

# ELIZABETH MORGAN, CRUSADER FOR LABOR REFORM

By RALPH SCHARNAU

Of the late nineteenth-century female reformers concerned with the plight of women and children workers, Jane Addams and Florence Kelley are doubtless the most prominent. Less well known are the pioneering efforts of Elizabeth Morgan, the wife of one of Chicago's leading socialists, Thomas J. Morgan. Born in Birmingham, England, in 1850, she came from a family of ten children. Her parents, like her husband's, were poor factory operatives. She had little formal education and began working in a mill at age eleven, toiling ten to sixteen hours a day. After their marriage on January 26, 1868, Elizabeth and Thomas Morgan's combined earnings kept them on a sustenance level and no more. They began to perceive the reality of their condition, as well as that of their fellow laborers, at about the time that, attracted by the economic promise of the United States, they emigrated to this country in 1869.

Settling in Chicago, Elizabeth Morgan would stay home, do housework, and care for their two small children, while her husband found employment as a brass finisher and machinist. In 1871 he joined the National Union of Machinists and Blacksmiths. The 1873 Panic left Thomas Morgan unemployed for fifteen weeks, during which time the family had no credit, a dwindling supply of flour, and several cold days and nights without any heating. As a result of these bitter experiences during the winter of 1873-1874, the Morgans became convinced socialists. He joined the Illinois Workingman's Party in January 1874 and later became the leading figure in the Socialist Labor Party in Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article is a slightly revised version of chapter seven in the author's doctoral dissertation. See Ralph W. Scharna, "Thomas J. Morgan and the Chicago Socialist Movement, 1876-1901" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Northern Illinois University, 1970).

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Elizabeth Morgan devoted her energies to protecting and furthering the interests of labor, although no longer a wage earner herself. In 1874 she became a charter member of the Sovereigns of Industry, a cooperative society that disappeared before the end of the decade. In September 1881 she was one of the first women in Chicago to obtain membership in the Knights of Labor, joining Local Assembly 1789, the second local established in the United States. This assembly later elevated her to the post of master workman.<sup>2</sup>

It was during the years from 1888 to 1895, however, that Elizabeth Morgan established her real reputation as a labor organizer and radical reformer. More and more Chicago women had begun to enter the ranks of wage earners in this period. They suffered greater oppression than men, lacked political power, worked for low wages, and faced public opposition to their membership in unions.<sup>3</sup> It was Elizabeth Morgan who welded the rising discontent among women workers into a movement which combined trade unionism and political action.

Elizabeth Morgan led a small group of Chicago women who organized the Ladies' Federal Labor Union No. 2703 in June 1888. This mixed trades union contained clerks, book binders, candy makers, typists, dress makers, music teachers, gum makers, and other female workers.<sup>4</sup> It secured a charter from the American Federation of Labor and state recognition as a legal corporation.<sup>5</sup> It organized working women and enlisted the support of other labor organizations and women's groups. It agitated for the enforcement of existing, and the adoption of new, state and local laws "to improve the conditions of employment of women and children."<sup>6</sup>

Mrs. Morgan had a pervasive influence on the Ladies' Federal Labor Union. She served as both its secretary and as its delegate to the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly, a city-wide association of trade unions. She also did excellent work as an organizer<sup>7</sup> — organizing women watch-makers in Elgin, Illinois, and women shoe workers employed by the

<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Times*, September 2, 1894; Unidentified newspaper clipping, Thomas J. Morgan Collection (Illinois Historical Survey, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois), Folder 21 and Book 2; Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago*, Vol. III: *The Rise of the Modern City, 1871-1893* (New York, 1957), 264.

<sup>3</sup> Pierce, *Chicago* III, 297.

<sup>4</sup> *Labor Enquirer*, June 16, 1888.

<sup>5</sup> See copy of Illinois state certificate of incorporation, dated December 12, 1888, Morgan Collection, Folder 8.

<sup>6</sup> Hectograph copy of the Constitution of the Ladies' Federal Labor Union No. 2703, Morgan Collection, Folders 16 and 30; *Workmen's Advocate*, October 27, 1888.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, to Mrs. T. J. Morgan September 10, 1891, Sempel Gompers' Letterbooks (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

Chicago firm of Selz, Schwab and Company.<sup>8</sup> By 1892 the Ladies' Federal Labor Union had created twenty-three craft unions which had, in turn, received their own A. F. of L. charters.<sup>9</sup> "The Chicago union," wrote Philip Foner, "was the most important organization of women workers affiliated to the early A. F. of L."<sup>10</sup>

In the late summer of 1888, the *Chicago Times* ran a series of articles entitled, "City Slave Girls," depicting the misery of females employed in factories and workshops.<sup>11</sup> Stirred by the *Times* exposure, Elizabeth Morgan induced the Ladies' Federal Labor Union to establish a committee to determine the authenticity of the articles. If the articles were found to be true, then the committee, which she headed, would seek the cooperation of the Trade and Labor Assembly and various women's groups in fighting these evils.<sup>12</sup> After finding that the *Times* articles were quite accurate, on November 2, 1888, the committee formed an organization to protect working women and children, the Illinois Women's Alliance.<sup>13</sup> The Alliance was composed of the Ladies' Federal Labor Union and a number of women's groups having suffrage, medical, floral, literary, religious, and temperance interests. This coalition aimed "to prevent the moral, mental, and physical degradation of women and children as wage-workers" by enforcing the existing factory ordinances and compulsory education laws and by seeking the enactment of such new laws as might be necessary.<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Morgan was a member of the Alliance's executive committee and also chairman of the Trade Assembly delegation to the Alliance.

The Illinois Women's Alliance first turned its attention to Chicago's public school children. The 1883 Compulsory Education Act provided that children between the ages of eight and fourteen must be in school for a period of not less than twelve weeks each year. But since the law had no effective enforcement provisions, it was virtually useless, and the Alliance found thousands of school age children roaming the streets and

<sup>8</sup> Gompers to Mrs. Morgan, March 11, 1892, Morgan Collection, Folder 46; Gompers to Mrs. Morgan, November 25, 1892, Gompers' Letterbooks; *Chicago Daily News*, March 9, 1892; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 26, 1892; *Chicago Times*, September 2, 1892.

<sup>9</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 21, March 9, 1892.

<sup>10</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. II: *From the Founding of the American Federation of Labor to the Emergence of American Imperialism* (New York, 1955), 190.

<sup>11</sup> See the *Chicago Times*, July 30-August 17, 1888.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, August 18, 1888.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, August 20, 24, 28, 30, 1888; *Workmen's Advocate*, September 8, 1888.

<sup>14</sup> Printed copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Illinois Women's Alliance, Morgan Collection, Book 2; *Chicago Herald*, November 3, 1888; *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, November 3, 1888; *Chicago Times*, November 3, 1888.

working in factories and stores.<sup>15</sup> A severe shortage of school buildings exacerbated the situation. The Alliance members put pressure on the City Council and the Board of Education to enforce the attendance law by appointing more truant officers; "to provide that where parents or guardians are too poor to spare children from work or provide them with the necessary clothing, assistance be given from a fund provided for that purpose"; and to proceed as rapidly as possible with the construction of new school buildings.<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Morgan and other Alliance members argued, moreover, that the attendance law was defective. They proposed a new law which would lower the age for entering school from eight to six years,<sup>17</sup> and raise the length of time spent in school from twelve to forty weeks.<sup>18</sup>

On July 1, 1889, an aroused Illinois General Assembly passed a new Compulsory Education Act providing that children between seven and fourteen years must attend school for at least sixteen weeks each year. Enforcement would rest with truant officers appointed by the school board. Fines for violations of the act ranged from \$3 to \$20 for each offence.<sup>19</sup> Compared to the act of 1883, the new legislation required children to begin school a year earlier and extended the minimum time spent in school by one-third.

Encouraged by its success and by public sympathy, the Illinois Women's Alliance pressed for more reforms. It convinced the Board of Education to appoint four more truant officers, three of whom were women;<sup>20</sup> it secured passage of a city ordinance empowering the Commissioner of Health to appoint five women factory inspectors;<sup>21</sup> it sponsored a clothing drive for school-age children from poverty stricken families;<sup>22</sup> it coordinated a mass campaign which resulted in the construction of new schools,<sup>23</sup> and, after a long struggle, it obtained the appointment of an Alliance woman to the Board of Education.<sup>24</sup> At the

<sup>15</sup> See *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *Chicago Times*, December 17, 1888; *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, December 17, 1888; *Chicago Herald*, December 17, 1888.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, January 24, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> See printed copy of "An Act Concerning the Education of Children," Morgan Collection, Book 6, 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Times*, January 24, 1889; *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, January 24, 1889; *Chicago Herald*, January 24, 1889.

<sup>21</sup> *Chicago Herald*, July 26, 1889; *Chicago Daily News*, July 26, 1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1889; *Chicago Herald*, October 30, 1889; *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, October 30, 1889.

<sup>23</sup> *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, January 23, 1890; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 30, 1889.

<sup>24</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, Morgan Collection, Book 2.



same time, the Alliance demanded expansion of the compulsory school term to at least twenty-four weeks each year, the inclusion of kindergarten in the public school system, a provision for free text books for all pupils, and the establishment of a special program for educating neglected and homeless children.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Morgan summarized the achievement of the Alliance in her delegate's report to the Trade Assembly. "Through the efforts of the Alliance," she noted, "the educational laws of the state have been improved and the laws more strictly enforced. Truant officers have taken thousands of children from the streets and placed them in the schools."<sup>26</sup>

The Illinois Women's Alliance also diligently worked for a comprehensive child labor law. Elizabeth Morgan was also in the forefront of this campaign as chairman of the Alliance's Committee on Child Labor. An 1881 city ordinance prohibited children under fifteen years of age from working in places where machinery was used, and limited their workday to no more than eight hours between seven o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening. Lax enforcement and nominal fines made this statute relatively ineffective.<sup>27</sup> The Alliance took the position that no child under fourteen years of age should be employed by any person, company, or firm. These principles were embodied in a local ordinance enacted by the City Council on June 26, 1890. Violations of the act were subject to fines of not less than \$5 nor more than \$50.<sup>28</sup>

The Alliance women had scored another victory, but they remained somewhat dissatisfied. They complained about the ordinance's exemption clause, which permitted children over ten years of age to be employed if their families lacked "means of support." Such children could obtain a work permit from the Board of Education.<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Morgan objected that these children were too young to be employed and that, if their families were destitute, the Board of Education should pay the children's educational expenses.<sup>30</sup> About a year after the passage of the Chicago ordinance, the Illinois General Assembly enacted its first general child labor law. This law paralleled the one in Chicago, except that eligibility for the employment certificate required not only that the

<sup>25</sup> See Illinois Women's Alliance circular, Morgan Collection, Book 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Chicago Herald*, February 21, 1891.

<sup>27</sup> Pierce, *Chicago*, III, 294.

<sup>28</sup> Printed copy of "Child's Labor Law," Morgan Collection, Book 6, 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, March 17, 1890.

child's labor be essential to family support but also that the child attend at least eight weeks of school in the current term. Unfortunately, because of the exemption provision and the fact that no department was charged with enforcement, the local and state acts were actually of little value.<sup>81</sup>

In mid-August 1891 Abraham Bisno,<sup>82</sup> a socialist and President of the Chicago Cloak Makers' Union, depicted the shocking conditions in the city's "sweating" dens at a meeting of the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly. The Assembly responded by setting up a committee to investigate the clothing industry sweatshops. Elizabeth Morgan was the outstanding member of this committee which also included two residents of Hull House.<sup>83</sup> An officer of the city Health Department, the city attorney, and members of the local press accompanied the Trade Assembly committee on its fact-finding tour. Mrs. Morgan prepared a twenty-four page report of the investigation, and the Assembly printed and distributed 10,000 copies.

The Morgan report, completed on September 6, clearly disproved clothing manufacturers' denials of the existence of a "sweating system" in Chicago. It estimated that "the greater part" of the clothing industry labor force worked for "sweaters." The materials for garments were cut to shape and size by the large downtown clothing firms. The materials were then farmed out to "sweaters" who contracted to finish the goods at a price far below what it would cost if done in the factory itself. The "sweater" hired men, women, and children to do the work in shop rooms or, more frequently, in their tenements. His profit derived from reducing wages to the lowest point and subdividing the work to diminish skill as much as possible. These workshops were overcrowded dens of filth, vermin, and disease, where the hours of labor ranged from ten to fourteen. Women accounted for nearly half of the labor force, and the employment of children under fourteen years of age was common. About one-third of Elizabeth Morgan's report was devoted to describing the "simply horrible" conditions at specifically identified sweatshops. It closed with a plea for enforcement of the city child labor and sanitary

<sup>81</sup> Pierce, *Chicago*, III, pp. 294-295; Earl R. Beckner, *A History of Labor Legislation in Illinois* (Chicago, 1929), 153.

<sup>82</sup> See Abraham Bisno, *Abraham Bisno, Union Pioneer* (Madison, 1967).

<sup>83</sup> *Chicago Times*, August 17, 20, 21, 1891; *Chicago Herald*, August 17, 20, 21, 1891; *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, August 17, 20, 21, 1891; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 254-255; Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House With Autobiographical Notes* (New York, 1910), 202.

inspection ordinances in order to shut down the "fiendish sweaters' dens."<sup>84</sup>

The Morgan report produced a great public outcry of indignation and disgust,<sup>85</sup> a reaction that, according to Mrs. Morgan, resulted not so much from a sensitivity to the wretchedness of "sweated" employees but from a fear of wearing contaminated garments. It was thought that diphtheria, scarlet fever, smallpox, and other contagious diseases might be communicated to the clothing and cause a serious epidemic.<sup>86</sup> But at least the public had been awakened, and Elizabeth Morgan and her Committee on Child Labor of the Illinois Women's Alliance continued its probe. During February and March 1892, the committee exposed a number of new sweatshops, with Mrs. Morgan describing the conditions in one dress-making shop as follows:

Five girls work ten hours per day and also on Sundays, and earn \$4.00 per week. Two men work twelve hours per day in the same room for \$9.00 per week. This room is about twelve feet by twelve. The building is a tumble down shanty surrounded by dirt and filth. One small room is used for living and sleeping purposes.<sup>87</sup>

Mrs. Morgan's committee also tried to determine the cause of low wages, an inquiry that met with a cold reception from employers. Children employed in workshops were instructed "to lie about their age and decline to tell what they were paid."<sup>88</sup> But the *Tribune* reported that Mrs. Morgan's "energetic efforts" would "quite likely" bring regulatory measures to stop persistent and open violations of the child labor law.<sup>89</sup>

In March 1892, when Mrs. Morgan learned that Congress was preparing to make its own investigation of the "sweating system," she sent a copy of her Trade Assembly report to the special committee appointed to conduct the inquiry. "The report made such an impression on the Congressmen," Philip Foner has written, "that they decided to start their inquiry in Chicago and invited Mrs. Morgan to be the first wit-

<sup>84</sup> Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly, *The New Slavery: Investigation into the Sweating System as Applied to the Manufacture of Wearing Apparel*, A Report Prepared by Mrs. Thomas J. Morgan (Chicago, 1891). See also *Rights of Labor*, October 10, November 17, 1891.

<sup>85</sup> Pierce, *Chicago*, III, 296; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 255; Dorothy Rose Blumberg, *Florence Kelley: The Making of a Social Pioneer* (New York, 1966), 127.

<sup>86</sup> *Chicago Times*, September 2, 1891.

<sup>87</sup> See Ms. typewritten reports of Mrs. Morgan to the Alliance, dated March 4, 1892, and April 1, 1892, Morgan Collection, Book 2 Inserts.

<sup>88</sup> *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, February 22, 1892; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1892.

<sup>89</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 31, 1892.

ness."<sup>40</sup> The committee, chaired by Congressman J. DeWitt Warner of New York, arrived in Chicago in early April. In her testimony before the committee, Mrs. Morgan recounted the evils of the sweating system and recommended the following reforms: state licensing of manufacturing firms; monthly reports to the state from the manufacturers on "the number of employees, ages and sex, hours of labor, accidents and total earnings of employees during the preceding month"; and strict prohibition of the labor of children under fourteen years of age.<sup>41</sup>

Inspired by growing public concern and Mrs. Morgan's trail-blazing activities, Florence Kelley of Hull House urged the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics to conduct an inquiry into Chicago's sweatshops. Bureau Commissioner Ethelbert Stewart agreed to undertake the investigation and Florence Kelley to supervise the project. The Bureau disclosed its findings in its biennial report to the Governor in November 1892.<sup>42</sup> This report thoroughly analyzed the "sweating system," describing the alarming conditions as follows:

One of the principal aims of the sweater is the avoidance of rent. Hence the only requirement for a sweaters' shop is that the structure must be strong enough to sustain the jar of the machines. This condition being filled, any tenement-house is available, whether in loft, or basement, or stable. Fire-escapes in such buildings are unknown; water for flushing closets is rarely found; and the employes are equally at the mercy of fire and disease. . . .

But the worst conditions of all prevail among the families who finish garments at home. Here the greatest squalor and filth abounds and the garments are of necessity exposed to it and a part of it during the process of finishing. A single room frequently served as kitchen, bed-room, living-room, and working-room. . . .<sup>43</sup>

The survey estimated that there were 800 sweatshops employing 13,000 persons.<sup>44</sup> An increasingly vocal public now demanded action from the General Assembly.

In February 1893 the state legislature appointed a special committee to study further conditions in the Chicago sweatshops. Assisted by Florence Kelley, Elizabeth Morgan, and Abraham Bisno, the committee spent five days in Chicago visiting the various sweatshop districts. Its

<sup>40</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 191-192.

<sup>41</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, April 5, 1892; *Chicago Herald*, April 6, 1892.

<sup>42</sup> *Seventh Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1892* (Springfield, Illinois, 1893), 357-443; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 255-259; Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 201; Blumberg, *Florence Kelley*, 127-128.

<sup>43</sup> *Seventh Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1892*, 364-365.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 369-370.



study substantiated the findings of earlier investigations and recommended remedial legislation.<sup>45</sup> In June 1893 the General Assembly passed the Factory and Workshop Inspection Act, or, as it became known, the Sweatshop Act.<sup>46</sup> The new legislation largely resulted from the tireless efforts of Florence Kelley and Elizabeth Morgan; the staunch support of trade unions, Hull House residents, and various women's organizations; and the enthusiastic cooperation of the state's liberal Governor, John P. Altgeld.

Primarily designed to safeguard public health by setting sanitary standards for certain types of sweatshop manufacturing, the Sweatshop Act was also the first measure to attempt adequate regulation of child labor and the working hours of females. Section four of this Act prohibited the employment of children under fourteen in any manufacturing establishment, factory, or workshop within the state. Children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen were required to present affidavits of birth from their parents or guardians. Furthermore, factory inspectors could demand a certificate from some reputable physician as to physical fitness.<sup>47</sup> A number of manufacturers who employed children resisted these provisions as violations of their property rights. "The bitterest opposition to the law," Jane Addams recalled, "came from the large glass companies, who were so accustomed to use the labor of children that they were convinced that manufacturing of glass could not be carried on without it."<sup>48</sup>

Section five of the Act limited the employment of females in any factory or workshop to eight hours a day, six days a week.<sup>49</sup> Factory inspectors attempted to enforce this section, but they encountered determined opposition from the employers. A state-wide organization of industrialists, the Illinois Manufacturers Association, was formed to seek the overthrow of the eight-hour provision.<sup>50</sup> No sooner had the Association been organized than Elizabeth Morgan challenged it. With the

<sup>45</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11-15, 1893; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 259-261.

<sup>46</sup> Printed copy of the Illinois Factory and Workshop Inspection Act, 1893, Morgan Collection, Folder 13; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 153-154, 188, 262-264; Pierce, *Chicago*, III, 295-296.

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

<sup>48</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 206.

<sup>49</sup> Printed copy of the Illinois Factory and Workshop Inspection Act, 1893, Morgan Collection, Folder 13; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 153-154, 188, 262-264; Pierce, *Chicago*, III, 295-296.

<sup>50</sup> *Eighth Hour Herald*, February 20, 25, 1894; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 188-189.

backing of the Illinois Women's Alliance, the Trade and Labor Assembly, the Central Labor Union, the Women's Shoe Makers' Union, and various women's societies, she invited the Manufacturers' Association to send representatives to a public meeting to debate "the justice, necessity, and legality" of the eight-hour factory law for women.<sup>51</sup> The debate was to be held on April 22, 1894, with Henry D. Lloyd, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, Thomas J. Morgan, and Ethelbert Stewart, Commissioner of the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, as the main speakers to defend the law.<sup>52</sup> The Manufacturers' Association, however, sent no representatives. Association Secretary J. E. Tilt explained that no "particular good would be accomplished by such debate." He called the law "pernicious" because it reduced profits and increased competition.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Franklin MacVeagh, one of the members of the Association, indicated that he favored reduced hours and had put the eight-hour law into effect in his factories.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately MacVeagh was out of Chicago on business and could not be present at the meeting.

Although the Association had officially declined the invitation to debate the eight-hour question for women workers, the meeting was held anyway. Elizabeth Morgan chaired the event, and the speakers upheld the right of the state to control contracts made by women for the sale of their labor. Thomas Morgan spoke last, concluding approvingly that the affirmation of state regulation of the hours of labor was socialism pure and simple.<sup>55</sup>

In a vigorous drive to strike down the eight-hour clause for female workers, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association sponsored a series of test cases in the courts. Finally on March 15, 1895, the Illinois Supreme Court found section five of the Sweatshop Act unconstitutional.<sup>56</sup> The unanimous decision rendered in *William E. Richie v. The People* was the first court decision in the United States against the eight-hour law and presented a new obstacle in the path of the movement for shorter hours. In his history of Illinois labor legislation, Earl Beckner wrote that the decision "effectually closed the question of legislative restriction of

<sup>51</sup> See copy of Mrs. Morgan's letter, dated April 7, 1894, Morgan Collection, Folder 9.

<sup>52</sup> H. D. Lloyd to Mrs. T. J. Morgan, April 10, 1894, Florence Kelley to Mrs. T. J. Morgan, April 10, 1894, Morgan Collection, Folders 46 and 9.

<sup>53</sup> J. E. Tilt, Secretary of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association, to Mrs. T. J. Morgan, April 18, 1894, Morgan Collection, Folder 9.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin MacVeagh to Mrs. T. J. Morgan, April 17, 1894, Morgan Collection, Folder 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, April 23, 1894; *Chicago Times*, April 23, 1894; *Chicago Daily News*, April 23, 1894.

<sup>56</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 16, 1895; Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 189-190.

the hours of employment of women for a number of years."<sup>57</sup>

The effectiveness of the 1893 Sweatshop Act was hampered not only by hostile employers and courts but also by certain defects in the measure itself. It did not regulate all sweatshop-made articles, provided no protection for children in other than manufacturing occupations, and did not attempt to safeguard the employee from fire, unsafe machinery, or other such hazards.<sup>58</sup> In spite of these defects, the Act was a brave beginning. With this law the state government had unmistakably shown its willingness to intervene on behalf of workers to help them secure decent and healthful conditions of labor. Florence Kelley, the Chief Factory Inspector, her assistant, Alzina P. Stevens, and ten deputies, five of whom were women, vigorously enforced the Act. They secured a reduction in the number of small children employed in the shops. They also partially succeeded in enforcing the eight-hour day for women and girls until this provision was voided by the Illinois Supreme Court.<sup>59</sup>

Elizabeth Morgan's strenuous efforts to protect working women and children were endorsed at the 1894 convention of the American Federation of Labor. She was the only female delegate at the convention, and she represented Ladies' Federal Union No. 2703. The convention went on record as supporting her three basic proposals: state compulsory education laws should be enforced where they existed and instituted where they did not; state legislatures should proscribe the eight-hour workday for women and children employed in manufacturing establishments; and the sweating system and tenement house manufacturing should be abolished by state action.<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Morgan also accepted a nomination for First Vice President, marking the first time a woman had run for such a high Federation office. But her opponent was P. J. McGuire, who had been re-elected to the post each year since 1890. She received only 226 votes; he polled 1,865.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless Alice Henry maintained that her total represented "a vote for those days large enough to reflect credit equally upon the woman for whom it was cast and on the men who cast it."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Beckner, *Labor Legislation in Illinois*, 190.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-156, 265-266.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 154, 264-265; Blumberg, *Florence Kelley*, 137-141.

<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor Held at Denver, Colorado, December 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18, 1894*, 31, 45, 46.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Alice Henry, *Women and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1923), 54.

To Elizabeth Morgan must go much of the credit for first making the public aware of the oppressive conditions under which children and women were forced to work in many of Chicago's industrial establishments. Through her initiative the Ladies' Federal Labor Union and the Illinois Women's Alliance were organized to protect these workers. The constant agitation of the Union and the Alliance helped to produce remedial legislation. That Mrs. Morgan failed to achieve the more thoroughgoing reforms she desired should not obscure the significance of those gains which were made with her help. Because of her efforts, many of the existing evils connected with the employment of women and children were either abated or abolished. Despite antagonistic employers, loosely drawn legislation, and inadequate funds and staff for enforcement, Mrs. Morgan never despaired. She relentlessly struggled to abolish child labor and to secure justice and dignity for women workers. Certainly she deserves recognition as "among those women who have made distinguished contributions to the development of the American labor movement."<sup>68</sup>

Elizabeth Morgan believed that the emancipation of the working class required both economic and political organization. She saw trade unions as a necessary and valuable outgrowth of the worker's desire for protection against the profit system. But her attitude toward labor organizations was always conditioned by her belief that political action offered the only really effective way of combating the evils of capitalism. Thus she struggled to achieve immediate social reform through legislative action, and she held that the future socialist state could be ushered in peacefully at the ballot box.

<sup>68</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 192.