

The Correspondence of Mother Jones

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1986 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"The Correspondence of Mother Jones." *The Annals of Iowa* 48 (1986), 338-339.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol48/iss5/19>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

mass radical activism evident in the 1945–1946 strikes was defused, says George Lipsitz, by the Taft-Hartley Act, the Cold War, and the expulsion of Communists from the CIO. Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, to whose memory the book is dedicated, summarizes the organizational efforts of women workers in the 1970s. Manning Marable identifies the crisis among black workers since the mid-1970s as a result of the acceleration of joblessness and underemployment, the demise of militant labor groups, the continuation of racial antipathies, and the shift to the right of a number of middle-class black leaders. The concluding essay by Sidney Lens discusses the contemporary weaknesses of organized labor and awaits the emergence of a new labor left.

Working for Democracy provides a very readable introduction to the history of American workers' recurrent struggles for power. Students, unionists, and the general public can benefit from the book's insights. The volume's chief drawback is that chapters varying from eight to eleven pages of text limit both the depth and the precision of analysis. Consequently a number of essays suffer from generalizations that miss nuances and explanations that neglect antecedents. The editors have succeeded, nonetheless, in presenting brief articles that chronicle and clarify the heritage of the American labor movement.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE

RALPH SCHARNAU

The Correspondence of Mother Jones, edited by Edward M. Steel. Pittsburgh Series in Labor History. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985. xlix, 360 pp. Notes, index. \$34.95 cloth.

In the history of American labor there is no individual more colorful and legendary than the white-haired Mary Harris Jones, who began her career as a labor organizer in her mid-sixties. Arrest, incarceration, threats, menacing company guards, recalcitrant mine owners, and long walks in the dark of night to meet with oppressed coal miners were common fare for the Irish-born woman whose matriarchal concern for American miners was appropriately recognized by friend and foe alike in calling her Mother Jones.

The Correspondence of Mother Jones contains 364 letters written by and to Mother Jones during the last three decades of her life from 1900 to 1930. The letters are arranged in chronological sequence and are published with original spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Footnotes and explanations of the letters' contents are kept to a minimum; notes identify individuals mentioned in the letters. The letters are preceded by a twenty-three page introductory essay by the editor, Edward M. Steel, professor emeritus of history at West Virginia University.

Book Reviews

The letters reveal much about Mother Jones. Particularly interesting are those written while she was imprisoned in West Virginia and Colorado, those that offer insights into organizing methods and problems, and those that illuminate the conflict within the labor movement itself. Mother Jones considered many paid union officials to be self-serving, undedicated, and generally ineffective. She had only contempt for John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America, writing, "There is nothing to that fellow but an empty piece of slime" (179). In contrast, she showed matronly affection for Terence V. Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, and John H. Walker, a national organizer from Illinois and later president of the Illinois Federation of Labor.

The Correspondence of Mother Jones brings together in one place letters scattered throughout collections in several states. It complements *Mother Jones Speaks: Collected Speeches and Writings*, edited by Philip S. Foner (1983), which contains speeches, testimony, articles, interviews, and 112 letters written by Mother Jones. Readers interested in biographies of Mother Jones may want to turn first to *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, edited by Mary Field Parton (1925), and *Mother Jones, the Miners' Angel*, by Dale Fetherling (1974).

UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ALLAN KENT POWELL

Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era, by D'Ann Campbell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. xiv, 304 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$20.00 cloth.

From Working Girl to Working Mother: The Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980, by Lynn Y. Weiner. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. xii, 187 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$17.95 cloth.

The tensions caused for American women by the divergence between their idealized and actual roles in society form a theme explored in both D'Ann Campbell's *Women at War with America* and Lynn Weiner's *From Working Girl to Working Mother*. Both of these interesting, well-researched monographs survey important, broad subjects, aspects of which other historians have explored in detail. Campbell's work is a comprehensive examination of women's experiences during World War II. Weiner provides a general summary of the history of working women in the United States from the early nineteenth century through 1980. Both provide a welcome synthesis of evidence and interpretations of subjects crucial to an understanding of the history of women in

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.