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"LIKE A DEATH IN THE FAMILY": THE TEXTILE CRISIS IN SOUTH
CAROLINA, 1965-1990

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Cal Preston Bedenbaugh
May 2021

Accepted by:
Dr. Rod Andrew, Jr., Committee Chair
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Dr. H. Roger Grant
Dr. Rebecca Stoil

ABSTRACT

During the late twentieth century, roughly between the 1970s and the 1990s, South Carolina's textile industry experienced a crisis triggered by growing imports and modernization. This crisis led to mass layoffs and plant closures on a scale previously unheard-of within the Piedmont South and led to the death and decline of many textile-dominated towns across the state. This thesis explores this crisis and examines the reactions to the textile crisis by textile workers, industry leaders, and local leaders within these towns. It examines the actions taken by federal and state government officials to counter the causes and effects of the textile crisis. Utilizing correspondence from textile workers, government officials, and industry leaders, speeches from state leaders, and newspaper articles, this thesis argues that the reaction and action from the parties at play in South Carolina's textile crisis underwent three separate stages between 1975 and 1990 – from denial to intense activism to disillusionment and silence. This thesis aims to place the experience of textile mills and textile-dominated towns into conversation with other works of deindustrialization in the United States and refute historiographical claims that textile workers were not politically active in the period after the Second World War.

DEDICATION

To Kelsey – without your unwavering support and love, this project would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks are in order for everyone who made this work of historical scholarship possible and successful. I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Rod Andrew, who taught me as an undergrad and was still willing to advise me, as your courses in southern history are what pushed me to pursue graduate studies. Many thanks to you for many meetings about topic discussion, proofreading, and your lasting impact on who I am as a historian and a writer. Thanks must also be given to Dr. Rebecca Stoil for taking me under your wing and ushering me into the field of postwar American History and for many discussions about future directions and navigating academia. Many thanks also to Dr. Vernon Burton and Dr. Roger Grant for signing onto this project and providing critical insights into the directions to take this thesis.

In addition, I would like to thank the staff of the South Carolina Political Collections at the University of South Carolina for opening up your doors, despite a global pandemic and allowing me to complete this research in a timely manner.

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INTRODUCTION

“It was like a death in the family.”¹ This sentiment characterizes how many workers, local leaders, and townsfolk felt after the closure of textile and apparel mills in many rural cities and towns across the South Carolina Piedmont in the 1980s. For many workers – whom Jacquelyn Down Hall described as “like a family” – who had been millhands for their entire lives, losing their only source of employment was genuinely akin to losing someone with whom they had spent more than half their lives. The same could be said of mill towns, like Honea Path, Ware Shoals, and Laurens, and textile-dominated cities like Greenville. The loss of the industry that dug them out of poverty in the New South period and brought the cities prosperity was indeed “a death in the family.” The textile crisis that befell the industry in the late twentieth century was the final blow to this once-dominant industry – leading to the destruction of livelihoods and entire towns that once pledged loyalty to the industry.

Textiles were once the leading force in the South Carolina economy. By the turn of the twentieth century, cotton textile mills dominated the newly forming industrial landscape of the South Carolina Piedmont. Once the domain of independent farmers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers, this rural landscape had become a collection of industrial towns, fueled by a mill-building campaign from small-town boosters in the late nineteenth century. Further, by the 1950s, South Carolina’s industry had boomed from a

¹ “The Mill News,” *The Laurens County Advertiser* (Laurens, SC), 2 May 1983.

small collection of mills to become the United States' largest producer of cotton textiles with the textile and apparel industry comprising 37% of the manufacturing workforce in South Carolina.² This dominant textile industry within the state remained centered in its traditional base – small, rural cities and towns across the Upstate region of South Carolina, often operating out of the same building for upwards of 70 years.

The end of textile mills and other manufacturing endeavors in the rural Piedmont South, which began in the late twentieth century, occurred at a time of transition in the economics of the South from the manufacturing that came out of the New South of the turn of the 20th century to the high-tech industry, service, and tourism economy that emerged in the 1970s and helped create the modern, Sunbelt South. At the time of this transition, large cities and economic centers within the South continued to grow and carry on despite the departure of their original industrial base. The story was often different, however, for the smaller cities and towns in the industrial Piedmont.³

Due to the industry remaining scattered around the industrialized Piedmont in various towns, these textile towns became heavily dominated by the industry. Even by the 1970s, a mill often was one of the sole sources of employment for the population. By 1975, however, three significant issues had begun to chip away at the textile industry – primarily imports, lowering tariffs, and economic downturn. Many government officials,

² Butler Derrick, "Handwritten Speech Notes" (Washington, DC, 1983), Butler Derrick Papers, Box 21, South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library.

³ In this thesis, a large city/town/economic center denotes cities in South Carolina such as Greenville (population ~58,000 in 1990) or Columbia (population ~100,000 in 1990) which would dominate the markets or serve as transport/distribution hubs for the industry of the smaller, rural towns such as Laurens (population ~10,000 in 1990).

newspaper editors, and local workers started to decry foreign countries and lament an already dying industry while saying they could save it. This change of economic focus within the South and the closure of the textile industry in the South in the late twentieth century leads to a series of questions regarding the reaction of those directly related to the textile industry: How did mill workers react to losing their jobs? How did federal and state leaders act on the reactions and rhetoric of the mill workers? Moreover, did workers and industry leaders ever believe the industry had died?

Laurens, South Carolina, a rural city in the upstate of South Carolina wedged between two of the largest cities in the state, Greenville and Columbia, provides an ideal look into the stagnation and decline of small cities in the rural Piedmont South as it housed a variety of industries, namely textiles and glass production, a fair-sized class of wealthy industrialists, and a large working class as well. Laurens is one such town that quickly industrialized by the turn of the twentieth century and remained dominated by only a few industries by the middle of the twentieth century. Incorporated as Laurens County in the 1790s, the town was officially chartered in 1845 as Laurensville before shortening its name to Laurens in 1873. Primarily dominated by two mills, the Laurens Cotton Mill (founded in 1895) and the Watts Cotton Mill (founded in 1902), the city expanded with its industry. It claimed a population of 10,298 by 1970, an increase of over 100% from the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ Although not the sole source of industry within the city by the mid-twentieth century, textiles employed 5,100 within the county

⁴ Jacobs, William Plumer, ed, *The Scrapbook: A Compilation of Historical Facts About Places and Events of Laurens County, South Carolina*, (South Carolina: Laurens County Historical Society and Laurens County Arts Council, 1982), pg. 702, 672, 58.

as a whole – comprising the most significant majority of employment in the town and county.⁵ Laurens, along with other towns, such as Greenwood, Honea Path, Ninety Six, and Ware Shoals, provide an excellent backdrop to study the textile crisis’ effects on textile-dominated towns and the reaction of local citizens and mill workers themselves.

This thesis results from having lived in the aftermath of the decline and closure of textiles in a once textile-dominated city, Laurens. It attempts to make sense of what the millworkers and townsfolk of places like Laurens experienced in their thoughts and actions. As a result, this thesis contends that government officials, local leaders, and the working classes went through three distinct phases of reaction to an ever-worsening textile crisis. First, those in and around the industry ignored that it was in decline until the late 1970s, despite the efforts of a few members of Congress attempting to sound the alarm. Second, by the early to mid-1980s, the textile industry was in a real crisis, with federal, state, and local leaders working hand-in-hand with textile workers and industry leaders toward a solution or an alleviation of the crisis. Third, by the late-1980s, textile workers had become disillusioned by the efforts and justifications of government officials and local leaders, and eventually silence fell upon a textile industry that many non-verbally acknowledged as dead.

Utilizing a variety of sources, including correspondence between members of Congress and constituents, newspaper articles, and the *Congressional Record*, this study intends to characterize the three significant issues facing the textile industry as it entered

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1972, Volume III: Area Statistics, Part 2, Nebraska-Wyoming* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976) p. 41-15.

the late twentieth century at the national and state level: imports, tariffs, and economic recession. Further, through the use of Representatives Butler Derrick, William Jennings Bryan Dorn, and others' correspondence with constituents, political speeches from national and state leaders, and newspapers, especially *The Laurens County Advertiser*, this examination looks into the justifications and explanations given by local leaders and government officials for the issues leading to the "textile crisis" and reactions to these issues by the working classes of Laurens and other textile-dominated towns in South Carolina. Together, with this characterization of national and state issues and policy to combat them and the examination of reactions on the local level, this thesis posits that throughout the decline of the textile industry due to imports, modernization, and other causes, those directly related and associated with the textile industry underwent three phases of reaction to the crisis.

The textile industry was central to the Piedmont Southern way of life throughout most of the twentieth century; however, scholars have primarily focused on its early stages, using the "golden age" of textiles to discuss what it meant to be a mill worker in the Piedmont. Scholars since the 1980s have continued largely to neglect the impact of the textile industry on its workers, towns, and states in the late-twentieth century. Yet, their works shine a light on issues and stances this thesis aims to uncover. In *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (1987), Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and her cowriters argue that this industrial society in the rural South gradually grew in importance throughout the late-19th to the mid-20th century with millhands and their ideas and positions gaining momentum in southern culture, and that mill society was indeed

“like a family” for residents of textile mill villages. However, their scope is limited to the early twentieth century and focuses on the growth and stability of the textile industry, without discussing its decline. *Like a Family* does provide a basis to study workers by characterizing them as essentially a separate social group from management and the townsfolk around them.

The importance of the political activism of mill workers and their reactions to federal policy has been studied in the early twentieth century, yet this importance has been similarly neglected in the latter part of the twentieth century. Bryant Simon’s *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948*, is one of the centerpieces of scholarship of the political involvement of mill workers – particularly their relationship to those in public office and how they engaged in political activity themselves. Simon argues that millworkers often latched onto political figures at the national and state whom they felt best served their varied interests regarding race, economics, jobs, and more, and that a variety of factors “made it hard for millhands to prevail” in their political endeavors.⁶ This thesis draws on Simon’s ideology and argument that millworkers were actively involved politically, that they worked toward what they felt were their own best interests, and that due to a variety of factors, they found it difficult to find success on their own. However, I push back against Simon’s claim that mill workers and their political activity faded in the postwar period, and I argue they were still actively involved through the late 1980s.

⁶ Bryant Simon, *The Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p.8.

Similarly, Jack Roper's *The Last Orator for the Millhands: William Jennings Bryan Dorn, 1916-2005* draws from Simon's work and argues that Dorn continued in a line of politicians that drew on the support of mill workers. Roper argues that Dorn was convinced that the proper legislation could save the textile industry. This thesis feeds off this argument and expands it into the late 1970s and 1980s to argue that Dorn's successors expected the same and fueled the political involvement of mill workers into the 1980s.

Few historians have attempted to bridge the gap between the story of the thriving textile industry and subsequent narrative of its decline. Nevertheless, Douglas Flamming's *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* studies the economic and social transformation of one mill town in northern Georgia. Flamming, one of the first and only historians to study mill workers in the postwar era, states briefly at the end of his work that the southern economy was undergoing a rapid transformation in the late twentieth century and is one of the first to say that the South had its own "rustbelt" decline in the twentieth century.⁷ Flamming's focus on Dalton, Georgia, however, causes him to argue that industrial decline occurred much earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, which this thesis argues was not representative of the actual decline of the textile industry in the Piedmont South.

Further, regarding deindustrialization, this thesis builds on three major works on the closure and decline of certain low-wage industries in the American South over the

⁷ Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pg. xxix.

twentieth century by arguing that textiles fit into the same narrative as other declining American industries during the past century. Two of the first scholars to discuss the concept of “deindustrialization” in the United States were Barry Bluestone and Bennet Harrison in their *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closures, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (1982), which argues that world competition and shrinking profits led to the beginnings of a decline in traditionally low-wage industries in America that would only continue. This thesis builds on this argument by claiming that South Carolina’s textile industry declined due to these factors in the years after the book was published. Furthermore, Jefferson Cowie’s *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (1999), which studies industrial migration from the North to the South and then abroad over the twentieth century in search of cheaper labor, primarily informs this thesis by arguing that industrial investment in a community, as well as the industry’s departure, and set in motion a series of social and political changes on the state and local level.

Timothy Minchin’s *Empty Mills: The Fight Against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (2013) provides the first actual economic and political study of the decline of textile mills and provides some research on the effects of imports and tariffs on the industry between the late 1970s and the 1990s. However, it neglects the more personal aspects of the industry’s decline, such as how workers and local leaders reacted to this decline, something that this thesis aims to fill the void. This thesis intends to fill some of the gaps left in the historiography primarily by examining explanations and justifications given for the decline of the textile industry. It also aims to examine

reactions to its decline and to explore the impact on the communities, both physical and social, in which the industry was dominant.

This thesis is focused on the ever-changing and complex relationship between the textile industry, its workers and leaders, national and state politicians, and local citizens. The three chapters presented within focus on three distinct stages in the reaction of the parties at play because of their relationships and their actions taken to improve the ailing textile industry. Chapter One explores the situation facing the textile industry and textile-dominated towns in the 1970s as the textile industry began to falter. As politicians, mill workers, and townsfolk started to understand and grapple with the possibilities of a declining textile industry, although some politicians attempted to preempt the industry's decline, the majority of workers ignored the decline of the industry until the 1980s. Chapter Two describes the textile industry's continued decline swiftly followed by mass closures and layoffs. In reaction to these mass closures, mill workers, industry leaders, and townsfolk formed a unified interest group to push for textile and trade legislation federally and for policies to support the industry at the state level. Chapter Three chronicles the continued failure of national leaders to secure legislation to help textiles, and it follows state leaders' success in securing other industries to replace the textile industry in the state. Because of these two different conclusions to the textile crisis at the national and state level, mill workers and local leaders became disillusioned with the efforts of members of Congress and slowly faded into silence, while local leaders continued to praise the efforts of state leaders attempting to attract new industries to

replace textiles. In all, these spoken and unspoken reactions indicate that by 1990, textile workers and local leaders had come to believe that the textile industry was dead.

CHAPTER ONE

“WE WILL SOON NOT HAVE A TEXTILE INDUSTRY!”: RISING IMPORTS AND EARLY RESPONSES, 1965-1979

“Sometimes I feel that our elected officials do not know, or maybe don’t even care what happens to a town or community where the majority of the people depend on textiles for their income.”⁸ Such rhetoric was the feeling of many South Carolinian textile workers, industrialists, and townsfolk of textile-dominated towns across the state’s Piedmont region by 1975. Thousands of these folks dedicated their entire lives to the textile industry. Often, these millhands worked thirty or more years in the industry since they were children and built their families in thriving textile towns kept afloat through employment and investment from a singular textile mill. These folks had become terrified of the consequences of a dying industry they had pledged their entire lives to, and they responded in droves to politicians to make sure their voices were heard, often simply asking to end this threat to their “family’s security and to [their] community.”⁹ This industry that had dominated South Carolina’s industrial landscape, which led the South into the industrial age – now stagnated and faced unprecedented competition which it had not foreseen. However, just a decade prior, textile workers, their communities, and their

⁸ Ken Watson to Rep. Butler Derrick, 15 November 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁹ George V. Ashmore to Rep. William J. Bryan Dorn, 12 September 1967, W.J. Bryan Dorn Papers, Box, 91. Folder Dorn, Topical, 1967-1968, Textiles, Imports (2 of 6) South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

representatives in Washington continued as they always had – with no concern for textiles’ future.

By the turn of the twentieth century, cotton textile mills dominated the newly forming industrial landscape of the South Carolina Piedmont. Once dominated by independent farmers, this rural landscape had become a collection of industrial towns, fueled by a mill-building campaign from small-town boosters in the late nineteenth century. Further, by the 1950s, South Carolina’s industry had boomed from a small collection of mills to become the America’s largest cotton textile producer, with the textile and apparel industry comprising 37% of the manufacturing workforce in the state.¹⁰ This dominant textile industry within the state remained centered in its traditional base – small, rural towns across the Upstate of South Carolina, often operating out of the same building for upwards of 70 years. Due to the industry remaining scattered around the industrialized Piedmont in multiple towns, these textile towns became heavily dominated by the industry. Often, the textile and apparel industry was one of (if not the only) the sole sources of local employment even by the start of the 1970s – providing well over 50% of textile jobs in some Piedmont counties.

Life in these towns, such as Honea Path, Ware Shoals, Laurens, and Clinton, was dominated by textiles. This mills provided the primary source of employment in these towns and villages and the means for entertainment, religion, shopping, and more for the cities they were located in even through the mid-twentieth century. It wasn’t only

¹⁰ Butler Derrick, “Handwritten Speech Notes” (Washington, DC, 1983), Butler Derrick Papers, Box 21, South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library, University of South Carolina.

employees of these mills that depended on the textile payroll. The “filling stations, retail stores, barber shops, beauty parlors, banks, loan agencies, doctors, lawyers, and virtually every small business” in these communities depended on the patronage of textile employees and their paychecks.¹¹ Textiles provided the economic, political, and social lifeblood of these towns, and if taken away, it would mean certain doom for everything and everyone who depended upon the industry.

Although seemingly impervious through the 1960s and early 1970s, by 1975, three significant issues had begun to chip away at the textile industry – growing imports, lowering tariffs, and economic depression. These issues led many government officials, newspaper editors, and local workers to decry foreign countries and lament an already dying industry while saying they could save it. Together, with this characterization of national and state issues and policy to combat them, and the examination of justifications and reactions on the local level, it is seen that those government officials, local leaders, and the working classes ignored that the industry was clearly in decline far before the textile crisis of the 1980s.

The Revival of “Millhand Politics”

The textile industry in the South Carolina Piedmont progressively grew and became more prosperous over the course of the twentieth century until it became the largest sector of not only the state’s manufacturing base but also its economy as a whole. According to the U.S. Census of Manufactures, the state’s textile employment grew

¹¹ Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn, “Textiles Vital to Third Congressional District,” 7 October 1967, W.J. Bryan Dorn Papers, Box, 90, Folder Dorn, Topical, 1967-1968, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

steadily from around 128,000 in 1958 before reaching its highest-ever number in 1967 with 359 mills employing 138,600.¹² Similarly, the state's apparel industry reached its peak highs in the 1960s, employing 42,600 statewide in 1967, up from ~24,000 a decade prior.¹³ Despite these record employment numbers across the state, several key politicians and leaders began catching a whiff of foreign competition. In the 1960s, they started sounding an alarm that mostly fell on deaf ears.

William Jennings Bryan Dorn, a popular Democratic congressman from South Carolina's Third Congressional District, which comprised the far-western corner of the state, including the majority of the textile producing areas – minus Greenville and York counties, focused heavily on attempting to “save” the textile industry during his terms in Congress – even when others were not interested in it.¹⁴ Dorn served in Congress from 1947-1949 before an unsuccessful campaign for the Senate, but returned to the House from 1951-1974. Dorn, a self-styled candidate “of the people,” from Greenwood, focused primarily on labor issues and populist issues of the time (much like his namesake, William Jennings Bryan). Primarily, he spent his time in the House as an advocate for the

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1963, Volume II: Industry Statistics, Part I: Major Groups 20-28* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 22-4.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1967, Volume II: Industry Statistics, Part I: Major Groups 20-24* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), p.22-3.

¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1967, Volume II: Industry Statistics, Part I: Major Groups 20-24*, p.22-3; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1963, Volume II: Industry Statistics, Part I: Major Groups 20-28*, p. 22-4.

¹⁴ Known more simply as Bryan Dorn in his lifetime, but will be solely referred to as Dorn from now on.

South Carolina textile industry, so much so that Jack Roper argues in his recent biography of Dorn that he was the last true “orator for the millhands.”¹⁵

Dorn, a farmer by profession from Greenwood, a significant textile producing area of South Carolina, pledged his support to his constituents as their liaison in Washington, and he functioned as a populist candidate. Dorn argued that he was one of the few politicians in Washington that were “unbossed, unbiased, and uncontrolled” by special interest groups or lobbyists; he always spoke that he acted honestly in the best interests of his constituents.¹⁶ During his tenure in Congress, Dorn claimed he was “just plain old Bryan Dorn,” that he was not bought out or controlled by special interest groups but that he wanted to “belong to the people” and to “return the government” to the people.¹⁷ It only follows that he would spend his terms in Congress fighting for the issues that he saw as the biggest threats to his constituents, despite a lack of focus from other politicians in Washington at the time, starting with his emphasis on the textile industry.

While in office, Dorn targeted the slowly growing imports of textiles from industrializing countries in the Far East, particularly Japan, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China, to support the interests of his constituents in South Carolina (including some in Laurens, despite not being in the Third District) both through legislation and his work on committee hearings. Legislation-wise, Dorn introduced two

¹⁵ Roper, John Herbert, *The Last Orator for the Millhands: William Jennings Bryan Dorn, 1916-2005* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2019).

¹⁶ William Jennings Bryan Dorn, “I am just plain Bryan Dorn” Campaign Speech for Governor in Abbeville County, 1978, W.J. Bryan Dorn Papers, William Jennings Bryan Dorn: In His Own Words, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

major bills into the House stating his support for the industry and wishing to protect it from imports in the mid-20th century – 85 H.R. 12512 (1958) and 88 H.R. 4528 (1963). Introduced in 1958, during the 85th United States Congress, Dorn’s H.R. 12512 was the first in a line of many bills over the late twentieth century to tackle the “import question.” This bill primarily acted “to extend for 2 years the authority of the President to enter into trade agreements under section 350 of the Tariff Act of 1930,” and in turn to seek a favorable balance of trade for U.S. industry.¹⁸ This proposal did not pass the House; however, it represented the beginnings of national attempts to “protect” textiles, especially by South Carolina representatives whose constituents were heavily involved in the industry. Furthermore, by 1963, Dorn also introduced two bills into the House with the exact text as 88 H.R. 4528, which sought “to revitalize the cotton growing and cotton manufacturing industry and reduce Federal expenditures for price support operations.” These bills were another attempt by this “last” supporter of the millhands to protect the industry that was so important locally for many in South Carolina, including Laurens.

Also, Dorn used his influence on the House Committee on Education and Labor, and particularly his membership on the Subcommittee on the Impact of Imports and Exports on American Employment, to represent his local interests on the national level. Most appropriately, Dorn testified in front of this committee in 1967 on the Hearing on Impact of Imports on American Industry and Employment. In this hearing, he argued that it was not just federal labor regulations (such as shorter work weeks) or management

¹⁸ William Jennings Bryan Dorn, “85 H.R. 12512,” Pub. L. No. 85 H.R. 12512 (1958).

decisions like the stretch-out) that caused the liquidation of many textile mills. Dorn was one of the first to claim that this decline was due to “low-wage foreign imports.”¹⁹ He argued for protectionism within United States trade policy, which would become a battleground over the late-20th century in regards to the textile industry.

Not only were Congressmen like Dorn arguing for their constituents in Washington, but also a few Senators had begun realize that the textile industry in the 1960s was clearly in decline. However, they were also largely ignored by others in Washington and at home. Senator Ernest F. “Fritz” Hollings, Democratic Senator from South Carolina, who served between 1966 and 2005 after a stint as Governor, became one of the major players in the on-going textile debate. Although he became a proponent of protectionism regarding the textile industry by the 1970s, he largely ignored the industry’s decline in the early 1960s. However, by 1967, Hollings published a report to his constituents entitled “Textile Industry Jobs at Stake,” in which he blasted Lyndon B. Johnson administration’s handling of the textile industry. Primarily, he argued that although 400,000 lost their jobs in a textile crisis in the 1950s (the beginning of the industry’s decline), President John F. Kennedy swiftly fixed the industry’s issues.²⁰ He further argued that Johnson treats “the domestic textile industry as expendable” and that a

¹⁹ “Impact of Imports and Exports on Employment. Part 4: Textiles,” § House Committee on Education and Labor (1961), p. 162. <https://congressional-proquest-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1961-edl-0036?accountid=6167>.

²⁰ Ernest F. Hollings, “Textile Jobs at Stake,” *Senator Ernest F. Hollings Reports to South Carolina, 1967*, Fritz Hollings: In His Own Words, University of South Carolina, South Carolina Political Collections, p.1. <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/how/id/1>.

favorable balance of trade will fix the problems that many have begun to highlight by the 1970s.²¹

Locally during the 1950s and 1960s, Laurens did not experience many issues with their textile industry involving closure or economic struggle, even as people nationally began to target challenges that would start to conflict with South Carolina's textile industry. Over the early 20th century, Laurens Cotton Mills (and later Laurens Mill) continued to grow steadily and merged with Deering Milliken, Inc. (now Milliken and Company) in 1968.²² Similarly, J.P. Stevens Company acquired the formerly independent Watts Mills (located in the Wattsville Section in the northern part of the city) in 1947, and it continued to grow and modernize over the early to mid-twentieth century. This modernization was mainly seen in 1966 when it added "44,000 square feet of carding and spinning room" and increased employment by 15 percent.²³ This growth allowed Watts Mills to turn raw material into finished cloth entirely within the plant. This lack of concern regarding Laurens' textile industry was further confirmed by a lack of commentary in *The Laurens County Advertiser*, the local weekly newspaper. A study of articles from the *Advertiser* in 1965, around the time when Dorn and Hollings were beginning to discuss the textile industry's decline nationally, shows next to no information about textile struggles locally, except for "mill awards" or the "\$3 million

²¹ Ibid, p.2.

²² Jacobs, William Plumer, ed, *The Scrapbook*, pg. 672.

²³ Ibid, p. 702.

expansion” of the Watts Mills plant.²⁴ This lack of discussion within editorials confirms that locally, people were blissfully unaware of the challenges and problems that soon would strike the textile industry nationally.

The Beginnings of a “Textile Crisis”

By the 1970s, however, it was clear to many lawmakers in Washington representing the Piedmont South and the textile industry realized that it would be necessary to protect their constituents (and for the industry’s interests) due to several growing challenges that were causing problems with the industry domestically – mainly imports, protective tariffs, and an economic recession during the 1970s. During the first half of the decade, leaders mostly were feeling out the issues at hand, and these efforts were felt locally in Laurens, as well as carried out by Congressmen such as Dorn, his replacement Butler Derrick, as well as those who represented Laurens during a re-districting to the 5th District in the middle of the 20th century. These Congressmen concentrated their efforts on beginning to recognize and combat imports and requesting tariffs or tariff exemptions.

Nationally, Timothy Minchin, in his *Empty Mills: The Fight Against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (2013), reports that between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, textile imports from “emerging Asian economies” such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and China, skyrocketed which only exacerbated the issues seen within

²⁴ “Watts Expanding; \$3 Million Program,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 27 October 1965.

the industry during the 1960s.²⁵ This growth in imports prompted many national leaders from textile producing states to jump into action and speak out against imports to appease the industries who financially supported them and their constituents who voted to keep them in office.

Locally, it was not until 1970 that these issues facing the textile industry were raised by residents, and concerns began to rise. An editorial simply titled “Textiles Need Help,” from June 17, 1970, within *The Laurens County Advertiser* raised some brewing problems within the county regarding imports. The author made the case that fifty percent of Laurens’ industrial payroll was employed in textiles, so that “anything that hurts textiles will hurt our economy.”²⁶ In turn, the editor asked all readers to write letters to South Carolina Congressmen because if “nothing is done to limit textile imports, then the industry” and the local economy “will face some rough times.” Later that same month, the *Advertiser* featured a front-page headline, “From Textile Imports... Laurens’ Economy is in Danger,” which built on the earlier editorial, arguing that legislators and others in Washington were not doing enough to heed the call to protect the industry. The author, reporter Nancy Parks, argued that the cause for alarm came from the fact that the “import volume of man-made fibers exceeded” U.S. production for the first time in 1969, and ended with a call for action – “should 58% of Laurens County’s economy be allowed

²⁵ Timothy J. Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight Against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p.67-68

²⁶ “Textiles Need Help,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 17 June 1970.

to be washed away by a rising tide of imports?”²⁷ The president of Clinton Mills, a nearby textile mill in Laurens County, argued that local producers “don’t have the time to fight the import situation” with their products.²⁸

Heeding the call and wave of letters from his constituents and those from Laurens, Bryan Dorn, in one of his last actions before leaving Congress to run for Governor, introduced yet another bill aimed at curbing imports in 1971, 92 H.R. 9479. This measure, one of the first to specifically target imports of textiles from foreign markets rather than textiles overall, aimed to “amend the Tariff Schedules of the United States to increase the rate of duty on certain tops, rovings, and yarns...and on certain woven, knitted, or nonwoven fabrics.”²⁹ Although this bill was never brought to a vote and died in the House, a tariff bill did occur in an attempt to curb the skyrocketing imports temporarily. However, it represents an important step in attempting to curb imports for his constituents, followed by his successor, Butler Derrick.

Locally, this first step at curbing textile imports by Dorn was noticed and welcomed by various citizens and leaders of Laurens; however, the concerns of these citizens and local leaders were not placated. This continued concern about the state of the textile industry within Laurens most actively played out again on the editorial page of the

²⁷ Nancy Parks, “From Textile Imports...Laurens’ Economy is in Danger,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 24 June 1970.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ William Jennings Bryan Dorn, “92 H.R. 9479,” Pub. L. No. 92 H.R. 9479 (1971), https://congressional-proquest-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/congressional/docview/t01.d02.92_hr_9479_ih_19710629?accountid=6167.

Advertiser, which quarterly throughout 1970 and 1971 brought up discussions of the textile industry and its mounting issues, almost as a report to readers. One such editorial, entitled “Little Validity,” published in the December 26, 1970 edition of the *Advertiser*, foreshadowed the textile concerns to come when it made the case that residents of Laurens should not accept only trade bills from Congress but also push them to “negotiate agreements.”³⁰ This, the editors argued, was the best-case scenario for the state’s textile industry.

Furthermore, the editor, Jim Kluttz, argued again later in 1971 in his editorial that there is concrete evidence that the textile industry is now in decline in South Carolina (and therefore in Laurens County) following a report that claimed that “textile net revenue had declined 28 percent” in South Carolina, and that 4,500 had lost their jobs in the industry statewide.³¹ He then editorialized that “unless something is done to relieve this hard-pressed industry from the pressures of textile imports, this decline will continue,” and ended with a warning that “help must be forthcoming, and soon.”³² These editorials indicated that these local leaders and citizens of Laurens continued to push for legislation and any measure to “save” an industry that they finally believed to be at death’s door, almost at any moment. However, only two years prior, they had virtually no concerns about the industry – and actively praised its expansion and growth within the city.

³⁰ “Little Validity,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 26 December 1970.

³¹ “Textile Dilemma,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 26 May 1971.

³² *Ibid.*

Although most of the focus on the problems of the textile industry in the 1970s centered on rising import numbers and attempting to impose import quotas or protective tariffs, there was also a domestic economic recession occurring under Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter that played a role in the beginnings of the decline of the textile industry as well. Representative Butler Derrick received a select few letters referencing “depressed market conditions” and other domestic economic problems that the industry faced.³³ Furthermore, this economic recession was noticed locally, with articles in the *Advertiser* appearing to have discussed the effect of this recession on the local economy and arguing that concern over the textile industry is not helping the already depressed economic situation within the state.

Overall, concern over the textile industry and the challenges it faced increased dramatically throughout the first half of the 1970s. Representatives in Washington caught on first before the issues became a concern in Laurens and across the state. These leaders and citizens focused their concerns on textile imports from the Far East, yet they also focused on a domestic economic recession beginning in 1970. Nevertheless, both parties only recognized the challenged and said that something needed to be done, rather than making formulating plans to solve them.

The “Import Question” and the Late 1970s

As the 1970s progressed, the rhetoric from citizens of Laurens and other textile centers advocated stopping textile imports entirely, which was characteristic of actions

³³ Baxter Huntley to Rep. Butler Derrick, 10 September 1975, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 1, South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

taken by South Carolina congressmen – particularly that of Butler Derrick, freshman congressman representing the South Carolina Third Congressional District during his first term from 1974-1976. Representative Derrick received many letters and requests from throughout the state over this term asking him to do anything he could to curb imports. One such letter from Baxter Huntley, CEO of textile manufacturing firm Huntley of York, asked Derrick if he to “see if something can’t be done about the ever-increasing flood of imported knit goods.”³⁴ In response to these letters, Derrick promised very little, yet he always claimed his responsibility was to protect “the interests of our business and manufacturing” across the state.³⁵ Furthermore, in a letter to a concerned citizen of Anderson, SC, Derrick echoed many of the concerns given in the early portion of the 1970s, writing that he knew that the industry was “threatened by a relaxation of import quotas” imposed during the first half of the 20th century and a relaxation of the measures taken in the early-1970s.³⁶ Despite these pleas, Derrick and other national and state leaders failed to take much action toward the industry nationally. Although he was not necessarily enthusiastic about textiles in his freshman term, as mass closures and further imports continue to threaten the textile industry during the late-1970s his position shifted. By the beginning of the 95th U.S. Congress and Derrick’s second term, many of the attitudes that Representative Derrick and Senator Hollings (and other members of

³⁴ Baxter Huntley to Rep. Butler Derrick, 10 September 1975

³⁵ Rep. Butler Derrick to Juanita Bowman, 3 March 1976, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 1, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1976, Commerce, Consumer Protection and Fair Trade), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

³⁶ Ibid.

Congress of the Piedmont South) dramatically changed to match the growing concern of their constituents. Fittingly, these two members of the South Carolina congressional delegation began to take the lead on textile issues nationally.

To illustrate this trend, in 1977, a group of congressmen from textile producing areas launched the Informal House Textile Committee, which claimed to be a “bipartisan organization...working for a sound United States textile policy” to promote and preserve the “fiber-textile apparel industry and the 2.3 million jobs it provides.”³⁷ Within their promoted policies, these congressmen asked for an extension of the GATT Multifiber Agreement with an added exemption on textile tariffs in the next round of negotiations.³⁸ The GATT agreements, or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, were agreements negotiated among major industrialized nations in hopes of reducing tariffs and barriers on trade world-wide – and constituted one of the first targets that proponents of the textile industry nationally and locally aimed at as one of the root causes of the industry’s woes. Furthermore, many claimed that the ongoing Tokyo Round of GATT negotiations in the late 1970s, if not blocked by U.S. representatives, would result in textile tariffs being slashed by 60%, and worried it would result in millions of lost jobs.³⁹ The Informal House Textile Committee earmarked China as the first significant enemy of American

³⁷ “Textile Trade Policy: A Resolution of the Informal House Textile Committee,” 20 April 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Thomas Bratton to Rep. Butler Derrick, 9 November 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

textiles and claimed China was “the [only] remaining uncontrolled low-wage supplier of textiles and apparel to the United States.”⁴⁰ This trend of identifying nations that posed the most significant risk and scapegoating them continued thereafter into later decades of the twentieth century – particularly the 1980s.

These actions and concern by national legislators reflected local constituents and textile workers who were inflamed and anxious about the issues that faced an industry so critical to their lives. Derrick and other South Carolina congressmen received hundreds of letters of support and concern from not only corporations and manufacturers, but also workers and local folks. All asked for his help to keep their industry afloat. Many explanations were given in the 1970s for why the industry might be dying or what they believed could save it; most in the 1970s, though, focused on the impact of imports from East Asian nations like China and Japan. Many workers, like Ken Watson of Duncan, South Carolina, wrote that they worked for or know people who worked for textile firms that were “forced to close one of their plants down, mainly because of textile imports.” This full-scale closure described by him was rare for the late 1970s, but his rhetoric was indicative of the plight that many workers had begun to face by 1977.⁴¹ Watson also blamed Washington alongside his anti-Asian import rhetoric, writing that he could not

⁴⁰ “Textile Trade Policy: A Resolution of the Informal House Textile Committee,” 20 April 1977.

⁴¹ Ken Watson to Rep. Butler Derrick, 15 November 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

understand why “government officials” would “stand idly by and let materials from other countries come in and eliminate [our] jobs.”⁴²

Some workers simply pleaded for help without explanation. Marvin Jackson, a textile worker from Fort Lawn, South Carolina, cautioned lawmakers that “if something isn’t done, we will soon not have a textile industry!”⁴³ Some letters came from concerned citizens, like John Nash of Spartanburg, who wrote that South Carolinians overall were highly concerned about impending tariffs cuts.⁴⁴ He echoed concerns over East Asian imports, writing that “it is a shame that here in the center of the textile industry we cannot buy textiles or apparel without seeing the names of Taiwan, Korea, Japan, or Hong Kong.”⁴⁵ Nash also wrote that there was a grave concern for “the generation to follow” on whether there would be more significant disturbances within the textile industry for the last decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶

By 1978, the rising concerns of textile workers, South Carolinians, and lawmakers turned into early actions to again stem the tide of imports and to keep protective tariffs at the levels of the early 1970s at the national level. Notably, several resolutions in the 95th

⁴² Ken Watson to Rep. Butler Derrick, 15 November 1977.

⁴³ Marvin Jackson to Rep. Butler Derrick, 18 November 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁴ John R. Nash to Rep. Butler Derrick, 17 November 1977, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 7, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1977, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Congress, H.R. 856, H.R. 9937, and H.R. 10853, constituted attempts by textile proponents at the national level to slow the hemorrhaging and assuage the anxiety of textile workers back in South Carolina and elsewhere. House Resolutions 856 and 9937 consisted of amendments tacked on to other bills regarding economic matters in an attempt to request industry-wide exemption from the tariff reductions agreed upon within the Tokyo Round of GATT negotiations. Both failed however, with H.R. 856 dying in committee.⁴⁷ H.R. 9937 reached the Senate; however, with Fritz Hollings tacking on an amendment to “oppose any such resolution” to lower tariffs on “cheap textile imports.”⁴⁸ Hollings’ resolution soundly passed the Senate 48-11 and the House 198-29. Yet, it was quickly vetoed by President Carter due to pressure from U.S. Trade Representative Robert S. Strauss and other advisors.⁴⁹

President Carter claimed throughout his presidency that he was “determined to assist the beleaguered textile industry,” and was “committed to a healthy and growing textile and apparel industry.”⁵⁰ However, Carter vetoed the Hollings Amendment to H.R. 9937 because he saw that the bill “would not address the real causes of the industries

⁴⁷ Rep. Butler Derrick to J.C. Self, 9 January 1978, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 10, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1978, Textiles, Import Tariffs), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina; Rep. Butler Derrick to Eric Tindal, 6 December 1978, Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lee Bandy, “Hollings Assured Domestic Textiles to Be Protected,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), 2 March 1978.

⁴⁹ Lee Bandy, “Textile Trade Bill Ready for Presidential Action,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), 1 November 1978; *A bill to amend the One Bank Holding Company Act of 1970*, H.R. 9937, §1, 95th Congress (1977).

⁵⁰ Jimmy Carter, “Memorandum of Disapproval” 11 November 1978, Office of the White House Press Secretary, W.J. Bryan Dorn Papers, Box 142, Folder Dorn, Personal, Topical, Textiles, 1978-1983, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

difficulties,” and in return argued that it would lead to retaliation from trading partners writing that the loss of other export areas was “too high a price for our Nation to pay.”⁵¹ Carter outlined his plan for the textile and apparel industry within his veto press release, in which he focused on the continued globalization of the United States economy. He wrote that for the 2.5 million textile workers to “survive in their jobs, we must work to keep the world economy strong and international trade free” – which communicates that he would not consider other bills to limit imports.⁵² Furthermore, Carter proclaimed that “each step that we take must be directed toward the long-term health of this industry and the United States economy as a whole,” confirming further his antagonism toward supporting one aspect of the economy at the expense of another.

Despite the short-lived success of Hollings’ amendment, H.R. 10853, also referred to as the Holland-Broyland Bill, was introduced in the House of Representatives in February of 1978 by Rep. Kenneth Holland (D-SC) of South Carolina’s 5th District and representative of Laurens County. Although the bill still ultimately failed, it generated more support nationally and locally, and it represented another step from South Carolina’s members of Congress to attempt to support their textile constituents directly. The bill, a measure to “amend the Trade Act of 1974,” again took aim at imports and sought to “exempt textiles and apparel from any tariff reductions” during the GATT negotiations, without which Holland worried would in the textile industry 41,000 jobs

⁵¹ Jimmy Carter, “Memorandum of Disapproval” 11 November 1978.

⁵² Ibid.

would be lost.⁵³ Holland claimed he “believed in free trade,” however he believed these protectionist measures are necessary because “foreign markets have not opened up to U.S. goods” like the textile industry wanted them to.⁵⁴ This free trade will become an ever-increasing argument used by proponents of the textile industry, as referenced in a letter to Rep. Derrick and President Carter in support of the Hollings amendment, J. Dan Winchester of Greenville invoked the free trade argument, writing that the textile industry “isn’t against free trade,” but argued that for the textile industry to be competitive “all the trade rules [must be] the same.”⁵⁵ This argument continued to reoccur through many of the letters sent to Butler Derrick and other members of Congress, effectively arguing that textile proponents are not for free trade after all. However, at first, they seemed to be in favor of “equal” protection.

Although these measures failed to gain traction in Washington, they were still representative of the population of South Carolina in the areas that Holland, Derrick, and Hollings represented, and were wildly popular amongst constituents, both in the industry and with onlookers. Although not directly involved in the Holland-Broyland Bill or other measures in the 95th Congress, Butler Derrick received hundreds of letters from textile workers, textile manufacturers, and general citizens asking him and pleading with him to pledge his support to these bills. For example, in a letter from Eugene Stone, CEO of

⁵³ H.R. 10853, 95th Congress (1978); Bob Finlayson, “Rep. Holland Says He Won’t Accept Cuts in Textile Tariff,” *The State*, 14 July 1978.

⁵⁴ Bob Finlayson, “Rep. Holland Says He Won’t Accept Cuts in Textile Tariff,” *The State*, 14 July 1978.

⁵⁵ J. Dan Winchester to President Jimmy Carter, 5 January 1978, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 10, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1978, Textiles, Import Tariffs), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

Greenville-based Stone Manufacturing Company, he pled to Derrick that “imports are closing down American businesses” and “taking away the jobs of your constituents;” however, Stone conceded that imports are not the only issues at hand – environmental red tape, labor regulations, and others are also at play.⁵⁶ Furthering this, Erskine Lee of Beacon Manufacturing asked Derrick to support H.R. 10853 due to a possible loss of 400,000 jobs because of the increasing trade deficit, and the industry’s most significant non-import burden were OSHA regulations.⁵⁷

Despite the pleas from those related to the industry and the local support given regarding these resolutions, they gained no traction in Washington. The trade negotiations went through while giving some concessions to the textile industry. Despite vetoing Senator Hollings’ efforts in 1978, President Carter spearheaded his own effort to protect the textile and apparel industry. This step taken by the administration provoked mixed reactions among South Carolina’s textile community; however, by 1979, most believed that it was a step in the right direction. For example, Robert M. Vance, President of Clinton Mills in Laurens County, wrote to Derrick that Carter’s actions “serve[d] the national interest by helping to restore order to our domestic textile and apparel markets.”⁵⁸ Despite the crisis a year earlier and many criticizing Carter’s position on

⁵⁶ Eugene E. Stone, III to Rep. Butler Derrick, 23 March 1978, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 10, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1978, Textiles, Import Tariffs), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁵⁷ Erskine Lee to Rep. Butler Derrick, 15 November 1978, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 10, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1978, Textiles, Import Tariffs), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁵⁸ Robert M. Vance to Rep. Butler Derrick, 5 March 1978, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 15, Folder (Derrick, Public, General, 1979, Textiles), South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections, University of South Carolina.

textiles, these letters of support and thanks indicate that the state's industry's desires had been placated – at least for the time being – until the crisis re-emerges in the early-1980s.

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, particularly the 1960s and the 1970s, members of Congress, local leaders, and even citizens voiced their concerns regarding challenges the textile industry faced in the Piedmont of South Carolina – particularly regarding imports, protective tariffs, and economic recession. However, the local citizens of Laurens and other textile-dominated towns were not worried about the decline or the issues facing the textile industry in the 1960s, while members of Congress and others in Washington did little to address the already mounting imports and other issues for the industry that appeared well before the mid-twentieth century.

By the first half of the 1970s, due to skyrocketing import numbers and a worsening economic recession under the Ford and Carter administrations, both local and national leaders began lamenting the steepening decline of the textile industry while simply claiming restricting imports would solve the industry's issues, or else it would die. Despite the small work being done by government leaders to solve some issues with the textile industry in the 1960s, the issues were primarily ignored locally until the beginning of the import crisis by 1970. In all, it can be seen that the textile industry began its decline over the middle of the twentieth century despite some short-term growth. Primarily, government officials, local leaders, and the working classes ignored that the industry was clearly in decline far before the beginning of the import crisis in the early-1970s and mass closures of the late-1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER TWO

“IT WAS AS IF A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HAD DIED:” AN INDUSTRY IN CRISIS, 1980-1985

When textile employees and citizens of Ware Shoals, South Carolina, awoke on the morning of Sunday, November 4, 1984, no one expected that their lives and their town were about to change forever. However, as church ended and the town’s population of a little over two thousand filed home, word began to spread that the Riegel Textile Corporation was shuttering its flagship plant, the small town’s lifeforce.⁵⁹ Riegel officially blamed the “surge of textile imports for a sharp decline in the company’s output and earnings” for its closure.⁶⁰ However, it left the 900 employees and town’s businesses stranded without their community’s economic backbone. The closure left behind loyal employees who never “quite believed that someday the mill would leave Ware Shoals all together” – the mill that built a textile empire for the Riegel Textile Corporation, despite years of small, downsizing layoffs in 1981 and 1982.⁶¹ These workers, shocked by the decision, acted as “if a member of the family had died” before their grief often turned to anger and despair as they watched their income and the town in which they built lives disintegrate before them. The Riegel Mill’s closure left behind “severe unemployment,

⁵⁹ William E. Schmidt, “Town Built By Textile Mill Faces Future Without It,” *The New York Times* (New York), 22 December 1984.

⁶⁰ Rudolph A. Pyatt, Jr., “Factory’s Shutdown Tears Fabric of Small Company Town,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), 14 October 1985.

⁶¹ William E. Schmidt, “Town Built By Textile Mill Faces Future Without It.”

mortgage foreclosures, outmigration, empty stores,” and much, much more in the once-glorious jewel in the crown for a thriving textile company.⁶²

Ware Shoals’ story was not unlike the story of so many textile-dominated towns within the Piedmont of South Carolina by the mid-1980s. The progression: the closure or threatened closure of a textile mill, followed by the crisis within the population, and then the collapse of the local economy and town structure. Deborah Lake, a textile worker from Ware Shoals, wrote that her community was “left holding the bag” in the form of property and businesses that were now virtually worthless in the wake of the Riegel Mill leaving the town.⁶³ Representative Bryan Dorn once said that “when the textile industry sneezes, main street in South Carolina catches pneumonia” referring to the fact that so many of South Carolina’s towns and cities depend on the textile industry.⁶⁴ This was true not just in terms of employment, but also in keeping local businesses afloat. For example, in Ware Shoals, when the Riegel mill closed, it wiped out close to sixty percent of the town’s businesses and more than fifty percent of property tax revenue generated by the mill that provided services to its residents.⁶⁵

By the early 1980s, many of the fears that government officials, industry leaders, and workers began to have in the late 1970s materialized – leading to an industry-wide

⁶² Rudolph A. Pyatt, Jr., “Factory’s Shutdown Tears Fabric of Small Company Town.”

⁶³ Deborah Lake to Butler Derrick, 5 November 1984, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (2 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁶⁴ “Textile Imports: Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn for Governor” c. 1978, W.J. Bryan Dorn Papers, Box 135, Folder Dorn, Personal, Campaigns, 1978, Campaign Literature, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁶⁵ Rudolph A. Pyatt, Jr., “Factory’s Shutdown Tears Fabric of Small Company Town.”

crisis that escalated throughout the early 1980s. The economic conditions surrounding the textile industry in the 1970s had begun to cripple the already struggling industry by the middle of the 1980s, leading to mass layoffs and plant closures across South Carolina and the Piedmont South. This crisis, fueled by the conditions of the 1980s, was ascribed to growing imports by industry leaders, and it was the result of a modernizing industry.

These two factors combined with an already struggling industry fueled further uncertainty among those in the Piedmont South whose livelihoods were determined by the domestic textile industry's success. By the mid-1980s, industry leaders, workers, and townsfolk panicked and mulled over the possibility of the textile industry's demise – and projected their anger, despair, and confusion onto local newspapers and in correspondence with their government officials at home and in Washington. Through their attempts at convincing their government to rescue the ailing textile and apparel industry in South Carolina, these textile employees use various rhetoric in discussing their feelings over the industry – including anti-Asian xenophobia, patriotism, and personal anguish.

In their responses, members of Congress and state government officials took two separate paths in the early 1980s to assuage the fears of the textile industry while also trying to figure out the best path forward to remedy the economic situation developing within the state. Federal leaders in Washington continued their fight against imports as they did in the late-1970s, to varying levels of success. Simultaneously, state and local government officials took another path by mourning the loss of their textile industry while actively trying to replace it with new economic opportunities. In all, these two

responses by state and federal government officials constituted the action taken to soothe and placate the concerns of workers, industry leaders, and townsfolk who sought explanation and justification for the steepening decline of their industry.

A Steepening Decline

By the beginning of the 1980s, some aspects of the American economy had begun to improve since the late 1970s and the early years of the Jimmy Carter administration, but the textile and apparel industries had begun to falter once again. According to the United States Census of Manufactures, in 1982 South Carolina had only 113,300 textile employees (not including those in apparel) in its manufacturing sector.⁶⁶ This number was down eighteen and a half percent from the state's textile employment number of 139,100 in 1977 and twenty percent below the 143,300 textile workers in 1972.⁶⁷ These numbers show that between 1977 and 1982 – and particularly from 1980-1982 – there was a steepening decline within the textile industry of South Carolina. This was manifested through the mass layoff of mill workers and closures within the ever-struggling textile manufacturing sector. This precipitous downswing occurred primarily because of concerns regarding the impact of imports; however, it also came about due to

⁶⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1982, Geographic Area Series, South Carolina* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 1-35.

⁶⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1977, Volume III: Geographic Area Statistics, Part 2: General Summary, Nebraska-Wyoming* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 41-9; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures, 1972, Volume II: Industry Statistics, Part 1: SIC Major Groups 20-26*, p. 22-3 (see chap. 1, n. 5).

the modernization and continued automation and mechanization of the industry during the first half of the decade.

In 1980, national leaders followed much of the same rhetoric as they did in the 1960s – that of turning a blind eye to the issues they once combatted in the late-1970s due to accepting Carter’s textile policy in the short term. The Carter administration’s short-term textile policy focused on reviewing existing import agreements and searching for potential harmful surges, creating new agreements, and launching a pilot program to improve productivity and promote exportation within the domestic textile and apparel industry.⁶⁸ For example, U.S. Representative Butler Derrick, for one, called Carter’s agreement with China in September of 1980 “a first step” in the right direction, keeping imports from China at the 1977 levels.⁶⁹ Meanwhile the American Textile Manufacturers Institute (ATMI) called Carter’s agreement a “positive development.”⁷⁰

This trend of optimism continued again into 1981, with members of Congress starting to caution that something might have to be done to maintain the status quo. Representative Derrick spoke in October of 1981 that he was “pleased that the textile industry appeared to be healthy;” however, he argued that import regulations were still needed to “protect American jobs.”⁷¹ Derrick also planned to introduce trade legislation

⁶⁸ Jimmy Carter, “Memorandum of Disapproval” 11 November 1978 (see chap. 1 n. 49).

⁶⁹ Lin Smithwick, “Textile agreement gets mixed reaction,” *The Aiken Standard* (Aiken, SC), 18 September 1980, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 88, Folder Clippings, 1980, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Derrick speaks to Textile Weeks Luncheon at Tec,” *The Seneca Journal* (Seneca, SC), 21 October 1981, 18 September 1980, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 88, Folder Clippings, 1981, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

to implement a program which sought “to limit the growth rate of imports to the growth rate of the domestic market” in an attempt to ‘protect’ South Carolinian textile jobs from foreign ‘threats.’⁷² In the period from 1980 until 1982 there was no legislation on the docket in Congress to attempt to control imports; however, South Carolina’s congressional delegation worked alongside the Ronald Reagan administration to persuade it to continue to protect U.S. interests as they entered into talks to renew the latest Multifiber Agreement (asking him to keep imports at the 1979 levels).⁷³

Despite this relative optimism at the federal level, things were not all that well for the South Carolina textile and apparel industry. Between 1980 and 1982, many textile plants began shutting down – albeit not at the levels to be seen in the coming years. What started in the late-1970s had soon gathered a snowball effect, with more and more layoffs and closures as the decade continued. In 1980, ten textile and apparel mills shuttered, displacing 2,101 workers, followed by seventeen mills in 1981, and then twenty-two closings statewide in 1982.⁷⁴ If this many mills were closing as early as 1982, why were federal officials from the state so late at catching on?

At the state level, however, leaders had realized the industry’s condition, and by 1982 the tune from leaders in Columbia was less optimistic than they were at the national

⁷² Derrick speaks to Textile Weeks Luncheon at Tec,” *The Seneca Journal*, 21 October 1981.

⁷³ “The Senate Record of Ernest “Fritz” Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, 3rd edition” April 1984, Ernest F. Hollings Papers, Box 603, Folder Hollings, Public, Senate, Voting Record, Hollings’ Office, Vote Book, April 1984 (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁷⁴ “Plant Closings, 1979-1982,” Richard W. Riley Papers, Box 71, Box RWR, Personal, Campaign, 1982, Gubernatorial Re-election, Debates and Forums, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

level. Governor Richard W. “Dick” Riley, a Democrat from Greenville in office from 1979 to 1987, led the charge to recognize the challenges that faced South Carolina’s textile and apparel industry, and he discussed the steps to be taken during the early 1980s. In September 1982, Governor Riley gave a speech outlining his views where he said that many South Carolinians had witnessed the plight of the “textile and apparel industry and its bitter harvest of high unemployment.”⁷⁵ He further passionately argued that “we cannot and will not abandon this basic industry, so vital” to the state.⁷⁶ Riley suggested that South Carolina (and the federal government) construct a strategy to rebuild the state’s economy after the recession and import crisis of the late 1970s. He argued that this strategy should be “committed to the survival and prosperity of our textile industry,” it should care “about the worker who has been displaced,” and it should be “determined to put those men and women back to work.”⁷⁷ Riley’s comments foreshadowed the rhetoric that he would later use in regards to the industry.

In Laurens, between 1980 and 1983, the local textile industry’s situation was painted in an even more dire light. *The Laurens County Advertiser* ran several articles about how unemployment in Laurens County continued to increase over 1980, reaching a little over thirteen percent by July of that year.⁷⁸ Job experts in Laurens County attributed

⁷⁵ Richard Riley, “On jobs and the economy,” Sumter, SC, 8 September 1982, Richard W. Riley Papers, Box 88, Box RWR, Speeches, 1982, Sept-Nov & c. 1982, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jac Versteeg, “Unemployment on increase in county,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 8 September 1980.

this unemployment to “temporary closures” of the garment industry and “cutbacks in the textile industry” despite no permanent closures of the industry within the county during the year.⁷⁹

Furthermore, by March 1981, J.P. Stevens & Co. announced a change in the products produced in the Watts Mill in Laurens’ northern section to make the plant “more competitive” and make “jobs more stable for its employees” – a response to rising import numbers.⁸⁰ However, this change would result in 275 textile workers permanently losing their jobs to ‘save’ the 375 others employed at the mill – the first true local impact of rising imports and a hurting industry within Laurens.⁸¹ By May of 1981, although down from the intense jobless rate of 1980, the county’s unemployment rate still hovered at 9.2 percent – giving the county the sixteenth highest unemployment rate across forty-six counties, and the local officials prepared county residents that “the job picture [would] get worse before it [got] better.”⁸²

After almost two years of increasing unemployment across Laurens, primarily due to layoffs in the area’s textile and apparel industry, local leaders and townsfolk finally resumed their calls for stricter import controls they previously sought in the late 1970s – joining forces with the ATMI in calling for restrictions once more. In a “textile

⁷⁹ Jac Versteeg, “Unemployment on increase in county,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 8 September 1980.

⁸⁰ “Watts Plant laying off 275 employees,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 30 March 1981.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Ken Garfield, “County’s unemployment rate zooms to 9.2%,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 18 May 1981.

appreciation” banquet held by the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce on October 20, 1981, W. Ray Shockley, President of the ATMI, argued that “to prevent the loss of more jobs...government leaders must renegotiate a stricter agreement with textile exporting countries” because “imports are growing faster than the American market.”⁸³ Shockley further inflamed the crowd and blamed not only foreign low-wage labor for the domestic textile industries problems but also the federal government itself. He suggested that the federal government did not do enough to stop imports while imposing federal regulations in which mills were expected to pay “one out of every five” dollars made by the industry to comply, claiming it shrunk the amount of capital these mills have to invest in their plants or their workers.⁸⁴

In all, during the period leading up to the severe textile crisis of the mid-1980s, the federal, state, and local leaders and commonfolk had three different visions of what was currently taking place within South Carolina’s textile and apparel industry. The cautious optimism of congressmen like Derrick, to the practical solutions advocated by state leaders such as Governor Dick Riley, and the rekindling of fear and despair on the local level led to a disconnect between the three levels on the current status of the industry and also what steps should be taken to fix the challenges. However, by 1984 and 1985, the textile industry experienced an unrivaled crisis heralded by imports, government regulation, economic struggles, and modernization. This crisis would lead to

⁸³ Lea Kahn, “Leaders must negotiate stricter textile import agreements,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 21 October 1981.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

changes in thought, reaction, and strategy played out on the federal, state, and local levels.

The Zenith of the Textile Crisis

As the textile industry in South Carolina moved into 1984, an alarm sounded within local communities, including Laurens, and among textile industry leaders of the need to inform their members of Congress, about the significant issues which the textile industry now faced. Butler Derrick, who earlier led the in the House of Representatives, began to speak out against what he saw were the textile industry's ills and described what he saw taking place around him. Furthermore, these descriptions were paired with reactions from industry leaders and workers themselves and paint a complete picture of what South Carolinians thought was going on with their industry. Together, South Carolina's congressmen, industry leaders, and textile workers showed that by 1984, the state's textile and apparel industry faced threats from rising imports, economic woes, and modernization. Together, these forces threw the textile industry into a crisis characterized by mass layoffs and statewide closures.

However, as this crisis kicked off in 1984, not everyone was convinced. An editorial in the *Greenville News-Piedmont* claimed that "hysteria" was "growing as well as imports." The author tried to assuage the fears of his readership, many of whom worked in textiles, arguing that "the truth is that the American textile industry is growing and expanding in spite of imports, not shrinking because of them."⁸⁵ The editor argued

⁸⁵ "Editorial: Hysteria growing as well as imports," *The Greenville News-Piedmont* (Greenville, SC), 2 September 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (2 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

there was a “Chicken Little” quality to the textile industry reports that were threatened by growing imports, and he did not believe the “sky is falling down on the American textile industry.”⁸⁶ This type of criticism was few and far between; however, articles like these prompted government officials, industry leaders, and textile workers to push even harder to prove their industry was in a full death-spiral.

Members of Congress, like Butler Derrick of South Carolina, began once again to assign the blame for the majority of the textile industry’s issues on the impact of imports from foreign countries – particularly the developing countries of East Asia. In a speech on the House floor in September of 1984, Derrick noted that in 1979, textile imports made up 20.2 percent of the market within the United States, but by 1982, imports within the U.S. had grown over fifty percent to 30.6 percent of the total market.⁸⁷ Derrick further argued that this increase in imports was equivalent to 740,000 American textile workers’ jobs, and if something were not done, these workers would soon continue to lose their jobs due to imports. This trend only continued into 1985, where imports increased another 67 percent from the 1982 numbers, which Derrick believed led to a 40 percent decrease in the domestic output of cotton textiles.⁸⁸ Derrick also outlined the two reasons he saw being responsible for the import problem as the industry entered the middle of the

⁸⁶ “Editorial: Hysteria growing as well as imports,” *The Greenville News-Piedmont*, 2 September 1984.

⁸⁷ Butler Derrick, “Floor speech on imports and employment,” c. September 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (2 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁸⁸ Rep. Butler Derrick to Chairman Sam Gibbons, 23 May 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

decade: a “lack of effective action” by the government and “unfair trade practices by foreign competitors.” These two reasons would become paramount in the rhetoric and actions taken by all parties involved in their attempts to solve the textile crisis as time continued.

At the same time that Derrick and other members of Congress were outlining what they saw as the mortal enemy of the textile industry, industry leaders and mill workers were bemoaning the continued rise of imports and undertook a campaign to make sure their voices and stories were heard. Textile industry leaders primarily focused on how imports directly hurt their business. However, they also employed the rhetoric of threats – such as from J. Connie Robinson, Vice President of Manufacturing at Burlington Industries – who threatened in a letter that if Republicans want the support of “the South, and particularly the textile industry,” they should become more interested in curbing the import problem and more interested in the “effect[s] it is having on textile employment.”⁸⁹ Others, like W. M. “Mat” Self, Vice President of Greenwood Mills, argued that imports, combined with a whole host of “unfair trade practices” such as quota violations, exclusion of American imports, and other factors would soon doom the domestic textile industry.⁹⁰ Self also brought back the old argument that the textile

⁸⁹ J. Connie Robinson to Rep. Butler Derrick, 28 June 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁹⁰ W.M. “Mat” Self, “Speech at the Piedmont Technical College 3rd Annual Textile Awards Lunch,” Greenwood, SC, 25 October 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

industry just sought “free trade” brought about through import controls to compete with rising imports.⁹¹

Textile workers, however, took a less combative tone than did their superiors and industry leaders, and instead wrote their concerns and showed their despair through the pages of their letters. Workers also used various rhetoric to convey their opposition to imports, usually discussing how textiles surrounded their entire lives or using anti-Asian or xenophobic rhetoric – even if it was simply implied and not open hatred. Letters from workers like Ruth Coggins, who wrote that imports were “killing our nation,” placed the blame solely on the countries who were importing textiles into the United States.⁹² She and others often argued that countries from East Asia were “sending our nation down the drain.” However, most workers focused on how they were simply worried about the future and expressed their anguish, worry, and fear to government officials and letters to the editor to many local newspapers. This sentiment was summed up by Larry Hensley of Greenville, who wrote that he was “worried about [his] future job outlook because of the surge of imported textile and apparel products.”⁹³ These fears were soon realized for many textile workers across the state.

⁹¹ W.M. “Mat” Self, “Speech at the Piedmont Technical College 3rd Annual Textile Awards Lunch,”

⁹² Ruth Coggins to Rep. Butler Derrick, 9 February 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁹³ Larry Hensley to Rep. Butler Derrick, 28 September 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

By late 1984 and 1985, fears of the impact of the continued growth of imports had become reality in the form of mass layoffs and closures of plants across the Piedmont. In a speech on the House floor on jobs and imports, Butler Derrick said that employment decreased in South Carolina in ten out of twenty categories of textile manufacturing since “July of 1983 when the industry was already severely threatened.”⁹⁴ He continued that the state lost “almost 10,000 jobs in more than thirty textile plants in two years.”⁹⁵ Derrick further described the closure and mass layoffs through the example of J.P. Stevens – the second-largest textile producer in the nation by 1985 – who had closed thirteen plants in South Carolina since 1980 and had most recently shuttered the Appleton Mill, which would result in 500 people losing their jobs in Anderson County.⁹⁶ In all, Derrick reported that in the first half of 1985 alone, 1,140 textile workers had lost their jobs due to the textile industry’s problems in the mid-1980s.

Similarly, this trend of mass closures and layoffs was seen through the closure of the Riegel Textile Corporation’s mill in Ware Shoals. The mill’s closure, prompted by the increasing imports and competition from foreign textile producers, led to the displacement of 900 textile workers and threw the community into disarray. Former employee Deborah Lake argued that not only the workers but “every person in Ware

⁹⁴ Butler Derrick, “Floor speech on imports and employment,” c. September 1984.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Rep. Butler Derrick to Chairman Sam Gibbons, 23 May 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

Shoals will be affected by the mill closing.”⁹⁷ The example of Ware Shoals was also representative of the reactions of textile workers who lost their jobs and those who were nervous about losing them, who were worried about the possible death of their livelihood, the town they lived in, and their plans for the future.

More locally, this trend of mass layoffs and plant closures which resulted in the unemployment of thousands of textile workers was represented by the closure of the Laurens Mill by Milliken in 1983. Although it occurred a little before the main thrust of the textile crisis in 1984 and 1985, it still represented the reasons for mass layoffs and closures and the impact it had on the community. Milliken officials announced on April 27, 1983, that the plant would close, laying off 180 employees due to the ‘increasing flow of imports from the Far East into markets where Laurens Mill fabric products compete.’⁹⁸ Following this news, Laurens Mayor Bob Dominick called the closure “like a death in the family,” while others argued that the closure of the plant would “hit the community like a ton of bricks.”⁹⁹ The editor of the *Advertiser* ran an editorial following the breaking of the closure news and attempted to comfort the grieving city and workers who had just lost their jobs. He wrote “like a family that suffers an untimely death the City of Laurens...must pull itself together” and begin “to pick up the pieces” to “bounce back from the tragedy and make life better for the survivors.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Deborah Lake to Butler Derrick, 5 November 1984.

⁹⁸ Diane Veto, “Laurens Mill to Close,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 27 April 1983.

⁹⁹ “The Mill News,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 2 May 1983.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

“Survivors,” was an excellent descriptor for those who became unemployed or barely squeezed past actually getting laid off. It was these “survivors,” both textile workers and those who are the leaders of the industry, who began in the mid-1980s to petition their government to do something about the flood of imports, mass layoffs, and plant closures that were plaguing their industry and ending or threatening their way of life. Deborah Lake, a former textile worker, laid off from the Riegel Plant in Ware Shoals in 1984, summed up the feelings of the workers and leaders of South Carolina’s textile industry when she wrote to Butler Derrick in the wake of the plant closure that “it’s okay to complain about imports, but it’s not okay to let those complaints be the only thing that’s done to prevent plant closures.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, starting in 1985, federal and state officials attempted two different strategies to respond to the crisis raging within the textile and apparel industry.

Crisis Management and Reaction

As reactions from textile workers, industry leaders, and concerned citizens piled onto the desks of members of Congress, senators, and state government officials, these leaders began to put in motion a series of bills, plans, campaigns, and rhetoric to allay the fears of the textile industry and comprised their attempts to “save” the already dying industry. Federal and state officials took two separate paths in an attempt to mitigate the problems facing the industry and the state’s economy while alleviating the fears of textile workers and towns. Members of Congress, like Representative Butler Derrick, and Senators Fritz Hollings and Strom Thurmond, sought to confront the import issues head-

¹⁰¹ Deborah Lake to Butler Derrick, 5 November 1984.

on in the early stages of the crisis through bills attempting to diminish textile imports and dilute their effects and the creation of a campaign aimed to support domestic textiles. However, state officials, primarily Governor Dick Riley, now in the final years of his governorship, took a different approach focusing on economic development and appreciation campaigns instead of attacking imports. Altogether, these different strategies focused on a common goal, mitigating the impact of the textile crisis on workers and towns beginning to struggle with the consequences of their dying industry. In turn, these workers reacted in various ways, both positively and negatively, toward the efforts being made by their government.

By 1983, President Reagan had implemented a plan for the nation's textile industry, similarly to how Carter, Ford, and Johnson had earlier responded. Reagan's textile plan entailed utilizing new criteria "for addressing import increases," and if the criteria were met, it would establish "a presumption of market disruption" that the Administration would then address.¹⁰² These criteria were two-fold, one being if imports grew more than 30 percent in a single year or if imports from one individual supplier equaled one or more percent of the total U.S. production of the product. However, members of Congress from textile-producing states and industry leaders contended that Reagan's policy did not go far enough to protect the domestic industry. Instead, they introduced legislation to create a policy that they felt better represented the industry's

¹⁰² Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Press Release on Textile Imports," 16 December 1983, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 21, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1983, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

interests. Despite these efforts, Reagan continued to support this policy, foreshadowing the battles to come between textile-producing states and the Reagan administration.

Textile industry leaders and federal government officials first began their efforts by calling for the re-introduction of “free trade” in the context of textile imports. Many of these officials called for the trade to be “fair and equal,” but that for fair and equal trade to happen, there needed to be regulations that shifted the balance back to favor the United States. For example, the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers put out a statement in which they supported laws and regulations that were equal between all textile countries, advocated reform to the current trade agreements to make them “less complex, less expensive, and less arbitrary,” and finally asked for better enforcement of trade law overseas to provide for “equitable competition.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, “Mat” Self, Vice President of Greenwood Mills, argued that the textile could “compete with anyone” if the trade was made free and fair and made claims that East Asian nations manufacture under illegal conditions.¹⁰⁴

The first attempt by Butler Derrick and other members of Congress to introduce legislation to assist the textile industry was a program designed to mandate that textile goods produced domestically should be labeled as such. The program was designed as a way to “win some quick relief for textiles overrun by imports” without attempting to pass

¹⁰³ National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, “Position Statement on US Trade Laws,” 20 September 1983, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Textiles, General (1 of 3), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁰⁴ W.M. “Mat” Self, “Speech at the Piedmont Technical College 3rd Annual Textile Awards Lunch,” Greenwood, SC, 25 October 1984.

a sweeping import reform bill.¹⁰⁵ By the end of 1984, a textile-focused amendment was tacked onto the Drug Price Competition and Patent Term Restoration Act of 1984. It passed the House unanimously 362-0 en route to the bill being signed into law by President Reagan in September.¹⁰⁶ Derrick and fellow congressman Carroll Campbell (R-SC) co-sponsored this labeling measure requiring all textile goods to “carry a label conspicuously identifying” where it was produced.¹⁰⁷ Derrick promoted the decision, holding that this would help save textile jobs because “the conscientious American will get in the habit of looking for [and buying] items made in the U.S.A.”¹⁰⁸ The bill was then coupled alongside a marketing campaign designed to promote products that were “Crafted with Pride in the U.S.A,” all in an attempt to “boost the sale of our own textile products: to blunt the impact that foreign made product, particularly from the Far East, are having over here” as the editor of the *Advertiser* put it.¹⁰⁹ The textile labeling law and the “Made in the U.S.A.” marketing campaign were hailed as a success and a victory that came few and far between for the textile leaders and mill workers alike, and it was

¹⁰⁵ Butler C. Derrick, Jr., “Labeling for Textiles,” *Congressman Butler Derrick’s Washington Report*, Vol. 10, No. 5-84, September 1984. Butler Derrick Papers, Box 24, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1984, Voter Questionnaires, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁰⁶ Chris Weston, “Country-of-origin label now law for textile goods,” *The Greenville News* (Greenville, SC), 25 September 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 89, Folder Clippings. 1984, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; “The Textile Labeling Law,” c. September 1984, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁰⁷ “The Textile Labeling Law,” c. September 1984.

¹⁰⁸ Butler C. Derrick, Jr., “Labeling for Textiles.”

¹⁰⁹ “Pushing ours,” *The Laurens County Advertiser* (Laurens, SC), 8 August 1983.

considered to be “the most significant piece of textile legislation to become law in recent memory.”¹¹⁰

Following their success with the labeling campaign, federal government leaders then attempted another go at passing a sweeping textile trade bill to fix the industry’s challenges in 1985. 99 H.R. 1562, also known as the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985, was introduced into the House in March of 1985 and co-sponsored by 291 members of Congress, including all of South Carolina’s congressional delegation.¹¹¹ Butler Derrick, one of the original co-sponsors and one of the most outspoken proponents of the bill, wrote that this proposal was an attempt to stop “free trade and a strong dollar from destroy[ing] our economy.”¹¹² He continued that there “are no free trading partners anymore,” creating a “threat to the long-term viability of our domestic industries, particularly the textile and apparel industry.”¹¹³ This bill was one of the first significant attempts to pass a sweeping import quota and trade control bill since the short-lived Holland-Broyland Bill almost a decade earlier, and it was justified through the fair versus free trade argument employed by many of the industry’s leaders.

The Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985 sought to protect the domestic textile and apparel industry from growing imports by reworking the Multifiber

¹¹⁰ “The Textile Labeling Law,” c. September 1984.

¹¹¹ Butler Derrick, “Free trade? It’s us against them,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), 25 September 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 89, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1985, Textiles, Jan-Sept., South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Agreements currently in place in a way that experts believed would best suit the interests of the industry. Primarily, the trade bill provided for a two-fold approach to handling the import segment of the textile crisis. First, the bill would categorize exporting countries into three categories: major producing countries (10% or more of imports into the United States), producing countries (1.25% or more of imports to the U.S), and all other countries – with the exclusion of Canada and the European Economic Community.¹¹⁴ Then, based on that categorization, it would limit or rollback imports from these countries, namely Taiwan, Korea, and Hong Kong would get rollbacks of 30%, while all other producing countries would be limited to the quotas agreed upon in the 1984 round of Multifiber Agreements.¹¹⁵ In all, this trade bill was written to target the imports from developing East Asian nations that had received the blame again and again over the mid-twentieth century for the domestic textile and apparel industry's challenges.

The bill passed the House and Senate primarily along the textile support lines – textile-producing and other traditional industry bases supporting the bill, while most Republicans and those from non-textile areas not supporting it. However, when it reached President Reagan's desk, it was quickly vetoed and returned to the House. Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige wrote Butler Derrick explaining why the Administration could not and would never support the legislation, believing the bill would “have a negative effect on the domestic economy and violate the United States' multilateral and

¹¹⁴ “A Comparison of the House and Senate Amended versions of The Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985,” c. 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

bilateral agreements.”¹¹⁶ Baldrige also noted that the Administration would continue to work within the policy set by the President in 1983 and work on a case-by-case basis.¹¹⁷ Following this response, Derrick and the other 291 co-sponsors on the bill set out on a veto override, which failed to reach the needed two-thirds majority.

In terms of reactions from industry leaders, mill workers, and residents of textile towns, the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985 generated support from across the state like never seen before for any previously introduced measure. Textile workers and management joined local officials to craft letter-writing campaigns and circulated petitions to members of Congress and notably President Reagan to tell their stories and urge federal officials to pledge their support for the trade bill. For example, the 2,100 employees of Mayfair Mills in Acadia wrote over 3,400 letters encouraging the President to “urge his support for fair trade and encourage him to sign this important textile legislation.”¹¹⁸

Butler Derrick himself received thousands of letters from textile workers regarding the pending legislation, sharing their connection to the textile industry while expressing various feelings regarding the industry’s fate ranging from appreciation and thanks to despair and hopelessness to even optimism. Again as in the 1970s, through their

¹¹⁶ Sec. Malcolm Baldrige to Butler Derrick, 23 July 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Frederick B. Dent to Butler Derrick, 17 October 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

letters of emotion, textile workers still relied on underlying rhetoric in their attempts to convince or thank leaders for their support – primarily focusing on patriotism, the American Dream, xenophobia, or the fact that they had no formal training or education. One textile worker of Honea Path invoked xenophobia and patriotism when he wrote that he was “a working American” in the textile industry worried about losing his job and asked Derrick, “why does our federal government find it more important that people in other countries have jobs when they take ours?”¹¹⁹ Another worker thanked Derrick for his support of the trade bill and used discussions of the American Dream to justify the bill, asking Congress to “give Middle Class America our self-respect back, let us keep our homes and jobs.”¹²⁰ Most focused on how long they were textile workers, like one textile worker who wrote that he had been working in textiles for nineteen years and had no “other training or education and would find it difficult to change” jobs.¹²¹

However, despite the underlying messaging within many of the letters composed by textile workers, all of the thousands of letters received by Derrick and other federal leaders had an underlying tone of gratitude even in the depths of their despair. Although many wrote about how they were terrified of not finding a new job due to lack of formal

¹¹⁹ Raymond Fleming to Butler Derrick, c.1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act (5 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹²⁰ James Cromer to Butler Derrick, 21 September 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act (5 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹²¹ David Dixon to Butler Derrick, 24 April 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act (11 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

training, they were ultimately thankful for the help. Also, for the first time in a long time, these textile workers felt heard by those in power. Everyone who wrote a letter believed their voice mattered, from elderly workers who devoted their lives to the textile industry to young children. For example, Joanne Brown of Calhoun Falls wrote to Derrick that her husband worked in the textile industry for thirty-five years and is “very glad [he] support[s] this bill” because they would find it hard to make a living without it.¹²² Others provided more personal stories to justify why they needed support or what they would like to see done in Congress, like Glenda Armstrong of Clover, SC, who wrote that she always made sure to purchase goods bearing the tag of “Crafted With Pride in America,” and told Derrick that “we must curtail imports in order for our industry to survive” before thanking him for his support of textiles in South Carolina.¹²³ Overall, textile workers’ reactions regarding the work federal leaders were doing to save the textile industry were positive, and they used their platform to share their ideas and worldview with their leaders.

South Carolina’s government officials took a different approach from that of members of Congress in their plans to handle the textile crisis. Primarily, state leaders such as Governor Richard “Dick” Riley focused on working solutions that were easily

¹²² Joanne C. Brown to Butler Derrick, 1 May 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act (8 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹²³ Glenda M. Armstrong to Butler Derrick, 14 May 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act (10 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

within the grasp and the power of the state, such as textile appreciation weeks and the beginnings of an economic development focus in Columbia.

In the early 1980s, state officials and local leaders began designating one week a year as “Textile Week” in South Carolina, dedicated to remembering and celebrating the textile industry’s importance and thanking textile workers for their hard work amid the textile crisis. These were primarily acted upon at the local level and became celebratory and meaningful weeks within many textile-dominated communities. Locally, in Laurens, Textile Week became a jam-packed event-filled week with mills having open houses for tours, five-kilometer road races, banquets, luncheons, and sales in stores.¹²⁴ Statewide, all Textile Weeks usually culminated in the Clemson-North Carolina State football game dubbed the “Textile Bowl” due to the importance of the industry within each school.¹²⁵

However, local and state leaders wanted to make sure the public remembered that the events of Textile Week were to honor those who worked in the industry, not just a time to have fun. The *Advertiser* ran editorials during Textile Week to make sure residents understood that “Textile Week should be of paramount importance not just to those who work in the mills, but to all those who call themselves good Laurens County citizens.”¹²⁶ To local leaders and local citizens, Textile Week was “the perfect time to

¹²⁴ Jayne Gordon, “Week’s events cite textile industry,” *The Laurens County Advertiser* (Laurens, SC), 22 October 1984.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ “Textile Week: Much meaning,” *The Laurens County Advertiser* (Laurens, SC), 22 October 1984.

recognize how much we need the textile industry” and “to take action to show that we can be of help to that same industry during its perilous times.”¹²⁷

Starting in the mid-1980s, state leaders, particularly Governor Riley, began to shift focus away from the ills of the textile industry and began to supplant hostile rhetoric with a focus on economic development to replace closing mills rather than saving them. Many of Riley’s speeches after 1983, for example, focused on economic development to help those whose mills were closing – rather than focusing on how the state should help fight the challenges the industry faced. In a speech to the Textile Manufacturer Association Board, Riley discussed the importance of economic development across the state, wanting “to make sure South Carolina’s economy (and people) is well-prepared to fully respond” to the uncertain times the textile industry faced.¹²⁸ Furthermore, Riley argued that the “need for good economic development has never seemed so important” in the challenging times of the textile crisis and outlined new initiatives to jump-start economic development in the state, such as the South Carolina Research Authority or better investment in education for future industry leaders.¹²⁹ This focus on economic development as a solution to the state’s economic woes and the plight of displaced textile workers would only increase as the decade continued.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Richard W. Riley, “Speech to the Textile Manufacturer Association Board,” 5 January 1984, pg.1, Richard W. Riley Papers, Box 88, Folder RWR, Speeches, 1984, 1-5 Jan, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹²⁹ Richard W. Riley, “Speech to the South Carolina Textile Manufacturers Association,” 21 May 1983, pg. 2-3, Richard W. Riley Papers, Box 88, Folder RWR, Speeches, 1983, 20 Jan-June, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

Throughout the first half of the 1980s, the textile industry experienced renewed crisis and uncertainty due to climbing imports and a lack of action in the 1970s that culminated in a full-on textile crisis beginning in the mid-1980s. Characterized by mass layoffs and mill closures on a scale never experienced before, federal and state leaders took different approaches to assuage the dying industry's concerns. Members of Congress attempted to attack the import situation head-on through trade legislation, while state leaders attempted recognition campaigns and economic development to heal their broken economies. All in all, textile workers responded to each and came out of the woodwork to support their struggling industry and promote it to the rest of the nation as something worth fighting for. However, national leaders' failure to secure a trade deal led to a continuation of the textile crisis into the late-1980s, with more consequences for the state's textile and apparel workers.

CHAPTER THREE

“WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”: CRISIS, DISILLUSIONMENT, AND SILENCE, 1986-1990

“We are asking for a chance to survive,” declared mill worker Becky Timms of Ninety Six in the aftermath of the failure of the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985, “Nothing More. Nothing Less.”¹³⁰ While her response could be considered typical of the textile workers’ response during the height of the textile crisis, her no-nonsense, authoritative tone differentiates her and others’ correspondence and feelings toward the actions of federal and state leaders’ actions following the failure of multiple trade enforcement measures in the mid-1980s. Others, like worker Doug Johnson, of Starr, took an even more aggressive tone in telling Congressman Butler Derrick, “you dumb asses need help if you are still falling for” what he called the lies and deceit of industry leaders, and argued they and the government had no concern for the welfare of the textile workers themselves.¹³¹ Others, like local leaders and state officials, tried to stay optimistic, with outlets like the *Laurens County Advertiser* attempting to promote “some good news.”¹³² Nevertheless, their optimistic rhetoric slowly faded into radio static.

¹³⁰ Becky Timms to Butler Derrick, 15 May 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 33, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1987, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹³¹ Doug Johnson to Butler Derrick, 23 March 1988, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 35, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1988, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹³² “Textile Week: Some Good News,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 22 October 1986.

What had been a unified front of workers, industry leaders, and local leaders working together to push the federal and state governments to support South Carolina's textile industry had become a disunited and fragmented group. In the state's textile-dominated towns and cities, blind support from textile workers transformed almost overnight to disillusionment with federal and state leaders' attempts to save the industry between 1985 and 1987. Their disillusionment and outspoken nature soon faded into silence by the end of the 1980s – with workers, industry leaders, and local officials barely mentioning textiles or updates to the challenges the industry faced by the 1990s.

Starting with the attempted veto override of the Textile and Trade Apparel Act of 1985 in the early stages of 1986, the textile-friendly members of Congress began several campaigns across the latter half of the 1980s in the same manner as they had in 1984 and 1986. These officials undertook these campaigns due to the overwhelming amount of support they received from the textile industry in 1985 and believed they would receive the same support this time. These campaigns constituted attempts to pass trade legislation amid continued mill closures and layoffs statewide, as well as increasing imports from East Asian nations, which they continued to see as threatening to the domestic textile industry. Meanwhile, state officials continued with the same tactics they employed in the early-1980s, using textile appreciation weeks and a stronger focus on economic development within the state – to varying levels of success.

Despite these efforts by national and state leaders, the support of the once-unified textile interest group seen in the first half of the 1980s began to fracture and wane across 1986 and 1987. Textile workers, disillusioned by the 1985 textile trade bill's failure,

became brusque and disenchanted with the efforts of members of Congress and other federal leaders. Meanwhile, industry leaders continued to support the efforts of members of Congress while often condemning the actions of state leaders whom they thought had “abandoned” the textile industry in their time of need. From 1986-1987, local leaders in Laurens (and other towns) attempted to sit the fence, trying to appease their textile workers and the industry leaders and praising state leaders’ efforts to bring new industry into the county.

Due to the continued failure of federal leaders to secure the passage of a trade bill for the textile industry by 1988, the disillusionment of the textile interest groups turned to silence. No workers, industry leaders, or local leaders discussed their industry, its challenges, or asked for help to save their jobs as they had done a decade prior.

There is no direct acknowledgment, speech, or rhetoric from current and former millhands, industry leaders, or other parties that they believed the South Carolina textile industry could no longer be saved in the late 1980s. However, shifting modes of employment, rhetoric regarding former mill buildings, and a growing focus on economic development amidst the silence on the textile industry within Laurens and other Piedmont towns declared otherwise. By 1990, the textile crisis that ravaged the state’s traditional (and first) manufacturing industry had evolved from a true crisis for the state’s economy to the status quo.

The Veto Override Failure

Over the latter half of the 1980s, the textile industry continued in the downward spiral it had started in 1984, with employment especially plummeting by the late 1980s.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, textile employment by 1982 had dropped to 113,300 – down 20 percent from the early 1970s. Five years later, textile employment in the state was down another 12.7 percent to only 98,900 textile workers within the state, and all in all, the state had lost over 30 percent of its textile workforce between 1972 and 1987. This crisis, which had roots stretching back for nearly a decade prior, had begun to drive the nail in the coffin of the state’s textile and apparel industry, and the on-going crisis was still attributed to growing import numbers by the late-1980s. By 1986, South Carolina’s textile industry was continuing to experience the challenges as it had earlier, despite the efforts of national lawmakers who were largely unsuccessful – particularly the attempted veto override of the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985.

Following President Reagan’s veto of the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act, South Carolina’s congressional delegation joined other members of Congress, and attempted a veto override. These textile proponents believed they could garner enough support for the two-thirds majority necessary to preempt Reagan’s case-by-case free-market textile policy. Congressman Butler Derrick thought the veto override was totally necessary, as he believed this bill, in particular, would “stop the basic erosion of the textile industry” through its provisions to “take action against specific causes of unfair trade” – or imports.¹³³

By 1986, many within the industry and those who lived in and near the South Carolina Piedmont’s textile industry began to view the veto override of the Textile and

¹³³ Mike Petrovsky, “President’s Veto Hits Home,” *The Seneca Journal* (Seneca, SC), 9 June 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1986, Textiles, Jan-May, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

Apparel Trade Enforcement Act as a last-ditch effort to preserve the industry. Local leaders in Laurens and many other textile towns saw the veto override as do-or-die for the textile industry. The editor of the *Advertiser* declared that “success means that the textile industry in America will get a fighting chance to survive,” while “failure means that the floodgates of foreign-made goods will swing open even wider.”¹³⁴ Many considered the bill and veto override the “only option left” for the textile industry – which had struggled throughout the early 1980s.¹³⁵

Textile workers themselves remained active in their letter-writing campaigns as they had for the earlier iteration of the bill, yet, nowhere near the numbers as they had written in 1985. Textile workers’ reaction and support for the override followed a similar form, yet with more of a tinge of desperation. One worker, writing before the override vote, believed that “it is almost as bad as the 1929 Depression we had” in the towns and cities devastated by textile mill closures.¹³⁶ Others, like Marion Argo of Abbeville, wrote that “you could not imagine the depression and feeling of hopelessness that gripped the people” and pleading that “Congress must now take control of the trade problem” by overriding Reagan’s veto.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ “It’s now or never for textile bill,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 4 August 1986.

¹³⁵ “Proposed trade bill our only option left,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 23 September 1985.

¹³⁶ James Boggs to Rep. Thomas Petri, 7 August 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 31, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1986, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹³⁷ Marion Argo to Rep. MacKay, ca. 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 31, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1986, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

On the eve of the override vote in August of 1986, textile proponents were confident but unsure of what the results would hold. Butler Derrick believed he had “people who did not initially support the bill thinking” about supporting it.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the editor of the *Laurens County Advertiser* wrote that “well-reasoned persuasion” seemed to be working, arguing that the override “looked to be a real possibility.”¹³⁹ However, when it came to a vote in early August, the veto override failed to obtain the two-thirds majority by a slim margin of only eight votes, 276-149.¹⁴⁰ The most significant attempt to assist the textile industry to date had failed, not only once but twice.

Workers and local citizens were shocked, and despite the previous failures, they had gotten their hopes up once again that the federal government would rescue them from their crisis only, in their view, to be let down and failed again. Mark Lyday, a junior-high school student in Easley, echoed the sentiments of the entire industry when he questioned Butler Derrick, “where do we go from here?” and “What happens next for the textile industry?”¹⁴¹ The editor of the *Advertiser* put it best that “close [in getting the override] is also good in breaking hearts,” and that just when textile workers thought help was

¹³⁸ Kathy Murray, “Congressmen See No Textile Bill Push Until August,” *Anderson Independent-Mail* (Anderson, SC), 8 March 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1986, Textiles, Jan-May, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina

¹³⁹“Textile bill defeated, but battle not over,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 11 August 1986.

¹⁴⁰ Chris Weston, “Textile Veto Upheld,” *The Greenville News* (Greenville, SC) 7 August 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1986, Textiles, Jan-May, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁴¹ Mark Lyday to Butler Derrick, 21 September 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 31, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1986, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

forthcoming, “the rug was pulled out from under them.” Chris Weston of *The Greenville News* reported that following the override’s failure, industry leaders promised to continue the fight against imports and push for trade legislation from Washington throughout the decade “as long as American textile communities are being dismantled by unfair imports.”¹⁴² However, those same communities of workers and local citizens started becoming more and more disillusioned by the continually failed efforts of federal leaders in the 1980s, being particularly true following the Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987.

Foundering Assistance and Disillusionment

Throughout 1986 and 1987, national and state leaders continued with the same policies they had done earlier in the decade and continued to diverge in their economic policy and political rhetoric regarding the state’s textile industry. Federal leaders continued their attempts to pass sweeping trade bills to cut the imports they saw as damaging the textile industry. In contrast, their state counterparts continued to support economic development within the state and “appreciate” the dying textile industry. Despite these efforts, textile workers and industry leaders’ reactions sharply diverged. Millhands became more and more disillusioned with repeated failures by federal leaders while industry leaders were becoming more and more disillusioned with state leaders by 1988.

Picking up with members of Congress and other federal leaders in the Textile Caucus in 1987, Derrick, Fritz Hollings (D-SC) and others attempted yet another sweeping, omnibus trade bill for the textile industry. The proposed Textile and Apparel

¹⁴² Chris Weston, “Textile Veto Upheld,” *The Greenville News*, 7 August 1986.

Trade Act of 1987, which took a similar tone and form as the bill only two years prior. Still, it was yet another attempt by textile-friendly members of Congress to slow the ongoing hemorrhaging from imports. Derrick and others claimed that this bill, modeled after the previous one, was scaled down in an attempt to “resolve the complaints that cost them victory” in 1985 and 1986.¹⁴³ Most congressmen, like Derrick, believed that the compromise bill was the best way to get restrictions passed, while senators, like Hollings, felt “we ought to be singing the same song,” and making changes could scare off supporters.¹⁴⁴ Derrick proclaimed that this bill was “far more generous to our trading partners than past legislation.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, he argued that it was necessary to provide an “effective remedy to the import problem.”¹⁴⁶ In the end, the compromise bill landed on the House floor in early 1987, attempting to do what its predecessor could not.

This newest piece of legislation simplified and significantly slimmed down the provisions of the previous one to answer the criticisms of the 1985 proposal in order to gain further support from those previously against it and sway President Reagan from another veto. Derrick argued that this simplified compromise bill was the direct result of

¹⁴³ “Scaled down textile bill offered,” *The Index-Journal* (Greenwood, SC), 20 February 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1987, Textiles, Jan-June, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁴⁴ “Democrats To Try Textile Bill Again,” *The News* (Lancaster, SC), 2 February 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1987, Textiles, Jan-June, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁴⁵ “Derrick Touts ‘Global Quota’ In New Textile Bill,” Press Release, 17 February 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 33, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1987, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

three criticisms to the previous bill that the Textile Caucus tried to remedy: first, that the last bill was anti-Asian; second, that the Reagan Administration “did not have the flexibility” to carry out foreign policy, and third, that “it would invite retaliation.”¹⁴⁷ The Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987 acted upon two significant provisions: one, that it would install a global quota of no greater than one percent higher than 1986 import levels and would grow by that one percent every year (rather than targeting individual nations), and two, there would be no rollback of trade or imports.¹⁴⁸ Derrick argued that this bill addressed the above concerns twofold – through global quotas rather than targeting specific nations, and “since there is no rollback of trade,” there should be no retaliation from trading partners.¹⁴⁹

Amid the discussion and battle over the Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987, industry leaders and textile operatives expressed divergent views over their feelings toward federal leaders’ efforts. Mill workers became more disillusioned and discouraged with national leaders, while industry leaders continued their support. Throughout 1987, members of Congress, especially the South Carolina delegation, received hundreds of negative letters from mill workers expressing their discontent and irritation toward the trade bill and pent-up frustration and disappointment from the previous failures in 1985 and across the late 1970s. Many workers focused their displeasure on the idea that these

¹⁴⁷ Butler Derrick (SC), “Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987,” *Congressional Record* 133:25 (19 February 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 33, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1987, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁴⁸ “Derrick Touts ‘Global Quota’ In New Textile Bill,” 17 February 1987.

¹⁴⁹ Derrick (SC), “Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987,” *Congressional Record* 133:25.

textile legislation attempts and losses were starting to hurt workers, those who depend on the textile industry, and other local citizens more than help. For example, the owner of a womens' boutique in Georgia wrote to Derrick in frustration, saying that this bill would hurt "the 'little man' and [have] no effect on the big and powerful."¹⁵⁰ Similarly, a textile worker felt that this legislation would not help "anyone other than [the] Millikens, Stevenses, and their cohorts" – not the workers that federal officials claimed to be protecting.¹⁵¹

While not lambasting the efforts of federal leaders outright, other workers took a more exasperated tone when communicating with members of Congress regarding the Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987. Often through these terse letters of support, workers implied that they were on their last straw with the federal government. One textile worker of Ninety Six wrote to Representative Derrick seemingly exasperated that using lofty terms such as "protectionism" and "free trade" to try to solve the industry's ills was "wearing pretty thin with Americans who stand to lose their jobs."¹⁵² She and many other textile workers across the state asked for "a chance to survive," and wrote that they did not want any bombastic claims – anything that was "political" or something

¹⁵⁰ Raymond Baumel to Butler Derrick, 19 February 1987, pg. 1, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 33, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1987, Textiles, General, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵¹ Doug Johnson to Butler Derrick, ca. 1987, pg. 1, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 33, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1987, Textiles, Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵² Becky Timms to Butler Derrick, 15 May 1987.

that was “only important...for reelection.”¹⁵³ Simultaneously, silence from many workers who may have written to plead with the government in 1985 indicates that many workers no longer believed the federal government could save them.

By the time the bill came to a vote in Congress, it had garnered much of the same support as the previous bill, and again the vote was mainly along party lines. With President Reagan making it very clear that he would “veto any bill that established import quotas” that he saw was “protectionist,” the bill passed the House of Representatives 263 to 156, twenty-seven votes away from the two-thirds majority needed in case of an override.¹⁵⁴ The Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987 was then passed onto the Senate as S. 2662 in September of the same year before being vetoed by Reagan in 1988.¹⁵⁵ Butler Derrick did report that “Congress was not willing to override President Reagan’s veto of the textile bill on October 4.”¹⁵⁶ Derrick vowed that he would “not cease in his efforts to bring some fairness to this trade problem,” and expressed his “total commitment to the fight for the textile industry.”¹⁵⁷ Despite his zeal, there was a distinct lack of coverage of the bill’s veto and override process in local newspapers at the time, as

¹⁵³ Ibid.; Kaye Maness to Butler Derrick, 13 January 1986, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 31, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1986, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵⁴ John H. Sorrells, Jr., “House votes limit on textile imports,” *The Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA), 17 September 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1987, Textiles, July-December, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵⁵ Butler Derrick to Gerald Adams, 7 September 1988, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 35, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1988, Textiles; Butler Derrick to Hugh Harris, 13 October 1988, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 35, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1988, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵⁶ Butler Derrick to Hugh Harris, 13 October 1988.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

well as a lack of discussion among textile workers, industry leaders, and federal officials about the override process. This silence indicated that many had given up on the efforts of their members of Congress to save the industry.

At the same time that Congress was fighting an uphill battle to pass the 1987 textile bill, state leaders continued their efforts to repair the economy left behind by the textile crisis through economic development, and they continued to focus on the industry through a changing textile appreciation week and textile festivals in mill towns. Once a member of Congress from South Carolina's Fourth Congressional District (the area surrounding Greenville County), Governor Carroll Campbell, elected to the governorship in 1986, became the major player at the state level in 1987, revitalizing the State's Development Board and Department of Commerce to serve his agenda of economic development better. Campbell kept the attention of displaced workers and anxious mill workers through the positive image he painted for the textile industry to be appreciated – which he continued from his predecessor Richard Riley. Together, these two state policies became wildly popular at the local level with millhands and citizens, while many industry leaders became disgruntled and demonized state leaders for their economic development efforts despite their approval of “textile week.”

Across 1986 and 1987, state and local leaders doubled down their textile appreciation efforts, continuing their “Textile Week” campaigns to support the South Carolina textile industry and celebrate the workers as heroes of American industry. These campaigns, which began in the early-1980s, focused on textile-centric events to recognize the textile industry's impact on South Carolina. However, by 1986, Textile Week in the

state began to take on a new tone following the failures at the national level, with textile weeks attempting to be a bright spot amidst the dim outlook for the industry. In Laurens the 1986 Textile Week was overshadowed by “the frustrating news that the textile industry is on the decline” as well as the “disappointment” of the failure of the veto override.¹⁵⁸ However, local leaders in Laurens, like those in other towns across the state, attempted to instead “celebrate those efforts” of the industry, and to “[chart] new strategies and [create] new opportunities” within the state.¹⁵⁹ In other towns, such as Greenwood, Textile Week became a self-examination of the relationship between mill and town. To illustrate this, Mat Self of Greenwood Mills claimed during a Textile Week event in 1987 that “the problems of the community are also the problems of the textile industry,” and that through “partnership,” these challenges could be overcome.”¹⁶⁰ Rather than being the festive celebration as it was in the early 1980s, Textile Week had become a somber recognition of the industry’s ills, along with an attempted celebration of what could be a dying or changing industry.

While the textile appreciation week had taken on a new tone, mill towns across the Piedmont began to form “textile festivals” to celebrate the textile industry’s impact on those communities. One particular example, the Joanna Textile Festival centered in Joanna in south-western Laurens County, became a successful and thriving celebration of

¹⁵⁸ “Textile Week: Some Good News,” *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 22 October 1986.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Mike Hermann, “Ceremony kicks off Textile Week,” *The Index-Journal* (Greenwood, SC), 12 October 1987, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 90, Folder Derrick, Clippings, 1987, Textiles, July-December, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

the town's life force. Joanna Textile Days (eventually the Textile Festival) began in April 1984 as an annual festival to "instill some unity and spirit into the town" that began to feel the effects of the industry's downturn.¹⁶¹ By 1987, the Joanna Textile Festival became a successful "tradition over the [previous] four years," drawing large crowds into the cramped mill town with parades, beauty pageants, mill tours, and arts and crafts booths.¹⁶² The festival's purpose had shifted from town unity to a promotion of textiles and "American-made products" because "textiles are the heartbeat of Joanna" – and many other towns who promoted similar festivals.¹⁶³ Local leaders in Laurens County called it an "homage to the textile industry," and it emerged as a way to celebrate the industry in a different way, not just to boost the local economy.¹⁶⁴

As local leaders and mill towns continued to promote Textile Week and create textile festivals to celebrate their decaying industry amid the failure of national textile trade bills, state leaders redoubled their emphasis on economic development in South Carolina to remedy the textile crisis. Attracting new industry, jobs, and capital into the state's economy became one of the main agendas of Governor Campbell – telling a group of future investors in 1987 that he hoped that "economic development and progress in

¹⁶¹ "Festive unity," *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 11 April 1984.

¹⁶² Rick Hendricks, "At Joanna springfest, Textiles reign supreme," *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 13 April 1987.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ "Textile festival carves out its niche," *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 15 April 1987.

South Carolina [would] be the major hallmark” of his administration.¹⁶⁵ Campbell began actively promoting South Carolina as a place for investment by large corporations, especially international companies – especially with Asian nations such as Japan. Particularly, Campbell underscored South Carolina’s “pro-business climate,” a “host of incentives” for relocation, a “fair and reasonable tax structure,” and more as factors that made South Carolina “a great place to live as well as a good place to do business.”¹⁶⁶

Alongside Governor Campbell’s work, the efforts of the State Development Board also contributed to the economic development focus of the state government and shifting away from a focus on textiles. J. Mac Holladay, then director of the State Development Board, announced in 1986 that South Carolina needed to move in a new direction, and the state could “no longer rely solely on our manufacturing and industrial past.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, he and other state official began to believe that textiles were no longer the future for the state’s economy. The State Development Board’s efforts concentrated on enticing and promoting new industry to call South Carolina home, to “promote the state to business decision-makers,” and to promote the state’s “trainable workforce.”¹⁶⁸ The trainable workforce was a euphemism for the unemployed, unskilled

¹⁶⁵ Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., “Trade and Investment Resources in South Carolina,” Speech at The Waldorf-Astoria, 9 April 1987, Carroll Campbell Papers, Box 3, Folder Campbell, Speeches, 1987, April, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁶⁶ Campbell, “Trade and Investment Resources in South Carolina,” 9 April 1987

¹⁶⁷ South Carolina State Development Board, “Media Information - For Release: Friday, June 13, 1986” (Columbia, SC, June 13, 1986), S 346017 Department of Commerce, Press Releases, 1986-2010, Box 1, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

textile labor force, whom many in the state government believed could be retrained into other industries to ameliorate the textile crisis.

However, textile industry leaders reacted negatively to the State Development Board and other state officials that promoted economic development and a shift away from the textile industry. Many industry officials even branded the state agency as anti-textile and against the once-largest industry in the state. For example, W. M. “Mat” Self of Greenwood Mills claimed that Mac Holladay and that State Development Board “question[ed] the worth of the textile industry,” “dismiss[ed] the textile industry,” and “question[ed] its importance.”¹⁶⁹ Despite the attacks from some textile executives, the Development Board maintained that they were “aware of the countless contributions that the textile industry has made to our state.”¹⁷⁰ However, Director Holladay stated that the facts showed that “the industry [had] lost 59,000 jobs in South Carolina” since the mid-1970s and that “South Carolina’s economic growth in recent years [came] from other parts of the manufacturing sector.”¹⁷¹

Throughout 1986 and 1987, federal and state leaders took divergent paths to acknowledge and assist the textile and apparel industry and their strategies for repairing the state’s economy because of the textile crisis of the 1980s. Federal leaders continued attempting to pass bills limiting imports they saw as hurting the textile industry with the veto override of the 1985 bill and the failed Textile and Apparel Trade Act of 1987. On

¹⁶⁹ J. Mac Holladay to W.M. Self, 18 December 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 31, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1986, Textiles, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

the other hand, state leaders focused on celebrating and acknowledging the state's textile industry while focusing more heavily on economic development and growing other aspects of South Carolina's industrial sector. These two efforts were met with divergent and divisive reactions from textile workers and industry leaders – effectively ending the unified textile interest group that so successfully lobbied for the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act of 1985. Textile workers, feeling let down by federal leaders continued failures to stem the flow of imports, became more and more disillusioned and frustrated with their members of Congress. Meanwhile, industry leaders continued their support of federal leaders while becoming angered by state leaders' economic development efforts. Moving into the late 1980s, the continued disillusionment of textile workers and national leaders' failures would lead to largely silence on textile issues by 1990.

From Crisis to Status Quo?

Following the repeated failures of national leaders to pass a sweeping trade bill and the disillusionment of textile workers towards national and state leaders and their efforts, silence ensued from federal, local, and industry leaders, mill workers, and citizens of textile towns regarding the textile industry starting in 1988. This silence, stemming first and foremost from the disillusionment of the workers themselves, was the beginning of the unspoken recognition and realization that South Carolina's textile industry was dead on arrival as a result of the textile crisis. Although there was relative silence on the textile industry by 1988, several elements and events, including continued economic development and new forms of employment opportunities allowed workers to relocate.

These constituted forms of unspoken acknowledgment across the state that the fight for the textile industry was over.

Continuing the previous trend, state leaders and Governor Campbell, in particular, increased their emphasis on economic development between 1988 and 1990. In his State of the State speech to open the 1988 legislative year in South Carolina, Governor Campbell declared that there was “extraordinary success in economic development,” mainly through the creation of a “twenty-two year high of more than twenty-two thousand new jobs” – all in spite of and without mention of the declining textile industry.¹⁷² Furthermore, Campbell made “rural and small town development” a priority, more than likely to bail out and rescue those areas that lost their primary source of income due to the textile crisis – further evidencing the unspoken death of Piedmont textiles.¹⁷³

On top of economic development, state leaders increased their focus on workforce development, education, and retraining for South Carolina’s industrial workers. This policy of workforce education and retraining was supported by Campbell as early as 1988, where he argued in favor of an “Initiative for Work Force Excellence” to “help adult South Carolinians improve...through education” which he argued, “nothing is more

¹⁷² Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., “1988 State of the State,” 20 January 1988, Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. Papers, Box 3, Folder Campbell, Speeches, 1988, Jan (1 of 2), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷³ Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., “Report on Southern Growth Policies Board,” 27 February 1988, Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. Papers, Box 4, Folder Campbell, Speeches, 1989, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

important for our people and our state's long term economic growth.”¹⁷⁴ Primarily, these efforts would have focused on displaced textile workers, many of whom previously wrote to politicians that they have “no other training or education” or would “find it difficult to make a living” due to having no education or skills outside of textiles.¹⁷⁵

Another aspect of the period between 1988 and 1990 in South Carolina regarding industry was an acknowledged focus and excitement about new industries and the success of statewide economic development – shifting the focus away from the dying textile industries to new forms of employment. This excitement about new jobs and economic opportunities was especially pronounced in medium-sized cities like Laurens, which had the resources to attract new industries and benefitted the most from state economic development programs. For example, the first significant industry to enter Laurens following the closure of the Laurens Mill was in late-1986 – when Wal-Mart announced the construction of a distribution center, and local leaders felt it was the first big step in the right direction to revitalize the city and bring jobs to replace the then-hemorrhaging textile industry¹⁷⁶

This excitement surrounding the new industry in Laurens was further evidenced by a series of articles in the *Advertiser* profiling the growth of industry and Laurens

¹⁷⁴ Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., “Speech at Press Conference for the South Carolina Initiative for Work Force Excellence,” 11 February 1988, Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. Papers, Box 3, Folder Campbell, Speeches, 1988, February (1 of 2), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷⁵ David Dixon to Butler Derrick, 24 April 1985; Joanne Brown to Butler Derrick, 1 May 1985, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 27, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1985, Textiles, Textile and Trade Enforcement Act of 1985 (8 of 17), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷⁶ South Carolina State Development Board, “Media Information: For Release: Tuesday, August 19, 1986” (Press Release, August 19, 1986), S 346017 Department of Commerce, Press Releases, 1986-2010, Box 1, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

County while brushing aside the textile industry's status in the county. The editor of the *Advertiser* wrote in late 1988 that "progress" was a "real process that is all around us," and he argued that the progress the county had made pointed "Laurens County to the 21st century in grand fashion."¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the newspaper listed all of the projects the city and county were and would be undergoing throughout the end of the 1980s and the last decade of the 20th century. These included "the creation of the McCrory and Wal-Mart distribution centers...and the establishment of many, many new businesses."¹⁷⁸ The excitement surrounding the future jobs in Laurens without concern or discussion of the textile industry and the loss of job surrounding it was further evidenced by the new slogan of the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce – "Laurens County: Upcountry, up-coming" – not declining.¹⁷⁹ Between 1988 and 1990, silence from textile workers, townfolk, industry leaders, and state leaders was paired alongside the enthusiasm for future industry at the local level and the increased focus on economic development statewide. This dual reaction indicated that most people directly connected to or surrounding South Carolina's textile industry either believed it was not worth saving or were done dealing with federal officials' attempts to fix the industry by 1988.

Across the second half of the 1980s, the textile crisis continued as it had during the beginning of the decade, albeit slightly less intensely as it had between 1984 and 1985. Due to federal representatives' continued failure to pass trade legislation to protect

¹⁷⁷ "A profile of progress," *The Laurens County Advertiser*, 21 September 1988.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the textile industry and the renewed efforts toward economic development from state leaders, the reaction and action taken by workers, industry leaders, and townsfolk began to diverge from a single textile industry interest group into fragments. Textile workers, disgruntled from continually getting their hopes up and being let down by their members of Congress, began to become disillusioned with the federal process, and they slowly became completely silent regarding their industry by 1988. Similarly, local leaders and townsfolk of textile-dominated towns became silent about the textile industry primarily because of state and local leaders' success in attracting new industries to their cities and towns.

National leaders would again push for trade legislation in 1990. However, with only the support of industry leaders and without the vocal support of workers and others, the bill enjoyed less success than prior ones and ultimately failed yet again. By 1990, the silence from those surrounding the textile industry and the continued intense discussion around new industry indicated that the once proud and storied textile industry had finally died, and those once so vocal were now unwilling to keep trying to save it.

CONCLUSION

In mid-October 1993, Congressman Butler Derrick composed an editorial circulated in the weekly newspapers in his Third Congressional District explaining his opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Within it he praised the textile worker and then stated, “I fear this agreement would do little other than promote the rapid export of US jobs across the border to Mexico...The textile and apparel industries have acted as a punching bag for one administration after another.”¹⁸⁰ The response from the textile industry on NAFTA – silence. As the years continued, the textile industry’s enemies changed – from East Asia, South Asia, to Mexico and Central America. Still, federal leaders like Derrick, who built their careers on textiles, found a way to continue to create a scapegoat for the industry that mill workers, industry leaders, and local residents already knew had passed away years prior. Derrick soon retired from Congress in 1994 to be replaced by an up and coming state representative, Lindsay Graham, who was the first Republican to hold South Carolina’s Third Congressional District since Reconstruction. The silence from textile workers and local citizens soon matched the silence in Washington, as the state finally accepted that its first major industry was unsavable.

As seen in the previous chapter, silence has shrouded and continues to cover the subject of textiles in South Carolina ever since the late-1980s, locally and nationally.

¹⁸⁰ Butler Derrick, “The American Textile Worker – A Vital Part of the U.S. Economy,” October 1993, Butler Derrick Papers, Box 43, Folder Derrick, Public, General, 1993, Textiles (1 of 2), South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

After the retirement of Derrick and Senator Fritz Hollings, federal officials turned their efforts to other subjects, and state leaders continued their economic development efforts. The textile industry continued its steep decline through the early-2000s, leaving behind empty mills, ruined fortunes, and ghost towns in its wake. Some cities, like Greenville, captured other industries or shift employment to the service sector, some, like Laurens, took longer to regain some sense of normalcy, while smaller mill towns like Ware Shoals were left to die.

This thesis has chronicled the textile industry's crisis in the late twentieth century which was blamed on imports and characterized by mass layoffs and closures which led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs in South Carolina. It has also focused on the elaborate, complicated, and evolving relationship between mill workers, industry executives, members of Congress, and state and local leaders. Further, this study contends that due to these relationships' ever-changing nature, there were three distinct phases of reaction to the textile crisis between 1970 and 1990.

First, local leaders and workers largely ignored the textile industry's decline well into the late 1970s, despite warnings from southern congressmen such as William Jennings Bryan Dorn from South Carolina. Second, mill workers, industry leaders, and local citizens unified to form an interest group to lobby on behalf of the textile industry to secure trade legislation to stop the flow of imports they saw to be so damaging to the industry. Third, due to the continued failure of members of Congress and other federal leaders to secure trade legislation to alleviate the strain on the textile industry, the once-unified interest group fragmented by 1988, characterized by the disillusionment of textile

workers with national politics. This final chapter argued that textile workers and local leaders began to focus on and celebrate the limited success of state leaders in promoting economic development and new industries to the state. Furthermore, once the interest group fragmented, it led to silence from all parties involved. This, alongside other state and local leaders' actions was an unspoken acknowledgment of the death of the textile industry.

The limited framework of this thesis and the relatively unexplored nature of the twilight of the textile industry lead to many questions regarding future research on the topic. One further consideration is whether other major textile-producing states – North Carolina and Georgia – experienced the same phenomenon as South Carolina regarding the decline of their respective textile industries. Did these states' textile workers, industry leaders, and others also react similarly to those in South Carolina? Did their federal leaders support trade legislation with the same fervor as those from South Carolina? Another direction for future research lies in how different cities were affected by the textile crisis and why this was the case. Why was Greenville able to quickly rebound from losing its textile mills, while Laurens was slower to recover, and towns like Ware Shoals and Honea Path were never able to rebound at all? Lastly, further research is necessary to study migration patterns within South Carolina and the Piedmont South due to the closure of textile mills and mass layoffs. It can be seen that due to the closure of mills, people left their traditional homes in textile mill villages – leaving the town to die – but where did they go? For what forms of employment were they moving? What was their reasoning for moving?

Although the mid-to-late twentieth century in the American South is traditionally characterized by the rise of the Sunbelt South – a prosperous, urban-centered picture of the South that began to outpace the North economically – there was an industrial decline occurring in the Piedmont South’s textile industry that parallels the deindustrialization that was occurring in Northern cities. This time of industrial decline was a period that demonstrates the political activism of mill workers, industry leaders, and townsfolk late into the twentieth century through their reactions to the textile crisis threatening their livelihoods. Furthermore, by the late-1980s, these same groups silently acknowledged their industry had no hope left – leaving it to continue its slow death. Industrial decline in South Carolina’s textile industry also illustrated that to many textile workers, industry leaders, and local citizens, the closure of their textile mill was indeed “like a death in the family” through the devastation of local economies, desertion of entire towns, and personal feelings of loss toward a life they had always known.

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