4

The women of the Colorado Fuel and Iron strike, 1913–14

Priscilla Long

Miners around the world more often manifest class consciousness in its classic form than most other groups of workers. The geographic isolation of mining also tends to produce highly developed family and community involvement in strikes. Like the Lawrence strike, the 1913–14 Colorado Fuel and Iron coal strike – well known for its dramatic and tragic defeat in the Ludlow Massacre – involved the entire local community, and the activities of the women were crucial. In contrast to Lawrence, however, here women were not among the striking workers; rather, they were the wives of miners. In this chapter, based on extensive primary research, Priscilla Long explores the consciousness of the women active in this strike, against the background of their daily experience in the highly sex-segregated environment of the mining camps. She suggests that while the consciousness of the miners' wives was distinctly female, it was not in any way feminist. Indeed, the women's strike activity was an extension of their domestic roles, not a challenge to them.

This chapter explores the lives, consciousness and activism of the coal miners' wives who participated in the Colorado Fuel and Iron strike (1913–14).[1] It outlines the women's strike activities, the condition of their lives, and the texture and feel of their view of the world. It places them in their historical context, that of the coal industry within a recently developed industrial capitalism. It suggests the relationship between their daily lives as young, married mothers living in the coal camps of the West, and their worldview, a view colored by their class, by their national backgrounds, and by the roles they occupied as women.[2]

The Colorado Fuel and Iron strike, called by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in September 1913, was one of the most grueling, long-lasting industrial conflicts in the history of the United States. It is best remembered for the Ludlow Massacre, the April 1914 attack by troops of the Colorado National Guard on the strikers' tent colony at Ludlow. Among those who died were two women and twelve children, as well as five strikers and one guardsman. The next day, striking coal miners took their guns into the foothills and for ten days an open shooting and burning war raged in southern Colorado.

The strike lasted for fifteen months, gradually drawing the focus of national attention; it ended in defeat for the strikers. Although it was a strike of miners in all Colorado coal fields, it particularly affected those in the bituminous coal field of southern Colorado. This 1,000-square-mile coal field was located mainly in Las Animas and Huerfano Counties, on the border of New Mexico, and had the town of Trinidad as its urban center. Eleven thousand coal miners, 4,000 miners' wives, and 9,000 children were involved in the conflict.[3] Most of the miners worked for one of three major companies which were dominated by the largest: the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CFIC). Given the anti-union stance of this company, the strike was the inevitable result of a UMWA organizing campaign begun in 1912. The union's purpose in calling the strike was to force these companies to negotiate over seven demands, the most important of which was the demand for union recognition.

The women participated militantly, but they participated as wives. They strongly supported the union, although they were not union members. Yet their antagonistic feelings toward the company arose out of their own experience. For in the coal camps – company-owned communities situated high in the canyons of southern Colorado – the company oppressed and repressed not only the miners, but the entire mining community. For the women as well as the men, the company was the obvious cause of bad conditions. The women fought for the union, therefore, not out of a vicarious concern for their husbands, but out of their own self-interest.

Class consciousness was the strongest component in the world-

view of the miner's wife, as it was for her husband. This grew out of the fact that the woman's conditions of life and work were directly affected by company policies. But their separate work and roles gave husband and wife separate experiences. As a result, the class consciousness of the miner's wife had its own qualities. It was based on female experience of class oppression. It was different from the class consciousness of the coal miner himself, but it led to militant action just the same.

The most prominent woman associated with the strike was not a miner's wife, but rather the elderly UMWA organizer 'Mother' Mary Jones.[4] The figure of Mother Jones looms over most of the great coal strikes of the period. Hers was a clear female voice and, during the Colorado Fuel and Iron strike, it was heard across the nation. Mother Jones did not speak for the miners' wives. Her perspective, which was both anti-capitalist and virulently anti-feminist, was not precisely theirs. Her main job was organizing the coal miners, not their wives. Yet the women looked to her for leadership. When she was imprisoned in the winter of 1914, they rallied to her defense. Mother Jones provided them with a role model; her example of militance was part of the context within which their own activism took place.

The bitter class conflict that was the Colorado Fuel and Iron strike came at the close of a thirty-year period in which the development of industrial capitalism had radically altered the class structure of American society. Within a relatively short time after 1880, the concentration of wealth into very few hands, along with the rise of the giant firm, had been accomplished.[5] Coal was the quintessential fuel of the new capitalism. The mining community's relationship to a commodity so central to the economy may have helped it to understand the economic system as a whole. Despite the community's physical separation from other kinds of workers and from the diversity of urban centers, it had immediate experience with the railroad and steel corporations which often owned the coal and in many ways dominated the society. This, as well as the environment of the coal communities and the structure of the union, helps to explain why, by 1910, despite intensive anti-union activity by employers, the UMWA had succeeded in organizing 27 percent of the nation's coal miners. In contrast, only 11 percent of all workers were union members.[6]

The CFIC perfectly exemplified the changes brought about by the

new capitalism. By 1896, it was one of the 100 largest firms in the United States. It was primarily a steel-manufacturing enterprise, yet with 19,000 acres of coal lands, it was the largest coal-producing company in Colorado. By 1910, the CFIC employed 12,000 workers, almost half of whom were coal miners. It controlled the governments of Las Animas and Huerfano Counties, dominated the region's other coal firms, and enjoyed a large influence in the state government. Its assets amounted to more than 100 million dollars. Behind the company, and behind its intransigent anti-union stance, loomed the figure of John D. Rockefeller.[7] In 1903, Rockefeller had purchased the controlling interest in the CFIC. By 1910, he controlled a vast economic empire, and was himself worth, as an individual, one billion dollars.[8]

In contrast, southern Colorado coal miners and their families lived in near destitution. 'The miners get very poor food,' a coal miner stated in 1913, 'and some of the children are dressed in gunny-sacks and their fathers are working every day.'[9] Another said, 'the little children go barefoot and half-clad.'[10] Mary Thomas, a miner's wife (whose memoir of the strike provides an extraordinary glimpse of the women's role in it), described her first sight of a Colorado coal camp: 'it was the most desolate place I'd ever thought could be . . . Only a mass of unpainted shacks and bungalows along dust covered streets.'[11]

Organizers like Mother Jones frequently pointed out that the coal miners created the wealth, whereas the coal operators enjoyed it. She often contrasted the life of the miner's wife with that of the owner's wife. 'You do the work that enables the wives of the operators to pay $1,000 for dresses to put on their rotten carcasses,' she told a crowd of strikers and their wives in Starkville, Colorado. 'You dress the mine owner's wife and you put your wife in rags.'[12]

Mother Jones did not extend the hand of sisterhood across the barrier of class to the mine owner's wife, and neither, it is likely, did the miners' wives. The class differences dividing the two groups of women were made more obvious by the fact that, in the coal camps of southern Colorado, the only paid labor available to the miners' wives was washing and scrubbing for the managers' wives. Like other women who worked as servants, they were apt to develop a sharp understanding of the class differences dividing women. Moreover, in Colorado the woman's work as servant was at times tied

directly to the conditions her husband had to tolerate underground. The pit boss (underground foreman), often a petty tyrant, assigned workplaces (called 'rooms') at the face of the coal. For miners paid by the ton, a good room could make the difference between a living wage and near starvation. One of the many ways to bribe a pit boss for a good room was with the unpaid labor of the miner's wife. Speaking to strikers, Mother Jones said:

> Did Jack ever tell you, 'Say Mary, you go down and scrub the floor for the superintendent's wife, or the boss's wife, and then I will get a good room.' (Applause) I have known women to do that, poor fools. I have known them to go down and scrub floors like a dog, while their own floors were dirty.[13]

In the coal camps, there was no buffer zone between the representatives of the giant firm and the working people. Class relationships were direct, personal and unambiguous. The camps were closed to outsiders and, inside, the power of the company was absolute. The company was landlord as well as employer, saloon-keeper as well as storekeeper. The teacher and the doctor were on the company payroll. The mining superintendent was also the town mayor and, often, the chairman of the school board. At the slightest suspicion of union activity, a miner would be 'sent down the canyon' – fired. Company gunmen inspected everyone entering or leaving a camp. Detectives kept the population under continuous surveillance, with the purpose of keeping the union out.

The company profited not only from coal, but from every human necessity of the mining community. This was a source of continual distress to both miners and their wives. According to the Colorado Bureau of Labor Statistics, 'any attempt by the miners to purchase supplies from any other than the company stores would mean instant dismissal to the purchaser.'[14] A UMWA investigation showed that prices at these stores were 30 percent higher than those at the independent stores outside the coal camps.[15] The company also routinely deducted charges for rent, water, lights, etc., from the paychecks, to the point that, as Mary Thomas observed, most of the men were so in debt to the company that 'they do not see what was the color of money, they did not know what was money.'[16] Consequently, the women struggled daily with poverty.

The repressive atmosphere of the coal camps included, for the

women, the threat of sexual harassment. While the miners worked underground during the day, the women were exposed to the whims of company gunmen. 'I have been told by women at Primero,' a coal-mine inspector reported, 'that there was no privacy in their home life, that whenever a representative of the company or deputy sheriff desired, they entered the house unannounced.'[17]

Rape was certainly not unknown. For example, a former Colorado miner wrote to President Woodrow Wilson of an incident that took place in 1910. 'One camp marshall . . . was trying with a revolver in his hands . . . when man was in mine, a wife to unjust purposes, and the mining foreman and Superintendent was clearing him the way to flee before he could be arrested.'[18]

One mine guard, Bob Lee, had such a reputation for brutality that no one was surprised when he was shot dead shortly after the strike began, almost certainly by a striking miner. A former under-sheriff described Lee as

> a brutal man, very brutal . . . The miners' wives . . . who used to come up the hill to do washings for the American women, told hard stories on him of how he terrified certain miners' wives into submitting to him by authority of his star and threatening the loss of their men's jobs . . . if a miner's woman saw him coming she'd get up and hike over to a neighbor's house to keep out of the way.[19]

Coal mining was the most dangerous occupation, and the danger had its own particular consequences for the miner's wife, who lived with the daily possibility of her husband's disablement or death. If he died, she faced, in addition to her own grief, an economic calamity. In Las Animas County alone, 200 married coal miners were killed between 1907 and 1912. The 200 widows were responsible for the care of nearly 700 children. The death of their husbands left them with no means of support whatever.[20]

State law required the company to compensate the family of a miner killed on the job, but only if the coroner's office found his death to be the fault of the company. The CFIC controlled the county governments to the extent that, as one citizen remarked, 'There is no form of government in Huerfano County . . . we don't consider it part of the United States.'[21] The company domain extended into the coroner's office, which determined the cause of death. Company-

selected coroner's juries invariably passed verdicts concluding, 'We hereby exonerate the company from all responsibility.'[22]

Conditions in the home in the southern Colorado coal field were affected by poverty and insecurity, and by the fear of repression and harassment. In contrast, Mother Jones posed an ideal home, one in which the woman occupied her traditional role as housekeeper and caretaker of children, but where conditions for doing so were better. To a Denver reporter, she said:

> A new race of women is developing . . . women who can live in their homes surrounded by happiness and carry out their fundamental tasks of caring for their homes and raising their families under wholesome conditions and in the knowledge that they and their loved ones are no longer borne down and oppressed by the greed of capitalism.[23]

Miners' wives, struggling to do their traditional work under harsh conditions, in general accepted their separate roles and may have found Mother Jones's vision appealing. However, there is some evidence that they were also affected by changing ideas about women's roles. For example, Mary Thomas, who had just arrived at the coal camp from Wales, was observed by her neighbor, Margo Gorci, as she buttered her husband's bread. Later, Margo watched Mary preparing to shine her husband's shoes. 'Maria,' Margo said, 'women don't shine men's shoes in America.'

In fact, it was Mary Thomas's desire to escape the constraints placed upon her by traditional notions about women that motivated her to migrate to the United States at the age of twenty-four. Three years before, her coal-miner husband had deserted her. In the Welsh coal-mining valley of her girlhood, a woman in this situation faced a lifetime of loneliness and disgrace. 'They didn't change in this valley, especially when it came to a deserted woman,' she wrote. 'These hypocritical witch hunters were always watching to see if she made even one mistake so they could drive her to the gutter.'

In the southern Colorado coal camps, on the other hand, if a man deserted his wife, it was he who was in disgrace. 'Tom would be blackballed if anyone knew he had deserted his wife and children,' explained Mary's uncle, a Welsh coal miner. 'There are so few women in these camps where there are thousands of men that they greatly respect them, regardless of how old they are or how they

look.' Mary planned to force her husband to support her and her daughters until she could get on her own feet. In exchange, she would keep his desertion of her a secret.[24]

Except for her estrangement from her husband, she typified the women of the Colorado coal camps. She was young, married, and the mother of young children. (Of the Ludlow tent colony, she later wrote, 'They were all young people. There wasn't one . . . I don't think, over 40.')[25] Mary Thomas was an immigrant, and first came to know her new country through its western coal fields.

According to Pearl Jolly, a 21-year-old miner's wife, the 1,000 residents of the Ludlow tent colony included approximately twenty different nationalities. Her recollection corresponds closely with the CFIC's employment records. In April 1913, the company listed twenty-four nationalities among 4,000 coal miners employed. Union records confirm that, among the 11,000 striking miners, there were three important groups: the Mexican miners who were indigenous to Colorado, the English-speaking miners, many of whom were of British origin, and the miners of European origin or descent. Nearly 80 percent of the workforce spoke a first language other than English.[26] In southern Colorado, the European group predominated.

The people of the coal camps were not all foreigners, although outsiders often lumped them together as such. Italians, for example, first came to the state in the 1880s. They were brought by labor agents working for the railroad capitalists who developed the southern coal field.[27] By 1913, many Italians, such as the miner's wife Mary Petrucci, were Colorado-born and Colorado-raised, unlike many 'Americans' in the state. Mary Petrucci was born in 1889, in the Hastings coal camp. She later moved with her family to Tobasco, and then to Berwind, both CFIC camps. At sixteen, she married a box-car loader, an employee of the coal company. By the time of the CFIC strike the Petruccis had been married for eight years and were the parents of four children. All of their children died during the strike.[28] They were not foreigners but rather American citizens who had never lived in any other country.

Colorado unionists accused the coal operators of hiring many nationalities with the conscious purpose of preventing communication between miners who didn't speak the same language. One UMWA official said:

> the coal companies . . . place an Italian working alongside of a Greek, a Croatian working alongside of an Austrian, and so on down the line of 22 or 23 different nationalities. The purpose is that no two of them shall get together and discuss their grievances.[29]

Despite their varied origins, the xenophobia to which the people were subjected became a common experience in their new country. Even some of their Denver supporters looked down upon the strikers as 'ignorant foreigners.' One progressive state senator spoke of them in this derogatory manner: 'Thirty-six nationalities are herded together down there,' she said, '. . . [the mine operators] have not lifted a finger to aid or uplift these ignorant foreigners.'[30]

'Race hatred,' noted a more sensitive federal investigator, 'contributed in surprising degree to the bitterness existing between the strikers and militia.'[31] It was a prejudice which directly served the class interests of the operators. Company sympathizers pointed to the character of the working people to explain the class conflict. For instance, the Colorado National Guard reported that 'the remote cause [of the 'Ludlow Battle'] lies with the coal operators, who established in an American industrial community a numerous class of ignorant, lawless, and savage south European peasants.'[32]

Their common national and cultural backgrounds were an important bond between many husbands and wives in the coal camps. Within the larger community, however, there was a potential for rivalry and conflict among the several national groups. Overcoming divisions among nationalities was a key organizing goal of the UMWA in this period.

Yet across barriers of language and culture the people had much in common: the environment of the coal camp, for example, and, for many, the struggle to learn English. They were loyal to their new country, but also felt a common nostalgia for the countries of their childhoods. 'Most of us Europeans are alike in our ways,' the Italian organizer Charles Costa told Mary Thomas shortly after she arrived from Wales. 'It's all the mother country, and the longer you are away the more you realize it.'[33]

Clandestine organizing carried out at community dances and other events was important for drawing the community together in preparation for an open fight. Not until the fall of 1913 did union organizers known to the coal operators become visible. Previously

they had stayed away, because miners seen in their company were identified as unionists, and fired. The arrival of the best-known organizer – Mother Jones – was a signal that the strike was about to begin. In September 1913, Denver newspapers began to report daily that this 'angel of the coal camps' was billed to speak in Trinidad. On the appointed day, miners milled in the streets and talked in groups on street corners. That evening, hundreds were turned away from the West Opera House, 'owing to the lack of seating capacity in that large hall.' Mary Thomas recalled that when it came time for Mother Jones to speak,

> she strode to the center of the stage, took the long pins out of her hat and threw them over for the men in the front row to catch, smoothed down her lovely, pure white hair, straightened the shawl over her floor length black dress, and put up her hand in a command for silence.

She held the audience spellbound for two hours, reported the *United Mine Workers' Journal*, 'mercilessly scoring the operators.'[34]

Unionists believed that the benefits of the union, if the strike were won, would extend into the community and into every home. 'The United Mine Workers of America has advanced the interests of its members in a hundred different ways,' announced the Colorado strike call issued on September 6, 'and has brought happiness and sunshine into thousands of homes.'[35] Two of the seven strike demands – one for the abolition of the 'notorious and criminal guard system which has prevailed in the mining camps of Colorado'; and another for 'the right to trade in any store we please, and the right to choose our own boarding place and our own doctor' – related directly to the community as a whole. Three other demands – those pertaining to the miners' standard of living – would also have a direct impact on conditions in the home.[36] Although the women did not help to formulate the demands, union advocates believed that they would also benefit from a victory. The week before the strike began, 255 cheering coal miners paraded the streets of Trinidad with a banner on which they had written: 'We are Fighting for our Homes.'[37]

On September 23, 1913, a day of freezing rain, 11,000 Colorado coal miners walked off the job. The superintendents promptly evicted the inhabitants of the coal camps, causing the strike to

become a family experience on the first day. Families began struggling through the mud out of the canyons, their possessions piled high on wagons hauled by teams of horses, or on carts pulled by the coal miner and pushed by his wife. All day and into the night, they streamed into tent colonies established by the union on the prairie just beyond the company domain.

From the first freezing day, a spirit of mutual support dominated the life of the tent colonies. Mary Thomas writes that when people straggled into the Ludlow colony – cold, exhausted, and soaked to the skin – 'the Slavs, Germans, Russians, Portuguese, French, Italians, Greeks, and many other nationalities pitched in to help each other get settled.' The Hungarian and German women began cooking as soon as their stoves were set up, and brought hot food to the others as they arrived.[38]

The tent colonies were well-organized, cohesive communities. The UMWA provided the basic necessities: tents with wooden sides and stoves, coal, water, and strike relief – paid at a weekly rate of $3.00 per striker, $1.00 per woman, and 50 cents per child. Three union-employed doctors attended to medical needs. Everyone participated in tasks such as cleaning, and guard and picket duty. A coal-miner fiddler was elected head musician, and Mary Thomas was elected 'greeter-singer.'[39] Mother Jones made the rounds every day, 'cheering the women, inspiring the men,' and distributing candy to the children. Mary Thomas remembered the 'thrilling talks' she and other organizers gave at Ludlow.[40]

Music was an essential component of the community spirit. Mike Livoda, the Slavic organizer, later recalled how in the evenings, he 'used to get out and listen to the songs, different songs, Spanish songs, Mexican songs, Slavic songs, Italian songs . . . Sometimes they put on dances – they used to polka. You just begin to feel that even though they're out on strike, they're happy, because they're singing and they're enjoying themselves.'[41]

The women played a special and indispensable role in helping to form a cohesive, unified strikers' community – a community of resistance. Within their separate sphere of responsibility, they formed bonds of mutual support and sharing, which extended across barriers of language and nationality. They kept house as usual, except in tents. There were 'lots of little children' and the women helped one another care for them.[42] Every day, Mary Thomas, Cedi

Costa and Margo Gorci had coffee together. 'Margo, Cedi, and I continued our gossip sessions,' Thomas wrote. 'Their husbands tried to bring a little good news to cheer us up. They knew more about things than we, and daily we women awaited their opinions regarding the strike.'[43]

In October, sporadic gunfire broke out between strikers and mine guards. Colorado Governor Ammons vacillated over whether or not to send the Colorado National Guard into the coal field, a move favored by the operators and opposed by the strikers. In late October, the governor traveled south to investigate conditions for himself. In response Mother Jones organized a huge parade in Trinidad, on October 21, in order to dramatize the union side of the question.

'Never in local history,' reported one newspaper, 'has there been a more spectacular demonstration.' The parade was led by a band, followed by the women and children: 'Hundreds of women carried small babies at their breasts and toddling youngsters hardly able to keep up walked sturdily in line . . . women with baby buggies followed . . . shouting and singing.' More than 1,000 coal miners, many of them also carrying children; marched behind the women. The marchers carried banners, one of which read, 'Some of Mother Jones's Children.'[44]

Despite the opposition of organized labor, the governor succumbed to intense pressure from Denver business interests and called out the National Guard. When the soldiers arrived, on October 28, a new phase of the strike began. The relationship between the strikers and the Guard (supposedly a neutral force standing between the two sides), began on a friendly note. However, before long, mine guards began joining the state militia. Then, in November, the governor issued an order permitting the troops to escort strike-breakers into the coal camps. In the minds of the strikers, the military arm of the state of Colorado had joined the coal operators' side.

The women, following the leadership of the UMWA, were in the forefront of strikers' parades, demonstrations and daily picketing. Their traditional roles in the family in no way prevented them from taking aggressive actions. One morning in late November, for instance, a rumor circulated in the Ludlow tent colony that troops were going to escort strike-breakers through the Ludlow Depot and into the Berwind Canyon on the 8.30 a.m. train. The women came

out in force to block the train. An officer of the Guard described the scene:

> the women carried clubs . . . Opposed to ten sentries [guardsmen] was a solid mass of strikers, with their club swinging women in the front rank, giving vent to all manner of profanity, and a sullen bunch of men in the rear urging the women to violence.[45]

The rumor proved to be without basis, so the people returned to the tent colony without incident.

As time passed, the strikers were increasingly unable to distinguish the militiamen from a collection of rowdy and dangerous mine guards. Discipline among the troops was lax and it gradually deteriorated. In December, a governor's committee (appointed at the insistence of the Colorado State Federation of Labor) investigated the conduct of the Guard and issued a report on abuses – from robberies to harassment of strikers – which ran to over 700 pages.

Relations between the soldiers and the miners' wives became rancorous. For example, two militiamen reported walking down the street in Starkville, 'minding our own business,' when two women 'called us "scab herding sons of beaches" [sic] and we retaliated by saying "Go on you ten cent whores" . . . When they got up the street . . . they put their hands to their noses as if to tell us to kiss their asses.'[46]

During weapons searches of the tent colonies, the women lined up the children to taunt the soldiers. According to one officer, the women would say to the children, 'Now tell them what they are [repeat] after me.' The officer indignantly recalled, 'I have heard an American mule skinner in the Philippine Islands drive eight head of mules, but I have never heard anything equal to it.'[47]

Militiamen subjected the women to sexual harassment, just as the mine guards had done. Alluding to rape, Mary Thomas, testifying before the Commission on Industrial Relations, said:

> And the women that have been insulted in Ludlow – it is terrible . . . It cannot be stated – the insults the women have had to undergo. And since these militiamen have been there there's dozens of young girls who have had to go to homes expecting to become mothers.

In the midst of her testimony, Mrs Thomas was told that her time was running short, and another commissioner changed the topic by inquiring about the company stores.[48]

As Fall turned to winter, the strike event which attracted national attention was Mother Jones's deportation, on January 4, 1914. Her first statement upon arriving in Denver was, 'I'll go back. They can't keep me from my boys.'[49]

Among the many protests from across the nation came one from the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association. This Denver organization denounced the deportation on the grounds that 'such actions were unconstitutional and abridged the right of free speech.' However, at a subsequent meeting it became evident that the 'Mother Jones resolution' had stirred up a 'small hornets' nest.' Some of the suffragists considered Mother Jones to be a dangerous agitator, while others stood by her on the principle of free speech. The governor aggravated the dissension in the organization by 'delivering a castigation over the telephone upon two of those most prominent in the passing of the resolutions.'[50]

A week later, Mother Jones publicly returned to Trinidad, where she was promptly arrested. She was put under guard in a hospital, and held there incommunicado for nine weeks.[51]

The women of the tent colonies ardently protested her detention. On January 15, a group of 200 women – chanting, waving flags and singing union songs – marched from the union hall to military headquarters. There they confronted General John Chase, the military commander of the strike zone. They demanded Mother Jones's immediate release. General Chase informed them that Mother Jones was a disturber of the peace and an inciter of riots, and under no circumstances would she be released. His remarks were greeted with jeers.[52]

The union viewed the participation of the women as an essential strategy. The women were at least as effective as the men in a demonstration or on a picket line, and they were less likely to be physically attacked. Attacking women was unchivalrous and soldiers who did so were likely to be considered cowards, which was bad for public relations on the company side.

On January 22, the UMWA organized a large women's demonstration to protest Mother Jones's imprisonment. Reporting on this matter to the governor, General Chase described the union strategy:

> The strikers had evinced a disposition to cause disturbance and disorder through their women folks. They adopted as a device the plan of hiding behind their womens' skirts, believing, as was indeed the case, that it would be more embarrassing for the military to deal with women than with men. Accordingly, a parade of women was arranged as a demonstration to protest the incarceration of Mother Jones.[53]

The demonstration began peaceably, but did not end well. A thousand 'wives, mothers, and sisters' of striking miners, dressed in their Sunday best, began the march. They were accompanied by children and followed by a crowd of men – strikers and sympathizers – many of whom also carried or walked with children. The procession moved down Commercial Street and then turned into Main Street, where it confronted approximately 100 troops on horseback. General Chase, who was mounted, ordered the women to halt. Instead, they continued to advance, slowly. Then, according to 16-year-old Sarah Slator, 'General Chase's horse became frightened at something . . . and it ran into a horse and buggy . . . and he fell off the horse . . . He had been treating us so mean that everybody screamed and laughed at him and that made him angry.'

At this point, General Chase lost his temper and ordered the troops to charge. They did so, swinging rifles and cutting several women with sabers. The demonstrators scattered into porches and yards. Some of the women found sticks and bottles and began hitting and throwing.[54]

Mary Thomas, who was arrested later in the day, began to hit one of the soldiers with an umbrella. An officer of the Guard later remarked that 'she seemed to be the ringleader of a mob of women.' General Chase reported that Mary Thomas was a 'vociferous, belligerent and abusive leader of the mob. She forcibly resisted orders to move on, responding only with highly abusive, and, to say the least, unwomanly language. She attacked the troops with fists, feet, and umbrella.'[55]

At the day's end, women from the tent colonies and from Trinidad met and declared themselves 'The Women's Voting Association of Southern Colorado.' Their purpose was to protest the presence of the militia in the strike field and to organize the defeat of Governor Ammons in the next election. They had invited a member of the

Denver Equal Suffrage Association to speak, one of the women who had introduced the 'Mother Jones resolution' before that organization. However, this woman failed to appear in Trinidad. When her absence was announced, the hall was filled with cries of 'Quitter' and 'Deserter of the cause.'[56]

As the winter wore on, the strike settled quietly into a stand-off. By spring, the expense of keeping the National Guard in the field had bankrupted the Colorado treasury. Militiamen began to receive IOUs from the state instead of paychecks. Soldiers were observed openly entering the offices of the CFIC to receive paychecks. For lack of a better idea, Governor Ammons ordered the withdrawal of some, but not all, of the troops. The remaining companies were increasingly joined by mine guards. Discipline was poor. One officer of the Guard wrote to another, 'The detachment at Sopris turned out just as I thought. They had a drunken brawl the first night and raised Cain in general, shot holes in the walls and ran each other all over the place.'[57]

On a visit to the Ludlow tent colony, state Senator Helen Ring Robinson found an atmosphere of waiting, of dread. The women showed her the cellars their husbands had dug beneath the tents, where they could run to hide with the children in case of attack.[58] A railroad employee who lived on the prairie nearby noticed that the strikers 'seemed to be kind of restless and scared all the time, for fear something was going to happen.'[59] Soldiers and strikers alike told Senator Robinson that they expected the tent colony soon to be wiped out.

But Senator Robinson also discovered that an unusual community had developed in the tent colony – a community of sharing and mutual support. 'I found,' she testified before the Commission on Industrial Relations, 'among the women particularly, and many of the children, that this long winter had brought the nationalities together in a rather remarkable way. I found a friendliness among women of all nationalities – 22 at least. I saw the true melting pot at Ludlow.' The people also seemed to Senator Robinson to be 'pretty comfortable,' and 'rather happy.'[60] The cohesive community, the community of resistance, had survived the winter of 1914.

April 19, the Sunday before the Ludlow Massacre, was the Greek Easter. People of all nationalities celebrated with a service, a baseball game, a big dinner. After dinner, Mary Thomas, Cedi and Charles

Costa, and Margo and Tony Gorci fell to singing hymns. 'We all sang many hymns thinking of the Easters in the lands we came from, we women in tears. Cedi, Margo and I before retiring . . . had our coffee and talk. Little did I think – this is the last coffee. The next day the whole Costa family was dead.'[61]

On Monday, April 20, the attack on the Ludlow tent colony began at approximately 9 a.m. In the colony at that moment, time seemed to stand still. Later, many of the women remembered vividly what they were doing at 9 o'clock. A composite of their recollections, taken from affidavits and testimony, gives a picture of the ordinary mornings at the Ludlow tent colony.

At that hour, according to Pearl Jolly, not one-half of the tent colony residents were up and dressed. Ometomica Covadle looked out her tent window to see three of the Greek bachelors still celebrating – singing, dancing and playing music on a mandolin, a violin and a flute. Mary Petrucci had just started to wash. The little Thomas girls were eating their oatmeal. Margaret Dominski had allowed her children to sleep late. After putting the wash water on the stove, she was walking to another tent to get some postal cards to 'send away from our Ludlow Easter.' Mrs Ed Tonner, who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, was sweeping her front-room tent. Leyor Fylor, aged ten, was out playing ball.[62]

Then the shooting began. 'Suddenly the prairie was covered with human beings running in all directions like ants,' Mary Thomas writes. 'We all ran as we were, some with babies on their backs . . . not even thinking through the clouds of panic.'[63] Many of the women ran with small children into the cellars dug beneath the tents. Others ran out of the tent colony. The men took what weapons they had and ran to rifle pits purposely dug to one side of the tents to draw fire away from the tents in case of attack.

Pearl Jolly spent the day in the tent colony in a rain of bullets, tending the wounded, making sandwiches, trying to provide for people. 'Shots were flying all around me and a bullet hit the heel of my shoe and shot it off,' she said. 'I thought my foot had been shot off but I didn't have time to stop and see whether it had or not, I had to keep on the run . . . we would go from tent to tent and make the women and children in these tents as comfortable as could be. We went about dodging bullets all day.'[64]

By mid-afternoon, the children in the cellars were becoming restless and hungry. Eleven-year-old Frank Snyder, the eldest of six children, came up into the Snyder tent to get something to eat. He was shot in the head and killed. His father came up to lie down beside him for a while, then began running from tent to tent, telling people to make their children lie down rather than have them killed. After this, it seemed to Mrs Tonner that 'the machine guns turned loose all the more. My tent was so full of holes that it was like lace, pretty near.' Meanwhile, the strikers, returning fire from the rifle pits, were faring badly. At approximately 4.30 p.m., they ran out of ammunition.

At dusk, the attackers entered the colony with war whoops. After looting the tents of quilts, clothes and musical instruments, they began to set them on fire. The light of Tuesday morning revealed whiskey bottles strewn across the prairie. The Greek organizer, Louis Tikas, and Pearl Jolly ran from tent to tent, getting out the women and children. As they were leaving with one group, the sound of screaming made them realize that they had left some behind. Tikas turned back; on his way, he was captured and killed. Two other prisoners were shot and killed, just as the tents were starting to burn. One of them, John Bartoloti, had run back into the tents for his wife and children, for whom he had been crying all day. The other man killed was Charles Costa, the Italian organizer, who was thus spared knowledge of the death of Cedi Costa and their two children.

Gunmen escorted a few families up to the Ludlow Depot. There, according to Juanita Hernandez, one of the soldiers took an accordion 'and played on it before us.' Sometime after midnight, soldiers came upon the Snyder family, with their five living and one dead child. A soldier ordered them out of the tent, saying to the father, 'You redneck son-of-a-bitch I have a notion to kill you right now.'[65]

Early Tuesday morning, Mary Petrucci regained consciousness. She was lying in the cellar where she had run when her own tent had started to burn. With her were the dead bodies of her three children, and of two women and eight other children. Mary staggered out of the cellar toward the Ludlow Depot, not entirely in her right mind. 'I suppose I was like a drunken person,' she said later. 'The road was all mine.' Her only thought was to go to Trinidad to see her mother. Nine days passed before the knowledge that her children were dead entered her conscious mind.[66]

On Tuesday, other miners' wives straggled into Trinidad, having spent the night on the prairie. They were cold and hungry. Some were only half-dressed. One woman had given birth out on the prairie in the night, and mother and child came into town half-clad and freezing cold.

The aftermath of the Ludlow Massacre – the national sense of shock, the ten-day war that ravaged the southern Colorado coal field, and the entrance into the region of the United States Army – cannot be told here. Nor is it possible to relate the complex events leading to the defeat of the strike, which the UMWA called off in December 1914. Some of the UMWA strategy can be faulted, and a severe national recession in 1914 did not help. But at the heart of the strikers' defeat was simply the huge disparity in the resources at the disposal of the opposing sides, which included the blatant involvement of the state of Colorado, and the more subtle but arguable involvement of the federal government, on the side of the company.

Some weeks after the Ludlow Massacre, several of the women – Mary Thomas, Margaret Dominski, Pearl Jolly and Mary Petrucci – traveled around the country speaking on conditions in Colorado. According to Pearl Jolly, Mary Petrucci was 'simply grieving herself to death.'[67] In mid-tour, she was unable to continue. Before returning home, however, she gave an interview to a Washington reporter. This 1914 interview captures the voice, clear and uninterrupted, of a coal miner's wife:

> Perhaps it seems strange to you that I want to go back home. But I do. My man is there and my children are buried there . . . I have been so happy there. Why, there wasn't a happier woman anywhere than I was . . . You see, I'm Italian, although I was born in this country, and our people are gay of heart. I used to sing around my work and playing with my babies. Well, I don't sing anymore. And my husband doesn't laugh as he used to. I'm twenty-four years old and I suppose I'll live a long time, but I don't see how I can ever be happy again. But I try to be cheerful on account of my husband. It is so hard for him when he comes home from work to find only me in the house, and none of the children . . . But you're not to think that we could do any differently another time. We are working people – my husband and I – and we're stronger for the union than we were before the strike . . . I can't have my babies back. But perhaps when everybody knows about them, something will be done to make the world a better place for all babies.[68]

Mary Petrucci was a class-conscious woman, but neither her experience nor her perceptions were those of her husband. Her consciousness was that of a miner's *wife*; her experience of class oppression was a particularly female one; and her class-conscious view of the world took a female form.

Within the coal communities, both women and men experienced the class system directly, in its raw form, just as the most oppressed industrial workers do today. Consequently their perceptions about class had a certain accuracy reflecting the real world. But their oppression was not of the type tending to produce a split between the sexes: the men and women did not compete in the same workplace. The factors which brought the interests of men and women together despite their separate roles included their common national backgrounds, their common experience of xenophobia in their new country, and the intervention of the coal company in every aspect of life. For the women, even the sexual harassment coming from company hirelings was a form of class, as well as sex, oppression.

At the same time, Denver suffragists were split over class issues and could not come unambiguously to the support of the women of the coal fields. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the Colorado miners' wives were virulently anti-feminist or against women's suffrage, as Mother Jones was. The scant evidence suggests that although they had not broken with traditional roles within the family, some new ideas on this subject were under discussion. Furthermore the miners' wives did not have an ideology about appropriate feminine behavior which prevented them from taking militant action. Yet it was not the environment of the coal fields but that of the urban factory which produced the class-conscious feminists of the period.

Notes

1 The important sources on the strike include the thousands of pages of testimony in US Commission on Industrial Relations, *Report and Testimony*, vols 7–9, Washington, DC, 1915 (hereafter: *CIR Report*);

US Congress, House Committee on Mines and Mining, *Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado*, Washington, DC, 1914 (hereafter: *Cong. Hearings*); Donald McClurg, 'Labor Organization in the Coal Mines of Colorado, 1878–1933,' PhD dissertation, University of California, 1959; and George McGovern, 'The Colorado Coal Strike, 1913–1914,' PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1953.

2 My thinking on the theoretical issues raised by this paper was stimulated by Temma Kaplan, 'Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona,' *Signs*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1983; Clark Kerr and Abraham Sigel, 'The Interindustry Propensity to Strike – An International Comparison,' in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin, and Arthur M. Ross, eds, *Industrial Conflict*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1954; Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1980; and Royden Harrison, ed., *Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypical Proletarian Reconsidered*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1978.

3 E. L. Doyle Papers, envelope no. 18, Western History Department, Denver Public Library (hereafter: WHD/DPL).

4 Mary Harris Jones, *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, Chicago, Charles Kerr, 1925; Dale Fetherling, *Mother Jones: The Miners' Angel*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1974; Priscilla Long, *Mother Jones: Woman Organizer, and her Relations with Miners' Wives, Working Women, and the Suffrage Movement*, Boston, Red Sun Press, 1976.

5 In essential agreement on this point are Glen Porter, *The Rise of Big Business 1860–1910*, New York, Thomas Crowell, 1973; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977; David Kotz, 'Finance Capital and Corporate Control,' and Douglas Dowd, 'The Concentration of Capital,' in Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas Weisskopf, eds, *The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1978; and V. I. Lenin, 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,' in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Lenin Anthology*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1975.

6 Clifton K. Yearly, *Britons in American Labor: A History of the Influence of the United Kingdom Immigrants in American Labor, 1820–1914*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, p.21.

7 H. Lee Scamehorne, *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West: The Colorado Fuel and Iron Co., 1872–1903*, Boulder, Colorado, Pruett Publishing, 1976; David G. Bunting, *Statistical View of the Trusts*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1974, p.57; McGovern, 'The Colorado Coal Strike,' p.4; *Moody's Manual of Railroad Securities, 1910*; *Rocky Mountain News* (hereafter: *RMN*), January 1, 1910, p.3.

8 Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *An American Dynasty*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976.

9 Delegate Lamont, Proceedings, Special UMWA District No. 15 Convention, Trinidad, Colo., September 16, 1913, in E. L. Doyle Papers, WHD/DPL.

10 *Read the Grievances of the Colorado Coal Miners*, UMWA Papers, File: District No. 15, 1913, Washington, DC.

11 Mary Thomas O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, Hollywood, California, Minerva Printing & Publishing, 1971, p.67.

12 Mother Jones's speech at Starkville, Colorado, September 24, 1913, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,253.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Colorado Bureau of Labor Statistics, *12th Biennial Report, 1909–1910*, Denver, Smith Brooks Printing, p.127.

15 John McLennan testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,529.

16 Mary Thomas testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,354.

17 Colorado Bureau of Labor Statistics, *12th Biennial Report*, p.27.

18 Waleryon Korda to President Woodrow Wilson, April 29, 1914, National Archives, RG60 (Department of Justice), File 168733-a.

19 John McQuarrie testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,782. McQuarrie quoted in Inis Weed, 'The Miner as Citizen,' Committee on Industrial Relations Papers, Box 10, 'Coal Mine Strike,' National Archives, RG174 (Department of Labor).

20 Lindsey exhibit no. 5, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,388.

21 Joseph M. Patterson testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,784.

22 Patterson exhibit no. 1, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,269.

23 Lillian Green, 'Resent Insult – Mother Jones,' Denver *Times*, December 17, 1913.

24 O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, pp.33–4.

25 *Ibid.*, p.100.

26 Pearl Jolly testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,354; Operators exhibit no. 101, *Cong. Hearings*, vol. 2, p.6,615; *Nationalities Employed in the Mines of Colorado during the Year 1912, and the Percentage*, UMWA Papers, File: District No. 15, 1912, Washington, DC.

27 Charlotte Erickson, *American Industry and the European Immigrant, 1860–1885*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1957, p.86.

28 Mary Petrucci testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.8,190.

29 John McLennan testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,531.

30 Helen Ring Robinson quoted in 'Army of Women,' *Denver Post*, April 26, 1914, p.6.

31 'The West Report on Ludlow,' Committee on Industrial Relations Papers, Box: 'Colorado Strike,' National Archives, RG174 (Department of Labor).

32 Report of the Military Commission, May 2, 1914, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,311.

33 O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.73.

34 *United Mineworkers' Journal* (hereafter: *UMWJ*), September 25, 1913, pp.2 and 12; O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, pp.87–8; *RMN*, September 9, 1913, p.4; *RMN*, September 15, 1913, p.3.

35 E. L. Doyle testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.7,067; and E. L. Doyle, Minutes of the Policy Committee, E. L. Doyle Papers, WHD/DPL.
36 E. L. Doyle testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.7,017.
37 *RMN*, September 16, 1913, pp.1 and 5.
38 O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.101.
39 E. L. Papers, envelopes nos 11 and 18, WHD/DPL; John McLennan testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,526; O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.108.
40 *The Miners' Magazine*, October 23, 1913, p.6; O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.112.
41 Priscilla Long, interview with Mike and Katherine Livoda, Denver, Colorado, January 1977.
42 *Ibid.*
43 O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.114.
44 *RMN*, October 22, 1913, p.3; *UMWJ*, October 30, 1913, p.1; clipping stamped October 20, 1913, John Chase scrapbook, WHD/DPL; E. L. Doyle, Minutes of the Policy Committee, E. L. Doyle Papers, envelope no. 11, WHD/DPL; O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, p.113.
45 Van Cise exhibit no. 2, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, pp.7,325–6.
46 Statement of Robert Burroughs, Hildreth Frost Papers, Box 1, Colorado State Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.
47 Karl Linderfelt testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,883.
48 Mary Hannah Thomas testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,359.
49 Clipping, 'Mother Jones Put Out of Mine Town,' Mother Jones Papers, Box 2, File: Colorado 4, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC; 'Troops Deport Mother Jones,' *RMN*, January 5, 1914, p.2; clipping, 'Mother Jones Deported by Militia,' John Chase scrapbook, WHD/DPL.
50 'Denver Suffragists Raise Cry at Expulsion of Mother Jones,' *RMN*, January 7, 1914, p.1; 'Mother Jones Divides Women,' *RMN*, January 12, 1914, p.4.
51 *UMWJ*, January 22, 1914, p.17; *RMN*, January 7, 1914, p.1; *RMN*, January 12, 1914, p.4; *RMN*, January 13, 1914, p.8.
52 *RMN*, January 16, 1914, p.4.
53 Report of the Commanding General to the Governor, 'The Military Occupation of the Coal Strike Zone by the Colorado National Guard, 1913–1914,' WHD/DPL.
54 'Great Czar Fell,' *UMWJ*, January 29, 1914, p.4; clipping in *Trinidad Free Press*, George Minot Papers, WHD/DPL; *RMN*, January 23, 1914, p.1; *Denver Post*, January 23, 1914, p.9; J. W. Brown, 'Military Despotism in Colorado,' *UMWJ*, March 26, 1914. p.2.
55 Report of the Commanding General.
56 *RMN*, January 23, 1914, p.1.
57 Lieutenant C. A. Conner to Captain Frost, April 14, 1914, Hildreth Frost Papers, WHD/DPL.
58 Helen Ring Robinson testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,211.

59 M. G. Low testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,853.
60 Helen Ring Robinson testimony.
61 Mary Thomas O'Neal to Arthur Biggs, president District No. 15, UMWA, June 5, 1970 (in author's possession).
62 Mrs Dominski testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 9, p.8,186; Mrs Ed Tonner affidavit, *CIR Report*, vol. 8, p.7,384; Mrs Petrucci testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 9, p.8,194; William Snyder testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,853; Ometomica Covadle affidavit, Leyor Fylor affidavit, Mrs James Fylor affidavit, William Snyder affidavit, Virginia Bertoloti affidavit, Juanita Hernandez affidavit, Mrs Ed Tonner affidavit – all in Committee on Industrial Relations Papers, National Archives, RG174 (Department of Labor); Mrs Lee Champion speech, May 21, 1914, Washington, DC, in Ellis Meredith Papers, Colorado State Historical Society, Denver; McGovern, 'The Colorado Coal Strike,' p.286.
63 O'Neal, *Those Damn Foreigners*, pp.133–4.
64 Pearl Jolly speech, Mayt 21, 1914, Ellis Meredith Papers, Colorado State Historical Society; Pearl Jolly testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 7, p.6,357.
65 Juanita Hernandez affidavit; William Snyder affidavit; William Snyder testimony.
66 Mary Petrucci testimony, *CIR Report*, vol. 9, p.8,094; clipping, Lucy Huffaker interview with Mary Petrucci, Mother Jones Papers, Box 2, File: Colorado 4, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.
67 Pearl Jolly testimony, p.6,351.
68 Lucy Huffaker interview with Mary Petrucci.