You Don't Need A Vote To Raise Hell

Mother Jones, Woman Organizer

And Her Relations With Miners' Wives, Working Women, And The Suffrage Movement

By Priscilla Long

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A charismatic, acid-tongued agitator, "Mother" Mary Jones (1843?-1930) devoted her life to organizing male workers, especially coal miners, into trade unions. Her skill at creating a public spectacle for the purpose of dramatizing inhuman working conditions was an important strike tool which also brought her great fame. To many she became a symbol of working class protest, an embodied "spirit of the proletariat."

She took no part in the women's movement of her day, and had only sporadic and transitory associations with groups of women. Yet her unique position as a *woman* in the male labor movement, combined with her symbolic importance as a champion of *workers,* causes her life and attitudes to illustrate interesting aspects of the tension between class and sex.

The subject of this pamphlet is how Mother Jones related to the labor movement as a woman, and how she related to three important groups of women: the wives of male workers, women workers themselves, and the organized suffrage movement. Her views about women, her relationships with other women and the condition of her own life as a female organizer are fascinating to examine, especially when seen in the context of a historical scenario in which working class and women's movements (sometimes found in the same group, but usually not) were both challenging the status quo. Feminism was a dynamic force, in the air; it could not be ignored. Simultaneously women were pouring into industrial work in greater and greater numbers; their real lives were changing drastically, regardless of current opinion.

Background

She was born Mary Harris in the city of Cork, Ireland, in 1843* and came to America as a child. Her father's job as a railroad construction worker moved the family to Toronto where Mary grew up and attended Normal school. She taught school in Michigan and practiced the trade of

* Mother Jones' birthdate is conventionally thought to be May 1, 1830, not a surprising conclusion since she herself gives that date in her autobiography, written in the early 1920s.[1] Accordingly, on May 1, 1930 her 100th birthday was widely celebrated in labor circles. However, I hypothesize that the blessed event occurred in 1843, although further work is needed to establish better proof. To begin with, in newspaper interviews given during her life, she gave different birthdates at different times. The older she grew, the earlier she tended to set her birthdate. (Although it does not prove anything, a later birthdate makes better sense in terms of her father's immigration to America, because if he arrived in the late 1840s instead of the late 1830s, he would have been part of the massive Irish immigration of that decade.) In the earliest interview that I have, given in 1901, she gives her birthdate as 1843.[2] In 1860 she taught for one semester in a convent school in Monroe, Michigan. 1860 was a census year and Mary Harris turns up in the census as a member of the school, age 17,[3] which would confirm a birthdate of 1843. My search of birth records in Ireland was fruitless.

dressmaking in Chicago before moving to Memphis, Tennessee. There she met her husband, George Jones, an Iron Moulder who was active in his trade union. They were married in 1861 and had at least one child. All the children and her husband had died by 1867, possibly in a yellow fever epidemic.*

By 1871 she had returned to Chicago and established a prosperous dressmaking business which clothed the city's finest women. The devastating Chicago fire of 1871 burned this enterprise to the ground. Camping in a church near the lake with other homeless refugees of the fire, Mary Jones began to attend the nightly lectures given in a nearby fire-charred building by members of the Knights of Labor (an early, important labor organization). Their words took effect and there, in the social upheaval created by the fire, she realized and began her life work.

During the seventies and eighties she became completely immersed in the labor movement, associating particularly with the Knights of Labor and for a time with the Chinese exclusion movement** in California. Records on her life for this twenty-year period are scant, leaving us with small insight into her formative years as a labor movement activist. Glaring questions such as how she supported herself go unanswered.

The facts of her life emerge more clearly in the nineties, when her politics changed from Populist to Socialist[6] and she helped start the socialist/labor paper *Appeal to Reason* in Kansas City. The paper explicated a

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* Information about Mother Jones' early life is hazy and various sources contradict one another. For example, in her autobiography Mother Jones claims to have had four children. Yet at the turn of the century she was telling newspaper reporters about her three children. Then again, Mrs. Lana Blizzard Harlow of Cabin Creek, West Virginia, the daughter of Mother Jones' friend "Mother" (Sarah Rebecca Rogers) Blizzard, who spent many childhood hours with Mother Jones, insists that she often heard her tell the story of her only child, a son, who died when he was nine or ten years old. Mrs. Harlow also insists on the truth of the recurring story that Mother Jones' husband was a coal miner, killed in the mines.[4] Nimrod Workman, a miner and union organizer, who knew Mother Jones around 1919, also insists that her husband was a union organizer, killed in the mines, and that in order to qualify to replace him as an organizer Mother Jones had briefly become a mule driver.[5] These stories may or may not be true. What does seem clear is that Mother Jones told them in West Virginia.

** In 1877 the Working Men's Party in California was founded with its primary purpose being the exclusion of "coolie" labor. The Party soon became quite influential among California trade unionists and a force in local elections. By 1880 its influence had declined and it fused with the Greenback-Labor Party. Only a few raised their voices against the strident racism of this movement to urge that Chinese workers join the labor movement to improve their wages and working conditions.

rather eclectic batch of radical views along with jokes, recipes, strike news, and other items of interest to the working class. Mother Jones went around talking up socialism and selling subscriptions at the same time. She used the paper as an organizing tool, as one of several means of waking up the workers. It was direct, to the point and easy to read, adding a further dimension to what she and other organizers said in their speeches and meetings.

Sometime in the 1890s, her *Appeal to Reason* activities brought her to the coal fields of western Pennsylvania.[7] Socialist views were not foreign to coal miners at that time and the president of the United Mine Workers District 5 (Pittsburgh) agreed to convince mine owners to allow her to sell subscriptions at the mines. The owners believed that she was a harmless religious personage. That year she visited every mine in the district, absorbing the intimate details of the miners' lives, discovering herself able to relate, alleviate and inspire. For much of her remaining life she worked as a paid organizer of the United Mine Workers of America, although she often clashed with its leadership and consistently supported the rank and file insurgency which dots the history of that union.

But coal miners were not the sole beneficiaries of her work. In her lifetime she aided child textile workers, street carmen, steel workers and metal miners in their struggles to organize. She also put her shoulder to the wheel of many radical causes of the period, including the fight to free Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone in 1907,* the fight to save the lives of Mexican revolutionaries detained in American prisons in 1909 and 1910 and the futile effort to free Tom Mooney.**

She helped to launch the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905 and was the only woman seated on the stage of its opening convention. But she soon left the Wobblies in favor of the Socialist Party and its policy of working through electoral politics. Her socialism (and her friendship with the legendary Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs) lasted until the 1916 Presidential election, when she broke with him and the Party to work for Wood-

* They were officers of the Western Federation of Miners who were kidnapped in Colorado by Idaho law officers, brought to Idaho and framed for the murder of ex-governor Frank Steunenberg.

** In 1916 Tom Mooney was framed for bombing the Preparedness Day Parade in San Francisco. For his devotion to trade union principles he spent 22 years in prison before being pardoned.

row Wilson and Democratic candidates for Congress. But she was essentially a grass roots agitator who felt more at home standing in a creek sassing a mineguard than in the living rooms of Socialist Party intellectuals.

On May 1, 1930 her 100th birthday was celebrated with elaborate fanfare. Little but the will to live and an ample supply of whiskey kept her going for seven more months. Finally after muttering "what the hell, what the hell," over and over again, she died, shortly before midnight, on November 29, 1930.

Although the entire labor movement paused to honor Mother Jones in her death, most of the 5,000 mourners who attended her funeral were those for whom she had lived—poor, working class people who came to pay their respects for the last time. She was laid to rest in the Miners' Cemetery in Mt. Olive, Illinois, where her grave is tended by the Progressive Mine Workers of America.

Mother Jones, Organizer

Her style was flamboyent and revivalistic. Haranguing with an Irish lilt that could rise to a screech or fall to a whisper, she could move a crowd to its feet even when no one else spoke English. She would shout, stamp, gesticulate, and throw in a few words of whatever language seemed appropriate. Her message rang from coal towns hidden in the West Virginia hills to the drab coal counties of Pennsylvania and Colorado. In the miners' cause she waded creeks, faced machine guns, and taunted many a mine guard to shoot an old woman if he dared. As legendary as her sharp tongue was her physical bravado. She didn't seem to mind the idea of adding her own blood to all that already spilled on America's coal fields.

She made her impact in person. The tremendous force of her personality could not be reduced to paper. She rarely wrote articles. Not trusting the mails (too often the postmaster was in the pay of a coal company) she carefully left her most pressing thoughts out of her letters. "I have so much to tell you when I see you . . . can't write it in a letter," occurs with monotonous regularity in her letters.[8] Many of her speeches were not written down; well-meaning friends expurgated most that were, forcing them through a Victorian cheese cloth which yielded her ideas, but removed their flavor and force.*

We have persistent mention, but few examples, of her unfeminine diction. A court reporter did history a favor during the 1912 Paint Creek strike in West Virginia, by recording one of her speeches verbatim for use in a court injunction against her. We can feel her spirit as she cried out to 5,000 striking miners gathered in Charleston: "But I warn this little governor that unless he rids Paint Creek and Cabin Creek of these goddamned Baldwin

* Mother Jones' life illustrates one of the processes by which a working class organizer, even a famous one, is left out of the history books. Once public memory of her has receded, she is lost to history. No library retains a neat 20 boxes of her papers, waiting for a Ph.D. hopeful to sift through them.

Felts mine-guard thugs, there is going to be one hell of a lot of bloodletting in these hills."[9]

Her persuasiveness was partly due to her intimate knowledge of the miners' lives. She was no outsider, though she never stayed in one place for very long. Miners believed that she knew them so well because her husband had been a miner, killed in the mines. The flavor of her love was captured by a reporter who wrote down what she said, standing on a rock, to 700 inhabitants of a West Virginia coal town in 1904:

> 'Has anyone ever told you, my children, about the lives you are living here, so that you may understand how it is you pass your days on earth? Have you told each other about it and thought it over among yourselves, so that you might imagine a brighter day and begin to bring it to pass? If no one has done so I will do it for you today . . . . Let us consider this together, for I am one of you, and I know what it is to suffer.'
>
> "So the old lady, standing very quietly, in her deep, far-reaching voice, painted a picture of the life of a miner from his young boyhood to his old age. It was a vivid picture. She talked of the first introduction a boy had to those dismal caves under the earth, dripping with moisture, often so low that he must crawl into the coal veins, must lie on his back to work. She told how miners stood bent over until the back ached too much to straighten, or in sulphur water that ate through the shoes and made sores on the flesh; how

COAL MINER PHOTOGRAPHED BY LOUIS HINE, 1936.

> their hands became cracked and their nails broken off in the quick; how the bit of bacon and beans in the dinner pail failed to stop the craving of their empty stomachs, and the thought of the bare-foot children at home and the sick mother was all too dreary to make the home-going a cheerful one . . . .
>
> 'You pity yourselves, but you do not pity your brothers, or you would stand together to help one another,' said Mother Jones. And then in an impassioned vein she called upon them to awaken their minds so that they might live another life. As she ceased speaking men and women looked at each other with shamed faces, for almost every one had been weeping. [10]

Her work lent itself to a lifestyle which was far from typical of the women of her day (or ours). Homeless, she traveled from coal region to coal region, from strike to strike, staying in small town hotels, in the homes of miners and other workers, and many nights, on the train. (Often she got a free ride from a loyal trainman by walking up the track and flagging down the train out of sight of the station.) The little bundle that she carried contained everything that she owned. "An extra dress is only a burden to her . . . it makes too much luggage."[11] A friend writes of her that one time she came to his town (Peoria, Illinois) for a mass meeting in support of Tom Mooney. "She stayed all night at my home. My wife washed some of her clothes. If she could she always stayed at someone's home."[12] A labor historian recalls how she came to his mother-in-law's house in Chicago, wanting a bath. The water was heated, the tub carried out and "Mother took a bath, and then left to carry on her good work."[13]

A nomad, she refused to save money, giving strikers and their families any extra that came her way. The Internal Revenue Service became concerned in 1923; however, she had never before paid taxes and did not plan to start then. As she put it, "I have lived in America 88 years and never in all those years has the government asked me to pay any tax for I have nothing to pay tax on. I have seen most every president in the last 40 years and they never mentioned it to me in the White House, nor in the War Department, nor in the Department of Justice, nor in any other Department I went to for the workers."[14] Her few expenses were met by her United Mine Workers salary or by friends and other labor groups during times of estrangement from the UMWA.

She liked to drink, and her language was more reflective of the barroom than the drawing room. She liked the company of men, and must have spent more time with them than with women. With few exceptions, her friends were men, mostly organizers like herself, whose lives were totally at the

service of the cause. In fact, if her lifestyle could be compared to anyone's, it would be to that of the male union organizer.

But Mother Jones was no male organizer, and because of her sex, her organizing skill in itself does not sufficiently explain her tremendous influence in the coal fields, where miners were unlikely to follow the leadership of a woman. True, Mother Jones was not an average woman, but neither was she seen as a man in a dress. It was as their *mother* that she influenced male workers.

They could accept the scolding of an affectionate, if somewhat overbearing, maternal figure. Mother Jones could shout to a cheering, working-class audience in Michigan: "The workingmen have not kept pace . . . they do not think . . . . They go on just like dumb animals . . . . You scab on each other. The capitalists do not scab on each other."[15] In West Virginia she began speeches to coal miners with such admonitions as, "If you would just use your brains instead of your mouth but you do not." (Cries from the crowd: "Take your time, Mother.")*[16]

Those who wished to make use of her charisma exagerated her motherly attributes in order to heighten the effectiveness of her arrival in a strike region:

> Her tears have mingled with the tears of heart-broken mothers watching the dew of death gathering on the pallid brows of the baby slaves of the mills whose lives went out, ere youth had blossomed from the bud of childhood. . . . Her maternal hands have pressed the lids upon the sightless eyes and her sympathetic voice has poured the balm of comfort upon the bruised and bleeding heart, that mourned for the offspring that died through factory imprisonment. . . . This brave and fearless woman . . . has won for herself a simple appelation, the most loving and endearing that the human tongue or pen of man ever couched in the letters of a word, 'Mother'. [17]

Her maternal qualities were enhanced in the public mind both by her lifelong interest in the abolition of child labor and by her unusual ability to grow more than a year older each year. Her interest in the welfare of chil-

* It is unclear when miners began calling her "Mother." Few knew her by any other name than "Mother Jones" or just "Mother." Of course, the precondition for the use of this title had been met: she had been a mother, biologically speaking. Females in authoritative positions had been called "Mother" in the past, especially religious leaders such as Mother Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers. Other female labor organizers also became known as "Mother" but they were younger than Mother Jones and followed in her path.

dren had importance in itself,* but the way she exaggerated her own age can only be attributed to her likely perception that a mother, if nothing else, ought to be older than her children.

As the great mother of the working class, she conformed to contemporary notions on the nature of women, in spite of her defiance of the everyday conventions. Motherhood was central to a set of ideas about women (the "Cult of True Womanhood") which grew up before the Civil War.[18] As a female public figure, Mother Jones was understood in the context of these assumptions, which she herself did not question. Rather, she used them to her own advantage.

Women were supposed to be closer to God, men closer to animal lust. Women were also supposed to be pure (meaning virginal) except in marriage, and even then enjoying sex was not considered womanly. The double standard was based on the belief that women's natures were not sexual at all. If a woman deviated sexually she defied both God and Nature, whereas a man's sexual adventures were thought to be the natural expression of his male nature. This ideology about men and women made both good and bad women necessary, since if all women were good, men would have no outlet for their animal lust. A good woman could fall and become a bad woman, but there was no path by which a fallen woman could return to goodness.

Mother Jones' enemies tried to end her labor career by portraying her as a bad woman. In 1904, agents of Colorado coal interests accused her of having been the notorious Madam of various brothels in her younger days.[19] The accusation received wide attention; in 1914 it was revived and read into the Congressional Record,[20] but so few people believed it that it did little harm.

Editors of anti-labor papers and others who found her activities annoying contributed to the effort to paint her as a bad woman by their tendency to refer to her as "that vulgar old lady" or "The Old Hag," as in "The Old Hag has announced that she will invade the sacred precincts of the Winding Gulf [Coal Co.] . . . ."[21]

Her friends, on the other hand, designated her "angel of the miners,"

* Particularly effective was the march she organized in 1903 of mill children, which she led from Kensington, Pa., to Oyster Bay, N.Y., to petition Theodore Roosevelt against child labor. Roosevelt refused to see the maimed children, but the march generated effective newspaper publicity against child labor.

gushing regularly into print on this theme: "Mother Jones has become the patron saint and the 'angel of light' among the coal miners of this continent. . . . The angel evangelist of the United Mine Workers of America is adored and worshipped with a reverence by the hosts of labor—a reverence that is as pure and holy as ever linked together a mother and her son."[22] A woman could be a whore or she could be an angel; Mother Jones was one or the other depending on the speaker's point of view.

The way she lived, of course, was not patterned after the expected behavior of a good woman. Her drinking, swearing, traveling, her periodic sojourns in jail, her physical bravado, her labor career itself, called up no feminine ideal. Yet as a powerful symbol to great masses of workers, she represented the most womanly quality of her day.

Workingman's Wife

Mother Jones did not exaggerate the hardship of a coal miner's life. Isolated into little towns built next to the mines, the providers of heat for the nation were frequently despised as ignorant and lawless foreigners. They worked in the shadow of imminent death: instant death from a rock fall or an explosion of deadly methane gas released by coal; or slower death from an injury or by the gradual clogging of the lungs by coal dust. Overworked and underpaid, the miner was thanked for his pains by the coal company's suffocating grip on his community life. Often the company owned everything in town: the store and school, the houses, the church and the saloon, not to mention the teachers, doctors, and preachers.

Mother Jones was better acquainted with the women of the coal towns than with other groups of women. Life for the miner's wife was no picnic either, Victorian notions about fragile womanhood notwithstanding.

For example, in the anthracite coal region of eastern Pennsylvania at the turn of the century, the miner's wife was one of many tongues and many faiths. She was exhausted by continuous pregnancy, poor nourishment, and the care of too many children. Her poverty was often punctuated by the

THE LUDLOW TENT COLONY, LUDLOW, COLORADO, 1914.

sudden death of her husband; she aged before her time, and like her husband, died young. She was forced to raise her children in unsanitary conditions. In 50 of the 127 anthracite communities, the outhouses were so close to the homes that their contents drained into the cellars. The stench was so great in the summertime that the tenants could not open the windows facing the holes, and "members of the families have in the morning spells of nausea which destroy the appetite and frequently bring sickness."[23] Infant mortality rates were very high in these towns; babies and others died from diseases spread by festering human feces. Families were crowded into poorly constructed homes, owned by the coal companies and reclaimed by them during strikes. In 1901 a miner from this region reported:

> I have seen within the last two years, in the winter time, children without shoes to put on their feet—could not go to school, could not go out of the houses—and at the same time they have been refused a pair of shoes . . . from the company stores. . . . I have known families in the past year to do without meat for a month at a time; that did not know what it was to have meat. And I have known cases where families did not have the bread to give their children on their rising from their beds in the morning.[24]

The suffering of the miner's wife was intimately related to conditions in the mines; yet, one step removed from the extraction of coal, she had no voice in the union (the United Mine Workers of America). Unlike in Europe and the United Kingdom, women have never mined coal in the United States. The UMWA was almost entirely male for many years except for the secre-

tarial staff and Mother Jones.* The Ladies Auxiliaries supported the work of the union, but had no role in formulating policy.

Nevertheless, during strikes the participation of the women was crucial. Wives, as well as husbands, had to make do without a paycheck. When the inevitable evictions came, the women set up housekeeping in tents, often in the freezing cold, for months at a time. And when it came to dealing out violence, operators frequently harassed the tent colony itself rather than make distinctions between men, women and children. At these times the spirit of the women was critical in keeping up morale.

But the women's involvement went further than giving moral support, important as this was. They often seem to have been a militant component of a strike situation, an organized and irritating force with which the authorities had to reckon. Mother Jones sometimes bestirred an entire community by calling out the wives. For example, during the six week strike in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania in 1900:

> Mother Jones decided to form a woman's auxiliary known as the mop and broom brigade. When a carload of non-union men came in, the infuriated women met them. They were led by a woman of Mother Jones' own

* Another interesting female organizer of coal miners was Fanny Sellins, who began as a St. Louis garment worker, organized for fifteen years in St. Louis among women workers, then was hired in 1914 as an organizer for the UMWA. She was shot and killed by a mineguard during a 1919 coal strike in Pennsylvania.

choosing—a fierce-eyed, red-haired woman with a scarlet shawl wrapped around her head. This woman started such a racket by beating her dishpan with a hammer and finally throwing the pan at a mule's head that a stampede started that routed the newcomers.[25]

Another day:

Women were among the earliest arrivals at dawn today when villagers assembled to march to the . . . mines . . . . Just as the sun came up over the hills, the procession set out. There was a band, two flags, a detachment of men, a body of women carrying brooms, a large company of men, more women, and 'Mother' Jones, dressed in mourning.[26]

Mother Jones described another women's action during the same strike:

I went to a nearby mining town that was thoroughly organized (McAdoo) and asked the women if they would help me get the Coaldale men out . . . . I told them to leave their men at home to take care of the family. I asked them to put on their kitchen clothes and bring mops and brooms with them and a couple of tin pans. We marched over the mountains fifteen miles, beating on the tin pans as if they were cymbals. At three o'clock in the morning we met the Crack Thirteen of the militia, patrolling the roads to Coaldale. The colonel of the regiment said "Halt! Move back!" I said, "Colonel, the working men of America will not halt or will they ever go back. The working man is going forward!" They kept us there til daybreak and when they saw the army of women in kitchen aprons, with dishpans and mops, they laughed and let us pass. An army of strong mining women makes a wonderfully spectacular picture.

Well, when the miners in the Coaldale camp started to go to work they were met by the McAdoo women who were beating on their pans and shouting "Join the union! Join the union!"

They joined, every last man of them, and we got so enthusiastic that we organized the streetcar men who promised to haul no scabs for the coal companies. As there were no other groups to organize we marched over the mountains home, beating on our pans and singing patriotic songs.[27]

But before leaving they ate the militia's breakfast, feeling hungry after their night's march:

. . . the militia had ordered breakfast at some hotel and I told the women go in and eat and let the State pay for it; and it was our breakfast anyhow. So they did. We ate their breakfast. We had more strength to get back.[28]

Another time during the 1900 anthracite strike the women acted as decoys, distracting the law while the strikers closed down a mine. Before dawn Mother Jones and 1,500 miners wives entered Lattimer, a mining community that had not yet joined the strike. They knocked on all the

doors, and told every miner in town to keep on resting, there was no work to do. Then they grouped themselves in front of the company store, drawing the attention of the sheriff, his deputies, and the General Manager of the mine. In the meantime 3,000 strikers had gathered unnoticed at the mine, ready to prevent the morning shift from going on. Back in Lattimer, the sheriff was discussing the situation with Mother Jones. Let her tell the rest of the story:

> The Sheriff asked "What are you going to do, Mother?" And I said, "I'm going to close up this mine." And he said, "Are the women going to close it up?" And I said, "Yes, we are going to close it up." So the drivers came along to take the mules to the mines, and I said, when he ordered the boys to take the mules . . . that the mules would not scab, he had just as well leave them home in the barns, because the mules remembered that Patrick Henry had passed a Declaration of Independence, and that the mules were conscious of that, and he had just as well leave them in the barns. But the drivers were ordered to take them away, and I didn't worry then, because I knew they would come back pretty soon. I kept entertaining the sheriff and general manager and deputies, and the mules came back directly without the drivers. Of course we cheered the mules. The strikers down at the mines were driving the miners back who were going to work. We closed those mines in the anthracite.[29]

Blood was routinely shed during America's coal wars. Most of the widows were miners' wives. And the women themselves were not immune to the bullets of militia or company-owned guards. But their sex protected them from physical violence to some degree. During a strike they were often able to get away with backtalk, jeering and taunting, physical obstruction, whipping scabs, bottle and rock throwing and related activities for which the men would have been killed.* For example, in 1910 there was a strike in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, during the course of which 12 or 13

* Mother Jones would have us think that she created the wives' militancy. One should not believe her. I have run across examples of tremendous strike activity by the wives in her absence. A strike in which the women were especially aggressive was the Michigan Copper strike of 1913. Mother Jones came briefly to the strike area, but most of her energy was taken up in West Virginia and Colorado at this time, so her influence in Michigan was negligible. The women's activities were reported regularly to the Governor (Ferris) by his observer: "Women continually resort to rock throwing and filthy practices referred to in my letter." " . . . twenty-six arrested . . . for participating in an unlawful assembly. This trouble was brought about through a woman at Wolverine throwing a bucket of slops over a labourer returning home." "At Trimountain the soldiers were rotten egged and were assaulted by women with brooms, which brooms had been dipped in outdoor closets and were filthy with human excrement . . . . It is a very difficult thing to deal with women who resort to these tactics, and who are physically nearly the equal of an average man. Many of them profess to be unable to understand our tongue, and of course are excitable and impulsive, as is somewhat characteristic of the entire sex."[30]

women were arrested and sentenced to 30 days for disturbing the peace. (They had been standing in front of a mine hooting at scabs.) Mother Jones was with them when they were put on a street car to be taken to jail. As she tells it:

> I would not let the women leave their babies behind, so they got on the street car, and when we got to a station three or four scabs got on the car, and the women were going to jail, and they had a certain resentment against those scabs because they go in and take their bread . . . . So these women were a little irritated when they saw those scabs get on, and they gave me the babies, and I took the babies; I think I had four or five of them in my arms and another bunch of them around me, and they went and lampooned those scabs, and the scabs began to holler. There were two of the constabulary there, but they were nice boys and didn't meddle; I think they were a little leery of what was going to happen; and I would not let the street car motorman stop to let those men off until he got to a regular station. They were hollering, "Stop the car," and the motorman got a little nervous too, and I said, "Now don't you stop that car; it is against the law and you must obey the law." They licked them, and I took care of the babies until they licked the scabs.[31] When they got to the station those scabs looked as if they had been sleeping in the tiger cat's cage at the zoo.[32]

If the prisoners had been men, the story might have ended less humorously.

Singing to the baby is a mother's prerogative, and the 13 criminals sang, as loud as they could, all the way to the jail.

> . . . the two constabulary turned them over to the sheriff and the sheriff said, "Mother Jones, I would rather you had brought me a hundred men than these women"; and I said, "I didn't bring them, the old squire sent them up; you hold him responsible." He said, "I don't know how to manage them"; and I said, "What did you get married for if you can't manage women; these women are peaceable, you can manage them." And they were sent up to the room and I sent them food and milk for the babies; and I said to the women, "You sing all night, sing all day if you want to, but sing all night and don't stop for anybody." And they didn't; they sang the whole night, and the people complained about the singing, and the women would not shut up, and the babies would not shut up, and nobody would shut up, until they turned them all out.[33]

An important strike task, preventing scabs from replacing strikers in the mines, seems to have been one that the women often took upon themselves. In the early days of the grueling Paint and Cabin Creek (West Virginia) strike of 1912-13, an unsympathetic newspaper reported another example of such activity:

> To avoid trouble themselves, the men have permitted the women to organize under "Mother" Jones. These women meet all trains and all strangers to them

> are submitted to a search of questions as to what their business is, where they are going, etc. The slightest hesitancy on the part of these strangers invites a rapid fire of invectives from the women, while the men, who remain a short distance away, lustily cheer any remarks by the women. Watchmen, who have taken the place of the mine guards, are being subjected to the same abuse at many points. Many of them have been threatened with death, in addition to being subjected to abuse and profanity by the women who are urged on by the men.[34]

Once again, the women put their anger at the mine guards to good use in a situation too dangerous for the miners themselves.

The women's activities suggest that during a coal strike it may have been as important for the wives to be organized as it was for the men. Partly, this was because of the nature of mining communities. They were literally built on top of the mines and mining families were the only people who lived in them. The fact that miners were often "foreigners" increased their isolation from other kinds of people. Since the mine owners owned and controlled the towns, the families were dependent on them and unusually at their mercy during a strike. At the same time, coal towns were homogeneous communities where the people knew and could depend on one another. This situation created both a strength and a weakness. Because the communities were so isolated, it was difficult for miners to gain support from the outside world or even to get out information about a strike. At the same time everyone in town (including the children) could act as a cohesive unit when necessary. So the support of the women counted during a strike.

Mother Jones knew this, and although she primarily worked with the miners, she did make a point of organizing the women too. Occasionally we have mention of her everyday contacts with the wives. When she was in Colorado helping with a strike in 1903, she reported that she "went around holding meetings of the men, women and children." Later in the same strike, she "went out to the camp several days, talking to the women and children, and Saturday evening I came in; I had been out all day."[35]

MOTHER JONES AND STRIKERS, COLORADO, 1914.

STRIKERS; TRINIDAD. COLO., 1914

She was back in Colorado for the Colorado Fuel & Iron strike of 1914, a strike that dragged on unnoticed by the outside world, until the Ludlow Massacre of April 20* brought it to national attention.

When it came time to call for this strike, in September 1913, Mother Jones appealed to the women as well as the men: "Until you get some backbone and stick together and organize against these mine operators, you will never be as valuable to them as those mules they own. And if you're afraid to fight, we'll get the women together to fight for you and beat the hell out of them."[36]

Mother Jones spent most of this strike either in jail or deported from the strike region. But when she could, she helped coordinate the women's strike activities along with her other work. For example, she kept Mary Thomas (a

* The tent colony at Ludlow was attacked and burned to the ground by the militia. Seventeen miners, two women, and eleven children were dead before it was over.

miner's wife who took a leading role among the women, rose to brief prominence after the Massacre, and fell back to obscurity when the strike was over) informed of coal operators passing near the Ludlow camp. Mary would then get all the women and children singing the union song near the fence while the men picketed. She reports in the book she wrote about the strike that although this system of harassment didn't bother the scabs at all, it did irritate the operators and guards, much to the satisfaction of the women.[37]

Another time, after the Governor had banned picketing, Mother Jones led the women and children in a march to protest the picketing law. Mary Thomas describes what happened:

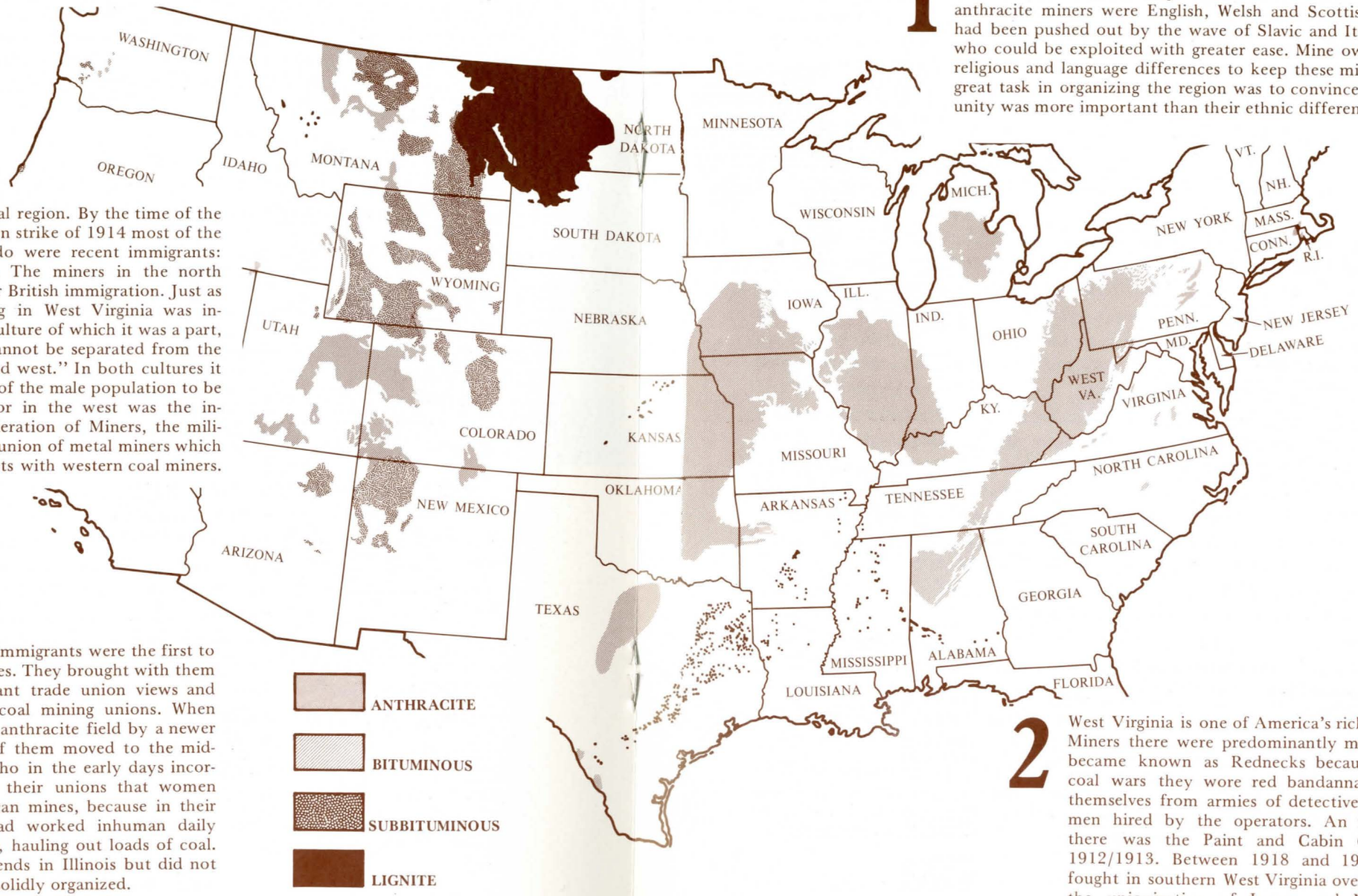
> We were taken by truck to Trinidad to march up and down in front of the Carinas Hotel where Governor Ammons and other state officials were staying. Mother's orders were to keep singing the Union Song at the top of our lungs. In her fog horn voice she shouted up at his room, "Governor, there are some women here who want to ask you a few questions." He didn't answer. She shouted at him again. Still no response. Now the second line of the Union Song was changed from "Down with management, and up with the law," to "Down with the Governor . . . . " Still no response. Mother sent a note to Ammons asking him to talk with us, and again her plea was ignored. Our peaceful demonstration had been useless. Ammons ordered Mother Jones deported.[38]

Mother Jones would not stay deported, and shortly after one of her reappearances she was arrested and spent the winter of 1914 imprisoned, incommunicado, in a hospital. On the 22nd of January, the women and children expressed their disapproval by staging a protest against her arrest. As they sang and marched their way up the main street of Trinidad, the state militia, led by General John Chase, turned their horses on the march and charged, sabers drawn. Several of the marchers were injured as they tried to scatter. Although Mother Jones was not freed, a great deal of publicity was gained for the strike.[39]

Mining communities were not the only places where Mother Jones organized the women to help their men. In any strike the wives could help keep up morale; often the women of other industrial communities were as active as those of the coal towns.

During a tense strike in New Jersey against the Williams and Clark Chemical Co. (1915), for example, Mother Jones urged the women to "stick to

Map of the U.S. Coalfields



1 The anthracite (hard coal) district, near **W**ilkesbarre and Scranton, Pa., was the scene of major strikes in 1900 and 1902. The first anthracite miners were English, Welsh and Scottish. By 1900 they had been pushed out by the wave of Slavic and Italian immigrants, who could be exploited with greater ease. Mine owners exaggerated religious and language differences to keep these miners divided. The great task in organizing the region was to convince miners that class unity was more important than their ethnic differences.

2 West Virginia is one of America's richest coal regions. Miners there were predominantly mountaineers who became known as Rednecks because during bitter coal wars they wore red bandannas to distinguish themselves from armies of detectives and other gunmen hired by the operators. An important strike there was the Paint and Cabin Creek strike of 1912/1913. Between 1918 and 1921 battles were fought in southern West Virginia over the question of the unionization of Logan and Mingo Counties. Federal intervention ended these wars.

3 Welsh, Scottish and English immigrants were the first to mine coal in the United States. They brought with them from the British Isles militant trade union views and formed the first American coal mining unions. When they were forced out of the anthracite field by a newer wave of immigrants many of them moved to the midwest. It was these miners who in the early days incorporated the provision into their unions that women should not work in American mines, because in their homeland female miners had worked inhuman daily hours, stripped to the waist, hauling out loads of coal. Mother Jones had many friends in Illinois but did not work there as it was already solidly organized.

4 Colorado was also a rich coal region. By the time of the great Colorado Fuel and Iron strike of 1914 most of the miners in southern Colorado were recent immigrants: Greeks, Italians and Slavs. The miners in the north tended to be from the older British immigration. Just as the history of coal mining in West Virginia was influenced by the mountain culture of which it was a part, so its history in the west cannot be separated from the frontier culture of the "wild west." In both cultures it was entirely usual for much of the male population to be armed. An important factor in the west was the influence of the Western Federation of Miners, the militant and sometimes radical union of metal miners which maintained extensive contacts with western coal miners.

your husbands . . . . Don't let them go back as scabs. Help them stand firm, and above all, keep them away from the saloons."*[40]

The next year, in El Paso, Texas, she reiterated, to the wives of striking street carmen, "You women must organize if you want your men to earn a decent living wage. It is up to you. Think of your babies and their future . . . . I tell you it is the women who must organize to help the men."[41]

Organizing to help the men could take many forms. Women could give indirect support by forming union-label groups which encouraged the public to purchase only union-made goods. Many of the Ladies Auxiliaries of the early trade unions did just this.

Or, they could take a direct action approach. In October 1916, for example, Mother Jones said, in an "inflammatory speech" to 200 women, wives and relatives of striking carmen in New York City: "You ought to be out raising hell. This is the fighting age. Put on your fighting clothes." Following her speech, the women left the hall and attacked a surface car of the New York Railways Co., breaking all the windows with paving stones, and trying to smash the screens. Following this action, "a fight broke out exceeding any with which the police have had to deal." The women "fought the police with fist and nails, bricks, and whatever missiles they could procure." Later, Mother Jones did not deny that she had started the riot, and "asserted her willingness to add the Tombs to her already long list of 'jails I have known'." She added that "the police are organized to shed our blood and we are going to organize to shed the other side's blood," and threatened to bring an army of women from other states to stop police outrages in New York City.[42]

Whether fighting police or quietly promoting the union label, women who organized to help their men acted in keeping with Mother Jones' view of their place in society. The good wife, Mother Jones thought, "must care for what the husband cares for and [must understand] that every man loves freedom, even freedom from domestic tyranny."[43] Homeless, husbandless, and childless, she never questioned her belief that women belonged in the home taking care of their babies and their husbands. Her appeal to the wives of McAdoo (Pa.) expresses her point of view precisely. She urged them to

* Mother Jones opposed saloons only during strikes, when they were often used as part of the strikebreaking apparatus. The faster strikers drank up the strike fund, the faster they would go back to work.

SOME SURVIVORS OF THE LUDLOW MASSACRE, APRIL, 1914.

help the men win a victory because "better labor conditions mean better home conditions."[44]

Motherhood was the sublime task, so sublime, in fact, that actual mothers generally didn't come up to snuff. "The mothers of this country have the greatest task of all. They should be awake to it," she said in a 1910 interview. "They should teach their children the truth about economic conditions, for the mother molds the child. She holds in the hollow of her hand the next generation. Let her spend more time in studying and not so much in thinking up things to wear on her back."[45]

Women seemed rather petty to Mother Jones, and fussing with their dresses wasn't the worst of it. In El Paso, Texas, she screamed at the assembled street car workers:

> If 4,000 of you . . . would take the electric meters out of your homes and use candles for awhile you'd soon bring the pirates to time . . . . But your wives won't let you. Shame on them! They would rather sell their babies into bondage than to do without the comforts of electric lighted homes.[46]

Women were often to blame for things, including their own troubles, and Mother Jones would criticize them at a moment's notice:

> Women have stood by and allowed their children to be starved and crushed and they have not raised a sword to strike down these murderers who are sacrificing their little ones on the altar of dollars. . . . No nation can be truly great until its women turn their skill to molding the minds and bodies of the young. Women have allowed themselves to be downtrodden. It is time for them to shake off this vicious heel, to stand up to their full stature and do the work that has been left for them.[47]

Their work was, inevitably enough, to return to the home and mind the children.

Working Women

Her views on woman's place in society help to explain why Mother Jones rarely left the ranks of "her boys" to aid the six million women workers in the United States (in 1903) in their struggle to organize. Her attempts to help women organize on their own behalf were noticeably sparse and short-lived in such a long labor career.

Working women suffered the brunt of the industrial revolution in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their wages were half those of men,[48] undercutting both the wages and jobs of male workers. Along with Blacks and successive waves of immigrants, women were used both as strikebreakers and to force wages and working conditions down.

From 1890 on, the trade union movement in the United States was dominated by American Federation of Labor craft unions, which chose to organize only highly skilled workers. Almost all women (and Black) workers were unskilled. Even when these unions made token statements about organizing women (which many did), women were effectively barred because union dues were so high that no unskilled worker could possibly pay up.[49] So the AFL unions proved to be of help to the industrialists, who liked to pit one group of workers against another; if they could satisfy a few privileged workers and keep the rest down, profits would keep rolling in.

Mother Jones was aware of the plight of working women. For example, in the 1890s she investigated the condition of the women and children who labored in the southern textile industry. She would apply at a mill for work, claiming that her six children would soon arrive. Mill owners had found that if they hired whole families of women and children, they could produce more cotton for less money. She moved from job to job, leaving when it became obvious that she had no children. She was sickened by the spectacle of the child workers:

> Sometimes it seemed to me I could not look at those silent little figures; that I must go north . . . . Little girls and boys, barefooted, walked up and down between endless rows of spindles, reaching thin little hands into the machinery to repair snapped threads. They crawled under the machinery to oil it. They replaced spindles all day long, all night long; night through, night

through. Tiny babies of six years old with faces of sixty did an eight hour shift for ten cents a day. If they feel asleep, cold water was dashed in their faces, and the voice of the manager yelled above the ceaseless racket and whir of the machines.

One day on my way to work I met a woman coming home from night work. She had a tiny bundle of a baby in her arms.

"How old is the baby?"

"Three days. I just went back this morning. The boss was good and saved my place."

"When did you leave?"

"The boss was good; he let me off early the night the baby was born."

"What do you do with the baby while you work?"

"Oh, the boss is good and he lets me have a little box with a pillow in it beside the loom. The baby sleeps there and when it cries, I nurse it." [50]

Mother Jones returned north to report her findings to sympathetic newspapers and speak on her experiences. Her effort was fruitless.

Fourteen years later, in 1910, Mother Jones worked for two months with the women who washed bottles in the Milwaukee breweries. Here is what she found:

Condemned to slave daily in the wash-room in wet shoes and wet clothes, surrounded by foul-mouthed, brutal foremen . . . the poor girls work in the vile smell of sour beer, lifting cases of empty and full bottles weighing from 100 to 150 pounds, in their wet shoes and rags, for they cannot buy clothes on the pittance doled out to them. . . . Rheumatism is one of the chronic ailments and is closely followed by consumption . . . the foreman even regulates the time [the girls] may stay in the toilet room, and in the event of overstaying it gives the foreman an opportunity to indulge in indecent and foul language. Should the patient slave forget herself and take offense, it will cost her the job. And after all, bad as it is, it is all that she knows how to do. To deprive her of the job means less crusts and worse rags. . . . Many of the girls have no home nor parents and are forced to feed and clothe and shelter themselves . . . on $3.00 per week.

No matter how cold, how stormy, how inclement the weather, many of [them] must walk from their shacks to their work, for their stipend precludes any possibility of squeezing a street car ride out of it.

An illustration of what these poor girls must submit to, one about to become a mother told me with tears in her eyes that every other day a depraved specimen of mankind took delight in measuring her girth and passing such comments as befits such humorous (?) occasion.

While the wage paid is 75 to 85 cents a day, [they] are not permitted to work more than three or four days a week, and the continual threat of idle days makes the slave more tractable and submissive . . . . Often when their day's work is done they are put to washing off the tables and lunch room doors and other odd jobs, for which there is not even the suggestion of compensation. ... What terrors has the over-investigated white slave traffic for

her? What a prolific recruiting station for the red light district! For after all the white slave *eats, drinks,* and wears good clothing, and to the hopeless this means living, if only for a minute. What has the beer slave to lose?—the petty boss will make her job cost her virtue anyhow. This has come to be the price of a job everywhere nowadays.

The foreman uses his influence . . . to neutralize any effort [to organize] these poor helpless victims . . . and threats of discharge were made, should these girls attend my meetings. One of these foremen actually carried a union card, but [I] reported him to the union and had him deprived of it for using foul language to the girls under him.[51]

The brewery capitalists met and decided that they would not permit the women to organize. Mother Jones' response was to tell one of them, Mr. Blatz, that: "he could not shut me out of the halls of legislation . . . I shall appear there and put these conditions on record and demand an investigation and the drafting of suitable laws to protect the womanhood of the state."[52]

Mother Jones' attempt to organize the girls was unsuccessful, which is why she turned to the idea of protective legislation for women. She had organized them as a separate branch of the men's Local No. 213 of the United Brewery Workers. At the national level this union, one of the most progressive in the AFL, waived their fees and dues until their condtions had improved.[53] But when all of the women were threatened with immediate discharge if they joined, they stopped attending meetings and the local fell apart.[54]

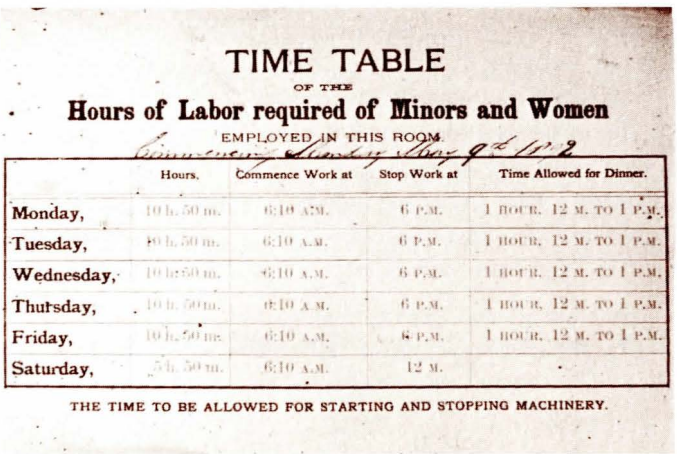
The girls who bottled beer characterized the situation of women workers in 1910. Hired because their labor was cheap, women worked long hours under dreadful conditions. Employers tolerated their attempts to organize until their unions became an actual threat; by 1902 women were successfully initiating strikes in many industries, engendering the uniform hostility of employers. For several years after 1902 membership in women's unions declined, crumbling under the two-pronged pressure of employer opposition and the hostility of AFL craft unions.[55] Many employers, like the brewery capitalists, who tolerated or even encouraged male unions, fought women's organization. The union label helped to sell beer; cheap female labor kept down costs. Although most national unions had "equal pay for equal work" clauses in their constitutions by 1910, many male workers at the local level disliked the women, making them feel unwelcome at union meetings and discouraging their attempts to organize.

The national unions did not do much better. Philip Foner cites as one of

the main reasons that women's unions declined, the discouragement the women felt at having their requests for charters repeatedly ignored or rebuffed by the national unions.[56] In fact, "It is claimed by many that unions demand [equal pay for equal work] mainly in the belief that it is the best way to get women out of the trade, since if employers have to pay women the same rate as men they will prefer men."[57] In any case, the "equal pay for equal work" clause did not change anything for most working women. Unskilled, and barred from training programs, most of them did not have access to equal work. Caught between the hostility of her working class brothers and her employers, the working woman was forced to accept low wages.

With this background in mind, we can agree with Mother Jones when she said in 1916, "Organized labor has not yet learned the lesson of lining up with its women." But she then went on to place the blame on the women instead of on the AFL unions when she added, "Labor must get its women thinking of bread and other necessities. Let the working women realize what they can do and they will join with the men, and industrial troubles will soon be over."[58] The women themselves were at fault. I have so far found no instances in which Mother Jones criticized AFL policies towards women.

Her ambiguous feelings towards working women centered on her belief that women didn't belong in industry at all. Women were supposed to be mothers and wives, not industrial workers. "If the industrial problem were solved," she proclaimed near the end of her life, "men would earn enough so that women could remain at home and attend to their duties."[59]



TIME TABLE

OF THE

Hours of Labor required of Minors and Women

EMPLOYED IN THIS ROOM.

Commencing Monday May 9th 1892

	Hours.	Commence Work at	Stop Work at	Time Allowed for Dinner.
Monday,	10 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	6 P.M.	1 HOUR, 12 M. TO 1 P.M.
Tuesday,	10 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	6 P.M.	1 HOUR, 12 M. TO 1 P.M.
Wednesday,	10 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	6 P.M.	1 HOUR, 12 M. TO 1 P.M.
Thursday,	10 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	6 P.M.	1 HOUR, 12 M. TO 1 P.M.
Friday,	10 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	6 P.M.	1 HOUR, 12 M. TO 1 P.M.
Saturday,	5 h. 50 m.	6:10 A.M.	12 M.	

THE TIME TO BE ALLOWED FOR STARTING AND STOPPING MACHINERY.

Class, Sex, and the Women's Trade Union League

If the problems of working women had held Mother Jones' interest for long, she would soon have arrived at the door of the Women's Trade Union League, formed during the 1903 American Federation of Labor convention, although not directly affiliated with the AFL. The League was unique in the labor world both because it was the only organization whose primary purpose was to aid working women and because its membership crossed class lines. Middle class, as well as working women were admitted, violating the trade union view that workers should organize themselves in their own interest. The middle class members of the League supplied the funds, and when splits over policy occurred along class lines within the organization, which they often did, the views of the middle class members inevitably prevailed.[60]

Nevertheless, the work of this organization was immensely useful. The

WTUL did much to educate the public about the conditions under which women worked. It spent quantities of time and money trying to organize women into AFL unions, waging a years-long battle against the indifference and hostility of the AFL towards women. The League participated in many strikes, organizing meetings and picket lines, printing and distributing leaflets, raising money, publicizing the strike and doing other vital support work. Particularly significant was the role it played during the great garment strikes of 1909-1913.

Mother Jones came into contact with the Women's Trade Union League in 1909 when she returned to the east coast to publicize the situation of the Mexican revolutionaries detained in American prisons. One of the shirtwaist strikes began while she was in New York, and it was natural that she, by then a world famous advocate of labor, should be asked to address the strikers.

She spoke at strike meetings for about two months before illness forced her to stop. Speaking in behalf of the Socialist Party (one of the organizations involved in the strike), she proclaimed to the girls:

> You make all the fine waists, but you do not wear them. You work hard and are poorly paid and now you have been forced to strike for better conditions of labor, shorter hours and higher wages. You ought to parade past the shops where you work and up the avenues where the swells who wear the waists you make live. They won't like to see you. They will be afraid of you . . . . You must stick together to win. The boss looks for cheap workers. When the child can do the work cheaper, he displaces the woman. When the woman can do the work cheaper she displaces the man. But when you are organized you have something to say about the conditions of labor and your wages. You must stand shoulder to shoulder. The woman must fight in the labor movement beside the man. Every strike that I have ever been in was won by the women."[61]

Perhaps inspired by the intense militancy of the shirtwaist strikers, Mother Jones seems to have had her highest opinion of women at this time. In November and December she spoke to strikers regularly, and also continued to speak on the Mexican prisoners. In one of her Mexican speeches she appealed to the women in the most glowing terms: "Women win all strikes! Women support all strikes. They keep their husbands in good standing in the union; they give them the courage to fight. We need the women in this fight against the tyranny of Mexico."[62]

In December the shirtwaist strike spread to Philadelphia and Mother Jones followed it there to continue her speech-making. On one occasion, she sharply articulated her feelings about women and class: "Tomorrow morning

I hope every girl in this hall will walk out of the shops and let the employers make the waists themselves. Walk out at 9:00 and don't wear your Sunday-go-meeting clothes . . . . Get the spirit of revolt and be a woman. It's not a Mrs. Belmont or an Anne Morgan that we want, but independent workers who will assert their rights." Since the two wealthy women were actively assisting the strike, some may have thought her remarks inappropriate. She went on to castigate two common preoccupations of middle and upper class women of the period: "I want to say to the police and secret service men here that you better go and tell the men and women of this city that we don't want charity brigades or temperance lectures or any of that sort of thing. If they leave us alone we will come out all right without these institutions."[63]

Mother Jones violently detested wealthy women, partly because of her class hatred, partly because of her feelings about the trivial nature of women, and perhaps also because of experiences in her earlier life of which we will never know. She reiterated her sentiments on the subject regularly throughout her life.

> . . . the word society, as applied to women of today, stands for idleness, fads, extravagance and display of wealth . . . . It nauseates me to see your average city woman. She is always overdressed, although she is careful to leave her right hand bared so that she can display her fingers crowded to their utmost with jewels.*[64]

The fact that the League crossed class lines helps to explain why Mother Jones had so little to do with it. She deeply believed in the struggle between two classes: the working class and the employer class. Workers did not need charity. Rather, they needed power. So the uplifters came in for some knocks: "These clubgoers, these welfare workers, these uplifters—they are all collecting salaries off the evils which they are employed to decrease. They are lazy shirkers. They are dodgers and temporizers . . . . "[65] The WTUL

* Mother Jones hated upperclass women more than upperclass men, inclining towards forgiveness in the case of the latter. One instance of this shocked and embittered many Colorado miners. After the Ludlow Massacre of April 1914, miners took their guns into the hills and engaged in a war against their former employers. By January 1915 the war was lost, the strike was over and there was still no union in southern Colorado. In Denver John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the owner of the state's largest mining company, was being questioned by a federal commission investigating the strike. Mother Jones attended the investigation and one day shook his hand and congratulated him on his testimony, adding that she thought he was a much misunderstood young man. Her remarks reached the newspapers and scandalized pro-union people, some of whom pressured her to publicly retract them.

both included wealthy women in its leadership and had a certain undeniable percentage of uplift in its programs. Either of these factors would have been sufficient to repel Mother Jones.

Mother Jones did not actively oppose the League, but failed to support it, never mentioning it by name even during the shirtwaist strikes, in which its work was so important. Considering that the League was the only significant organization with any interest in the working woman, this could not have been an oversight.

Perhaps her views on class do not provide a full explanation. Mother Jones did not enjoy sharing the limelight. She rarely spoke on the same platform with another woman. One source reports that there was jealousy between her and the well-known socialist (later Communist) Ella Reeve Bloor, especially as she became known as "Mother Bloor" before Mother Jones died.[66] She did admire a few women: Emma Langdon, the Colorado printer; Mary Field Parton, who edited her autobiography; and Mary Heaton Vorse, the labor journalist, are three. She was also a great friend of "Mother" Blizzard of Cabin Creek, West Virginia, who was a powerful force for the union and an interesting organizer in her own right, although she never left Cabin Creek. But in spite of her occasional woman friends, most of Mother Jones' friends and associates were men. There are many indications that she just didn't like women. "Mother Jones . . . didn't care to have truck with the other women," writes a woman who was active in the Socialist Party.[67] A West Virginia resident writes, "I have heard from very old women that the women of Mother Jones' day did not like her. They say she put women down and blamed mothers for all the juvenile delinquency . . . ."[68] Mary Thomas O'Neal, the former miner's wife from Colorado, writes that "generally she wasn't friendly to women. She was too blunt in telling them off if they weren't doing something useful."[69] At a luncheon given in New York for Mother Jones in the early 1920s, her hostility towards women comes out with particular venom. Roger Baldwin, president for many years of the ACLU, was present and describes the luncheon:

> The lunch came off with a great buzz of excitement over Mother Jones, so rarely in New York, so colorful a character and such an idol of militant workers. She made no speech; she just answered a flood of questions from all thirty around the table. She did not like most women and one young girl reporter who was there got a taste of her dislike when she asked a question. "You're a doll," said Mother Jones, "Just a doll, and I'm not going to answer you."[70]

Although we know little about her relationships with other female organizers, the signs point to the conclusion that Mother Jones liked to shine alone. Adding weight to this conclusion was her tendency towards self-aggrandizement, a quality which had always characterized her, although it became more pronounced as she grew older. A sister is one of many; a mother stands alone, especially when all of her children are sons. The Women's Trade Union League was an organization of sisters, daughters, mothers. Mother Jones' desire to be considered different than other women combine with her class loyalties to suggest why she was not drawn to the League and also why, in her long labor career, she made so few attempts to organize the women.

Women's Suffrage

Mother Jones was an opponent of the suffrage movement. Partly, this was due to her class consciousness. Although working class feminists did exist (mostly in the Women's Trade Union League), most suffragists were middle and upper class women, whose concern for working class women was hazy at best. After hearing a suffrage speaker in Pennsylvania, Mother Jones' opinion was that in the suffrage movement "the class struggle is lost sight of entirely."[71]

The vote for women would not change anything, was Mother Jones' view. She thought that it would be used to co-opt women. "The plutocrats have learned [the lesson of lining up their women]," she said. "They give their women suffrage, prohibition and other fads to keep their minds busy."[72] She pointed out that in Colorado, where women had had the vote since 1893, "the working men and women are in slavery. The state is in slavery, vassal to the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company and its subsidiary interests." With undisputable logic she added, "You don't need a vote to raise hell."[73]

During the 1916 presidential election campaign a situation arose which

highlighted the fallacy of working for the vote in the abstract, apart from other issues. Because the Republican candidate, Charles Evans Hughes, supported suffrage for women, Mrs. Raymond Robbins, president of the WTUL and a suffragist, gave him her allegience. She and other suffragists traveled by rail around the country on the Hughes "suffrage special," drumming up support for his candidacy. Hughes was a well-known enemy of labor, representing business and financial interests; organized labor solidly opposed him. Mother Jones was incensed at this "train of women representing $1,000,000 "[74] and it undoubtedly hardened her opposition to women's suffrage.

But there is no reason to assume, because Mother Jones opposed the suffrage movement, that she was against voting as a way of promoting social change (her views on Colorado suffrage notwithstanding). The Socialist Party of America for many years put its eggs into the electoral basket, hoping to vote in the revolution. Mother Jones periodically assisted in these campaigns to elect Socialists to office. She felt that workers' votes counted and often urged them to "shoot ballots, instead of voting for capitalist bullets . . . "[75] The suffrage movement was not alone in basing its hopes on votes.

Mother Jones' politics moved slowly rightward, and in 1916 she shocked many Socialists by speaking in Indiana coal towns for the Democratic incumbent, Senator Kerns. That year her old friend Eugene V. Debs was a Socialist candidate for Congress in Indiana. When news of Mother Jones' activities reached him he, according to one source, burst into tears.[76] She explained her actions in a letter to an irate Socialist who wondered why she had done such a thing: "I went in to the mining districts of Indiana to have Senator Kerns returned to the Senate because he saved me from serving five years in the state penitentiary of West Virginia with twenty-one of my fellows. I think that the miners of this country owe him a debt that they should pay by returning him to the Senate. If we did not do it we would be ingrates."[77] That year Mother Jones also declared her support for Woodrow Wilson for President, on the basis of his having averted a rail strike by pushing an 8-hour workday law for railroad workers through Congress and having also pushed a child labor law through Congress. "Socialism is a long way off. I want something right now," she explained.[78] Increasingly, she came to rely on the good will of individuals to correct isolated wrongs, rather than working for a change in the whole system.

So Mother Jones did believe in electoral politics. Even so, her opposition to a suffrage movement which saw the vote for women as a panacea is understandable, especially considering the middle and upper class base of that movement. But, a decade before the end of her life, women did get the vote. Her views on the subject, after the fact, take on a different light. She felt that "the enfranchisement of women was a mistake and their participation in politics a catastrophe."[79] She declared that women are out of place in political work; that it had been their "sad neglect of motherhood" which had "filled reform schools and kept the juvenile courts busy."[80] Finally, "women corrupt the ballot . . . . Women too often can be bought for a pair of gloves. They should stay home and tend to their children."[81]

Conclusion

Mother Jones' conservative views on women's roles in society permeated her attitudes towards all the women with whom she came in contact. The lifestyle of the militant, devoted miner's wife was most in accord with her views on both class and sex, and it seems clear that she felt most comfortable with miners' wives. She could not have been expected to lend her support to a suffrage movement which lacked any class consciousness. Nor could she really be expected to have been a feminist; that is, to have challenged the prevailing ideas about women in society. She gained much of her own prestige from traditional opinions about women. It was through her stance as *mother* that she was able to be so influential in working class communities. She frequently incorporated traditional ideas about the home into the rhetoric she used in generating a fighting spirit against the bosses. Challenging such views would simply have undermined her effectiveness.

But we can criticize Mother Jones for one glaring omission. She might have encouraged male workers to change their attitudes towards women workers. And she might also have pressured some of the AFL unions, which

used her, tolerated her, and were open to influence by her, to change their practices towards women workers. These things Mother Jones did not attempt. She shared with male workers and their unions an inability to see women as workers at all, in spite of their growing presence in the work force, and in spite of an organized and articulate women's labor movement embodied in the Women's Trade Union League.

For all her fighting spirit in other areas, perhaps it is unrealistic to expect that Mother Jones would have risked her utterly unique position in the male labor movement by pressuring it on such a sensitive question. In any case, it is doubtful that she ever thought of doing so. Mother Jones was often seen as the spiritual embodiment of the (male) labor movement. In her long life she usually reflected, uncritically, the views and aspirations of "her boys."

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Notes

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[2] Wilkes-Barre *Record*, March 30, 1901.

[3] U.S. Census, 1860, p. 49, Horace Rackham Graduate Library, University of Michigan.

[4] Interview with Mrs. Lana Blizzard Harlow, December, 1971.

[5] Interview with Nimrod Workman, July, 1973.

[6] Letter, Mother Jones to Miss Lloyd, April 27, 1913, Henry Demerest Lloyd Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Maidson, Wisc.

[7] Jones, op. cit., p. 127.

[8] Especially in the John Walker-Mother Jones correspondance in the John Walker Papers, Illinois Historical Survey, U. of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois.

[9] Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in West Virginia*, West Virginia University Press, Morgantown, 1969, p. 27.

[10] "Mother Jones and her Methods," Boston *Herald*, Sept. 9, 1904, clipping, Mother Jones Papers, Catholic University of America.

[11] Emma Langdon, "Mother Jones," *The Miners Magazine*, Mar. 20, 1913, p. 13.

[12] Letter, Tom Tippett to author, July 4, 1970.

[13] Speech by Philip Taft to Illinois Labor History Society, Nov. 21, 1970.

[14] Letter, Mother Jones to John Walker, Dec. 14, 1923, John Walker Papers, Box 12, University of Illinois, Champaign, Ill.

[15] "Mother Jones Touring Michigan," *The Miners Magazine*, May 4, 1905, pp. 8-9.

[16] Mother Jones speech, Aug. 1, 1912, Charleston, W.Va., West Virginia Collection, "Coal Strikes," West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.

[17] *The Miner's Magazine*, Feb. 4, 1915, p. 2.

[18] These ideas are taken from Barbara Welter, "The Cult of Womanhood," *American Quarterly*, Summer, 1966.

[19] "Polly Pry," *A Journal of Comment and Criticism*, Vol. I, No. 18, Denver, Colorado, Jan. 2, 1904, found in MS Division, Library of Congress, Woodrow Wilson Papers, LC Series 4, File X-902, "Colorado Coal Problems," File Nov. 17-Jan 1914.

[20] U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 2nd session, 1914.

[21] Letter, George Wolf, Manager, Winding Gulf Colliery Co., to Justus Collins, president, Winding Gulf Colliery Co., April 30, 1917, Justus Collins Papers, Series I, West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University.

[22] *The Miner's Magazine*, Feb. 4, 1915, p. 2.

[23] Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities*, The Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1904, p. 146.

[24] Testimony of Benjamin James, member National Executive Board, UMWA, U.S. Congress, *Report of the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor Employed in the Mining Industry*, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1901, p. 151.

[25] "Mother Jones Dies After a Long Illness," Washington *Post*, Dec. 1, 1930, p. 1.

[26] *United Mine Workers Journal*, Sept. 27, 1900, p. 8.

[27] Jones, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

[28] Mother Jones Testimony, *Commission on Industrial Relations, Report and Testimony*, Vol. II, Senate Documents Vol. 29, 64th Congress, 1st session 1915-16, p. 10618.

[29] Ibid., p. 10621.

[30] Letter, F.L. Abbey to Governor Ferris, Sept. 3, 1913, Michigan Historical Commission, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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[33] Mother Jones Testimony, op. cit., p. 10627.

[34] *Huntington West Virginia Advocate*, Nov. 4, 1912.

[35] Mother Jones Testimony, op. cit., p. 10624.

[36] Mary Thomas O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, Minerva Books, Hollywood, Calif., 1971, p. 88.

[37] Ibid., p. 112.

[38] Ibid., p. 113.

[39] *Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado*. Hearings of the subcommittee of the Committee on Mines and Mining, Part III, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1914. Also, Barron Beshoar, *Out of the Depths* Golden Bell Press, Denver, pp. 132-133. Also *The Miner's Magazine*, Jan. 29, 1914, p. 3.

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[42] *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1916; Oct. 7, 1916, p. 10, 20.

[43] "Mother Jones and her Methods," Boston *Herald*, Sept. 9, 1904, Mother Jones Papers, Catholic University of America.

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[51] Mother Jones, "Girl Slaves of the Milwaukee Breweries," *The Miner's Magazine*, April 14, 1910, pp. 5, 6.

[52] Ibid.

[53] *Brauer Zeitung*, Feb. 19, 1910, p. 1.

[54] Ibid., March 19, 1910, p. 1.

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[56] Ibid.

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[60] Meredith Tax, MS.

[61] New York *Call*, Dec. 10, 1909, pp. 1-2.

[62] New York *Call*, Dec. 13, 1909, p. 14.

[63] New York *Call*, Dec. 20, 1909, p. 1.

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[65] "Justice She Says . . . " op cit.

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[67] Ibid., note by Mrs. Caylor.

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MINERS' WIVES MARCH TO PROTEST MOTHER JONES' IMPRISONMENT, TRINIDAD, COLORADO, JANUARY, 1914.

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF MOTHER JONES' LIFE

May 1, 1843	– Mary Harris was born in Cork, Ireland
?	– her family moved to America and then to Toronto
1860	– graduated from the Toronto Normal School
1861	– married George Jones in Memphis, Tenn.
1867	– her children and husband died in the Memphis yellow fever epidemic
?	– moved to Chicago and opened a dressmaking business
Oct. 8, 9, 10, 1871	– The Chicago fire burnt her business to the ground and she joined the Knights of Labor
1877	– participated in the great railroad strikes of 1877
late 1870s	– worked in the Chinese exclusion movement in California
1894	– worked in Birmingham during the American Railway Union strike
1895/1896	– worked for *Appeal to Reason* and went south to investigate conditions in the cotton mills
1897	– organized in W.Va. for the miner's strike of 1897
1900	– organized miners' wives in the six-week anthracite strike
1900-1902	– participated in the UMWA organizing drive in W.Va., where she was jailed several times
1902	– worked in the second anthracite strike
Summer, 1903	– led the march of the mill children from Kensington, Pa. to Oyster Bay, N.Y.
1903-1905	– organized coal miners in Colorado and briefly worked for the Western Federation of Miners
June 1905	– helped start the Industrial Workers of the World
1905-1911	– she was estranged from the UMWA, working for various causes in the west
1912/1913	– Paint and Cabin Creek Strike, W.Va.
1913/1914	– the Colorado Fuel and Iron Strike
1915/1916	– spoke and agitated for various causes such as the garment and streetcar strikes in New York City
1916	– worked for Democratic candidates for Congress
1917-1921	– organized coal miners in southern W.Va.
1921	– made a trip to Mexico in which she was honored as a national heroine
1922-1930	– she spent her last years in retirement, largely at the Washington, D.C. home of Terrance V. Powderly.

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