agreed to refrain from firing union workers, most did not agree to union-only shops and remained hostile to union organizers. The Triangle Waist Company was one such factory.

March 25, 1911

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire: The Triangle Waist Company, located on the 8th and 9th floors of its building has a policy of locking all but one of its doors to keep its workers in and union organizers out. Piles of cotton dresses, more flammable than paper, are piled about. Rules against smoking are not enforced. There is no sprinkler system. A fire breaks out. The women working on the locked ninth floor, mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants are trapped. The one fire escape collapses. 146 workers are killed and over 500 are injured by burns, smoke inhalation and injuries suffered after jumping from the building to escape the flames.



Firefighters at the Shirtwaist Factory



Checking burned bodies



On the corner of Washington Place and Green Street stands the Asch building, now property of New York University. It is a haunting reminder of the injustice suffered by sweatshop laborers.

1911-1914

The Factory Investigating Commission of New York State is formed following a meeting in which Rabbi Stephen S. Wise joins the call for its inception. The Commission, which includes Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor and Mary Dreier of the Women's Trade Union League, is responsible for over 25 laws governing workplace safety, abolishing child labor, limiting working hours and creating other reforms. While great progress is made, there is always resistance and corner-cutting. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union stays in the fight.



Editorial cartoon about the trial of the Triangle Factory owners.

1958

A fire at the Monarch Garment Shop in New York kills 25 workers. The ILGWU co-sponsors a fire warden program in the shops that includes union workers. Fire prevention is written into union contracts.

February 25, 2010

21 workers die in the Garib and Garib sweater factory in Bangladesh. Workers were trapped by blocked exits in a factory piled high with flammable materials.

December 14, 2010

28 garment workers at the That's It! Sportswear factory in Bangladesh are burned alive, trampled to death or die after jumping from a fire at the multi-story facility in which most exits were locked. Many more are seriously injured. That's It!'s customers include H&M, The Gap, Target, Kohl's, Sears, Abercrombie and Fitch and other American companies. **Because of international pressure, including that from American consumers, all the companies involved agreed to compensate the workers' families, institute a fire safety program and meet directly with workers' organizations in Bangladesh.**



100 years later, the fire still burns.



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Ethics in the Workplace: Jewish Texts and Traditions



HUMAN DIGNITY

And God created the human in God's own image. (Genesis 1:27)

The dignity of human beings is a great thing, for it supersedes [even] a "shalt not" from the Torah. (Brachot, 19b, Shabbat 94b)

The lesson of the hour is that while property is good, life is better, that while possessions are valuable, life is priceless. The meaning of the hour is that the life of the lowliest worker in the nation is sacred and inviolable, and, if that sacred human right be violated, we shall stand adjudged and condemned before the tribunal of God and of history.

—Rabbi Stephen S. Wise on the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.

THE RIGHT TO REST

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to Adonai your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female servant, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female servant may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:14-15)

THE RIGHT TO PROMPT PAYMENT

You may not oppress your neighbor or rob them; the wages of a hired worker may not stay with you all night. (Leviticus 19:13)

You may not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy whether he is of your people or of the strangers who are in the land within your gate. (Deuteronomy 24:14)

Whoever withholds the wages of a hired laborer transgresses these five prohibitions of five denominations and one affirmative precept as follows: Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor; neither rob him; Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor; The wages of him that is hired shall not abide all night with thee; At his day shalt thou give him his hire; and, neither shall the sun go down upon it. (Baba Metzia 111a)

THE RIGHT TO FORM UNIONS

"The wool-weavers and dyers have the power to say, "Any order which comes to town—all of us will share in it." The bakers have the right to make agreements on weights and measures among themselves." (Tosefta Baba Metzia 11:24)

It is obvious that the Sages, of blessed memory, recognized the regulations of a craftsman's guild or union of laborers or clerks in the general labor federation, or other federations of professionals. Reason also dictates that we should not leave the worker alone, isolated as an individual, so that he would have to hire himself out for minimal wages in order to satisfy his and his family's hunger with bread and water in meager quantities and with a dark and dank apartment. In order to protect himself the law gave him the legal right to organize, and to create regulations for his fellows for the fair and equitable division of labor amongst them and the attaining of dignified treatment and appropriate payment for his work—so that he might support his family at the same standard of living as other residents of his city."

—Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai Uzziel, the Rishon le-Tziyon (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel), 1938

THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

According to the halachah, strike-breaking and scabbing are prohibited...Rabbi Yitzchak, one of the Tosephists, derives from this principle that a worker may not offer his services whenever there is another worker on the job, for he is damaging his neighbor's means of livelihood. From this it is quite clear that where there are workers who make their livings from a certain kind of labor and are striking for better conditions, others should not offer to replace them...this is included in the words of the Talmud that workers may come to a decision by majority force and may then force the minority to accept the decision.

—Simon Federbush, *The Jewish Concept of Labor* (1956)

(Re: a teachers' strike) If matters are such that the teachers are not getting salary to get along, and is therefore difficult for them to teach well, and it is a strong and clear presumption that if they don't teach a day or two the school board members pay on time and raise their salary to a living wage, perhaps it is permissible on the ground that, "now is the time to act for God, they overturned the law"...one should give them their wages. For they did not cease teaching frivolously, but rather from an excess of pain and poverty.

—Rabbi Moshe Feinstein 1954

EMPLOYEE OBLIGATIONS

"Love work" How? This teaches that a person should love work, and not hate work. Just as the Torah was given through the covenant, so too, work was given through the covenant, as it says "For six days you shall labor and do all of your work, and the seventh day is a Sabbath to your God." (Avot de Rabbi Natan, Nusach 1, Ch.11)

Just as the employer (literally: householder) is cautioned not to steal or delay the salary of the poor [worker], so too must the poor person be careful not to steal the work of the owner by wasting a little time here and there until the entire day is filled with fraud. Rather, he should be careful about time. For this reason, the rabbis specified that workers do not need to recite the fourth blessing of Birkat HaMazon. Similarly, the worker is obligated to work with all of his strength, for behold, Jacob the righteous said [to Rachel and Leah] "I have served your father with all my might." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Skhirut 13:7)



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In Their Own Voices: Yiddish Poets & Survivor's Testimony



THE FIERY PANIC BY MORRIS ROSENFELD

Excerpt. Translated by Aaron Kramer.

Originally printed in Yiddish on the cover of the Daily Forward just four days after the fire, this poem reflects the anger and emotion of the time.

*Not a War, nor demoniacal pogrom,
choked this greatest city with laments.
No cannons raked the air,
no tremors shook the earth,
no thunder rocked,
no bolt of lightning struck,
no clouds grew black.
No! A frightful redness glowed;
a slave-nest violently blazed;
the god of Gold, with mocking flames,
devoured our sons and daughters...
turned them into ash.*

*On a Sabbath-eve the redness came,
a Sabbath for the working-man;
this his Kiddush and havdalah.
Suddenly the fiery panic came,
sent by the Money-king and Dollar-prince...
Flow, my tears! Weep, my soul!
O! Cursed be the system!
Cursed be the planlessness
Cursed be the world!*

*For whom shall we grieve?
For whom shall we grieve first?*

*For those burned to death,
or those "beyond recognition?"
For those who now say kaddish,
or the "rescued" cripples?
Mourn for all of them, me sea of tears...
Drape yourself in black, o Golden Land!
Too stark your crime, too terrible your shame,
too deaf your conscience and too blind your law.
Too fiendish your Business, too bloody the net
which traps your poor, your unsuspecting poor...
Your time will come! Your time will come!*

*Light the Yartsheit candles in the Jewish streets!
This tragedy is ours
this tragedy of the Jewish masses
of our people poor and wretched.
This funeral is ours, and the corpses.
The children
snatched by fire from our arms
were ours, our blossoms... woe to us...
Mourn our precious cinders!
Mourn our gladness turned to horror!
Mourn our joys in rows of coffins!
Mourn our loved ones turned to memories of Hell...*

ROSE SCHNEIDERMAN, UNION LEADER

"The old inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth. We know what these things are today: the iron teeth are our necessities, the thumbscrews are the high-powered and swift machinery close to which we must work, and the rack is here in the firetrap structures that will destroy us the minute they catch fire. This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in this city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job, it matters little if 140-odd are burned to death. We have tried you, citizens! We are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers and brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable, the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us."

ROSE SAFRAN, TRIANGLE WORKER AND UNION ORGANIZER

"I was one of the pickets and was arrested and fined several time. The union paid my fines. Our bosses won, and we went back as a union shop having nothing to do with the union. But we strikers who were taken back stayed with the union, for it is our friend. If the union had won, we would have been safe. Two of our demands were for adequate fire escapes and for open doors from the factories to the street. But the bosses defeated us, and we didn't get the open doors or the better fire escapes. So our friends are dead."

(The above quotes are from *The Triangle Fire* by Leon Stein, Carroll and Graf, New York, 1962. They are culled from newspaper accounts, but unfortunately, Stein doesn't specify what edition or date.)



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The Outrage Continues: A Sweatshop Fire in Bangladesh



AT LEAST 28 MORE GARMENT WORKERS DIE IN BANGLADESHI FACTORY FIRE

TUESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2010 | BY THE CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN

Labour rights groups:

"Failure of brands, government and manufacturers to take preventive action condemns more workers to die".



At least 28 more Bangladeshi garment workers have died and dozens more have been injured after a fire broke out today on the 9th and 10th floors of the "That's It Sportswear Ltd" factory located 16 miles from the capital Dhaka. Several workers appeared to have suffocated, while others jumped to their deaths trying to escape the burning building or were trampled by their colleagues as they rushed towards the exits.

The factory was reportedly producing for major international buyers including Gap (confirmed) and Wrangler (VF Corporation), as well as for Hong Kong buying house BF Fashion. It belongs to the well-known Ha-meem (sometimes spelled Hamim)

group, one of the biggest manufacturers in the country, which has a dubious labour rights track record. The company is known for unauthorized subcontracting, meaning the factory may have also been producing for brands which are unaware of their production there.

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and other labour rights organisations have regularly contacted buyers sourcing from Ha-meem about violations of freedom of association and other labour standards at the company's factories. According to the Ha-meem Group website their buyers are presently Walmart, H&M, Next, JC Penney, Kohl's, Squeeze, Sears, Target Store, Charming Shoppes, Carrefour, Inditex, ETAM, Migros and Celio.

First eyewitness reports indicate that at least 2 of the 6 exits were locked, and that this was a common occurrence in the building. The Bangladeshi garment industry is notorious for its chronic safety problems, including locked or inaccessible fire escapes and malfunctioning fire equipment, which often lead to fatal accidents.

Said Scott Nova of the Worker Rights Consortium, "Labor rights organizations have pleaded for years with US and European clothing brands to take aggressive steps to address the grossly substandard fire and building safety practices of their business partners in Bangladesh. The brands have failed to act and, once again, we see the gruesome consequences of this inaction."

Following the deaths of 21 workers in the "Garib and Garib" factory in February of this year, virtually all of the buyers of Hameem group were contacted by the CCC, the International Labour Rights Forum (ILRF), the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), and the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) with a set of recommendations outlining specific measures that should be taken to eliminate the systemic problems underlying these deadly tragedies. "More needs to be done by all concerned to ensure further disasters are prevented" the buyers were told, but brands, employers and the government failed to take the necessary action to avoid these preventable tragedies.

Measures proposed by the labour groups included a thorough review of all multi-story garment production facilities, expert fire safety inspections and ensuring that workers are allowed to report and challenge health and safety violations by supporting their right to organize.

"Workers keep dying while the brands, the government and the employers drag their feet and try to shift the responsibility upon each other" says Ineke Zeldenrust from the CCC. "We've warned the brands repeatedly that this would keep happening again and again, but they've chosen to respond only in a minimal fashion," she added.

The CCC, ILRF, WRC and MSN also call upon the brands sourcing from the Hameem group to make sure that the injured receive all the medical care needed and that they and the relatives of the victims are compensated for current and future loss of income.

To read the full set of recommendations made by the CCC, ILRF, WRC and MSN to eliminate systemic safety problems in the Bangladeshi garment sector please visit: [**www.cleanclothes.org/news/action-for-safe-factories-in-bangladesh-on-5th-anniversary-of-spectrum-disaster**](http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/action-for-safe-factories-in-bangladesh-on-5th-anniversary-of-spectrum-disaster)



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Take Action Today!
Put Your Values in Action



ORDER APPAREL FROM A COMPANY THAT IS BUILDING A FAIR ECONOMIC MODEL FOR THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

If your synagogue, school, or sports teams orders apparel, Alta Gracia will produce your logo gear to order, giving more workers a pathway out of poverty.

Learn more at <http://altagraciaapparel.com/get-involved>

ABOUT ALTA GRACIA

Alta Gracia is a new unique brand from Knights Apparel that provides the workers who make the clothing with a pathway out of poverty and hope for the future.

Alta Gracia is a new brand of t-shirts, sweatshirts and hoodies on college campuses all over the country that offers students, their families and alumni the opportunity to give the workers who sew this clothing a pathway out of poverty. Our idea is simple: We pay our workers a wage that enables them to provide adequate food, clean water, clothing, shelter, health care, child care, and education for themselves and their families--a "living wage"—and hope for a better future. We don't charge more for the clothing than other major brands and your purchase makes an enormous difference in the lives of the people who make the Alta Gracia clothing you wear. Our brand gets its name from Villa Altagracia, the town in the Dominican Republic where our factory is located. The name means "High Grace" — we hope we're getting there.

MEET ALTA GRACIA WORKER, MARIZA VARGAS



These clothes have changed my family's life. I hope you enjoy wearing them.

I live in Villa Altagracia. Me and my coworkers are working in a factory where we make Alta Gracia products. Alta Gracia is great for me and my family because it gives us the chance for a better education — even for me to go back to school! We've organized a union, have a living wage and fair conditions — so we have a better life. It's a huge contribution to our community which has suffered so much from unemployment and poverty.

Thank you for buying from Alta Gracia because each garment is a contribution to dignity for our community.

THE "LA LABOR 411" GUIDE MAKES IT EASY TO BUY UNION

LA Labor 411 is committed to empowering American consumers to buy quality products that are safe, made here in U.S., and at a price point that means value. Union-made products enhance our community and build the cornerstone of our society — the middle class. Each one of us can make a difference every time we shop by choosing American-made, union-made products. With more than 2,600+ union products and services *and growing!*, **LA Labor 411** is the most comprehensive listing of union-made products anywhere.

Learn more at www.lalabor411.com

MAKE YOUR NEXT SIMCHA GREEN AND JUST.

In addition to the need for safe workplaces, the legacy of the Triangle Factory Fire reminds us of the importance of treating workers with fairness, respect and dignity. Today, we can be ethical consumers and support companies with good labor practices. The **Green & Just Guide** can help you plan a lifecycle event that honors our best values.

PUT JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY BACK ON THE GUEST LIST!

Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) is proud to present the **Green & Just Guide** for California's Jewish families. Adapted from an original guide with the permission of our partners Jews United for Justice in Washington, DC, the guide provides resources for local families to incorporate values of social justice and sustainability while planning weddings, *b'nai mitzvah*, or any other *simcha*. It is chock-full of ideas and suggestions from people like you in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and beyond.

Jewish lifecycle events represent key moments when we can reinvigorate ancient rituals with a modern sense of community and values or we can get lost in cultural expectations that emphasize the material over the spiritual. We invite you and your family to embrace the guide and help change the world—family by family, celebration by celebration.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

HERE ARE FIVE CHOICES THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT:

1. Choose Greener Paper

Recycled paper saves trees, water, and energy. Look for recycled papers with the highest possible postconsumer content or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for non-recycled content.

2. Take the "Just Journeys" Pledge

Honor hotel workers by patronizing hotels where workers have a voice on the job. Avoid hotels involved in a labor dispute, and encourage your out-of-town guests to strip their beds and leave a tip.

3. Serve Food that Doesn't Gobble Resources

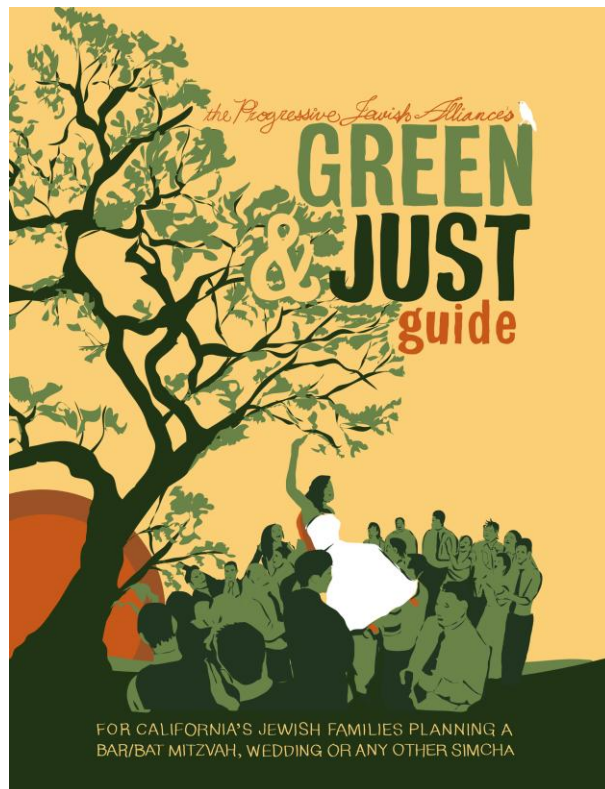
Often, the energy used and waste generated by serving meat in large quantity just isn't worth it. Consider leaving meat off the menu with a delicious *pareve* or dairy meal. Local or organic ingredients also help to limit your food's environmental footprint.

4. Offset the Climate Impact of Air Travel

One of the most significant environmental impacts of any celebration is the heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions associated with guests flying to join you. Take stock of that impact using an online carbon calculator, and balance it with a donation to renewable energy projects that reduce emissions.

5. Help Build the World You Want to Live In

Use the occasion of your celebration to direct much needed resources to building a world that more fully reflects your values. The ceremony, speeches, invitations, registries, and centerpieces all present opportunities to include guests in the sacred work of repairing the world.



ACCESS THE GUIDE AT WWW.GREENANDJUST.ORG

Call PJA at (323) 761-8350 to order printed copies for yourself, your synagogue, or your *b'nai mitzvah* class.