

THE WOMEN'S PROTECTIVE UNION:  
UNION WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN A UNION TOWN, 1890-1929

By  
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## PREFACE

The American labor movement and union membership are more than scholarly topics for me. The labor movement was not simply an abstract occurrence, for me it was something that I experienced first hand. I am a third generation union member. Both my paternal and maternal grandfathers were union members. My mother was a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 547 for more than fifteen years. However, for my father unionism was something that defined him as a man, a worker, and a person. It is impossible to separate my father from his union activism; it is a part of him. He has been an active member in the Carpenters Union for more than thirty years.

Union membership is a difficult thing to explain to those who have no experience with unions. The connection that union members have is often based on a mutual understanding of one another's unique circumstance and precarious economic position, but it is also their common struggle that binds them together. The way that union members view themselves certainly varies depending on the member, but knowing the topic intimately, I can attest to the fierce sense of identity that many members feel.

My childhood was not necessarily an average one, because my father was a union man. While other children were playing tag, my sister and I were often holding a picket signs, boycotting some product, or campaigning for some politician. I was four years old when I went to my first picket line; it was in 1977, for the Air Traffic

Controllers Union. For my family, and for many union families, the union was not an organization on the periphery of our life. The union was part of our family. My sister and I played in the hallways of the union hall, and attended numerous political events where we met legislators, senators, and the governor of Michigan, not because my father was an important politician or business executive, but because he fought for justice in the workplace through his involvement in the union.

My parents not only told us of the importance of justice, but also practiced what they preached. We only purchased American made products to ensure that American workers would always have jobs. We boycotted various products depending on what was happening to the workers in those industries. Even as children, my parents tried to make us understand the plight of the working poor in America; we understood why it was important to buy American made products and why workers needed to organize. The lessons my parents taught my sister and I about the importance and strength of unions, were ones that we learned and internalized. I feel it is necessary to reveal my childhood background to illuminate my standpoint. I acknowledge that I will not be able to be a neutral observer in this project when I tell about the struggles of those union women in Butte. However, I feel that my perspective is important and unique. I cannot divorce the union from my childhood or my life, it is part of me, it is part of who I am and how I became the person I am today and I believe that many union members share a similar experience.

## ABSTRACT

Women have organized into representative bodies to fight workplace oppression since the eighteenth century. Often the victims of abuse and exploitation, the positive attributes of collectively organizing were attractive to women. While many working-women found union membership alluring, few held positions of power within unions and many were denied entrance to unions altogether.

In Butte, Montana, however it was a different story. Butte was a union town to the very core. Almost everyone who worked in Butte was a union member in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although initially denied entrance into male trade unions, women took it upon themselves to organize their own women's union for white and black women workers in Silver Bow County in 1890. The Women's Protective Union founded and run by women, allowed for an organization that was exclusively gender segregated. Women were organizers, business agents, and delegates to the local Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council and Montana's State Federation of Labor. The unique attributes of the all women's union extend beyond its composition and leadership. By analyzing the WPU in the context of Butte's labor community, this study attempts to illustrate the activism of the union women. The women's union used direct action methods to achieve change for its membership. Through boycotts and strikes, the WPU demonstrated its willingness to participate in the local labor movement. Its activism and membership in the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council further illustrates the women's commitment to the labor community.

This study focuses on the early activities of the Women's Protective Union and its navigation in the local and state labor movement. It highlights the activities of the women's union between the years 1890-1929, including the women's efforts to fight amalgamation with the male culinary union and the month long strike for higher wages in 1920. Ultimately successful in its fight against merging with the male culinary union, the WPU maintained gender segregation and emerged from the early twentieth century a cohesive women's union.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WORKING WOMEN ORGANIZE

Work for women began long before they entered the factory floor. Survival alone meant they worked long hours just to keep their homes clean and their families healthy, clothed, and fed. By the time that the U.S. Civil War began, women were already entrenched in the wage labor market. They worked in factories and mills in the northeast and contracted for piecework with the textile industry, which enabled them to earn small wages and still maintain their households and raise their children. They also worked as domestic servants doing household labor for families that were more affluent. Often the victims of exploitation and abuse from their employers, women initially had no recourse to fight the injustices they endured. Industrialization perpetuated and intensified working women's exploitation. Women were used as low wage workers, and were often cheated out of their wages by unscrupulous employers who found any number of reasons to justify their actions. Women sought restitution, yet had little power to effect change individually. Their status as women and as low wage workers placed them in an extremely disadvantaged position. However, women quickly learned that joining together empowered them in a way they could not achieve alone.

As early as 1734, women collectively fought the oppression they faced. According to Philip S. Foner, New York maidservants organized to improve their working conditions by refusing to work in homes where their male employers beat them.<sup>1</sup> Although not formally organized into a trade union, those New York maids realized the power in

numbers and the value of collectively organizing to effect change. Power for women, and workers in general, lay in numbers, not in individual crusades to fight their often wealthy and more powerful male employers. Another example of collective worker power was the actions of the textile workers in Dover, New Hampshire at the Cocheco mill; in 1828 the women walked out because of overly restrictive and intrusive regulations that the mill attempted to impose.<sup>2</sup> The first women's trade labor organization was the United Tailoresses Society of New York City, organized in 1825, which also that year held the first strike by a women's labor organization.<sup>3</sup> And of course, in Lowell, Massachusetts the textile mills became the home of the Lowell Factory Girls' Association, the first female factory worker union to organize in 1834.

Another early example of women's efforts to organize was the New York City women sewers who organized the Workingwomen's Union in 1863, later changed by male board members to the Working Women's Protective Union (WWPU). The association's mission was "for the prevention and redress of frauds and impositions upon working women who obtain a livelihood by employments other than Household Service."<sup>4</sup> Run by a male executive board, the primary function of the organization was to provide free legal assistance for women who had experienced abuse by employers and to assist women in gaining employment in New York City. By the 1890s, many large American cities had a WWPU for working women to seek some justice, but usually only to retrieve withheld wages. Improved working conditions and increased wages were not the prime directive for the New York WWPU, but in the Western community of Butte, Montana, working women had a different idea about the function of a union.

Once called the “Gibraltar of Unionism,” Butte was a labor town to the core. The organized labor contingent was overwhelming. Initially barred from male trade unions, the working women of Butte decided to organize their own union. The Women’s Protective Union (WPU) was organized in 1890 initially with similar goals as the eastern WWPU. However, by 1903 the WPU expanded its function and also fought for higher wages, shorter workdays, and protective legislation for workers. From the evidence I found, there was no affiliation or connection between the eastern Working Women’s Protective Union and the western Women’s Protective Union.

Women’s organizations were not a new phenomenon in nineteenth century America. As Alice Kessler-Harris points out in her book, *Women Have Always Worked*, women formed a variety of organizations to ensure the safety and health of women in the workplace. In addition to the WWPU, women’s advocacy organizations began at the same time: the New York’s Working Women’s Association in 1869; Grace Dodge’s Working Girls Clubs in 1884 were in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Boston; the National Consumers League created in the late 1890s; and the National Women’s Trade Union League in 1903 to name a few. Although these organizations had different objectives ranging from wage issues, working conditions, and shorter hours, they were run primarily by middle-class organizers who focused on the preservation of women’s roles as caregivers. The women’s organizations focus was not on reforming labor laws, but instead their primary concern was the impact of wage labor on women and their families.

However, with more women entering the workforce for various reasons, by the turn of the twentieth century more working-women became active in women’s organizations.

At the same time, women were also activists in the suffrage movement. The connection between women entering the workforce and their disenfranchisement as non-voting American citizens became apparent to many activist women. The nation could no longer ignore women's demands for the right to participate in the electoral process, because now they entered the workforce in greater numbers and their economic position changed. As women became wage earners, they sought the right to protect themselves based on their expanded role in the nation's economy. As Kessler-Harris points out, the argument for women's right to vote was tied directly to "protect themselves against the economic exploitation that threatened to undermine the home."<sup>5</sup> By linking the suffrage movement with labor, white working-women were able to convince their legislators of their economically precarious position.

By the late nineteenth century, as women fought for suffrage, the industrial revolution was well underway and the nation's response was astounding. People across the country began to flock to urban areas in pursuit of employment. New employment opportunities in industry opened the door for female workers, not only seeking to supplement the family's wages but also to access new consumer products. Kessler-Harris described the impact of the rising consumer market on family households in her text *Women Have Always Worked*, "As the idea of consumption spread into the kitchens and closets of every home, it increased pressure on family income."<sup>6</sup> The emergence of new products, mass-produced clothes, technological innovations like washing machines, and the vast array of other new consumer goods changed the way Americans lived. Advertising campaigns in the early twentieth century convinced consumers that the new

products were necessities and resulted in their desire for many of the new goods. Items that were produced at home prior to industrialization and mass production were now available at the store to anyone who could pay the price. With families becoming consumers instead of producers, women were not only expected to perform their duties as a wife and mother, but with the increasing availability of mass produced goods, their duties expanded into industrial labor and low-wage service sector jobs to contribute to their family's purchasing power.

When women entered the paid labor force, they retained their domestic responsibilities, still expected to have dinner on the table and the children properly tended to, but they also faced other issues regarding their workplace. Many of those issues are ones that women still face today. For example, historically women have earned less than men for the same job. One of the largest hurdles for working women has been the wage scale. Employers justified lower wages for women based on the nature of the patriarchal family. The economic theory of wages "left room for a substantial degree of subjective judgment on the part of employers as to the value of particular workers," and allowed wages to be determined by "custom."<sup>7</sup> This "custom" was gendered, placing greater value on men's labor than on women's labor. According to Kessler-Harris, "The women's wage, at least for the early twentieth century, rested in a large measure on conceptions of what women needed."<sup>8</sup> Based on this analysis, men's wages reflected the need to support a family, whereas women's wages provided her only enough to survive, figuring that she was a temporary employee and would soon leave to get married or that she was already married and the wages were supplemental to men's wages. Based on either argument,

female wages were not seen as the primary income for the family but as supplemental to the male breadwinner's wage.

Despite these inequalities, women did not join unions or so the classic argument went. As Anne Forrest pointed out in her 2000 article "What Do Women Want from Union Representation?" the gendered, and often sexist literature on the women in unions asserted the argument that women "whether by nature or by socialization (sic)...were not willing to join unions: [quoting Woodruff Imberman] 'as many observers know, women are (generally) not union-oriented. They dislike the thought of strikes, pickets, violence.'"<sup>9</sup> Although recent labor studies challenge this out-dated perception, Forrest illustrated the sexist analysis that was prevalent in labor history.

To challenge the notion that women did not find union membership appealing, Kessler-Harris points out numerous examples of women's union activism: "In mixed unions of men and women, women often led men in militant actions."<sup>10</sup> She found union women were not afraid of striking, and often would be the last to resign to the demands of the companies, out lasting even the men on the picket lines. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's study focused on women strikers in the Appalachian South and further documented the story of female militancy. Hall suggests that the activities of the women participants in the 1920s textile factory strike were in line with the tradition of "disorderly women" in the small community of Elizabethton, Tennessee.<sup>11</sup> Despite a handful of studies of women's militant unionism, much further work remains to be done.

In 1989, Lois Rita Helmbold and Ann Schofield addressed the lack of analysis in the field of labor studies regarding women's work outside the industrial sector noting that,

“scholars of women’s labor have accorded the most attention to industrial work although in no historical period was it the major employer of women; far less studied are agricultural and service occupations.”<sup>12</sup> Attempts to provide deeper analysis of service occupations that Helmbold and Schofield acknowledge as valuable began to surface in the late twentieth century. Historians such as Dorothy Sue Cobble in her 1991 book *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, focused on waitresses and their international union, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union.<sup>13</sup> Cobble’s study expanded on the scholarship of the 1980s and addressed the role of women in food service and their efforts to gain union representation. Laurie Mercer’s 2001 article “Reworking Race, Class, and Gender into Pacific Northwest History” focused on the gendered nature of work in the Northwest and uses race, class, and gender to analyze the role of each in the predominately-male communities.<sup>14</sup> Although these emerging studies have encouraged further exploration, more research and focus needs to analyze women based on their own experiences as union members and leaders within the broader labor movement. Janet Finn’s 1998 book, *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Ethnicity from Butte to Chuquicamata*, attempted to reveal the leadership qualities of women, but she focused on the “transnational understanding and the understanding of transnationals as it traces the relationship of capitalism and community across cultural, national, and geographic boundaries.”<sup>15</sup> Finn illustrated the strong role of women in the community during times of labor strikes and the noticeable level of activism that American women and Chilean women commanded, but her focus was on the international mining company and its stronghold on the local communities, not female union members in the labor movement.

Butte's WPU seems to be one of the only unions organized and run entirely by women. More significantly, the women's union maintained its all female status for more than eighty years. Even within the international union of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), Butte's WPU stood firm against co-gendered representation and in 1926 "voted 177 to 26 against amalgamation with the male culinary workers."<sup>16</sup> Although Cobble's text *Dishing It Out* discusses the WPU in Butte, her focus is on the affiliation with the international union, HERE, which occurred in 1907 when the WPU became Local 457 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union.<sup>17</sup> While the WPU has been a point of reference regarding women in the labor movement found in many studies of labor relations, there has been no comprehensive study of the union and its membership.

Although this study attempts to illustrate the activism of the WPU, it is by no means an in depth analysis of the union and its history. This is, however, a small picture of the early actions of the women's union and its ability to successfully navigate the sometimes turbulent western labor movement. It was impressive that the Women's Protective Union was able to maintain its gender segregation given the demographics of Butte. Butte was a mining town to its very core, and significantly influenced by the huge international company, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM). The relatively high wages for miners drew men from all over the country and the world. However, not all who went to Butte were miners; many saw opportunities in merchandising and other small businesses, which were quite often successful. In addition to miners and entrepreneurs, laborers associated with the mines, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, ironworkers, pipe

fitters, and teamsters all created a predominately male blue collar union community. By the turn of the twentieth century, Butte's population was 30,740 and more than half, sixty percent, was male; "Butte was a working man's city."<sup>18</sup> Butte was also a young community, with a full 88 percent of its population under the age of forty-five, and fewer than one percent older than sixty-five.<sup>19</sup> Even two decades later, the population was still predominately male and single.

Montana's economy was significantly based on extractive industries such as mining and logging, and due to the nature of the work, these two industries restricted employment to men. The sexual division of labor in Butte was a reflection of socially defined gender roles, but it was also the result of Montana's male-dominated extractive industries. Men and women competed for work in few jobs in Butte because the unmarried male-dominated workforce, as Mary Murphy points out, "resulted in the need for commercialized domesticity," which determined not only the culture of Butte, but also "part of the women's economy."<sup>20</sup> The business community catered to the men's needs for food, shelter, and recreation, so saloons, gambling houses, and an enormous red light district, "reported to be the second largest in the United States," dominated the landscape and remained open around the clock to accommodate the miners' shifts.<sup>21</sup>

In Butte, few escaped the effects of the mining industry in their lives. No matter which shift a miner worked, rising before the sun to descend into the vast network of mineshafts that snaked below the city and mountains or leaving the cavernous tunnels at sunrise, life in Butte revolved around the miners' schedule. Restaurants and bars stayed open for twenty-four hours a day, boardinghouses were everywhere until the late 1920s,

and as with many Western communities, the red light district was always opened for business.

In addition to the red-light district, saloons also catered to Butte's male population; saloons were the domain of men and women of questionable morality. In 1916-17 there were 250 saloons operating in Butte, and by 1923 prohibition had little effect on them; many remained opened under the guise of soft drink parlors. Saloons had been a male domain, but during Prohibition women slowly broke through that gender segregated social activity. According to Murphy, "In the 1920s Butte women made, sold, and drank liquor in unprecedented fashion."<sup>22</sup> Post World War I Butte saw the breakdown of traditional gender roles and by the 1920s, women in Butte participated in the consumption, production, and dispersal of alcohol, perhaps not in an established saloon, but at home and in other social arenas.<sup>23</sup> This behavior illustrates that many women in Butte refused to be pigeonholed in their domestic role, and often broke through societal constraints that attempted to dictate their behavior.

While the male dominated consumer market may have accommodated the miners, driving the domestic side of life in the copper town was women. Although there may have been a demand for domestic services, there were too many women in Butte seeking employment to create a surplus of jobs. The situation was reported by historian David Emmons, "There were too few jobs for women [in "monoindustrial towns" like Butte], too few opportunities-however opportunities was defined."<sup>24</sup> The manufacturing jobs that were widely available in larger cities, like Chicago and New York, were not available on

the same scale in Butte. Not only single women in Butte searched for employment, but many miners' wives sought an income to help support their families.

The nature of mine work required many miners' wives to seek employment outside of the home, sometimes as a supplemental income, but also as the only income when injury or death struck. Mining was one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States with the highest death rate of any industry in the country.<sup>25</sup> The women and men of Butte knew that far too well. Women in particular felt the effects of mining possibly more than any other group beside the miners themselves. The women waited to hear the warning siren that indicated an accident. The wives, daughters, and mothers of those men who worked deep in the Earth, had an intimate relationship with the mines. For it was the mines that claimed their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, and it was a grim reminder each time the siren screamed that death or injury could strike at a moment's notice, threatening to tear their world apart.

In Butte, employment was unpredictable because the national and international economy dictated the rate of mine production. There were slower times when workers were laid off and then times when work was so abundant that a miner could work 24 hours a day if he wished. The result was an inconsistent income, with times of prosperity and times of scarcity, which affected families in various ways. When women did find work outside the home, it often meant long days cleaning, cooking, and serving customers, only to return home and have to do the same for their families. Twenty-two percent of the 13,000 women in Butte at the turn of the century worked jobs in accordance with what society deemed "conventional women's work."<sup>26</sup> Cooking, cleaning, serving meals,

teaching, nursing, and, of course, prostitution, were all opened to women, but those positions generally offered low wages and prostitution was only for the very desperate.

Butte's women held ties to one another for various reasons, but above all, it was that common tie of life in a male-dominated mining community that bound many women of Butte. Historian David Emmons pointed to the ethnic enclave that he studied, the Irish, and their understanding of the other Butte residents who lived outside their Irish neighborhood, Dublin Gulch. According to Emmons, the women could identify with other women in ways that "their husbands would scarcely understand," in their shared experiences as mothers and miners' wives, tolerance and compassion often out-weighed ethnic differences.<sup>27</sup> Although ethnicity often dictated social interactions, the formation of clubs and volunteer associations allowed for cross ethnic collaborations and provided an opportunity for social functions.

Union membership was similar in some ways to clubs and associations; it provided social interaction, but also offered more. Women, like men, joined unions to better their workplace and their lives. They attended conferences to access the broader labor movement in their communities and their nation. The members of the Women's Protective Union (WPU) entertained speakers to help them better understand the direction of organized labor's political agenda and issues of concern for all workers and union members. Blanche Copenhaver, president of the WPU for over twenty years, joined the union because she had been exploited for years in the low wage jobs she had worked prior to moving to Butte. Copenhaver, like her fellow members, just wanted "a better living," a sentiment, with which all workers can identify, regardless of gender.<sup>28</sup> The women of

Butte took their cue from the men, and organized to represent themselves as women, but also as workers and took their place in the local, state, and national labor movement to fight for justice.

Although the type of work that men did was different from women, there were commonalities between men and women that have long been ignored or overlooked. For instance, the motivation for workers, of either sex, to organize a labor union in their workplace stems from similar self-interests. Both men and women's unions fought for shorter workdays, higher wages, protective legislation for work related injuries, and to remedy unsafe working conditions. The WPU used direct action methods to fight employers who refused to abide by union rules and it was strongly supported by the local union men. The women also strictly enforced union rules within the membership and actively sought to expand the involvement of rank and file members' participation in the weekly meetings. My interest in the WPU focuses on its early activities in Butte's labor community and the larger statewide labor movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Foner. *First Facts of American Labor: A Comprehensive Collection of Labor Firsts in the United States Arranged by Subject*, (New York; London: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 202

<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Foner. *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I*. (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Foner, *First Facts of American Labor*, 202.

<sup>4</sup> Working Women's Protective Union. "A Report of its Condition and the Results Secured after Thirty-One Years of Activity," The Union Rooms, New York City, 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981), 90.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

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- <sup>9</sup> Anne Forrest, "What Do Women Want from Union Representation?" *Hecate*, Vol. 26, no. 2 (2000), 47
- <sup>10</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*, 91.
- <sup>11</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 73, no. 2, (Sept., 1986), 356.
- <sup>12</sup> Lois Rita Helmbold and Ann Schofield, "Women's Labor History, 1790-1945," *Reviews in American History* Vol. 17, no. 4 (Dec. 1989), 501-518.
- <sup>13</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana: Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).
- <sup>14</sup> Laurie Mercer, "Reworking Race, Class, and Gender into Pacific Northwest History," *Frontiers*, Volume 23, no. 3 (2001): 61-74.
- <sup>15</sup> Janet Finn, *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*, (Berkeley: London: University of California Press, 1998), 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 179.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>18</sup> Mary Murphy, "Woman's Work in a Man's World," *Speculator: Journal of Butte and Southwest Montana History*. Volume 1, no.1, (Winter, 1984),18. Also see Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1941*, (Urbana: Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), xvi.
- <sup>19</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 10
- <sup>20</sup> Murphy, "Woman's Work in a Man's World," 19.
- <sup>21</sup> David Emmons, *Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925*, (Urbana: Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 22.
- <sup>22</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 42.
- <sup>23</sup> See Mary Murphy's articles, "Bootlegging Mothers and Drinking Daughters." *American Quarterly*, Vol.46, no. 2 (June, 1994): 174-194. "... 'And All That Jazz: ' Changing Manners and Morals in Butte after World War I." *Montana Magazine of Western History* (Hereafter MMWH), Vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter, 1996): 50-63.
- <sup>24</sup> Emmons, *Butte Irish*, 71.
- <sup>25</sup> Mary Murphy, "Women's Work in a Man's World," 20.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>27</sup> Emmons, *Butte Irish*, 77.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Blanche Copenhaver, Oral History Collection, Vertical Files, Interview E-3, Butte Silver Bow Public Archives (Hereafter BSBA), Butte, Montana.

## CHAPTER TWO

## BUTTE, AMERICA

We talked of the future, when the working class shall have come into its own and the child of the coal miner will have as good a chance in life as the child of the mine owner...when woman will be economically free and stand beside man, his companion and equal, when science shall have solved the problem of heat and power and grass grows over the mining dump and the skies are blue. And we talked and pictured the glorious future, the future that her children would enjoy, the look of despair on her face gave place to one of hope that showed a faith in relief this side of the pearly gates.

-Frank Mabie, state organizer for the Socialist Party of Montana, 1912.<sup>1</sup>

In a conversation with an unidentified miner's wife, Frank Mabie the Montana state organizer for the Socialist Party, revealed the aspirations of a woman who was living in a community shadowed by the mines' steel headframes. Butte, Montana was a mining town and a union town, with a history that ran deep underground. The lure of gold brought the first miners to Silver Bow Creek, located in the southwest Summit Valley in Montana Territory in the 1860s, but it was copper that made Butte the home of the "richest hill on earth." For many mining families who had a loved one who worked the tunnels rich in silver and copper, life in Butte was difficult. Many families sought additional income to supplement wages from the fluctuating copper mining industry. Some married or widowed women opened their homes to strangers and took in boarders to help ends meet. It was often necessary for young single women to procure employment outside the home prior to marriage in order to contribute to the family's income and purchasing power. Fortunately, Butte's male dominated population resulted

in the commercialization of domestic services; therefore, women were able to find employment in a variety of service sector fields.<sup>2</sup>

The conversation between Frank Mabie and the unidentified miners' wife also revealed another aspect of life in the shadows of the "richest hill on earth." It exposed Butte's stark barren landscape where her children played; the grassless slag heaps, the smog-ridden sky, and the cold winters where she often struggled to get through the day. The reality was working-class housing in Butte was unsanitary, but cheap and in close proximity to the mines. According to a health inspector a neighborhood in the Cabbage Patch was "too filthy to describe" with "dead animals, sewage, and garbage" lining the streets.<sup>3</sup> A writer for an Industrial Workers of the World publication, the *Industrial Union Bulletin*, on March 24, 1908 described Butte as:

just about as dirty and disagreeable a place as a one-horse mining camp. There are some buildings of skyscraper dimensions, and some of the parasites have quite elaborate residents, but the average wage slave's home is a miserable, dingy, dirty board shack and the main feature is the numerous boarding and lodging houses, dirty, crowded, and unsanitary. The sky-line is dominated by the gaunt "gallows-frames" and the unsightly change rooms, waste dumps, and railroad tracks of the various mines. The business center for a few blocks each way is paved with rough stone, but the pavement is usually covered one to six inches deep under an accumulation of dust, soot, and garbage...Excepting a half dozen streets in the business center, there are no sewers anywhere and everyone throws their slops, garbage, or waste of any kind out the front of, or behind the houses.<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising that socialism and other alternative political philosophies appealed to Butte residents. Mabie represented an organization that offered a world where children would not have to play in the sewage-filled narrow alleys, and a world where workers would own the means of production and therefore share the wealth.

The Socialist Party offered the possibility of a better future for many of the working poor in Butte, so it was a relatively successful third party in Montana during the early part of the twentieth century. At the turn of the century, the Socialist Party's presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, spoke several times in Butte, advocating the party's social reform platform.<sup>5</sup> Precipitated by corporate control of the mining industry and the degradation of working conditions, alternative political parties gained a significant amount of support from the working-class in Montana, but particularly in Butte. According to Jerry Calvert's analysis of Butte's political landscape, "Local government in Butte was corrupt and inefficient. Workers and working class families lived in overcrowded, poorly ventilated housing without adequate sanitation."<sup>6</sup> The Populists or People's Party, Socialists, and Nonpartisan League were all viable third parties in the early twentieth century because they offered workers an opportunity to fight the corrupt climate of Montana state politics dominated by the mammoth Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM), and create a better daily life.

The ACM controlled not only the copper mining industry but also the timber industry and many municipal services in the state by the early 1900s; therefore the impetus for activism was in place early on in the Treasure State.<sup>7</sup> As Michael Malone pointed out, political corruption plagued Montana during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, "mining barons openly manipulated state government and boasted of their dominance over the Montana political economy," which left a mark on the integrity of politics for the entire state.<sup>8</sup> Mining moguls Marcus Daly and William Clark each purchased Silver Bow County based newspapers to manipulate

and control public opinion and used their powerful positions to influence the state and local politicians. The citizens of Butte were inundated with inaccurate reporting as the “Battle of the Copper Kings” played out on the pages of their news publications, which resulted in the loss of free press for the community and political corruption that marred politics for the entire state of Montana. Newspapers such as the *Labor World*, endorsed by the Montana State Trades and Labor Council (MSTLC) and the Butte Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly, and the labor weekly, the *Butte Bystander*, helped to inform voters and citizens of issues concerning labor unions and gave alternative viewpoints a voice. The feud between Clark and Daly lasted from the late 1880s until mid 1890s and during this time, the Butte Miners’ Union gained strength in numbers and affiliations, as Butte became the “center for the Western labor movement.”<sup>9</sup>

The concentration of ACM’s economic power in Butte was enormous and paralleled the trend in the United States during the end of the nineteenth century when large corporations began to dominate American economics. With a monopoly over Butte’s mining industry by the early twentieth century, the ACM was a major employer in the state, controlling the fate of many miners. By the early 1900s, after the death of Marcus Daly, the founder and superintendent of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company prior to the Standard Oil Company’s buyout of the mining colossus, wages stagnated and working conditions worsened. Pollution, overcrowded living conditions, and union corruption awakened many Butte residents to their precarious situation and most likely increased the level of their political and labor related activism.

As early as 1878, one year prior to Butte City's incorporation, the miners organized a representative union, the Butte Workingmen's Union led by Aaron C. Witter, to fight a fifty cent wage reduction.<sup>10</sup> By 1881, the organization became the Miners' Union of Butte City and opened its membership to all laborers. However, by 1885 the union reorganized again to become the Butte Miners' Union (BMU) with a membership of eighteen hundred limited to miners only. By 1887, the miners successfully organized every mine in Butte; the last was the Bluebird mine and that action sealed a closed shop for Butte miners.<sup>11</sup> The BMU "became the largest and most powerful in the West, surpassing even the Comstock unions....It boasted more than 4,600 members by 1893 and was the prime force behind the formation of the Western Federation of Miners that year."<sup>12</sup> In 1886 the BMU, along with other labor organizations, coalesced and formed the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly, otherwise known as the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council. According to Jerry Calvert:

Virtually every trade was unionized, and all of them had closed shops. There were about fifty different local unions: one for every construction trade, a union for brewers and another for beer wagon drivers, one for blacksmiths and another for horseshoers. There were also a hackmen's union and a teamsters' union, the Musicians' Protective Union, the Theatrical Stage Employees Union, and the Theatrical Ushers' Union. Dominating the unions in size and prestige, and political clout were the local affiliates of the Western Federation of Miners: the Butte Miners' Union No.1, the Mill and Smeltermen's Union No. 74, and the Butte Engineers' Union No.83. Together, these three WFM locals accounted for one-third of all union men in the Butte district. All the unions were confederated under the umbrella of the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly.<sup>13</sup>

The men were not the only workers in the community who recognized the value of organizing a union. The women workers in the mining city found their best protection

in the workplace was to follow in the footsteps of their union brethren. Absent from Jerry Calvert's text are those unions to which many of Butte's women belonged. For example, women laundry workers belonged to the Laundry Workers' Union, salesgirls were members of Butte's Clerks' Union, and in 1902 the first telephone operators union in the United States was organized in Butte.<sup>14</sup> Women also organized an all female union in 1890, the Women's Protective Union (WPU), with nearly eight hundred members after one year. Organized by Delia Moore, who was originally associated with the Knights of Labor in Amsterdam, New York, the union initially worked to assist Butte's women in finding housing, advice, and employment.<sup>15</sup> By 1892, the WPU operated its own library and housing assistance program for members, and helped its members with obtaining health care, child care, and legal representation.<sup>16</sup>

Over the course of the next forty years, the WPU affiliated with the American Labor Union, the Western Federation of Miners, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council (SBTLC), Montana Federation of Labor (prior to 1903 known as the Montana State Trades and Labor Council), and the International Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE).<sup>17</sup> The union was deeply connected to local, state, and national labor movements. For example, the WPU attended the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council meetings, and sent delegates to HERE's national conventions and the American Federation of Labor's national conventions. They also were politically active and sent members to lobby the state legislature on various issues that directly affected their membership. Politicians even

courted their vote after Montana women gained suffrage in 1914. In Butte, politics and the labor movement were synonymous.

Butte became the center for the western labor movement, which grew out of a common disapproval of the American Federation of Labor's (AFL) unwillingness to organize unskilled and semiskilled workers. By 1886, the Montana State Trade and Labor Council (MSTLC) withdrew from the AFL, due to its politically conservative stance and its focus on skilled craftsman.<sup>18</sup> The MSTLC, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), and 119 delegates from other Western labor unions in 1898 held a convention in Salt Lake City and formed the Western Labor Union (WLU), which later became the American Labor Union (ALU).<sup>19</sup> The ALU's headquarters were in Butte until 1904, at which point the ALU moved its operational base to Chicago. The main goal of the industrial union was to organize the workers that the AFL was not, including "women, blacks, and unskilled workers."<sup>20</sup> In 1905 the ALU representatives along with WFM representatives played a role in forming the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Although the ALU existed only briefly, it played a large role in the American labor movement, and at the center of that movement, was Butte, Montana. Butte was a stronghold for organized labor by the First World War, "...because nearly all wageworkers in Butte before the war were union members... Forty-four locals listed themselves in the 1917 city directory."<sup>21</sup>

Not surprisingly, the strong western labor movement was appealing to female workers in Butte. Given the progressive actions of Montana's women, their activism in the labor movement fell in line with their pursuit of political representation. In Montana,

women entered activist roles not only in the labor movement, but also fought for decades for the right to vote and the right to hold office. The editor of the *Helena Herald* although he expressed the opinion that women belonged in the home, also concluded that some women displayed the ability to fill jobs usually filled by men. In an article referring to Helena's Ella Knowles' desire to take the bar examination in Montana, he recommended, "the doors of all the professions and occupations [to] be thrown open to women and the test of merit alone be applied by a discriminating and intelligent public."<sup>22</sup> By 1889, Council Bill No. 4 passed both houses and amended the law to allow individuals to practice as attorneys, "without regard to sex."<sup>23</sup> By 1892, Knowles had taken and passed the bar exam and became Montana's first woman to practice law. The Populist Party nominated Knowles for Attorney General in 1892; she lost by only a small margin. Montana went one-step further, and in 1914 not only did women win the right to vote, two years later they also helped elect the first woman to Congress who represented Montana in the U.S. House of Representatives for two inconsecutive terms. In 1917, when Emma Ingalls and Maggie Smith Hathaway were elected to the state House of Representatives, the President of Montana's Senate, W.W. McDowell, said:

This is certainly a radical departure from former legislatures and I believe it is a stride in the right direction. I have no doubt but in the future more and more women will be members of the legislature and it is my belief that as women now have the right to vote they should take their full share of the responsibilities of government.<sup>24</sup>

The Treasure State even went so far as to pass an equal pay law in 1919, which while perhaps not enforced, signified Montana's progressivism.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, a women's role in Montana was not resigned solely to the home but to whatever field they chose to enter,

although with some exceptions, but apparently politics, law, and unions were within socially prescribed women's realm.

While women may have been the minority in Butte, they were not inconsequential. Butte's WPU was founded, run, and restricted to women workers only, and it effectively remained gender segregated until the 1970s when it merged with the Cooks' and Waiters' Union. The Women's Protective Union won a ten-hour workday by 1903.<sup>26</sup> These women fought first for the ten-hour day then for the eight-hour day, higher wages, and legislation that affected their membership, and often sent delegates to lobby in Helena, the state's capital. The union fought employers for its members; the business agent would even take a broom after bosses who ignored union rules. Unfortunately, the WPU remains absent from many modern day analyses of Butte's labor movement, thereby effectively resulting in a skewed interpretation of the role women played during the early twentieth century in the "Gibraltar of Unionism."

To understand fully the role the Women's Protective Union had in the western labor movement and in Butte, it is important to understand Butte's political and economic climate. The political chaos of the late nineteenth century and the labor insurgency of the early twentieth century propelled many labor organizations into action, including the WPU. Prior to further examination of the unique aspects of the women's union, it is necessary to analyze briefly Butte's complex labor and political history.

According to the reliable estimate of the *Inter Mountain*, the city's newspaper, Butte was by mid-1884 pouring forth silver and copper at the rate of \$1,250,000 per month. In August of 1885, the *West Shore*, a Pacific coast promotional magazine, reckoned that 'the largest, busiest, and richest mining camp in the world to-day is Butte, Montana.'<sup>27</sup>

The history of Butte reads like a Hollywood movie script, filled with corruption, violence, bribery, and betrayal. Beginning as many western communities did, Butte was a gold camp, which sprung up decades after the famous gold rush of the 1840s played out in California. The real boom in mining for the western territory of Montana named after the Latin term for mountainous, was during the mid-1860s when Bannack, Butte City, and Alder Gulch proved profitable in gold placer mining. The boom was underway and miners, many of whom were recent immigrants from Europe, came from all over the United States. In 1864, prospectors settled near the beautiful Silver Bow Creek in Montana's Summit Valley and discovered gold. By 1866 Montana was second only to California in gold production, but that did not last long.<sup>28</sup> Once the placer deposits depleted, many of the miners moved on in search of fortunes elsewhere. But that was not the end for Butte, instead it was just the beginning.

The other rich mineral deposits in Butte's hills still remained unexploited. Gold may have lured many to the region, but Butte's true wealth had yet to be revealed. In 1875 silver ore was the spark for another rush to the valley. The discovery of silver and its importance in the American economy helped establish Butte City in 1879 and would also contribute to the relatively successful Populist Party of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which advocated the "free coinage" of silver. Silver attracted many investors to the area, promising lucrative returns on mines that were acquired cheaply. The late 1870s brought many outside investors to the future Treasure State, securing a prosperous future for those with the capital to invest. Big investors and corporate mining interests dominated the landscape only two decades after independent miners found gold

in Silver Bow Creek. However, when the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was repealed in 1893, “the nation’s silver market collapsed” and so did Butte’s silver success.<sup>29</sup> Yet Butte had one more great treasure in reserve, it was copper and it would prove to be the true source of Butte’s wealth.

By the late nineteenth century, two mining moguls from Butte, William Clark and Marcus Daly, known as the “Copper Kings,” fought a fierce battle over political power, one that tarnished the political reputation of the state. Described as a shrewd, ambitious, hardworking capitalist, William Clark successfully made his way in the western frontier. By 1869, Clark had married and procured a “profitable mail contract between Walla Walla, Washington and Missoula, Montana.”<sup>30</sup> Soon after that, Clark established a store in Helena, and in order to obtain further capital for future opportunities, he formed a partnership with R.W. Connell of New York and S.E. Larabee of Deer Lodge, where Clark would later make his home. Specializing in merchandising, wholesale and retail, and “buying gold dust for resale to eastern banks,” the partnership was a lucrative one.<sup>31</sup> Clark was a savvy entrepreneur and successfully bought four major claims in Butte’s mining district at cheap prices. To ensure his financial success as a mine owner, he went to New York to study geology and mineralogy at Columbia’s School of Mines.<sup>32</sup>

Clark was not the only shrewd businessman who made a name for himself in Butte. The other name directly associated with the Montana town was Marcus Daly. Born in Ireland, Daly came to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century and followed the gold rush to California. Arriving in Butte in 1876, Daly was already an experienced miner, and would be known as a “miner’s miner,” endearing him to the

community that would be the source of his enormous wealth. Originally hired by the Walker brothers from Utah to estimate the production possibilities of the Alice Mine, Daly realized the potential of Butte's rich mineral deposits and quickly purchased his own mine, the Anaconda.<sup>33</sup> According to Murphy's *Mining Cultures*, "Metallic wealth had lured men to the arid Summit Valley of southwestern Montana...the Hill was a treasure trove of billions of dollars worth of gold, silver, zinc, lead, manganese, and, above all, copper."<sup>34</sup> Although silver brought Butte City to the map, it was copper that created the "richest hill on earth" and it was Marcus Daly who discovered it in 1882.

Butte embraced the Irishman easily, since there was a large contingent of Irish living in Butte, approximately ten thousand by 1910.<sup>35</sup> Butte's Irish miners loved Daly, and he returned the sentiment, often preferring to hire only Irishmen in his mines. Reflective of the Irish enclaves' behavior in general, the Irish stuck together, and Daly was part of that enclave. The shared Irish background between Daly and his Irish miners resulted in a conservative Irish-dominated union.

Daly's arrival and discovery of the rich copper vein proved to be the spark for Butte's economic turning, "the Alice Mine and the men who worked it 'proved' the Butte hill and awakened outside investors to its enormous potential."<sup>36</sup> The role of these investors should not be overlooked. The connection between Hearst and Daly was based on a history of wise but risky investments in the mining industry. Hearst was willing to take the risk in developing the Butte mine because of his success a few years earlier with the Ontario Mine, an investment that between the years 1872-1883 yielded seventeen million dollars, which he made because of a "tip from his old friend of Comstock days,

‘Mark’ Daly.’<sup>37</sup> According to historian Michael Malone, the Hearst-Haggin-Tevis syndicate controlled over one hundred mines across two continents “Chile to Alaska, including one of America’s greatest silver mines (the Ontario), its greatest gold mine (the Homestake), and its number one copper mine (the Anaconda).”<sup>38</sup> The company was internationally powerful, not just locally dominate.

As early as the 1880s, the days of individual miners successfully working claims were gone and Butte had become a corporate mining town with large outside investors deciding its fate. The ability to mine effectively and to invest wisely were traits that both Clark and Daly exhibited. Malone also described the clever tactics of many businessmen at the time, “Control of the major mines soon rested in the hands, not of the pioneers who opened them, but of the shrewd merchant-financiers who moved in during the hard times, bought them up cheaply, and had the capital and the ability to develop them.”<sup>39</sup>

In 1891, the Anaconda Mine owners incorporated, becoming the Anaconda Mining Company, and issued capital stock valued at twenty-five million dollars.<sup>40</sup> The company reorganized again four years later and became the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM). By 1899 the Hearst-Haggin-Tevis syndicate was no longer in existence as Heart and Tevis were both dead, leaving control of the company to Haggin and Daly. Shortly thereafter, the Standard Oil Company, under the leadership of William Rockefeller and his financial partners, purchased control of the ACM and formed the Amalgamated Copper Company.<sup>41</sup> For Montana, the amalgamation of the copper meant the loss of a friend in Daly and his replacement with corporate executives hungry for profit at all costs. For organized labor, that was a precarious situation.

The last obstacle for the ACM was F. Augustus Heinze, who fought the mammoth mining company for years. After being tied up in litigation for years with Heinze, the ACM decided to shutdown its operations, effectively laying-off 20,000 miners, and forcing Heinze to sell out by 1906.<sup>42</sup> By 1910, the Amalgamated purchased W.A. Clark's Butte holdings, including his mines and smelters, and "merged all of its subsidiaries into the Anaconda Copper Mining Company."<sup>43</sup> This was the beginning of Butte, the company town, and the end of relatively peaceful labor relations with the mammoth ACM.

Corporate domination of Butte meant that unions played an ever-growing role in the state's political arena. It was necessary to organize in order to effectively create change, but for miners, even that was not enough. The introduction of the rustling card in 1912 made it increasingly difficult for the BMU to organize and maintain their stronghold. The rustling card was a permit to work obtained through the company's employment office, which allowed the ACM to screen miners prior to hiring them, a process that took several weeks. If a miner were a "troublemaker" or "union agitator," he would not receive a card and would not be hired.<sup>44</sup> The new hiring practice was called a "blacklist" by the progressive BMU members but virtually ignored by the conservative miners.<sup>45</sup> The rustling card meant that for the first time since 1878, a union miner would not be guaranteed employment if a position was available. It gave the company the ability to filter out the more "radical" union members.<sup>46</sup> Radical unionism and hints of socialistic activities further drove a wedge into the union, fracturing its foundation. The IWW and WFM no longer affiliated by 1912, which caused a division between the

progressives since many still considered themselves IWW members and considered the radical WFM essential in working-class political solidarity. By June of that year, the BMU's conservative leadership signed a new contract that linked the market price of copper to wages for miners, which meant that wages effectively remained at the 1878 rate of \$3.50 a day.<sup>47</sup> To further infuriate the progressive union members, the contract mentioned nothing of the health and safety issues that had long been ignored by the conservative BMU leaders. By 1914, the Butte Miners' Union had lost much of its power and was divided between conservative and progressive factions, each vying for control of the union. Company spies infiltrated the union, using "Pinkerton and Thiel agency detectives...[to] provoke violence to weaken the unions from within."<sup>48</sup> The situation deteriorated and on 23 June 1914, the Miners' Union Hall was destroyed with dynamite. The ramifications of the BMU's destruction was the reinstatement of the open shop policy, which lasted until 1934.

The situation continued to deteriorate, and in 1917 the ACM had numerous mining accidents and disasters, including the nation's worst hard rock mining explosion in the Speculator Mine where over 160 men perished. The disasters sparked another labor insurgency, a general strike "erupted across the Hill with better working conditions and safety the key demands."<sup>49</sup> Union miners, tired of dying for the company's profit margin, pursued a safer and more hospitable work place.

Miners seemed to face an uphill battle at every corner. Their jobs were not just another hard labor occupation. For the miners and their families, mining was a way of life, and a dangerous one at that. According to David Emmons,

During that four year period [1910-1913], 162 men died in ACM [Anaconda Copper Mining Company] mines, another 5,233 suffered injuries requiring medical attention. Death came, in descending order of occurrence, from falling ground; falls, usually down a shaft; blasts, most often premature detonations of dynamite; being mangled by machinery; hoisting accidents; and electrocutions. Among the accidents were 349 fractures, including twelve broken skulls and 129 broken legs; sixty-seven eye injuries resulting in twenty cases of blindness; forty-six amputations; and eighteen 'scaldings.'<sup>50</sup>

Emmons also points out that injuries resulted in lost work, and possibly, the loss of employment altogether because of the long line of workers willing and able to replace those who fell.

Mining accidents were commonplace in Butte, as in other hard-rock mining communities. The advent of new technologies amplified the dangers of mining and decreased the use of highly skilled miners. As in many industries, technology led to the deskilling of the labor force, and it was no different in mining. New technologies made possible the use of unskilled or semiskilled laborers, which ultimately reduced labor costs and allowed for an easily replaceable workforce. However, the result was higher injury rates. Unskilled or semiskilled miners often performed the more dangerous work that the skilled miners knew to avoid. To further complicate matters, the unskilled miners were usually recent immigrants and not native English speakers, therefore communication, which was essential for obvious reasons, became difficult. Skilled miners also resented the use of unskilled laborers, mainly because it insulted their abilities and undermined

their safety. Prior to the 1890s, mining was a skilled trade that required miners enter into apprenticeships as in the Cornish and German mines, which was the birthplace of many Butte miners.<sup>51</sup>

As industrialization and electrification spread across the nation, the demand for copper increased the number of miners needed to satisfy the market and the rate of extraction. By the 1890s, technological innovations in mining contributed to the increased extraction rate but also led to a higher injury rate. For example, the threat of the respiratory illness was linked directly to the dust that machine drills produced. Machine drills were introduced in Butte's mines in 1895 and were responsible for the "100 percent increase in respiratory fatalities" because the drills created a fine dust that miners inhaled; the silica dust scarred the lungs of its victims "creating an epidemic of tuberculosis and respiratory disease among miners."<sup>52</sup> Although modification to the drills in the 1920s added water to the drilling process, many miners refused to use it because it resulted in standing water, which was uncomfortable and subsequently led to a higher risk of electrocution. In addition to the drills, steam powered hoists, dynamite, and electricity were all new technologies that increased production, but also resulted in more deaths. Explosions, electrocution, and malfunctioning hoists were a few of the hazards associated with the new technologies. "By 1908, metal mining had the highest fatality rate of all industrial occupations."<sup>53</sup> Clearly safety was an important issue for miners and their families, but since the Butte Miners' Union never prioritized safety, it is not surprising that by 1912 the miners actively sought a representative organization that would address the unsafe working conditions.

Safety was a concern for not just the men in the mines, but also the women in the community. To lose the head of the household and primary breadwinner was devastating for a family; it meant that everyone had to pitch in to keep food on the table and a roof overhead. It also resulted in a stronger sense of community, because the reality in Butte and other mining towns was that almost every family experienced loss associated with mining. The community assisted many women who lost their husbands, simply because, the “grim shadow of widowhood was ever present in Butte.”<sup>54</sup> Whether it was a tragic accident, a fire, a cave-in, a malfunctioning hoist, an explosion that resulted in death or long term debilitating injury or whether it was miners’ consumption, commonly known as miners’ con, which resulted in a slow death, miners’ families understood the risk involved in mining. The high percentage of injuries suggests that women became the primary providers for some families. Boardinghouses were abundant also because of the high percentage of single male miners, and for married or widowed women the operation of a boardinghouse was socially acceptable and for many women, essential for survival. As Mary Murphy pointed out, “Women worked outside the home because they were widowed, abandoned, or married to men who could not support them.”<sup>55</sup>

Butte residents understood the need for community support, as Emmons stated “...the largely mythical individualism of the nineteenth century gave way to associational, even communal, effort-in this instance, to minimize the full effects of the occupational risks.”<sup>56</sup> Unions provided sick and death benefits for their members that, at the time, were not provided by employers. Similarly, the existence of organizations such as the Ancient Order of the Hibernians (AOH) and Robert Emmet Literary Association

(RELA), two Irish fraternal organizations, not only provided a sense of Irish-ness, but also employment assistance, sick benefits, and death benefits.

The rich copper ore was not the only thing that ran deep in Butte. A sense of justice and community also touched many of the working class in Butte. An understood connection existed among the working-class because of their union membership and the dangerous nature of mining. Many mining families looked out for each other, ready and willing to lend a helping hand when needed. Women were able to break down social and racial barriers and provide assistance to each other. Butte's diversity would seem to be a barrier between the various ethnic groups represented, and at times, it was, but there were common ties binding Butte's residents together, their plight as miners and union laborers working to survive in the rapidly growing Western town.

Butte, Montana was a bustling metropolis by the early twentieth century. The population had multiplied thirty times between then and 1890, and Butte had ninety thousand residents by 1916. Typical of boom-and-bust western mining towns, Butte grew at an enormous rate, with little municipal planning. Neighborhoods divided by ethnicity sprang up almost overnight, the Cabbage Patch, Finntown, Dublin Gulch, Corktown, the East and West Sides all developed according to their occupants' cultural heritage and class, which was how Butte's residents also organized their social life. Butte's diversity was astounding and rivaled cities such as Chicago, New York City, and Seattle. A full quarter of the population were Irish, then there were the Cornish, Finns, Slavs, Italians, Swedish, Greeks, Czechs, Russians, Germans, Scandinavians, Yugoslavs,

Chinese, and Poles. “By 1910 immigrants and children of foreign or mixed parentage made up 70.2 percent of Butte’s population.”<sup>57</sup>

For the most part the demographics of Butte were so diverse that everyone living there in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century seemed to come from somewhere else. According to Mary Murphy, “Daughters of immigrants or of marriages between an immigrant and a native-born American formed the single largest category of female workers in Butte in 1920.”<sup>58</sup> Whether or not residents of Butte were native born, in the early twentieth century, it was likely their parents were not. Therefore, even if their cultural heritage differed, residents of the mining town had a commonality in their lives as miners and the families of miners, or they were connected to the “company” one way or another. One thing was certain; everyone joined a union, at least if they wanted to work in Butte, Montana.

Clearly, Butte has a colorful history. The complicated operations of the mining industry and political chaos created an atmosphere of uncertainty for the residents and workers of the Western community. It was in this boom-and-bust city that the women workers who joined the Women’s Protective Union made significant headway for their members. They fought for higher wages, workplace representation, protective legislation, and stood side by side with their union brethren in the labor movement locally, statewide, and nationally. Many Butte union locals not only supported the WPU in their efforts, they actively participated in assisting the local union women in their fight for justice.

The atmosphere of union activism during the first two decades of the twentieth century in Butte was electric, and the women of the WPU were plugged into that movement, participating in conventions locally, statewide, and less frequently, nationally. Were these women unique in their activism? My answer would be yes, in many ways, but they were part of a larger women's movement to enter the workplace and fight to obtain higher wages and fair representation. The Women's Protective Union in Butte worked to better their working conditions and wages, and to provide an avenue to pursue workplace justice for its members. They were successful in their endeavors due to their involvement in the larger labor movement and their place of residence in the "Gibraltar of Unionism."

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Calvert. *The Gibraltar: Socialism and the Labor Movement in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Murphy, "Women's Work in a Man's World" *Speculator*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter, 1984) and Mary Murphy, "...And All that Jazz' Changing Manners and Morals in Butte after World War I." *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* (Hereafter MMWH), Vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Murphy. "Woman's Work in a Man's World," 19.

<sup>4</sup> Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Michael P. Malone. *Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1864-1906*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 41-44. Also see Jerry Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Michael P. Malone and others. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*. Revised edition. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 207.

<sup>11</sup> George Everett. "'The Gibraltar of Unionism: The Labor Heritage of Butte, Montana.'" *Labor Heritage*, Vol.10, no.1 (Summer, 1998), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Richard E. Lingenfelter. *The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement in the American West, 1863-1893*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 132.

<sup>13</sup> Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 21.

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- <sup>15</sup> *Butte Journal*, n.d. (must be 1891, a year after WPU organized.) no author listed. "Workingwomen of Butte: Their Efforts at Organization Successful." Vertical files, Montana Historical Society (Hereafter MHS), Helena, MT.
- <sup>16</sup> Marilyn Maney. "Working Women's Union Fought for Social Justice-100 Years Ago." *Montana Family Union VOICE*, (December 1990), 4-6. Vertical Files, Folder entitled, "Labor Unions: Women's Protective Union," Butte Silver Bow Public Archives (Hereafter BSBA), Butte, Montana.
- <sup>17</sup> See WPU Meeting Minutes, 1903-1905, Manuscript Collection #174 (Hereafter MC #174), Box 13, Folder 13-8, Montana Historical Society (Hereafter MHS), Helena, MT; WPU Meeting Minutes 1916-1922, Labor History Collection #47, Box 1, Butte Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, MT; WPU Meeting Minutes 1922-1929, MC #174, Box 14, Folder 14-1, MHS, Helena, MT.
- <sup>18</sup> Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 17.
- <sup>19</sup> Gary M. Fink, ed, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions: Labor Unions.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 19.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>21</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 8.
- <sup>22</sup> Richard Roeder. "Crossing the Gender Line: Ella L. Knowles, Montana's First Woman Lawyer." *MMWH*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (Summer, 1982), 69.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>24</sup> *Butte Miner*, 3 January 1917.
- <sup>25</sup> *Laws of Montana: Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana, Sixteenth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly, 1919*, Bill No. 136. (State Publishing Co., Helena, Montana, 1919), 288.
- <sup>26</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 1903-1905, MC #174, Box 13, Folder 13-8, MHS.
- <sup>27</sup> Malone, *Battle for Butte*, 31.
- <sup>28</sup> Malone, et al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 68.
- <sup>29</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Malone, *Battle for Butte*, 14.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>33</sup> Malone, et. al., *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 203.
- <sup>34</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 2.
- <sup>35</sup> David Emmons, *Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town 1875-1925*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 63.
- <sup>36</sup> Malone, *Battle For Butte*, 20.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>40</sup> Malone, et. al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 210.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.
- <sup>42</sup> Everett, "'Gibraltar of Unionism,'" 8.
- <sup>43</sup> Malone, et. al., *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 230.
- <sup>44</sup> Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 78.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>46</sup> See Jerry Calvert's, Chapter Three: "Something Rotten in Gibraltar," from *Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920*, for a detailed account Butte's Miners' Union and its destruction.
- <sup>47</sup> Everett, "'Gibraltar of Unionism,'" 10; also see Calvert, *Gibraltar*, 76.
- <sup>48</sup> Emmons, *Butte Irish*, 9.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.
- <sup>51</sup> Brian Shovers. "The Perils of Working in the Butte Underground: Industrial Fatalities in the Copper Mines, 1880-1920." *MMWH*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 31.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 and 28.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

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<sup>54</sup> Murphy, "Woman's Work in a Man's World," 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Emmons, *Butte Irish*, 160.

<sup>57</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

## CHAPTER THREE

## UNION WOMEN

The ladies of Butte-God bless them!-are not going to be behind their brothers in demanding their rights. Last evening a representative assemblage of the working women of the city met at Miners' union hall and organized a protective association. Dressmakers, milliners, waitresses, sales ladies and representatives of other occupations were present, and all manifested a strong interest in the purposes of the meeting...The association is called the Women's Protective Union, and above and beyond its protective character its aims are to elevate the sex intellectually, morally, and socially, and to bring the members into closer relations with one another.<sup>1</sup>

With thirty-three members, the newly formed women's union began a movement to better working conditions and wages for women in Butte, a movement that began in 1890 and would continue for more than eighty years. According to the *Anaconda Standard*, the women formed the union because they were not "permitted in the Workingmen's Union."<sup>2</sup> As more women entered the workforce in areas such as industrial, clerical, and service work, women sought union membership. Initially denied entrance into male trade unions, the women had little option but to organize their own union.

The formation of the women's union was an expression of working-women's desire to pursue workplace justice for their members. Run and founded by women, the Women's Protective Union (WPU) opened its membership to women working in Butte, including African Americans, however prostitutes and Asian residents of Butte were excluded from its organization. According to Dorothy Sue Cobble, the WPU prided itself

on not “drawing the color line” and in 1907 had three black women as members. Clearly Asian workers were outside of the WPU’s established racial line.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the racial contradiction was not perceived by the WPU, possibly because during the late nineteenth century many unions held racist attitudes toward Asian workers. When the WPU first organized in 1890, labor unions in Butte were formulating a boycott against the Chinese and Japanese in Silver Bow County, the home of the state’s largest Chinese community.<sup>4</sup> Although there was no evidence that the women were active in the early boycott led by the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council, they certainly provided a strong justification for the boycott’s legitimacy.<sup>5</sup>

Anti-Asian sentiments were not a new phenomenon in Butte. As early as 1882, labor unions expressed their racism toward Asian residents through random acts of violence and small boycotts.<sup>6</sup> However, by the 1890s violence against Asian residents was no longer condoned, instead well-organized boycotts became the more favorable method of driving the unwanted residents from the city. One of the unions’ arguments for their racism, aside from the dominant belief that Asians were racially and culturally inferior, was the displacement of white women workers.<sup>7</sup> An investigation in 1890 led by Delia Moore, the organizer for the WPU, found that “six to eight hundred Chinamen in town...were doing domestic work and filling other positions in which the white women who go to Butte looking for employment ought to be able to find work.”<sup>8</sup> Moore also stated in the same article that she discovered that due to the lack of employment opportunities, the young female job seekers turned to the higher wages offered at “beer halls and other places of low resort.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Moore’s report contributed to the first

anti-Chinese boycott of 1891, at the least it provided a strong justification for organized labor's racism. While the boycott lasted only a year and was unsuccessful, the message was clear, Chinese and Japanese workers were not welcome by the labor community in Butte. The WPU's posturing on the anti-Chinese boycott was clever and allowed the labor community a strong rationale for its racism by insisting that they were protecting American womanhood from inferior races.<sup>10</sup> Moore logically used women's moral position as a lever for the union to gain support and possibly recruit members.

Although the boycott, which lasted from 1891-1892, was unsuccessful, the anti-Asian racism did not dissipate. A second boycott began in 1896 led by the Hotel and Restaurant Keepers, owners of three steam laundries, and a delegation from the Cooks and Waiters Union.<sup>11</sup> The 1896 boycott was aimed at Chinese and Japanese owned businesses and any establishment that employed Asians.<sup>12</sup> The boycott emphasized the importance of living wages for white men and women, and argued the presence of Asian-owned businesses and Asian workers jeopardized white workers ability to secure higher wages, potentially driving women into prostitution.<sup>13</sup> According to Stacy Flaherty, intimidation was an effective method that delegates from the unions used to enforce the boycott.<sup>14</sup> Delegates would stand outside of Asian owned businesses to intimidate potential customers and inform them of the boycott. Walking delegates would follow Chinese laundrymen on their routes and discuss the boycott with the laundry customers.<sup>15</sup>

Although the second boycott also only lasted one year and was unsuccessful in expelling all Asian residents, but did cause many Asian workers employed in white businesses to lose their jobs. Since no other means of employment were available to

them, approximately 350 Chinese were driven out of the city.<sup>16</sup> Although four Chinese business owners brought a suit against the labor unions to seek redress for the boycott and some level of protection from city officials.<sup>17</sup> The court placed an injunction against the unions but little changed in Butte regarding the treatment of Asian residents. As Flaherty pointed out, “Fundamentally, Butte labor unions waged a campaign based on race; their sentiments and prejudices ran far too deep to be summarily stopped with an injunction.”<sup>18</sup> The racist attitudes perpetuated through the twentieth century. During the 1920s, the WPU still held strong anti-Asian sentiments, and would pressure white women workers employed at Asian businesses to quit, regardless of whether or not the women were members.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, upon its formation, the women’s union was not taken seriously. As the *Anaconda Standard* reported, “The idea of a union of servant girls, chambermaids, and dressmakers was so unique and comical that the new union has been the subject of endless jokes.”<sup>20</sup> However, the female union was a necessity in such a heavily male community. The *Butte Miner* recognized the need for a women’s union, “of all the unions...of none has there been such urgent need, and none will be watched with greater interest or more fervent wishes for its success.”<sup>21</sup> A year later, another article appeared on the progress of the union citing the nearly 800 members “many of them the wives of miners and other laborers” were interested in “seeing that their members receive proper treatment at the hands of employers.”<sup>22</sup> The women sought the same thing that men did in union membership; they wanted workplace justice. While initially concerned with the intellectual, moral, and social condition of its membership, the WPU clearly redefined its

aim after one year of existence most likely due to mistreatment of women workers by their male employers.

Butte's organized labor contingent was unparalleled in the nation, so perhaps the union men influenced women who entered the male-dominated community as paid laborers. The male unions may have even supported the women's efforts to organize based on the same rationale. Early evidence that the men supported the women's efforts was in 1904 when the Miners Union and the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council came out in support of the WPU when the employment agencies questioned the women's legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> Both the Miners Union and the Trades Council wrote resolutions and submitted them to the *Butte Miner*, vocalizing their support of the women's union. Some union men even spoke to the union women regarding potential organizing drives, such as the president of the American Labor Union, who spoke to the WPU on behalf of the Candy Workers Union seeking assistance from the women on behalf of the workers and gave the WPU jurisdiction over women employed as candy workers.<sup>24</sup>

While perhaps the men were not willing to permit women into their union, few of the male laborers in Butte had justification for not supporting a separate female union. However, there was one male union, the Cooks' and Waiters' Union Local 22 (CWU), which vocally opposed the separate female union and worked to amalgamate the women into the male culinary union. Based on the position of male restaurant workers in such a heavily blue-collar community, the male waiters struggled to make a living. Restaurant work was not highly paid, and the entrance of women threatened to drive the men's wages further down. Men commanded higher wages than women in restaurant work by a

full fifty percent, but employers were replacing the higher paid men with women.<sup>25</sup> Although the CWU fought the women at every opportunity, the male union lost every battle with the WPU.<sup>26</sup> The women's union had an advantage over the male union because of its jurisdiction over all working-women in the county by 1929, therefore the women had a numerical advantage.<sup>27</sup> The Cooks' and Waiters' Union ineffectually pressed for amalgamation for decades, prompting the women to fight for their gender-segregated union.

The Women's Protective Union fought the male union until 1973, when the International Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) forced amalgamation. The fierce resistance to a co-gendered union was based on the fear that women would lose their leadership roles and other active roles, such as positions as delegates to the local, state, and national affiliates. The women were completely justified in their fear, as the men pressed for amalgamation they also worked to ensure that the uneven wage scale remained. For example, in May 1925 the waiters' union presented a new contract to the WPU, which outlined a new reduced scale for women.<sup>28</sup> The Financial Secretary Lena Mattausch responded and "told the sisters that the only thing to do was to stand firm and hold the conditions that they have made and showed where the cooks and waiters were not working in conjunction with [the] local but against [it]."<sup>29</sup> The threat of lowered wages for women in restaurant work was not just a local issue, an affiliate of the international union HERE, the Waiters Union Local 239 of Seattle, proposed an 85% wage scale for female workers, which the WPU recognized as being "injurious to women workers" and wanted to protest such an action at the national HERE

convention.<sup>30</sup> By 1927, the reduced wage scale for women was voted down.<sup>31</sup> It was after the 1927 international convention that the WPU delegates reported back to their local on the failure of mixed gender locals.<sup>32</sup> In Butte by 1928, the Central Café and other establishments were reported as replacing men with lower paid women, so the CWU feared losing sixteen of its members, which the men reported as significant enough to threaten the union's existence.<sup>33</sup> Instead of agreeing not to replace the men, the WPU suggested that the establishments pay the waitresses the same wages as waiters, a scale that would be in effect in any place where "combination work" existed.<sup>34</sup> The joint committee of the Cooks' and Waiters' Union, the teamsters, painters, machinists, and the Workingmen's Union unanimously voted in favor of the WPU's decision.<sup>35</sup>

Prior to the struggle with the male culinary union, the WPU worked to define its jurisdiction and establish strong union rules.<sup>36</sup> Originally affiliated with the Knights of Labor, "the first labor organization to place women on equal footing with men," the WPU aligned itself with industrial unions, including the radical Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Over time, as trade unions like the Clerks' Union and the Laundry Workers' Union opened their doors to women workers, the WPU redefined its jurisdiction and by 1929 organized all working-women in hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, delicatessens, boarding houses, lodging houses, produce houses, lunch rooms, all factories and public buildings in Silver Bow County.<sup>37</sup> Essentially, any women working in the county could become a WPU member if they were not welcome in a more narrowly defined trade union.

The broad jurisdiction of the WPU allowed the women to negotiate with the male unions over potential members. By positioning itself as a union for all working-women, the WPU had an advantage over the male trade unions because it had a large pool of workers to organize. Forced to navigate in the male union-dominated community, the women gained a certain level of respect and support from their union brethren and early meeting minutes reflect the union solidarity the women experienced. In 1917, business agents from the WPU and the Cooks' and Waiters' Union walked through town together and visited all the cafes on Arizona Street to check on conditions and to recruit new members.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the 1910s-1920s, when the WPU business agent was having difficulties organizing an establishment they would report the uncooperative employer to the trades council. The WPU was forced to learn to use its unique position in the labor community with care, sought assistance and accommodated the male unions when appropriate.

While the male-dominated population and consumer market was a welcome attraction for Butte's male inhabitants, women had a more ambivalent attitude. For instance, there was a conflicting sentiment regarding the red-light district. Many women felt as though it was an unavoidable vice: accommodating men's sexual desires and subsequently, resulting in safer streets for Butte's respectable women. Others believed the district to be morally degrading, and had the potential to lure young women into prostitution for higher wages which allowed them access to the new consumer society. For example, in 1920 the *Butte Daily Bulletin* ran several stories about the Symons and Hennessy's Department Stores' female cashiers, claiming their low wages drove them

into prostitution. Investigators reported that prostitutes employed at department stores were there to recruit young women into their profession and if the clerks refused, they would likely lose their jobs.<sup>39</sup> The investigator was never named in any of the articles, and it seems unlikely that many clerks turned to prostitution, but that was a common argument reformers and labor organizations, such as the IWW, used to justify raising women's wages.

The fear expressed by Butte's newspapers regarding the allure of prostitution was not uncommon in that period. The entrance of women into wage labor clashed with their role as wives and mothers. The expectation for women was to be the picture of morality and piety, to be quiet and submissive. Wage work was a place in which morality and women's virtues were at risk, and exposed them to the harsh reality of labor and possible moral corruption. One of Butte's local papers, the *Butte Miner*, reported several times throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the risk women faced if not paid higher wages or given appropriate opportunities for employment.

An issue that was also a concern for workers of the period was the eight-hour workday. The eight-hour movement extended to labor unions across the nation. The western labor movement maintained close communication from affiliated unions, therefore when one local needed assistance, other unions tried to help. For example, when the Colorado miners' pursued an eight-hour day, they requested the WPU's support. In the summer of 1903, the International Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) asked for assistance from the WPU in obtaining an eight-hour day as well. The women appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of an eight-

hour day for their members, and since the women managed to secure a ten-hour workday in 1903, the request from HERE was not surprising. In fact, the women took their reduced workday seriously and charged members fines if they worked over the negotiated hours without pay. In 1903, the union even went so far as to suspend their president, Bridget Walsh, because she worked more than the ten hours that union rules specified.<sup>40</sup> Not only did the members receive fines but the establishment in violation was declared unfair to organized labor, which ultimately meant that no union member would patronize the “unfair” business until the issue was resolved.<sup>41</sup>

Montana state law established an eight-hour workday for women in the early 1900s, and the WPU strictly enforced the law among its members. However, by 1928, there was a movement to increase the workday for women to nine hours, a movement that the WPU fought adamantly.<sup>42</sup> The WPU, along with many of the other members of the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council (SBTLC), worked to assure that the nine-hour day failed. According to the union meeting minutes, the vice president of the Montana Federation of Labor “protested vigorously” against the hourly increase for women, as did the Clerks Union and the Teamsters Union.<sup>43</sup> By 1 March 1928, the eight-hour day remained in place, unchanged.<sup>44</sup>

The union was very adamant regarding members and their adherence to union rules. In 1917, those that violated union rules were held accountable and if unable to mend their ways, they would at least be suspended from the local or worse yet, they would be fired from their jobs.<sup>45</sup> When two unnamed members were “trying to disrupt” the local, there was a general discussion at the meeting which resulted in the business

agent, Lena Antinolli (aka Mattausch), who received instructions to notify the proprietors where the two women worked and “have the said girls layed [sic] off.”<sup>46</sup> The enforcement of union rules also applied to the business owners that employed union workers; the WPU expected full cooperation from employers and would not hesitate to prosecute violators fully. For example, in November 1917, the business agent reported that girls were working over time at the Golden Seal Café, and because such action was a violation of state law, the WPU had the owner arrested.<sup>47</sup> In another similar situation, the owner of the Woodrow Café violated the eight-hour workday in 1918, and was fined \$50 and served time in jail.<sup>48</sup> By January, the “trouble had been adjusted” and the girls received their overtime pay, but the union card was not returned.<sup>49</sup>

In Butte, women had to abide by the customs of their community and live within the socially prescribed rules of morality and within their defined sphere as caregivers and mothers. However, in Butte, participation in the labor movement meant union women also had to be attentive to what was happening in the local labor community. When union houses, (businesses that were organized into labor unions) violated a labor law or union rule, it would be declared “unfair” to labor. The agreement in the labor community was that no union member could patronize the “unfair” business, under threat of monetary fines or possible suspension from their union. Therefore, the WPU needed to stay aware of what was going on in the larger labor community. When Mr. McLean of the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union challenged the WPU about its adherence to union rules, it responded that it “knew what action to take towards an unfair house.”<sup>50</sup> At the SBTLC meetings, various union representatives would report on their unions’ activities,

particularly if they were out on strike, so the WPU sent delegates to attend the weekly meeting and report back. For example, in 1923 the Clerks Union was on strike, which directly impacted some clerical workers who were WPU members. Since they were members of the SBTLC, the women could not cross the picket line and go to work if fellow workers in their field were on strike. The union also sought information regarding which businesses were declared “unfair to labor,” so as to not patronize those establishments.<sup>51</sup>

Whether fighting for its right to represent its members against another union or fighting an employer for higher wages, the WPU enabled women to live within societal boundaries, but also protect their rights as employees and protect members from abusive behavior in the workplace, which sometimes required behavior outside of their usual domain. Women reported their grievances to their union and the “business agents negotiated grievances but would also take after a boss with a broomstick if he gave their “girls” a hard time.”<sup>52</sup> According to Mary Murphy, “the WPU had a reputation for strictly enforcing its work rules...The officers were known as implacable adversaries of employers who mistreated union members.”<sup>53</sup> The female business agents would do whatever necessary to ensure their “girls” were treated properly. These women were certainly not afraid to stand up for their rights or to use whatever means necessary to ensure fair treatment by their employers. One Butte waitress expressed herself clearly when asked to perform duties outside of her job description, when she refused her boss cursed her. She then “smashed his nose with a syrup pitcher and then, for good measure,

threw a plate in his face.”<sup>54</sup> The woman’s actions were not necessarily the actions of a respectable Victorian woman in the early 1900s.

Prior to 1920, the Women’s Protective Union operated with seemingly little interference from its male union associates. However, after the WPU strike in 1920, the male culinary workers, the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union (CWU), began challenging the women’s all female policy, and pressured the women to amalgamate with them. On 16 September 1921, the WPU’s executive board reported that “a jurisdictional squabble was coming up and local 22 [Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union] was going to fight to a finish.”<sup>55</sup> The fight was on and the women were not going to back down. On April 21, 1922, the battle began, with the CWU filing a complaint of an unknown nature against the WPU with the trades council.<sup>56</sup> By August, the women filed a protest against the CWU’s wage scale card and its use of the word “persons” within its contract. The women fought such wording because the ambiguous language potentially allowed the CWU to gain jurisdiction over the WPU members in establishments that employed the two separate culinary union members. The SBTLC determined that the women had no grievance.<sup>57</sup> Instead, the council recommended the two unions have their executive boards meet and “work in harmony,” which they attempted to do. Ultimately, the CWU took the questionable word out of its contract.<sup>58</sup>

In 1923, the two unions continued their struggle. In July, the CWU presented a grievance regarding house cards that were displayed in union houses. The cards outlined union rules and terms that employers were required to follow. The male union wanted to print joint house cards, and put the name of the women’s union on them as well.

Essentially, the house card would indicate that the women were part of the male union, not a separate union. This was a similar ambiguous contract as the one the WPU fought in 1922. The women did not want to amalgamate with the men, and fought the actions of the CWU with fervor. After a joint meeting with the WPU's executive board, the men agreed to remove the women's union name from their cards.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps in an effort to mend relations with the men's union, the WPU made concessions and agreed not to replace waiters if they were laid off as a body, but if they were laid off as individuals gradually, then the women could replace the men without being in violation of union regulations.<sup>60</sup> The women understood the need for compromise, and understood the SBTLC's rules, so the WPU followed union policy, but would not back down to the male culinary union.

The Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council played a large role in Butte's labor community. In March, 1924 the SBTLC received a communication from Samuel Gompers, "allowing them sixty days to unseat any union that was not international."<sup>61</sup> So, the Cooks' and Waiters' Union, along with the Butchers and Clerks unions, were unseated from the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council because they were not international unions; they were independent, with no affiliation to the national labor movement.<sup>62</sup> However, the Cooks' and Waiters' Union was accepted back into the council on 6 March 1925, which must have been when the union affiliated with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE).<sup>63</sup> The CWU's affiliation with HERE gave it the perfect opportunity to continue its efforts to force the women to join the men's union, as the WPU was also affiliated with HERE. It was after this date that

the situation erupted, and in May 1925 the women claimed that “the cooks and waiters were not working in conjunction with our local but against us.”<sup>64</sup> The international union suggested that the women take a referendum vote regarding the amalgamation with the CWU and on 1 October 1926, 203 women voted, with the majority of 177 voting against amalgamation.<sup>65</sup> HERE, the international union, supported the women “to keep their distinctive union name and to retain their female only membership policy” and subsequently did not force the WPU to amalgamate with the male union until the mid to late twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> The women’s union merged with the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union, Local 22 in 1973 to become the Culinary and Miscellaneous Workers Union, Local 457 under the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union.<sup>67</sup>

For women, there was an appeal to join a union not only to provide some level of job security and economic justice, but also to tap into a network of other women. Union membership among women provided members with not only a network of union support, but also strong friendships, similar to the role of volunteer associations and social clubs. For Blanche Copenhaver, a WPU member, the union was her life in Butte, and she felt that everyone should have a union.<sup>68</sup> WPU member Val Webster expressed similar sentiments; she never missed a union meeting and considered herself “union all the way through.”<sup>69</sup> Union women formed bonds outside of formal union business, “Union women worked and played together. When union meetings adjourned, groups of women went out for ice cream or to a show.”<sup>70</sup> For many union members, unions were second families and in Butte, if you worked, you were union. For Val Webster, a member of Butte’s WPU, “Union was friendship,” and she considered herself, “union all the way

through” because her family was union; her mother was a member of the original WPU, her father and stepfather were both members of the BMU.<sup>71</sup>

Although women in Butte, Montana may initially have been a minority, according to some accounts, their small numbers were still too great. On 11 March 1904 the *Butte Miner* reported, too many women were moving to Butte with no employment opportunities: “over 300 unemployed women” already arrived “for whom no work is available.”<sup>72</sup> The scarcity of work for women caused the Florence Crittenton Rescue Circle to warn the women contemplating Butte as a possible destination that they should, “stay where they are.”<sup>73</sup> In order to assist women with procuring respectable employment, the Women’s Protective Union operated a free employment office for women, as was the practice of many unions. In 1895, the union established the Women’s Industrial Institute in Butte, which provided clean, affordable lodging for women workers and conducted classes for women on a variety of social issues including job skill training and political education.<sup>74</sup> The female union was not the only organization that provided women with assistance upon their arrival in Butte; the Florence Crittenton Rescue Circle also gave women temporary “respectable quarters.”<sup>75</sup> The WPU worked to ensure that women in the community had the opportunity to obtain employment and simultaneously allowed the union to recruit new members.

The Women’s Protective Union actively fought for advancement for its members by using direct action methods to obtain its goals. The first evidence of this was the WPU’s fight for the right to run its own free employment agency in the early 1900s. While forced to position themselves in the male-dominated union community, the WPU

fought for issues that concerned its membership, but also fought for its appropriate place in the local labor community. Other evidence of the union's activism was its effort to expand the involvement of its rank-and-file members and to insert itself into the broader labor movement. The WPU actively pursued knowledge about the direction of Butte's labor movement, and the state and national labor movements by sending delegates to the local trade council meetings, and state and national labor conventions. Another example of the women's activism was the strike for higher wages in 1920, which last for more than a month. WPU members participated in the fight for higher wages with the support of the labor community, which illustrates the effectiveness of the women's activism and their place in the union movement.

The first evidence of the WPU's activism and the subsequent support from Butte's labor movement was in 1904 when two employment agencies filed a complaint against the Women's Protective Union. The agencies requested that the union pay a fee for a business license to operate its employment agency, which was a benefit to its members. The union protested because it did not charge its members for employment assistance, arguing it was common practice and various labor unions "provided their membership with jobs without charge."<sup>76</sup> The WPU went one-step further in its self-defense and wrote a resolution that accused the two employment agencies, Saint Paul and the People's Employment Office, of misrepresenting jobs, charging "exorbitant fees," and not fulfilling their pursuit of employment for their customers.<sup>77</sup> In the resolution, the WPU charged that the agencies "criminally conducted business" and petitioned the city to revoke their business licenses.<sup>78</sup> The accusation was a serious one, and one that Saint

Paul Employment office manager G.H. Morrison resented. He declared that the resolution was from the “beginning to end the unqualified statements of a single individual, who is irresponsible for anything said,” although he did not specify who the individual was.<sup>79</sup> Morrison continued with his position stating that the union did not sanction the resolution submitted to the newspaper and that he could obtain an affidavit stating that the union never heard of the resolution at all.<sup>80</sup>

The resolution, however, was not fabricated, and in fact, was not without support. According to the *Butte Miner*, by 1904 the Women’s Protective Union represented over one thousand working-women and “girls” in the city.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the WPU received the support of the Butte Miners’ Union, the Workingmen’s Union, the Teamsters’ Union, and the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council. The SBTLC voted unanimously to pass a separate resolution stating its support of the WPU and countered Morrison’s published attack on the WPU.<sup>82</sup> Yet another resolution was submitted to the *Butte Miner*, this from the Miners’ Union stating, “fee employment offices are recruiting agencies in time of strike, and union-wrecking agencies in time of quiet...resolved, by the Butte Miners’ union that we heartily endorse the demand of the Women’s Protective union [sic].”<sup>83</sup> The union won the dispute, at an unknown date, but the WPU meeting minutes on March 30, 1905 reported that the union voted and made Annie Murphy trustee of the free employment office.<sup>84</sup>

The WPU’s fight against the employment agencies was not won without the assistance of its union brethren. Yet early affiliations of the Women’s Protective Union are unclear, due to the lack of primary evidence from the first thirteen years of the

union's existence. Aside from a few newspaper articles documenting its formation, the WPU's first thirteen years' activities are largely unknown. Organizational records begin in 1903, with the meeting minutes from weekly union meetings. By that time, the WPU was a well-organized union with a formal agenda and a strong membership. Women workers even sought out the WPU and asked to become members, including the candy workers and the women at the macaroni factory, the Imperial Pasta Manufacturing and Mercantile, Co.<sup>85</sup>

In 1903, the WPU received a communication from the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council (SBTLC) asking the women to affiliate with them again; it is unknown when the council had previously approached the women's union. The women placed the issue on the table for consideration and ultimately decided to affiliate with the labor council.<sup>86</sup> By March 9, 1905 the union decided that it should send more delegates to the SBTLC. The WPU's involvement deepened by the 1920s; the union meetings included regular reports from the council delegates who attended the council meetings weekly. The Women's Protective Union clearly recognized the importance of the labor council and the nationwide labor movement; it even appointed a committee in 1905 to visit "the different unions so as to thoroughly understand the new labor movement."<sup>87</sup> To further assist its members in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of labor, the WPU established a library in 1892, and by 1895 it conducted "weekly classes for women workers on topics ranging from job skill training, economic and political education, personal hygiene and the care of sick children."<sup>88</sup>

Educational aims were not limited to the WPU, the IWW also established a reading room in Butte “as a step toward educating the masses” and in 1905 presented the WPU with Walter Thomas Mills’ book *Struggle for Existence* that discussed socialism, economics, politics, and capitalism.<sup>89</sup> The appeal for the women to affiliate with the radical industrial union was not surprising, considering their history of alliances. The women’s union minutes indicated the women had already affiliated with the radical Western Federation of Miners and with the American Labor Union, as early as the summer of 1903.<sup>90</sup> The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) by 1898 affiliated with the Montana Trades and Labor Council, organized three years earlier in 1895. The state federation originally associated with the American Federation of Labor but split because to the Montana union men “the AFL was politically conservative and narrowly protectionist in its policy of only organizing and representing skilled craftworkers.”<sup>91</sup> The Western Federation of Miners organized the new industrial union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in January 1905. In fact, it was the WFM’s president, Charles Moyer, and the vice president, Charles O. Mahoney, who spoke at WPU meetings “persuading [them] to join” the IWW, which the membership unanimously voted to do on October 19, 1905.<sup>92</sup> The appeal for the syndicalist IWW was logical, but unfortunately, no records survive to detail the WPU’s involvement with the Wobblies.

Due to a gap in the WPU’s records, the date of the split with the IWW is unknown, but the women’s affiliation with the WFM would imply that they could have followed the federation in their disassociation with the Wobblies in 1907. This seems

plausible considering the WPU affiliated with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union to become Local 457 in the same year the WFM withdrew from the IWW. In addition, the leadership role that the WFM played in the women's union would explain why the women would follow the federation's lead.

Perhaps it was the women's connection to the WFM that precipitated the numerous communications from other western unions regarding issues important to the labor movement in the west. It was during the early 1900s that Colorado's mining district in Teller County was in upheaval. The Western Federation of Miners played a significant role in the dispute since they affiliated with western miners across the Rocky Mountains. In mid-February 1904, a committee approached the WPU from the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Council, with the president of the American Labor Union, and representatives of the Teamsters', the Cooks' and Waiters', and the Farmers' Union of Missoula. After the committee members' speeches, they asked for financial assistance for the "struggling miners of Colorado" and their fight for an eight-hour day.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout the spring and summer of 1904, the WPU entertained numerous speakers who lectured on the situation in Colorado, including Emma Langdon who wrote a book about the strikes at Cripple Creek. Ida Couch Hazlett, a Socialist Party orator and writer, editor of the *Montana News* and activist in the suffrage movement, spoke before the WPU on 4 August 1904 and gave a lecture on unionism and its benefits, as well as the Colorado strike.<sup>94</sup> The *Butte Miner* reported on the situation in Colorado almost daily throughout the month of June, and reported local unions' mass meetings. Over 3,500 Butte citizens protested the actions of Colorado's governor for "depriving of citizens their

constitutional rights” and appealed to President Roosevelt for a “complete and impartial investigation.”<sup>95</sup> Although there was no mention in the WPU organizational records detailing the action or the appeal to the president, the constant updates and communications from Colorado would imply that the women would have supported, and attended, the protest.

By the 1910s, the WPU had aligned itself with the American Federation of Labor. In December, 1916 it sent delegates to the AFL convention in Helena.<sup>96</sup> It was after this period that the Women’s Protective Union, all four hundred members, went on strike, effectively shutting down almost every restaurant and café in town.<sup>97</sup> In 1920, a strike committee presented a proposed wage scale to the employers association, which they met with a flat refusal. The union took a vote on whether or not it should walk out on strike; although only a minority voted, the outcome was 111 votes for and seven against. After the women sought the SBTLC’s endorsement, which they received, they jointly walked out on strike with the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union (CWU). At the time, the WPU and the CWU worked under the same union card, so the women asked the men not to move forward on any action until the WPU could obtain sanctions from its international union headquarters; the men complied. At 3 o’clock on March 31, 1920, the men and the women restaurant workers walked out on strike and removed all union house cards “out of all houses that would not sign up with both locals.”<sup>98</sup>

The smaller Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union, with a reported membership of 175, and the Women’s Protective Union were not alone in their struggle for higher wages.<sup>99</sup> Other union workers went out on strike, some in sympathy like the Butchers’ and Bakers’

Unions, and the other unions, like the Teamsters, threatened to do the same.<sup>100</sup> Theaters in town posted signs that expressed their anti-union sentiments and disagreement with the striking union workers, “If any member of the Associated Industries is unfair, then so are we.”<sup>101</sup> In response to the theater owners/managers posting of the signs, union musicians, stagehands, and theater employees went out on strike and “joined the ranks of the strikers in Butte,” which added another 400 to the union strikers in the community.<sup>102</sup> Ironically, the union theater workers had just won higher wages, but because their fellow union workers were on strike, and because of the position that the theater took by placing the anti-union signs, the theater workers “had no choice but to strike.”<sup>103</sup> The theater workers were affiliated with the SBTLC and because the theaters declared themselves “unfair,” the union workers there had to refuse to work until they removed the signs, which happened three days after the employees walked out.<sup>104</sup>

By the end of April 1920, the CWU and WPU went into arbitration to settle their contract, and by 2 May, both unions voted to end the strike, which had effectively closed every “restaurant and hotel dining rooms,” and “larger eating houses of the city for the entire period of the strike.”<sup>105</sup> The women originally rejected the “fifty-fifty” offer of employers, which was essentially half of the wage increase requested by the WPU. Fortunately, the men’s CWU refused to take any action until the women came to a decision regarding the settlement, which gave agency to the women to assess the situation fully prior to a decision.<sup>106</sup> According to the *Butte Miner*, 2 May 1920, the strike ended with a contract for the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union that set the pay scale was from \$25 to \$37.50 per week. The WPU achieved a significantly higher wage than most women were

earning across the nation, “\$17 to \$18 a week,” which was a full three to four dollars a week more than women’s estimated minimum wage, but it was still half of what the maximum men made.<sup>107</sup> The unions managed to obtain a union contract with every café and restaurant in town by the end of the three-week strike.

The WPU was a force to be reckoned with when it came to protecting its members. The union women knew how to navigate within the labor community to utilize their union brethren when necessary, but also could defend themselves when needed. Often forced to deal with male employers who were seemingly unwilling to negotiate with women, the WPU sought assistance from the SBTLC. Even when the Cooks’ and Waiters’ Union, Local 22 tried unsuccessfully for decades to persuade the WPU members, the SBTLC, and HERE International Union that the female union should be part of the male local and not part of a separate female union, the women stood strong against the pressure to amalgamate. Due to the WPU’s strong leadership, the women managed to stay gender segregated until the international union forced them to consolidate with the male culinary workers.

With members ranging from young sixteen-year-old girls to women in their fifties, the WPU fought adamantly to protect the interests of its membership. The business agent often walked the downtown blocks, stopping by the numerous union houses where WPU members worked to check working conditions and to ensure that union rules were followed. Members were encouraged to attend meetings and to bring in new members to the union. The Women’s Protective Union Local 457 was a unique, diverse, and influential union that participated in local, state, and national labor

movements. The WPU worked to ensure its members were treated with dignity and justice.

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<sup>1</sup> *Butte Daily Bulletin*, 6 June 1890, no author listed. Vertical Files, Folder “Labor Unions: Women’s Protective Union,” Butte Silver Bow County Public Archives (Hereafter BSBA), Butte, Montana.

<sup>2</sup> *Anaconda Standard*, 6 June 1890.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*. (Urbana: Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1991), 77.

<sup>4</sup> Stacy A. Flaherty, “Boycott in Butte: Organized Labor and the Chinese Community, 1896-1897,” *Montana Magazine of Western History* (Hereafter MMWH), Vol. 37, no. 1 (Winter, 1987), 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Unknown publication, possibly the *Butte Miner*, 1891. Vertical Files, Folder entitled, “Labor Unions: WPU,” BSBA.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Flaherty, “Boycott in Butte,” 36.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1922-1929, WPU Meeting Minutes 1916-1922.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1890.

<sup>21</sup> *Anaconda Standard*, 6 June 1890.

<sup>22</sup> Unknown publication, possibly the *Butte Miner*, 1891. Vertical Files, Folder entitled: “Labor Unions: Women’s Protective Union,” BSBA.

<sup>23</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 1903-1905, 10 March 1904, Manuscript Collection #174 (Hereafter MC #174), Box 14, Folder 14-1, Montana Historical Society Archives (Hereafter MHS), Helena, Montana.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 and 28 February 1904.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*. (Urbana: Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1991), 161.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>27</sup> Women’s Protective Union No. 457 Butte, Montana By-Laws, 1929. Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

<sup>28</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 15 May 1925, MC #174, Box 14, Folder 14-1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 May 1925.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 May 1925.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 August 1927.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 August 1927.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 November 1928.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 November 1928.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 November 1928.

<sup>36</sup> No records survive of the WPU prior to 1903.

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- <sup>37</sup> Women's Protective Union No. 457 Butte, Montana By-Laws, 1929. Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula.
- <sup>38</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 23 March 1917, LHC #47, Box 1, BSBA.
- <sup>39</sup> *Butte Daily Bulletin*, 9 February 1920 and 11 February 1920, Articles were in the Vertical Files, Folder entitled "Labor Unions: Women's Protective Union, Marilyn Maney," BSBA.
- <sup>40</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1903-1905, 20 August 1903, MC #174, Box 13, Folder 13-8, MHS.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 July 1904.
- <sup>42</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 1922-1929. 21 December 1928. MC#174, Box 14, Folder 14-1, MHS.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 December 1928 through 1 March 1929.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 March 1929.
- <sup>45</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1916-1922, 1 June 1917, Labor History Collection (Hereafter LHC) #47, Box 1, Butte Silver Bow Public Archives (Hereafter BSBA), Butte, Montana.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 July 1917.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 November 1917.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 April 1918.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 November 1917, 11 and 18 January 1917.
- <sup>50</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1922-1929, 5 June 1925, MC#174.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 October 1923.
- <sup>52</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 21.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>55</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1916-1922, 16 September 1921, LHC #47, BSBA.
- <sup>56</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1922-1929, 21 April 1922, MC #174, MHS.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September 1922.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September 1922.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 August 1923.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 August 1923.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 October 1924.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 October 1924.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 March 1925.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 May 1925.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 October 1926.
- <sup>66</sup> Marilyn Maney, "Working Women's Union Fought for Social Justice – 100 Years Ago," *Montana Family Union VOICE*, December 1990, Vertical Files, Folder entitled "Labor Unions: Women's Protective Union, Marilyn Maney," BSBA, 5. Also see WPU Meeting minutes from 1916-1930.
- <sup>67</sup> Conflicting dates over amalgamation, Marilyn Maney, "Working Women's Union Fought for Social Justice—100 Years Ago," cites 1983 as date the WPU and CWU merged, but according to the Oral History Collection at BSBA, the two interviews done in 1980 by Mary Murphy, one with Valentine Webster, and one with Blanche Copenhaver, indicate that the merger took place seven years prior to their 1980 interview, which would have been 1973. Another article, "Bucket Girl: Yard Girl: The Women Who Worked in Butte: History of the Women's Protective Union—Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartender's International Union, Local 457, AFL-CIO," *Catering Industry Employee*, October 1975, Folder entitled "Labor Unions: Women's Protective Union Marilyn Maney, BSBA, states that the merger occurred in 1973.
- <sup>68</sup> Interview with Blanche Copenhaver, 21 February 1980, Oral History Collection, Vertical Files, Folder E-3, BSBA, Butte, Montana.
- <sup>69</sup> Interview with Val Webster, 24 February 1980, Oral History Collection, Vertical Files, Folder L-3, BSBA, Butte, Montana.
- <sup>70</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 21.
- <sup>71</sup> Val Webster interview, BSBA.
- <sup>72</sup> *Butte Miner*, 11 March 1904.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>74</sup> Marilyn Maney, "Working Women's Union Fought for Social Justice—100 Years Ago," *Montana Family Union VOICE*, December 1990, Vertical Files, Folder entitled "Labor Unions: Women's Protective Union, Marilyn Maney," 5-6.
- <sup>75</sup> *Butte Miner*, 11 March 1904.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 February 1904.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 February 1904.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 February 1904.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 February 1904.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 February 1904.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 February 1904.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 and 14 March 1904.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 March 1904.
- <sup>84</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1903-1905, 30 March 1905, MC#174, Box 13, Folder 13-8, MHS.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 October 1903 and 21 December 1905; and the Polk Directory for Butte, Montana, 1902.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 July 1903.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 May 1905.
- <sup>88</sup> Marilyn Maney, "Working Women's Union Fought for Social Justice-100Years Ago," 4-6.
- <sup>89</sup> *Anaconda Standard*, 21 October 1905 and WPU Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1905.
- <sup>90</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1903-1905, 20 August 1903.
- <sup>91</sup> Jerry Calvert, *Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920*. (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1988), 17.
- <sup>92</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1905; 5 and 19 October 1905.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 February 1904.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1904.
- <sup>95</sup> *Anaconda Standard*, 20 June 1904.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 December 1916.
- <sup>97</sup> *Butte Miner*, 2 April 1920.
- <sup>98</sup> WPU Meeting Minutes 1916-1920, 2 April 1920.
- <sup>99</sup> *Butte Miner*, 2 April 1920.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 April 1920.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 April 1920.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 April 1920.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 April 1920.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 April 1920.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May 1920.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 April 1920.
- <sup>107</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 34.

## CONCLUSION

Working-women have historically organized for workplace justice, fighting for higher wages and better working conditions. Often denied entrance into male unions, women formed their own organizations to empower themselves collectively. Even when allowed into male unions, women did not hold leadership positions and were often only rank-and-file members. In company run towns, like Butte, Montana with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's stronghold on the community, unions provided an avenue for empowerment, particularly for women. The Women's Protective Union, organized, run, and comprised of women, illustrates the strong union women of Butte during the early twentieth century and their fight for justice as women and as workers, in a predominately-male town.

Butte's women worked outside the home because they were widows or their husbands were unable to provide for the family's basic needs. Many women worked to become part of the new consumer culture linked to mass production, usually working until they married. Whatever the reason women pursued wage labor, the result in Butte was that if they did work during the early part of the twentieth century, they were likely union members. Union membership for many members was about more than wages and hours worked. It was also about justice, loyalty, and economic survival. Butte was unique in the United States because of its strong union ideology and within that labor movement the WPU played a part in building a stronger union community.

The women's participation in the local labor movement was in line with the male unions. The only vocal resistance to the female union was from the male culinary union, the men pressed for decades to amalgamate the women into their own union. The WPU's fierce resistance to merging with the Cooks' and Waiters' Local 22 illustrates its independence. It also demonstrates the women's unwillingness to lose leadership positions within the union, which would certainly have happened if amalgamation with the men had occurred prior to 1973. The union women ensured that their leadership roles within the union were not lost to the male culinary union. Clearly, the WPU understood that few women held leadership positions within its international union, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, and also had no doubt that the same would happen to them. The resoluteness of the WPU to fight the Cooks' and Waiters' Union speaks to its commitment to maintain an all female union in every aspect. The WPU was composed of women, run by women and organized by women; and they meant to keep it that way.

The WPU was unique in its efforts to organize all working-women in Butte. It worked to assure that most women whom sought union representation were able to access its organization. By declaring itself as a women's union and not narrowly defining itself as an industrial or trade union, it was able to organize women working in the western community in virtually every trade and industry. Effective and clever, the women gained members based solely on gender. While this study begins to uncover the activities of the WPU, there are over forty years of the organization's actions that have not been fully

investigated. The unique aspects of the female union provide an interesting field of study regarding female union membership and activities.

Perhaps this thesis will prompt further investigation of the Women's Protective Union in Butte, Montana. At least, hopefully, it will provide insight into a union that provided its members with a sense of empowerment and sought more than workplace justice for its members. The members of the Women's Protective Union deserve to have their story told because it is an incredible account of justice, activism, and the strength of union women. This is not where the story ends, but rather it is just the beginning.

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