



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Philadelphian mill children march against child labor exploitation, 1903

July 7,

1903

to: July 31,

1903

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to New York City, New York

Location Description: The marchers visited towns all along the route from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and New York City, New York.

Goals:

1. Draw national attention towards the problem of child labor.
2. Meet with President Theodore Roosevelt to discuss child labor.
3. Raise money to support the strike of textile workers in Kensington.
4. Pass national legislation which made it illegal to employ children under the age of fifteen or to require more than fifty-five hours a week from any textile worker.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Child laborers
- labor union supporters
- textile workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Mary Harris "Mother" Jones

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Local socialist parties and labor unions along the route often provided food, shelter, and public speaking venues for the marchers.

Involvement of social elites:

New York City Mayor Seth Low allowed Mother Jones' protesters to hold a rally in the city after the Police Commissioner had opposed the proposal.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Child laborers
- Textile workers
- labor union supporters

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length: 4 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Employers of children, especially the owners in manufacturing and mining.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The March of Mill Children was very successful in drawing national attention to the plight of child laborers. The next year, the National Child Labor Committee was formed by, among others, former President Grover Cleveland, Harvard President Charles Eliot, Jane Addams, and Felix Adler, to champion child labor reform. In 1905, Pennsylvania revised its labor statutes and began more effective enforcement of its child labor laws. However, it would not be until the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt's fifth cousin, Franklin Roosevelt that lasting child labor laws would come into effect. The marchers were also successful in raising money for striking textile workers in Kensington.

According to the 1900 U.S. Census, at the turn of the century 26% of males and 10% of females between the ages of 10 and 15 were gainfully employed, for a total of approximately 1.75 million child laborers. In states like Alabama, the official percentage of male child labor was close to 60%. Moreover, a contemporary New York Times article reported that due to deliberate employer underestimation, the number of child workers was most likely between 2 and 3 million. As the children of the wealthy were receiving ever more education, with many, consequently, taking until twenty-six and twenty-eight to enter into their professions, the children of the working class were increasingly being sought as cheap labor for sweatshops. However, in accordance with the principles of laissez-faire capitalism and limited federal government, there were no national regulations on child labor.

In 1903, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, a prominent socialist and labor organizer, traveled to Kensington, a neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the time, between 75,000 and 125,000 textile workers were striking for better pay and a fifty-five-hour workweek. According to Mother Jones, at least ten thousand of the strikers were children.

Mother Jones was distraught by the condition of the children she met. Some were missing fingers and thumbs, others were

missing entire hands, and many looked malnourished. Though state law prohibited children from working before the age of twelve, the law was poorly enforced and mothers routinely lied about the ages of their children because they were in desperate need of income and many had husbands who had been killed or maimed in the mines. According to these mothers, “it was a question of starvation or perjury.”

With more than 120,000 officially reported child laborers, most of whom were employed in coal mining or manufacturing, Pennsylvania employed the most children of any state in the nation. What’s more, at that time 1,161,524 children were officially enrolled in Pennsylvania schools, but average daily attendance was only 847,445, leaving 314,079 children unaccounted for. But Mother Jones knew where these children were, slaving at the mines and factories. Furthermore, one investigation reported that the average hours of labor for children in Pennsylvania was approximately eleven hours a day and sixty hours a week for compensation of about \$2.50 a week (equivalent to the purchasing power of about \$60 in 2010). Many children worked sixty-five hours a week, and in some towns, children were required to work as much as fifteen hours a day, from 6 am to 9 pm, with just a half hour for lunch and a half hour for dinner.

When Mother Jones inquired as to why the newspapers neglected to report the facts about child labor in Pennsylvania, she was informed that the employers of those children had stock in the newspapers. Her response, “Well, I’ve got stock in these little children and I’ll arrange a little publicity.”

On 7 July, the 65-year-old Mother Jones organized a group of nearly two hundred laborers, including dozens of juvenile mill workers, to march to New York in order to raise funds in support of the striking textile workers and bring attention to the injustices of child labor. Beginning with a rally at the City Hall in Philadelphia, she held up the mutilated hands of multiple children, declaring that “Philadelphia’s mansions were built on the broken bones, the quivering ears and drooping heads of these children...Some day the workers will take possession of you city hall, and, when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profit.” The rally, widely reported throughout the East, soon made child labor a national topic of discussion.

Carrying signs such as “We Only Ask For Justice,” “We Want to Go to School,” “More Schools, Less Hospitals” (a reference to hospital visits caused by unsafe working conditions), “We Want Time To Play,” the group then left Philadelphia for the ninety-two mile march to New York. Along the route, Mother Jones frequently stopped to visit union meetings, make speeches, and collect donations. On 9 July, she gave a speech at the Plumbers’ Union in Morrisville, Pennsylvania that was met with enthusiastic applause. The next day, the marchers crossed over the Delaware River and Mother Jones addressed 5,000 supporters in Trenton, New Jersey, raising \$100.

The following day, her group marched to the Princeton residence of former U.S. President Grover Cleveland, who was away that day. However, the caretaker of the residence provided Mother Jones’ “army” with shelter for the night. After visiting New Brunswick, the workers marched to Elizabeth, New Jersey where they were guests at the local Socialistic Party and Mother Jones addressed a rally of 3,000 people. Following two days of exceptional hospitality given by the workers of Elizabeth, Mother Jones’ workers continued on to Newark, where she delivered a speech to several hundred residents outside of the local court house.

On 23 July, Mother Jones’ “army” reached New York and announced her intention to march to Oyster Bay, the summer residence of then-President Theodore Roosevelt, to request an audience for her and three child laborers from Kensington. In a public letter that would receive no response, Mother Jones respectfully beseeched the President to advise her and her supporters on the best course to end child exploitation and realize the children’s right to attend school.

After the Police Commissioner initially refused her request to march in New York, Mother Jones promptly visited New York City Mayor Seth Low who, after some persuasion, allowed the group to proceed. The next day, she delivered a speech denouncing child labor to a crowd of about 1,500. A couple of days afterwards, she delivered another speech to 1,000 people at Coney Island comparing child labor to slavery and criticizing the oft repeated myth of limitless opportunity because, by her estimation, these children were clearly being denied a legitimate opportunity to succeed.

On 29 July, Mother Jones and three young boys traveled to Oyster Bay to speak with the President, but his secretary informed her that the President would only meet with those who had scheduled appointments and advised her to write to the President. She proceeded to write to the President, but was informed that, while he was supportive of efforts to prevent child labor, “under the constitution it is not at present seen how congress has power to act in such a matter. It would seem that the states alone at present have the power to deal with the subject.” Mother Jones replied, “It is very sad commentary on the President of our nation that the plea of suffering little children who walked 100 miles...should be turned down.” Ironically, the same day that Mother Jones and the three boys were denied an audience; President Roosevelt took his sons and nephews for a night of recreation camping out underneath the stars; ensuring that his own children enjoyed the leisure time that those young boys were pleading for.

Despite their failure to meet with the President and pass national legislation regulating child labor, Mother Jones would later acknowledge that the crusade had been successful in drawing the nation’s attention to the plight of child workers and launching a nationwide movement against child labor. The next year, 1904, leading Americans such as former President Grover Cleveland, Harvard President Charles Eliot, South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman, Columbia professor Felix Adler, and Hull House founder and future Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jane Addams, joined the newly formed National Child Labor Committee to campaign for reform. By 1915, Pennsylvania enacted a new child labor law setting the minimum age at fourteen, and the year after that the first federal child labor law was enacted prohibiting the movement of goods across stage lines if child labor laws were violated (though the law was declared unconstitutional by the courts).

Research Notes

Sources:

"ARMY CROSSES DELAWARE: YOUNG GIRLS SENT HOME "Mother" Jones Says Her Crusade Is Against Child Labor "MOTHER" JONES HAS COMFORTS "MOTHER" JONES AND HER ARMY, AT THE NEW-JERSEY BORDER. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 11 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"Child Labor in U.S. History." Child Labor Public Education Project. University of Iowa Labor Center, n.a. Web. 7 Dec. 2011. <http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html>.

"Child Labor Law." Act of 1915, P.L. 286, No. 177. 1915.Web. 7 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552938&mode=2>>.

"Crusade of "Mother" Jones. " The Washington Post (1877-1922) 27 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1994), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"FAILS TO SEE PLATT: "Mother" Jones Gets to Oriental Hotel After Senator Had Gone BREAKFAST GIVEN THE ARMY. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 28 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"HEAR "MOTHER" JONES TALK: She Makes a Corner Speech, Having No Permit for a Park.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 25 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Jones, Mary Harris. “March of the Mill Children,” The Autobiography of Mother Jones. 1925. Explore Pennsylvania History. 2011. Web. 23 Oct. 2011. <<http://explorepahistory.com/odocument.php?docId=1-4-235>>.

McFarland, C.K. “Crusade for Child Laborers: ‘Mother’ Jones and the March of the Mill Children.” Pennsylvania History 38.3 (1971): 283-296. Print.

""MOTHER" JONES' ARMY PARADES: Mayor at First Refused Permit, but Later Reversed His Decision.. " The Washington Post (1877-1922) 24 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1994), ProQuest.

Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES'S ARMY PARADES IN NEW YORK: MAYOR LOW SURPRISES HER BY GRANTING PERMISSION. More Policemen Than There Are Members of the Army Keep Order--She Expresses Confidence in Her Ability to Get an Audience With President. " Los Angeles Times (1886-1922) 24 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1987), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES'S ARMY: REASONS FOR THE MARCH. " Los Angeles Times (1886-1922) 23 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1987), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES ARRIVES. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 20 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES ARRIVES: Textile Army Granted Permit to Parade in City Streets. Semi-Impromptu Meeting in Madison Avenue but a Forerunner of Bigger One To-night.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 24 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES AT CONEY :Sees the Sights and Speaks--To March on Senator Platt at Oriental To-day. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 27 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"MOTHER JONES DETERMINED: Says Her Army Will Arrive in Oyster Bay This Week Despite All "Bluffs." New York Times (1857-1922) 19 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES' FRUITLESS MISSION. " Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922) 6 Aug. 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1987), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES KEEPS MOVING. " New York Times (1857-1922) 13 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"" MOTHER" JONES'S MARCH: Her "Army" Arrives at Elizabeth and Will Remain Two Days.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 16 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"MOTHER JONES'S MEETING: GETS A PARADE PERMIT Too Tired to Make Address--Benjamin Hanford Speaks PLEASED WITH HER RECEPTION HERE TOLD OF TEXTILE WORKERS' STRIKE PAYS RESPECTS TO POLICE THE "ARMY" ARRIVES. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 24 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

""MOTHER" JONES AT MORRISVILLE. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 10 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"MOTHER JONES AT OYSTER BAY: Told by Acting Secretary Barnes That She May See the President Only by Appointment.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 30 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"" MOTHER" JONES AT PASSAIC: Her "Army" Due to Arrive in New York To-morrow.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 21 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"" MOTHER" JONES'S SLOW SPEED: Her Army Loath to Leave Elizabeth, N.J., in March on Oyster Bay.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 17 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

"MOTHER JONES SPEAKS TO CONEY ISLAND CROWD: Delivers Address in a Menagerie and Lions Interrupt. Anti-Child Labor Crusader Rebukes Young Man in the Audience Who Smiled -- On to Oyster Bay This Week.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 27 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Smith, Russell E. "The March of the Mill Children." Social Service Review 41.3 (1967): 298-303. Print.

Special. "MOTHER JONES HOPEFUL: Says She and Her Army Are Bound to Win. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 13 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "CLEVELAND BARNS SHELTER "MOTHER" JONES'S MARCHERS: Hospitality Extended to "Army" at the ex-President's Home in Princeton -- Drenching in Storm.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 12 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "'Mother' Jones's Army In Rahway. " New York Times (1857-1922) 15 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "' MOTHER' JONES HARD PRESSED: Her Army Being Steadily Depleted by Attacks of Rain and Mosquitos -- Danger of a Stampede. " New York Times (1857-1922) 14 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "' MOTHER" JONES MARCHING ON: Army of Mill Workers Camped Near Trenton on Its Way to New York to Air Grievances.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 10 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "' MOTHER" JONES IN POLITICS: Belief in Trenton That She Led Her "Army" in the Interest of the Socialist Party. " New York Times (1857-1922) 9 Aug. 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "MOTHER JONES'S TIRED ARMY: Many Marchers Take to Trolley Cars on the Road to Newark.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 18 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The New York Times. "' MOTHER" JONES IN TRENTON : " Army" Leader Talks to Crowd of Race Suicide -- Money Raised for Leader.. " New York Times (1857-1922) 11 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Special to The Washington Post.. "NOT TAKEN BY ARMY: Sagamore Hill Withstood the Assault of Mother Jones. VICTORY FOR MR. BARNES President's Secretary Met and Routed Textile Crusaders. Philadelphia Newspaper Had Backed Project Which Ended in Fiasco -"Mother" Jones Will State Her Grievances in Writing -- Mr. Roosevelt, His Sons, and Nephews Slept on the Bare Ground -- Mr. Payne to See President.. " The Washington Post (1877-1922) 30 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1994), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Stevenson, Frederick. "National Effort to Solve Child Labor Problem." New York Times 27 Nov. 1904, The New York Times. Web. 23 Oct. 2011. <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D00E5DF133AE733A25754C2A9679D946597D6CF>>.

TELEGRAPH TO THE TRIBUNE. "CHILD ARMY STARTS: But Only Fifty Children Begin the March with "Mother" Jones TO COME HERE TO RAISE FUNDS. " New - York Tribune (1866-1924) 8 Jul 1903,ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Tribune (1841-1922), ProQuest. Web. 23 Oct. 2011.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Thomas Fortuna, 23/10/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/25/2020 - 12:29): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/philadelphian-mill-children-march-against-child-labor-exploitation-1903>