

Appeal to Reason: A Fight against Child Labor

The major Socialist newspaper in the country, the *Appeal to Reason*, was published for many years in Kansas. Many well-known socialists wrote for the paper, one such activist was Mary Jones. Jones was an Irish immigrant who lost her husband and her four children in 1867 to yellow fever. With the loss of her family, she moved to Chicago to become a seamstress. She eventually became a labor union organizer. She was often referred to as "Mother Jones." Jones, like many other reformers of the time, worked for child labor laws throughout the country. In October of 1908 "Mother Jones" published the following article in *Appeal to Reason*.

...When I was in Alabama thirteen years ago, they had no child labor law. Since then they passed a very lame one. They evade the law in this way; a child who has passed his or her twelfth year can take ... his younger brothers and sisters from six years on, and (take) them to work with him. They are not on the pay roll, but the pay for these little ones goes into the elder one's pay. So that when you ...look at the pay roll you think this one child makes quite a good (wage) when perhaps there are two or three younger than he (working for that wage).

One woman told me that her mother had gone into that mill and worked, and took four children with her. She says, "I have been in the mill since I was four years old, I am now thirty-four." She looked to me as if she was sixty. She had a kindly nature if treated right, but her whole life and spirit was crushed out beneath the iron wheels of ---greed... She knew nothing but the whiz of a machinery in the factory...

Pretend you are a newspaper editor in 1908. Write your own editorial either for or against child labor. Writers who wanted change generally used personal stories that played on the readers emotions to make their point.