



## Fannie Never Flinched: One Woman's Courage in the Struggle for American Labor Union Rights

**Mary Cronk Farrell**

Harry N. Abrams (Nov 1, 2016)

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On August 26, 1919, Fannie Sellins was shot dead in Natrona, Pennsylvania, while trying to defuse a fight between striking coal miners and police deputies. In *Fannie Never Flinched*, Mary Cronk Farrell charts her heroine's transformation from sweatshop worker to union president and martyred protester. Broadening her scope, she also springboards off Fannie's experience to give a concise history of the labor movement in America.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Fannie, a thirtysomething widow, was working at the Marx & Haas Clothing Co. factory in St. Louis, Missouri, to support her four children. The sweatshop demanded ten- to fourteen-hour days, six days a week, in poor working conditions. Fannie and her fellow seamstresses formed a local branch of the United Garment Workers of America union in 1902. Marx & Haas soon agreed to nearly double wages and to shorten the workday. It was just the first of Fannie's many triumphs. She traveled between the Midwest and the East Coast to hold the picket line during strikes and negotiate for pay raises.

Hers was a life of highs and lows: she became president of the local union branch in 1909, but in 1913 she was arrested during a fight surrounding a West Virginia coal miners' strike and held in the county jail for four months. Though Farrell brands Fannie's death a murder, a coroner's jury exonerated the police who were involved, saying that Fannie had incited a riot.

"Today, we still need leaders with Fannie's courage, commitment, and compassion, leaders who will not flinch but will keep dreaming of and working toward fairness for all," Farrell insists. Her book—full of archival research, period photographs, and background information on the labor struggle, including a timeline of key events and a glossary of terms like arbitration and xenophobia—is a worthy tribute to Fannie.

REBECCA FOSTER (Children's 2017)

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