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“YOURS FOR INDUSTRIAL FREEDOM”: WOMEN OF THE IWW, 1905–1930¹

ANNE F. MATTINA

Department of Communication, Stonehill College

In January 1905 a group of labor radicals gathered in Chicago to assess the movement's efficacy intending to create “One Big Union.” Only one among the small group of 23 people was a woman, Mary Harris “Mother” Jones. Frustrated with the lack of progress experienced through traditional methods of craft unions the group proclaimed, “Universal economic evils afflicting the working class can be eradicated only by a universal working-class movement. . . . All power should rest in a collective membership” (Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book* 77). The constitution of the IWW announced, “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common” (185). Embracing a philosophy of accessibility to all workers as well as low dues and transferable membership, the IWW represented a unique opportunity for female activists at the dawn of the twentieth century.

In her opening speech to the convention, Lucy Parsons articulated the fundamental demand of the new group, “revolutionary socialism” which she defined as, “that the land shall belong to the landless, the tools to the toiler, and the products to the producers,” a theme echoed by countless IWW organizers over the next several decades (“Minutes of the Founding IWW Convention”). In addition to Parson and Jones, over a dozen women actively participated in the first meeting, harkening the beginning of unique opportunity for female labor activists in early twentieth century America (“Minutes of the Founding IWW Convention”).

Women, as has been thoroughly documented, found very little encouragement for participation in mainstream organized

Address correspondence to Anne F. Mattina, Department of Communication, Stonehill College, 320 Washington Street, North Easton, MA 02357. E-mail: amattina@stonehill.edu

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labor as members or as leaders (Kenneally). The Wobblies, as IWW members were colloquially known, did in fact offer a space to women though it proved to be non-hospitable. Despite the egalitarian rhetoric espoused by the constitution and some of the leading male organizers women's inclusion was often colored by endemic sexism. However, as Meredith Tax determines, these same male leaders were cognizant of the importance of women's support particularly during large scale strikes and had no problem mobilizing them when necessary. Tax asserts,

By addressing their problems as class problems rather than purely workplace ones, the IWW linked workers with the rest of their community—their husbands and wives, their ethnic organizations and churches, and workers in other industries—to build a working class army strong enough to lead embryo revolutions. (125)

Women played a multitude of roles in the IWW chief among these being speakers, organizers and free speech advocates. Equally important to the movement were the actions of local women in specific strikes supported by the Wobblies. While the many histories of the IWW mention women as part of the organization from its founding convention and some voices are included in anthologies of speeches, songs and other texts, there has yet to be a full-length monograph on their roles and activism. Philip Foner devotes several chapters to the topic in his two-volume work on *Women and the American Labor Movement*, discussing the contradictory nature of the Wobblies' perspective on women; on the one hand enacting a paternalistic attitude on the other, celebrating "rebel girls" and their wild spirits. In addition, Foner documents the activities of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Jane Street, and several others prominent in major strikes and free speech fights (Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement, Vol. I*). Tax also emphasizes the work of Flynn and Street, but further identifies several other women prominent in the organization including Margaret Sanger (Tax).

In her analysis of IWW publications Ann Schofield determines that despite the Wobblies' egalitarian ideology and celebration of the "Rebel Girl," this mythical being, "was not freed from domesticity by the coming of the One Big Union," instead, "she played a domestic role in the oppressed present and the liberated

future. The Rebel Girl stood by her male comrade as muse or helpmate and instilled a pacifist and revolutionary ideology in her children” (Schofield 335).

Analysis of both primary and secondary sources, along with review of contemporaneous newspapers and pamphlets however, reveals a more complex picture of women’s participation in and agitation on behalf of the IWW. From the influence of Lucy Parson’s anarchist philosophy and the theatricality of Mother Jones to the oratorical prowess of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the early history of the Wobblies resonates with women’s contributions. The IWW experienced some considerable success in the first decade and a half of their existence particularly around the issues of free speech and labor reform and women were very often at the forefront of this.

The Founders

Mother Jones, a leading light in the radical wing of the American labor movement, attended the founding convention for a time but evidently came and went over the days of the meeting. At one point delegates called for her to speak but she declined. She did, however, agree to serve on the committee that drafted the constitution. Jones was not active in the organization itself; however an argument may be made for her influence given the Wobblies’ later penchant for street theatre as a pressure tactic. In any event, she signed the original constitution in 1905.

Luella Twining, representing 30 members of a Denver local of the American Labor Union joined Emma Langdon, a delegate from the Denver Typographical Union at the first convention, Langdon serving as elected secretary. Also present was Lillian Forberg, a member of the Industrial Workers’ Club of Chicago who was elected to the Ratification Committee on the ninth day of the convention. Tax identifies Forberg as a paid IWW organizer in 1907, but no additional evidence of her activism could be found (Tax 132).

Lucy Parsons attending the convention as an unaffiliated delegate proved to be the most active female participant. The early life of Parsons is shrouded in mystery. Born about 1853 in Texas, her ancestry appears to have included Native American,

Mexican, and African American heritage. Historians speculate she may have been the daughter of slaves, or even possibly a slave herself (Aherns 15). Around the age of 17, she met anarchist Albert Parsons, who was working to register Black voters in post-Civil War Texas. Their marriage was both illegal (as it violated miscegenation laws) and dangerous.

In 1873, they left the south for Chicago where Albert found a job as a printer and became a labor leader, speaker, and organizer. He was fired and blacklisted for his activism. Lucy assumed financial responsibility for the family and became involved in local labor politics, writing for radical publications. Describing the evolution of her anarchist ideology she said,

I came to understand how organized governments used their concentrated power to retard progress by their ever-ready means of silencing the voice of discontent. . . . Governments never lead; they follow progress. When the prison, stake or scaffold can no longer silence the voice of the protesting minority, progress moves on a step, but not until then. (Parsons, *The Principles of Anarchism*)

In 1878, Parsons helped found the Working Women's Union in Chicago a group whose aim was to organize women into unions (Tax 45). In addition, the WWU agitated for the eight-hour day, an exercise in futility that led to Parson's embrace of anarchy described above. In 1883, Parsons delivered a powerful speech, "To Tramps, The Unemployed, The Disinherited, The Miserable" advocating a form of direct action or "propaganda by deed," which was appropriated into the IWW's philosophy and advocated by the group's leading organizers. Published as a pamphlet distributed by the International Working People's Association (another group Parsons helped found) in 1884, the text serves as a precursor to later Wobbly rhetoric and activism, ". . . stroll you down the avenues of the rich and look through the magnificent plate windows into their voluptuous homes, and here you will discover the *very identical robbers* who have despoiled you and yours. Then let your tragedy be enacted *here*" (Parsons, *To Tramps*) Parsons concluded by exhorting the workers to "Learn the use of explosives!" (A directive that proved injurious to her husband's case during the Haymarket trial.) After her husband Albert was executed by the state of Illinois in 1887, Parson's commitment to radical causes and solutions deepened. During the decade and a half between

the execution and the founding of the IWW Lucy espoused an “uncompromising syndicalist position”; identified free speech as an essential right, honed her class consciousness and gave recognition to the international nature of a true workers’ movement (Kornbluh). Each of these individual tenets emerges in later Wobbly ideology and rhetoric.

Parsons’s address to the opening convention provides insight into her feminist thought. Her introduction leaves little doubt as to her faith in men’s ability to effect change, “We, the women of this country, have no ballot even if we wished to use it, and the only way that we can be represented is to take a man to represent us. You men have made such a mess of it in representing us that we have not much confidence in asking you . . .” Continuing, she utters her famous assertion, “We [women] are the slaves of slaves. We are exploited more ruthlessly than men.” She warns her fellow activist against blaming women for their roles as potential strike breakers, observing “Whenever wages are to be reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them, and if there is anything that you men should do in the future it is to organize the women. . . .” Parsons also spoke directly to needs of women workers, advocating a sliding fee scale for IWW membership, arguing specifically that women workers were lower paid than men, and that “they are the class we want” (“Minutes of the Founding IWW Convention”).

After the convention Parsons continued her activism with the IWW by editing the newly established *The Liberator* from 1905–1906. She remained committed to the principles of the organization speaking on its behalf for the next several decades. Of those women present at the founding convention none seems to have secured a permanent position in the IWW. While the group supported Mother Jones’s activism, and lauded her efforts in its press, she was not an active member. Parsons’s participation in the IWW has been termed “sporadic” but supportive through the remainder of her life (Aherns 15).

The Organizers

It took several years for the IWW to find its footing on the radical landscape after the founding convention. The organization was beset by internal and external strife as many factions vied for

primacy within the group. The arrest of Bill Haywood on charges of the murder of former Idaho Governor Stuenenberg drained resources as money was needed for his defense. Organizing and activism did not begin in earnest until late in 1907. For the next decade or so, the IWW fought its class war on two fronts: labor organizing and free speech fights, with women participating fully on each.

It is difficult to estimate the number of official female IWW organizers. Though examination of the historical records yields evidence of other women, only Rabinowitz and Gurley Flynn are listed as organizers in *Solidarity*, the Wobbly paper. Margaret Sanger, most identified historically with the U.S. birth control movement, was an avid supporter and lent her organizational skills in several strikes. Iowa organizer Pearl McGill helped with the textile strikes of Lawrence and Lowell and other Massachusetts locales as an IWW representative. Jane Street, founder of IWW local 133 the Domestic Workers Union of Denver influenced the creation of similar groups in other American cities and served time in San Diego jails for soliciting membership in the Wobblies. Caroline Nelson devoted most of her energies to writing and speaking on the West Coast. Though there is evidence that each played a significant role, the most celebrated of all was the original “Rebel Girl” Gurley Flynn.

“Labor’s Ablest Woman War-Correspondent and Warrior”

An American activist of Irish parentage, “Gurley” as she known to fellow workers, was born in Concord, New Hampshire in 1890. Her father Tom Flynn was the grandson of a Fenian rebel from County Mayo while her mother Annie Gurley was a progressive advocate (Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography* 28). Both parents encouraged Elizabeth’s nascent militancy by introducing her to a wide array of Socialists and other radical thinkers both in person and in print. At the age of 15, she joined a debating society and met Emma Goldman for the first time.

In the summer of 1906, Gurley Flynn began her career as a labor activist an experience she later recalled in an essay entitled “How I Became a Rebel.” “I met the garment workers then in the throes of great struggles and learned of the idealism and fighting spirits of the Russian and Jews. I plunged into street speaking and

loved it intensely! I was ‘converting the masses!’” (Flynn, “How I Became a Rebel”).

Her 50-plus-year career as an advocate for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized had begun. “It must have been about this time that I heard Debs and DeLeon speak together on Industrial Unionism. It was immediately after the launching of the IWW and it certainly worked a turning point for me, I really began to place my feet on the ground and tread a definite path,” she recalled (Flynn, “How I Became a Rebel”).

She attended her first IWW convention in 1907 in Chicago and afterward went on a short organizing tour in Ohio and Pennsylvania on the Wobblies’ behalf. For the next several years, Gurley Flynn honed her skills as an organizer and speaker for the IWW. She participated in the Wobblies’ free speech fights in Missoula and Spokane. Along the way, she met and married Jack Jones, a fellow organizer. In 1910, when an all-male committee of the IWW discovered that she was pregnant they ordered her off the streets, limiting her speaking engagements to indoor events. As her pregnancy became more visible, her responsibilities became more circumscribed. She settled in Spokane for a period of time where she edited *The Industrial Worker*, the western Wobbly newspaper. One evening on her way to work, she was arrested for “conspiracy to incite men to violate the law” and during her trial the local papers reported that Gurley Flynn was “one of the most dangerous of the IWW” (Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography* 100). Her husband remained in Missoula throughout her ordeal, a contributing factor to the dissolution of their brief marriage.

After her son’s birth, she returned to life on the road. She was arrested several more times during 1911 and spent some time the summer of that year organizing in Lawrence, Massachusetts among workers in the woolen mills. She would return several months later to help coordinate the general strike in that community, known to history as the “Bread and Roses Strike” one of the few clear victories claimed by the by the Wobblies from this time period.

Gurley Flynn’s next big stage was in Paterson, NJ during the silk strike of 1913. It was in Paterson that she began to focus more exclusively on women, holding separate meetings for them. These gatherings empowered the women, creating an atmosphere for female strike leaders to emerge (Golin 63). Flynn later wrote, “The life of a strike depends upon constant activities” and she made

sure those activities included women (“Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Remembers the Paterson Silk Strike, 1913”). Gurley Flynn possessed keen insight into what it took to empower female strikers and after Lawrence, honed those skills with the Paterson strikers (Tonn 222). Additionally she inspired the women, both strikers and strikers’ wives, a group she specifically sought out as she felt that they were essential to success. “By reaching out to the women of the community through frequent for-women-only meetings, Flynn helped them to become conscious of their strength. They did the rest” (Golin 63).

The strike continued throughout the spring, the workers remaining steadfast. Pressure from the manufacturers caused the police and the private security forces to increase their aggressiveness with the strikers. Because so many of the IWW leaders had been arrested, rumors began to surface that they were set to flee Paterson, deserting the strikers. Gurley Flynn challenged these rumors at a strike meeting. “Personally, I intend to stay here until the strike is finished. I have nothing to lose so I can say whatever I please about the manufacturers as long as I express your sentiments” (“A.F. of L. and I.W.W. Clash Tonight at Armory”).

Total family involvement was essential to the strike’s success. “We are going to win this strike for the babies,” she declared at a women’s meeting” (“A.F. of L. and I.W.W. Clash Tonight at Armory”). Paterson proved important to Gurley Flynn’s development as an IWW organizer and helped strengthen her commitment to women as essential to building and maintaining an effective strike force. It was also here that she began to cultivate an individual perspective, separate from that of the organization.

The workers lost the battle in Paterson but Flynn continued her affiliation with the IWW for almost another decade. Active in the Northwest where her skills as a speaker were prized, she was lauded by the Wobbly press for her actions on the Mesaba Range, and in Everett and Spokane, Washington. However, she found herself often at odds with the direction of the IWW particularly after Bill Haywood took over the national leadership in 1916. In 1917, while visiting Chicago headquarters, she voiced her dissent over the content of some pamphlets. “What’s the matter Gurley? Are you losing your nerve?” she recalled Haywood taunting her (Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography* 227). It was her final visit to the national office.

Pearl McGill, Mid-Western Worker, East Coast Organizer

Ora Pearl McGill, born June 1894 in Iowa began her career as a labor organizer while employed as a button worker in Muscatine. At the age of 17, she was elected recording secretary and appointed to the executive committee of the Button Workers Protective Union (BWPU) No. 12854, an affiliate of the AFL. In 1911, Chicago Women's Trade Union League recruited McGill as an organizer, providing her with training in public speaking and fund-raising (Rousmaniere 11). The *Boston Daily Globe* identified her as a "prominent delegate" to the national WTUL conference in June of that year ("Applauds Foss' Appointment of Mrs. Evans"). McGill moved to Boston in December 1911 and the next month joined the fight in the Lawrence woolen strike playing "a significant role in the street-level organizing" (13). Working closely with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and other IWW leaders, McGill began holding women-only meetings in Lawrence (Cameron 141-142). Though she lost her AFL credentials as a result of her affiliation with the IWW she continued her activism on its behalf (14).

The workers' victory in Lawrence strengthened the determination of the Wobblies and they engaged in a massive push to organize throughout New England. McGill traveled throughout Massachusetts speaking and organizing at textile factories in Clinton, Barre, New Bedford, Webster, Warren, and Lowell, Massachusetts erupted with worker discontent. "During one noon hour, twenty-five young men, led by Miss Pearl McGill and Mrs. Coppens, marched up and down Market Street four abreast shouting and singing the I.W.W. songs," according to one account (Karas). In the fall of 1912, McGill led a massive parade of protestors onto the Boston Common during a rally in support of jailed IWW strike leaders Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti ("Haywood for General Strike").

McGill remained active in labor reform over the short remaining years of her life. She returned to Iowa, earning a teaching certificate and taught for several years, finding the experience very unsatisfying. Back in Boston for a brief period, McGill organized women into the IWW in 1914. In 1917, she married in Iowa and again taught school. Divorced in 1923, her former husband killed her in 1924 after his release from a mental institution (Rousmaniere 1).

Margaret Sanger—The Woman Rebel

Though Sanger does not appear to have been a paid organizer for the IWW, she played a crucial role in several of its largest strikes. During the Bread & Roses strike in Lawrence, Sanger helped organize and facilitate “The Children’s Exodus” from the city. The strategy, appropriated from the Italian labor movement was based on the premise that workers might be compelled to return to the mills before the strike was settled if they were worried about their hungry offspring. In order to help keep strikers on the picket line, their children were sent to sympathetic families in other communities for the duration. The “exodus” began on February 10 and received publicity favorable to the strikers’ cause in mainstream newspapers (“150 Strike Waifs Find Homes Here”). The Lawrence children were sent with much fanfare to Socialists in New York City and in Barre, Vermont. Lawrence officials called for the National Guard to prevent workers from repeating the action.

On February 24 the strikers returned to the train station with more children. They were met by brutal opposition. “A violent clash between the police authorities and women who wanted to assert what they had been told was their civil rights, took place here this morning,” the *New York Times* reported. “Both sides went the limit of their power and the police prevailed. Not one child got on the train. Fifty arrests were made, many of them who had fought the police savagely, and several heads were broken by the clubs of the officers” (“Police Clubs Keep Lawrence Waifs In”). The strikers surrounded the vehicles carrying the children and a twenty-minute battle with the militia ensued. The children were sent out of the city, not on the trains to a safe haven but to an orphanage.

Clashes occurred throughout the day resulting in the arrest of 27 women. The public was outraged by these events and both labor activists and social reformers called for an immediate investigation. Representative Victor Berger, a Socialist, instigated a Congressional hearing in Washington, DC. Testimony began on March 6 and observers included First Lady Nellie Taft and Anne Morgan, niece of industrialist J.P. Morgan (“Mrs. Taft Listens to Strike Charges”). Sanger accompanied the children to Congress testifying as to their mal-nourished condition (Katz 30). The testimony of the children was particularly persuasive as they described

horrible working conditions. Under mounting public pressure and unable to break the strike force the mill owners began to settle with the strikers. By mid-March, most had capitulated to the demands of reduced hours without a pay reduction. The Lawrence workers had won.

Sanger repeated her actions the next year during the Paterson silk strike. Though the act of removing the children generated some favorable press for the Paterson strike it appears to have had little effect on the outcome. In 1914, Sanger began publishing her journal, *The Woman Rebel*, trumpeting the anarchist slogan used by the Wobblies “No God, No Masters” on its’ masthead. Sanger informed her readers, “This paper will not be the champion of any ‘ism.’” She further declared, “The aim of this paper will be to stimulate working women to think for themselves and to build up a conscious fighting character. [A]t all times the WOMAN REBEL will strenuously advocate economic emancipation” (Sanger 1). The *Woman Rebel* was supported in the columns of Wobbly newspapers and distributed by IWW locals. An IWW-affiliated printer published her pamphlet *Family Limitation*, also distributed by the locals (Tax 160). Sanger’s advocacy for birth control engendered support among other IWW women such as Gurley Flynn, Matilda Rabinowitz, and Dr. Marie Equi (Tax 157). It was also the target of the federal government and soon Sanger was indicted for violating the Comstock (anti-obscenity) laws. Rather than be jailed Sanger left the country returning several years later to face a trial. While she hoped to use this as a venue for propagandizing, she was denied that opportunity when the government dropped the charges. Like so many other efforts at social change supported by the Wobblies this phase of public agitation for birth control died out during the government’s attack on radicalism.

Matilda (Rabinowitz) Robbins—“A Very Capable Little Woman IWW Organizer”

Born in the Ukraine in 1887, Tatiana Gitel Rabinowitz immigrated with her mother and siblings to New York in 1900. At 14, she began working for pay at a shirtwaist factory for \$2.50 a week (Peterson 35). As a young woman active in Socialist labor reform

Rabinowitz was “drawn to the IWW approach in Lawrence of organizing massive demonstrations that included entire families” (38). She traveled to Lawrence where she played a small supportive role in the strike and managed to gain the attention of Wobbly leaders (38).

Her career with the radical organization began several months later when she was sent by the national office to Little Falls, New York, the site of another textile strike. Though largely inexperienced, she imposed order amongst the strikers whose leaders had been jailed. During the strike, Bill Haywood reported on her work in the *International Socialist Review*, “Miss Rabinowitz is as small in person as the smallest striker, yet disciplined as she is in the Industrial Workers of the World principles, she is shaping the mighty force that means victory” (Haywood, “On the Picket Line” 522). *Solidarity* noted “Matilda Rabinovitz (*sic*), a pretty little Russian-American girl, left her home in Bridgeport, Conn. to come to Little Falls to assist the strikers in their fight” (“Little Falls Rebels”). Her size and looks are mentioned in almost every article on Rabinowitz’s organizing in Wobbly papers.

One of the most concrete actions undertaken by Rabinowitz in Little Falls was opening a soup kitchen, feeding about 100 strikers daily until the police closed it down (“Feeding the Strikers”). The struggle there was strikingly similar to that of Lawrence, albeit on a smaller scale. The strikeforce was largely female and foreign-born and the mill owners quickly enlisted the police and outside “specials” in their attempt to crush the uprising. Both the mainstream and radical press reported regularly on the beatings women suffered on the picket line. Rabinowitz had her hands full as the strike continued (Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, Vol. 1 447). The workers won in Little Falls and Rabinowitz’s career with the One Big Union accelerated.

Her work took her from silk mills to auto plants; speaking in defense of cigar makers and steel workers. For the three year period of 1912–1915, Rabinowitz was indefatigable in her activism on behalf of the IWW. Her arrest in McKeesport, Pennsylvania in 1913 made headlines in *The Industrial Worker* (“Matilda Rabinowitz Goes to Workhouse”). The chief of police ordered Rabinowitz’s arrest on charges of disorderly conduct while she was speaking at a legally permitted meeting. Though audience members attempted to pay her fine in order to secure her release, she

refused the assistance. "The IWW does not believe in paying fines. A 30-day sentence will not break the IWW's belief in free speech and won't kill the organization," she declared ("Matilda Rabinowitz Goes to Workhouse"). She returned to finish the speech.

According to Peterson, Rabinowitz became disillusioned by her experiences in the organization, in particular with the flamboyance and egos of many of the leaders. She preferred the quiet, unassuming organizers to the larger-than-life barnstormers such as Haywood (41). Further Rabinowitz "expressed doubts about Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, suspecting her of preventing other women from sharing the platform with her" (42). Important to the current study is Rabinowitz's identification of the "limits in the vision of gender equality" of the IWW. "While in her own life she rejected the role of domestic helpmate and companion to a male rebel, she was not unaware of the tribute paid by the Wobblies to the woman in the home nor the view of some Wobblies that the revolution would free women from the workplace for a life of domestic bliss" (43).

Much of the IWW's paradoxical stance towards women can be seen in the response to Rabinowitz. Indeed, much of the radical press's coverage of Rabinowitz's activism contains the same rhetoric of Haywood's remark quoted above. In an article on Little Falls the *International Socialist Review* reported, "Next to arrive was Matilda Rabinowitz, a dark-eyed magnetic little girl who knew not weakness or weariness until the strike was on its feet again" (Russell). Condescension appears to be the only way the IWW could reconcile this person's size and gender with her activism and organizational skill.

Jane Street, IWW Organizer, Denver Colorado

In September of 1916, *Solidarity* reprinted an article from the *Denver Post* under the headline "IWW Girls Educating Mistress." It began, "Are you in good standing with the 'Housemaids' Union? This is a question to be considered if you would avoid embarrassing complications in your social affairs." What followed was a humorous description of a dinner honoring "two distinguished visitors from the East" given by a well-known Denver hostess.

To avoid harrowing details; suffice it to say that soon after the maids began serving the hostess notice that the menu was not all what she had ordered, and upon quietly asking one of the maids what was wrong she was told very audibly that they were serving the same food they were expected to eat, and if it was good enough for them it was good enough for anyone. (IWW Girls Educating Mistress)

The “rebel girls” of Denver led by Jane Street and practicing a particular brand of Wobbly sabotage, held their employers hostage to their demands for better working conditions throughout the next several years.

Street reported to *The Industrial Worker* that the greatest number ever of “help wanted” advertisements for domestic workers was listed in the *Denver Post* for September of 1916. “This is a direct result of the crippling of the employment offices in Denver by the Domestic Workers Union, IWW Local 113.” She credited the “rebel girls” with shutting down the employment brokers and initiating their own blacklist of unsympathetic employers. “And,” she reported, “The ladies on the hill are as frantic as the employment sharks.” Street continued her report noting that the employers feared the blacklist,

Wealthy old slave-driving women who for years have been overworking and outraging girls, and firing them without notice, now condescend to call up the girls’ union and ask to have the record of their place changed. We tell them that the girls on the job are the only who can make or unmake our records. (“IWW Women on Road to Victory”)

Her work did not go unnoticed as the Wobbly press continued to cover events in Denver, and other locals of domestic workers began to spring up in places such as Duluth and Salt Lake City (“Duluth Women Organizing”). However, Street faced a significant amount of sexism and resistance from “fellow workers” both locally and nationally. In a 1917 letter to a woman seeking advice on starting a domestic workers local Street wrote of the difficulties,

The Mixed Local here in Denver has done us more harm than any other enemy, the women of Capital Hill, the employment sharks and the YWCA combined. They have cut us off from donations from outside locals, slandered this local and myself from one end of the country to the other, tried to disrupt us from within by going among the girls and stirring up trouble,

they gave our club house a bad name because they were not permitted to come out there, and finally they have assaulted me bodily and torn up our charter. (Street)

The backlash intensified as Street's organization became more effective. Employment agents financially threatened by the power of the local raided its offices, stealing essential records. Despite this and other setbacks, Denver Domestic Workers Industrial Union managed to keep the pressure on and improve conditions for its members for the next several years. Foner cites the "brutal oppression" of the federal government for its demise (along with many similar Wobbly locals) during World War I (Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement, Vol. 1* 411).

Street left Colorado for California where she was arrested in San Diego in December 1919, charged with criminal syndicalism. The police took her children away. Freed on bond after six days, Street had to fight charges of neglect in order to get her children back. Several months later, Street found herself in the San Diego jail again, on the charge of soliciting membership in the IWW, a crime under newly-enacted sedition laws in California (Larson). She is found on the federal census of that year listed as an inmate. Remaining true to her rebellious nature, she refused to answer any of the census-takers questions—including her date of birth (Federal Census of the United States, 1920).

The Free Speech Fights

The second front of the early Wobblies' class war was located on the streets of cities throughout the West. The "Free Speech Fights" began in Missoula, Montana in 1908, and continued for over a decade. Constrained by the reluctance of local authorities to allow organizers access to halls, many Wobbly recruiters set up shop on a soap box near to the workers they hoped to enroll. Foner asserts "For the IWW, the issue was clear: the right to speak meant the right to organize" (*Fellow Workers and Friends* 13). A typical event would unfold as local IWW organizers jailed for street speaking, appealed to the national office for aid. The word would go out among the "footloose" and the "hoboes" of

far-flung labor camps, encouraging them to descend upon the targeted city. One by one they would mount the soap box, get arrested and get hauled to jail. Immediately a “fellow worker” would step up to assume the “platform.” Soon the local jail would be filled with local and itinerant Wobblies straining the resources of the community. Still more would arrive, and upon their arrest, assert their right to an individual trial, further straining municipal budgets (15).

Once in jail a party atmosphere might develop, Wobbly songfests ensuing. As Foner notes, many humorous stories associated with the fights have found their place in IWW lore, but “there was nothing humorous about the brutal methods used to smash the IWW right of free speech” (16). Female free speech advocates were specifically targeted for abuse as their very presence on the street assuming the role of orator violated socially proscribed feminine behavior.

As previously mentioned, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was sent to organize the transient workers in Montana’s mining and lumber industries. Arriving in Missoula with her husband Jack in the fall of 1908, the couple took to the streets in search of new members. Gurley Flynn was particularly scathing in her attacks on local employment “agencies” generally scam operators who took money from job-seekers for non-existent positions (Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography* 104). She was arrested along with Edith Frenette a member of the IWW advisory board, and reported that they were treated with “kid gloves” by the local sheriff (104). Frenette was not so fortunate at the site of the next fight in Spokane. She was arrested on charges of being a “lewd woman” and served two weeks in jail where she became quite ill (Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement, Vol. 1* 415). Agnes Thecla Fair faced worse abuse in Spokane who was most likely raped by her jailers. She wrote of her ordeal, “[B]ig burley brutes came in and began to question me about our union. I was so scared I could not talk. One said ‘we’ll make her talk.’ . . . Another said, ‘F—k her and she’ll talk.’ Just then one started to unbutton my waist, and I went into spasms which I never recovered from until evening” (Foner, *Fellow Workers and Friends* 61). Describing another attack she noted, “It is too horrible to put on paper.” Despite being molested, Fair was willing to return to the streets after her recovery. Frenette played a major

role in the Everett free speech fight of 1916 which ended in the murders of seven IWW members at the hands of local vigilantes determined to keep the Wobblies out of their town (“Aftermath of Everett Bloody Sunday”).

Another violent chapter in the history of the free speech fights is found in San Diego in 1912. In 1910, the IWW local had succeeded in organizing Mexican workers at the San Diego Consolidated Gas and Electric Company. After a brief strike, the workers won better pay and the Wobblies now had a foothold in the city. Poet and speaker Laura Payne Emerson who gained experience organizing in 1910 emerged as a leader in the free speech fight. She was driven off her soap box by the force of a blast of water of a fire hose yielded and later beaten by police and jailed on charges of conspiracy (Pourade).

The hallmark of the San Diego fight was the viciousness of local vigilantes. Though private citizens in other communities did not like the Wobblies, few ignited with the ferocity of the San Diego residents. Emma Goldman and her partner Ben Reitman rushed to the scene. A mob surrounded their hotel and supporters literally carried Goldman to safety on an out-going train. Reitman, captured by the mob was brutally beaten and later described how his attackers burned the letters “IWW” onto his buttocks, with a lit cigar (Pourade). Other male soap boxers were given similar treatment as they were herded into cars, driven to outskirts of town and made to run a gauntlet where the “respected” citizens beat them close to death.

Women were not above joining the fray. *Solidarity* reported on a speech by Emerson which was interrupted by both a police officer and a group of vigilantes led by a Mrs. Yenrick. “You are an ill-bred thing,” she shouted at Emerson, “and if you don’t quit preaching trouble you will be driven out the same as Dr. Reitman.” The crowd urged her to strike Emerson (“San Diego Fight”). She was not hit at that point, but was the focus of harassment and abuse for the next several years. The brutality of the San Diego fight became a rallying cry for the organization over the next several years.

Emerson continued writing and publishing throughout the next decade, editing *The International*, a “militant advocate for syndicalism” and penning songs for the IWW (“The International”).

Local Rebels

In considering the history of the labor movement in the U.S., one must look at the family structure, particularly among immigrant workers. Unlike American-born Whites, among whom the ideal of the separation of the sexes into appropriate spheres was widely shared, immigrants and people of color knew no such reality. Though all existed under the hegemony of patriarchy, expectations for women and men's "place" in the time period under consideration here were distinct from that of the larger American culture. Working outside of (and in) the home for pay was very often an immigrant woman's life-long fate, and it was not a choice she made, it was an economic necessity. Further, public activism on behalf of her family was a cultural trait shared by Eastern European Jewish women, Sicilian and Polish Catholics along with many others.² Many of these women became IWW members and activists.

Three categories of Local Rebels are presented below. The first are strikers, women who worked for pay and participated in job actions to gain improvement. Most often these women were factory workers in the Northeast. The second group consists of strike supporters those activist women usually related to male strikers in mining camps. The third group consists of several highly-educated women who were active IWW members in their local communities and who served in various capacities of reform and agitation.

The Strikers

The Bread and Roses Strike had its roots in the protective legislation enacted by the state Massachusetts, reducing the hours of labor for women and children from 56 per week to 54, causing a de facto reduction in wages. The law was scheduled to go into effect in January of 1912. On January 11, Polish women in the Everett mills walked out when they discovered their pay was short. By the end of the next week, 10,000 workers had joined them, by the end of the strike, two months later, 30,000 were out.

²Federal Census of the United States, 1920.

It is significant to this study that females dominated the Lawrence work force (Cameron 33).

Lawrence women forged strong alliances with neighbors in their tenement blocks out of necessity born of poverty. They shared food and child-care, laundry, and "papers" necessary for gaining their children employment. The strength of these networks also contributed to the solidarity essential to sustaining the strike of 1912. Conventional wisdom held that the strike was doomed to fail precisely because of the ethnic make-up of the force. "In the past the foreigners have been the element through which strikes in the textile industry have been lost. This is the first time in the history of our labor struggles that the foreigners have stood to the man (*sic*) to better their conditions as underpaid workers," according to one contemporary account (O'Sullivan).

However this particular group of strikers, an ethnic polyglot, found strength in its diversity. "Among workers," Joseph Ettor, IWW organizer, stressed, "there is only one nationality, one race, one creed. Remember always that you are workers with interests against those of the mill owners. . . . There are but two races, the race of useful members of society and the race of useless ones" (Cahn 118). This message resonated through the community.

After leaving the mills the workers organized quickly, forming a strike committee consisting of 12 individuals including one woman, Annie Welzenbach, a skilled mender. Welzenbach is credited with bringing the English-speaking workers into the strike an essential ingredient to victory. A general committee composed of 56 members was also formed, each person responsible to the different ethnic groups involved. These individual ethnic units were charged with taking care of their own, providing soup kitchens, medical assistance and clothing among other resources for their compatriots. To support the local efforts The Italian Socialist Federation raised money nationally and internationally, (Dubofsky 250).

January 29 was a watershed day for the strike. It was reported that hundreds of strikers had seized trolley cars carrying strike-breakers to the mills ("Operatives Dragged from Electric Cars"). Among those arrested for rioting that morning were Margot Sonia and Serafina Peradelia. It was later determined that the "thugs" were actually Pinkertons hired by the owners, disguised as workers in an attempt to beat the workers back while generating fear and hostility amongst the general populace (Cahn 150).

Later that same day Anna Lopizzo, an Italian worker was shot and killed during a rally most likely by police. Very quickly the city clamped down on the demonstrations and meetings, restricting access to public venues. The IWW's Ettore and Arturo Giovannitti were arrested as accessories to the murder, police arguing that their actions had incited the mob leading to Lopizzo's death. They would remain jailed until the following November. City officials began to close access to public gathering places, forcing the workers to meet outdoors. It was here that existing communication networks of neighboring women became essential to the life of the strike. The women of Lawrence seized the neighborhoods early on. "Whether entering or exiting doorways in a rush of activity or purposefully blocking streets, women used physical space to act out their revolt against the mills" (Cameron 147). A common strategy was for huge numbers of women to link arms and form a human chain incapable of being broken by police and protecting each other from arrest. The strikers, many of them armed with scissors, jeered the soldiers and police, cutting suspenders and stripping the men.

"Scab mugging" another tactic, included following strikebreakers right to the gates of the factories all the while hectoring and bringing down the wrath of strike-sympathetic passerby. Domacilla Lafskoski, "an elderly woman," ended up being arrested while shoveling snow off her sidewalk in late February. Police said she was yelling "scab" at passersby "whacking the shovel while she said it" ("To Send None Away"). Four young Polish women were also arrested that morning for blocking the mill gates.

Another technique women employed was throwing pots of scalding hot water on strikebreakers from tenement windows above the street. In response, the police doused the strikers with fire hoses, clubbing and finally arresting them. One day Annie Welzenbach along with her sisters, Emma and Lillian Steindl were standing in front of one of the mills taking names of those who were crossing the picket line and stood in front of several women attempting to enter. They were arrested that night at midnight—to avoid the possibility of a backlash from the strike force—their father bailing them out for \$200.00. They were arraigned the next day on charges of intimidation (Marcy and Boyd).

Violence continued through the month of February. *The New York Times* reported that the militia had been recalled to the

vicinity of the Arlington mills to break up “thousands of Polish women.” They were contained by bayonets and charging police (“Bayonets Disperse Women”). Striker Josephine Liss, Polish delegate to the IWW strike committee and occasional courtroom interpreter during Wobbly trials in Lawrence, was found guilty of “molesting” a soldier. She flatly refused to pay the \$10.00 fine levied against her, choosing instead to be jailed. Eventually, both the judge and her attorney convinced her to appeal the case, and she was released on bond. “We can handle the men all right,” prosecutor Douglas Campbell declared, “but it takes 10 men to handle one woman” (“Judge Mahoney Laments”).

While Lawrence is arguably the most “famous” of the Wobbly strikes, it certainly was not the only one in which women were active. Gurley Flynn organized women in Minersville, Pennsylvania in 1911, where garment workers struck protesting wage cuts and abusive conditions (Flynn, *One Boss Less, The Minersville Strike* 9). Women workers were among a group hurling stones at police riding railroad cars filled with finished manufactured goods being transported out of Barre, Massachusetts, during a textile strike in that town (“Rioting Begins in Strike at Barre”). The IWW led strikes all over southern New England in the next few months from Clinton, Massachusetts to Middletown, Connecticut where it was reported that women were leading the charge against cavalymen brought in to squelch their parades. “The police did not want to use force,” the *New York Times* reported, “but the women used their finger nails and teeth.” It was further reported that all had recently joined the IWW (“Women Lead Strike; Cavalry Called Out”).

In January of 1913, another major site for female strikers’ activism emerged in Paterson, New Jersey, a city with a long tradition of immigrant radicalism. Many skilled male workers in Paterson were already unionized and had considerable experience with labor activism. The female sector of the Paterson silk industry did not sit on the sidelines, however. Historian Jennifer Guglielmo discovered the existence of an anarchist-feminist group in Paterson founded by Maria Roda, an Italian labor activist who had immigrated in 1892. Paterson’s one of several such groups in the greater New York area. *Gruppo Emancipazione Della Donna* began in 1897 and continued for over a decade (Guglielmo 117). According to Guglielmo, the

Italian-anarchist women formed one of the first IWW locals in Paterson (118). The women of Paterson equaled their sisters in earlier strikes in both grit and determination. There were frequent confrontations with police and the bosses. Many were transformed by their experiences, and refused to back down, or remain silent, even in the face of violence. Irma Lombardi, 17 at the time of the strike later wrote of her experience, “We thought we were going to change the world. When you’re young, you do have dreams. I was always on the picket line, every single day . . . the cops came. They would start chasing us, swing with their clubs from horseback. Many of us were hurt badly and many were arrested” (Bird, Georgakas, and Shaffer 70) Mary Gasperano, a 23 year-old worker, was arrested a total of 5 times during the strike for various infractions which included biting the hand of a police officer and slapping the face of a female strikebreaker (Golin 58). Carrie Golzio, a 25-year-old mother of four, was a regular speaker at meetings, and also joined strike parades with her fellow workers (58). “I had no choice about becoming a rebel,” recalled Paterson striker Sophie Cohen. “If you are not a rebel, it is easy to be pessimistic. How can people live with themselves? I fought whenever I could” (Bird, Georgakas, and Shaffer 68–69).

Local activist Hannah Silverman, 19 years old at the time the strike, was arrested along with other young girls for obstructing the streets and interfering with police. Upon being pronounced guilty, Silverman thanked the judge. For her sarcasm, she was ordered to jail for sixty days. The others received ten day sentences. As they were being led into patrol wagons the women cheered for the IWW and sang strike songs. According to Steve Golin, Silverman was radicalized and empowered by her activism, “spending the night in the city jail . . . made her even more determined to assert her rights and more confident in doing so. She was arrested again and again” (61). Her experience was shared by other women of her time.

The all-female staff of the Oregon Packing Company in Portland walked off the job in June of 1913, protesting unsafe working conditions, supported in their actions by local IWW members Mary Scwhab and Marie Equi. The strike turned into a free speech fight when, after hanging a banner proclaiming “Forty Cents a Day Makes Prostitutes” they were threatened with arrest. Schwab went to jail, and upon her release returned to the streets,

climbing a telephone pole to finish her address (“Portland Radical History Tour”).

In 1916, 300 women fig packers in Fresno, California walked off the job, in an attempt to stave off wage cuts. A fight ensued between picketers and a police officer, who broke a striker’s arm in the scuffle. Mrs. R. Harabedien and Mrs. Gogasian were arrested on the charges of interfering with the officer “in the performance of his duty of clubbing the strikers,” *The Industrial Worker* wryly noted (“Fresno Workers Win; Strikers Clubbed”). Rubber workers in Akron and domestics in Duluth were encouraged by the Wobbly press. In 1916, the *Industrial Worker* carried a report on “The Fighting Women of Detroit” and credited the workers with keeping 17 cigar factories in that city closed as “the result of the aggressiveness and fighting spirit of the girls.” The reporter explained, “The bosses tried getting scabs, but it did not work, as the girls told them they would break all the windows with bricks. They thought it was merely a threat, but in spite of the officers driving away the pickets and jailing the strikers, they made their statement good. When the patrol came around they would all rush it, and yell, ‘Arrest us all’ (“Fighting Women of Detroit”).

The Seattle General Strike of February 1919, a week in which the entire city shut down, garnered the support of many women’s unions, including the Hotel Maids, Laundry Workers, Lady Barbers. The women who participated in this huge demonstration of IWW power during the height of the Red Scare “showed great solidarity & strength” (Johnson 96). At an open-air Wobbly meeting, a recently released striker told her listeners,

I asked the reason I was out of jail. They told me that perhaps the reason was that first I had gray hair and second because I was a woman. Well, I want to say right here, that I am not going to dye my hair and I am going to continue to wear skirts because I want to be here and shoot off my mouth. I have a by-word which I think originated with myself, that I am proud of and that is, ‘Get together, stick together, and tell the boss to go to hell. (Johnson 1)

Several other women came to prominence through their association with the General Strike and the IWW. The first was radical journalist Anna Louise Strong, editor and reporter of the *Seattle Union Record* a pro-labor newspaper (Andrews). The other was Kate (Sadler) Greenhalgh, secretary of the Left Wing Caucus of

the Socialist Party of America and a founding member of the Communist Labor Party of America (“Delegates to the Founding Convention of the Communist Labor Party”). Ernestine Hara Kettler, a member of the Bookkeepers and Stenographers Union, echoing a theme of earlier reports, recalled the sexism of the IWW during the events of 1919, pointing out that while men were the organizers and speakers, women made the coffee and served food at the Seattle local (Gluck). Kettler later became an IWW employee working at offices in Montana and Chicago.

The IWW women were creative in their protests no matter the venue or issue. Pushing back against the constraints of the American ideal of appropriate feminine behavior and the sexism of their male colleagues, these workers regularly found unique ways to generate publicity and support for their cause of industrial freedom.

Strike Supporters

In many gender-segregated American industries, women demonstrated class solidarity by supporting their male relatives in strikes and other related job actions. In Seattle for example, several months before the General Strike women played an essential role in a metal workers’ strike of the shipyard (Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement from World War I to the Present* 104) Nowhere was women’s participation more vital than in the mining industry.

The mining camps of America in the early 20th century were worlds unto themselves. Mining companies owned the homes in which the miners and their families lived, the stores where they shopped and land they on which they walked. Employing immigrants almost exclusively, mining towns operated similarly to feudal systems of old. Women did not work in the mines for many reasons, not the least of which was the superstitious belief that they brought bad luck underground (Myers 156).

Women of the mining camps were not passive as the case of the Sablich sisters and Ruby Arrellano of Colorado illustrates. In 1927, Santa Sablich Benash led a mob of strikers on a “rampage” in the coal mining town of Trinidad (Myers 164). Upon her arrest, her younger sister, Milka, took her place at the head of the

picket line. Milka, 19 years-old, became quickly identified as the “girl in the flaming red dress” who sustained a broken wrist as the result of being dragged by a mounted police officer during a heated battle. Her story was carried in newspapers across the country, who dubbed her “Flaming Mamie” Sablich and covered her every move, driving the mine owners to distraction. After being released from jail for her participation in the riot, the IWW provided her with a convertible from which to address strikers. Milka was a bona fide celebrity, not only in Colorado but across the country (Myers 164). The owners and local authorities determined that it was necessary to contain the Wobblies and their “Flaming Mamie” and over 75 IWW members including Milka were rounded up. She would spend the next 5 weeks incarcerated in the Trinidad jail. Ruby Arrellano stepped into the void left by Milka, leading a protest over the jailing of additional IWW members in the nearby town of Walsenburg. Arrellano, of Native American and Mexican parentage was identified in the local press as a “half-breed” (Myers 167) Along with her mother, Senora Boz Bachcaco, Arrellano sang inspirational Wobbly songs to the prisoners and demanded their release. She also assumed leadership and organizing duties.

These women represent only a small fraction of a much larger number of female supporters and members of the IWW. It is essential to remember that regardless of which member of a working-class household was on strike, all members were affected. When their family’s livelihood was threatened, women took to the streets and challenged oppressive conditions, some at great personal cost.

Other Notable Wobbly Supporters—“I Don’t Give a Damn about Semi-Radicals”

Helen Keller, interviewed in 1916 by a reporter for the *New York Tribune*, explained her alliance with the Industrial Workers of the World, “I became an IWW because I found out that the Socialist party was too slow. It is sinking in the political bog. It is almost, if not quite, impossible for the party to keep its revolutionary character so long as it occupies a place under the government and seeks office under it.” Keller credited the Lawrence strike with bringing her attention to the Wobblies, and noted that its

principles of immediate action appealed to her. The interviewer then asked, "What are you committed to—education or revolution?" "Revolution." She answered decisively. "We can't have education without revolution. We have tried peace education for 1,900 years and it has failed. Let us try revolution and see what it will do now." The reporter advised Keller that it might not be in her best interests to have such radical thoughts published, to which Keller responded, "I don't give a damn about semi-radicals!" (Bindley).

Keller demonstrated her support through her activism on many different fronts during the 1910s. She sent words of encouragement and money to the strikers at Little Falls and went to Minnesota to speak in support of the jailed Duluth miners in 1916. Perhaps the most world-renowned of all women Wobblies, Keller's life was a testament to her radical ideology. She continued her public support for workers' causes well into her later years as the file kept on her activities by the FBI illustrates ("Federal Bureau of Investigation, Subject: Helen Keller").

Dr. Marie Equi was born in 1872 in New Bedford, Massachusetts but found fame in the Northwest as an activist in Portland, Oregon. Equi was the first woman to graduate University of Oregon Medical School in 1903. After supporting the Oregon Packing Plant strike in 1913, she contributed her speaking and organizing talents to the IWW local. It is interesting to note that as a professional, she was not allowed to become a dues paying member (Polishuck, Krieger, and Cook). Equi became a close friend of Gurley Flynn, joining her on the platform, raising money for those jailed in the Everett free speech fight ("Two Women and a Success").

Equi was notorious in Portland for many reasons not the least of which was her visible relationship with Harriet Speckart, her partner of over 20 years. Together, they raised Equi's adopted daughter Mary, who referred to the couple as "ma and pa." (Polishuck, Krieger, and Cook). She was also a public advocate for birth control earning the respect of Margaret Sanger.

After a 1918 speech in the IWW hall, Equi was arrested and charged with sedition under the Espionage Act. At her trial the prosecuting attorney warned the jury, "The red flag is floating over Russia, Germany and a great part of Russia. *Unless you put this woman in jail*, I tell you it will float all over the world!" (Flynn,

The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography 252). Equi served 10 months in San Quentin. She was not a model prisoner. Her correspondence during her incarceration was monitored by the government (Polishuck, Krieger, and Cook). After her release she continued agitating for radical causes and supporting other women. Gurley Flynn retreated from public life in 1928 due to ill health and went to live with Equi, where she remained for eight years. Equi died in Portland in 1952.

Mary Edna (Tobias) Marcy, born 1877 in Belleville Illinois championed the early IWW through her editorship of the leading radical journal of the day, *The International Socialist Review* (Rosemont). Orphaned at a young age, Marcy began her working life as a teen. At the age of 19 she was fired from a job for wearing a button supporting William Jennings Bryant's presidential bid. Clarence Darrow heard of her dismissal and found her a job working for the president of the University of Chicago. She took advantage of the opportunity to enroll in classes tuition-free. In 1901, she married Leslie H. Marcy and in 1903 they joined the Socialist Party. She assumed the managing editorship of the *Review* in 1909 and under her it became "the fighting magazine of the working class" (Rosemont). Bill Haywood, Arturo Giovannitti, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and other Wobblies found a home in its pages. Marcy regularly featured IWW activities and strikes and her 11 page account of the "The Battle for Bread at Lawrence" is one of the most comprehensive contemporary reports of the strike (Marcy). Women's agitation was a consistent feature of articles under Marcy's watch though her own writings on women have been deemed controversial ("Marcy, Mary 1877-1922").

Marcy's public anti-war militancy during World War I became the focus of the *Review* during its final years of existence, as the magazine folded in 1918. In 1919, she quit the Socialist Party and joined the IWW. Her Chicago home was raided that same year by the Department of Justice and her records confiscated. Marcy and her husband put that same house up for collateral in the bail for IWW leader, Bill Haywood who was among the hundreds of Wobblies jailed during the Palmer Raids. When Haywood jumped bail in 1921 and fled to Russia, Marcy lost her home. Despondent and in poor health, Mary E. Marcy committed suicide in 1922 ("Marcy, Mary 1877-1922").

Conclusion

Several themes emerge from this survey. The first is support for previous authors' conclusions that the IWW held contradictory visions about women's place in the One Big Union and the utopian world portended by its ideology. There is a continual paradox in the Wobbly's approach to women, as members and leaders struggled to reconcile the patriarchal ideal of women as domestic helpers to their hard-working spouse with the bold public advocacy of radicals like Parsons, Sanger, Equi, and others. Though quite willing to exploit the passions of women workers during strikes (particularly immigrant women), the IWW was not above employing arguments based on traditional sex-roles, especially in terms of the need to protect women and children and the sanctity of the home.

At the same time, it is in these very strikes that another distinct influence of women's activism emerges as a hallmark of the IWW. Women like Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recognized with great acuity the role whole families played in winning a labor war against capitalist oppressors. While mill and mine owners could count on the support of local governments, state and national militias, the mainstream press and the "decent citizens" of a given community, the workers only had each other and their extended families.

Women played a vital role in these networks and they, in turn, were invaluable during strikes. To begin, women participated fully whether as workers or as supporters, actively picketing and challenging scabs and the police. The ideology of the One Big Union included, welcomed and encouraged them where other labor organizations did not. They seized the opportunity to let their discontent with oppression be heard. Additionally, they used traditional gender roles to their advantage in many ways, turning them upside down in their pursuit of justice as the pregnant women in Lawrence and the Denver housemaids demonstrated.

The women cooked communally during strikes and raised funds. They spoke on street corners and stages and escorted children to better-resourced communities. They testified before Congress. They provided meals and places to stay for travelling organizers. They held fast against the police, the militia, and

Pinkertons. They also went to jail and suffered physical abuse. Some of them even died.

In thinking about working-class communities at the turn of the last century it must be stated that the American ideal of “separate spheres” wasn’t particularly relevant to the lives of immigrants. Yes, there were traditionally-based gender roles but unlike American-born women, immigrant women lived a much more public existence. Further, immigrant workers lived largely in ethnic enclaves and carried many ideals of communal interdependence that were also at odds with American cultural norms. There was very little chance that these women could have separated themselves from the labor movement and strikes. For them, work was as essential to their existence as their extended families and compatriots. If they had absented themselves it is doubtful that the overall movement would have gained the success that it did. Their roles were vital to the push for safer working conditions, shorter hours, child labor laws, and a host of other reforms Americans workers take for granted today.

Additionally, women who were even briefly involved with the IWW provided it with incredible creativity, energy and talent. In addition to labor agitation they advocated for free speech and birth control leading the way for future movements. Finally, it should be evident from the above discussion that there is more to women’s activism within and on behalf of the IWW than the Rebel Girl. Though she was by far the most celebrated woman by the Wobblies themselves, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was not alone. There is still much work to be done in terms of writing the history of women in the Industrial Workers of the World.

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