

The Rose

The Bread and Roses Strike

As we go marching,
marching, we stand
together tall
The rising of the women
means the rising of us
all
No more the drudge and
idler,
ten that toil while one
reposes
But a sharing of life's
glories,
bread and roses, bread
and roses!

In early 1912, in the textile manufacturing centre of Lawrence, Massachusetts, over 20,000 workers walked out of the mills to protest a rollback in their already meagre pay. When the work week was reduced by law from 56 to 54 hours a week, the textile bosses cut back the workers' wages to match. The massive walk-out, organized by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), became known as the "Three Loaves Strike," referring to what could be bought for the amount that wages were being cut, "The Singing Strike" because the songs of the IWW were being heard everywhere, and "The Bread and Roses Strike"



because young women workers carried a banner with the slogan "We want bread and roses too." The strike was begun and led by mainly immigrant women, creating unity and solidarity across ethnic, religious and cultural lines.

The strike lasted from the 11th of January to March 14th. Facing police and strikebreakers, the strikers bravely held on until their demands for better wages and working conditions were met. They were drenched with icy water from fire hoses; mothers and children were beaten and

clubbed; a pregnant woman was beaten so badly, she miscarried and another woman, Anna LoPizzo, was shot by the police.

A century later, workers face drastic rollbacks as we continue to fight the unjust inequalities between the 99% "that toil" while the 1% "reposes." As trade union women, when we sing "Bread and Roses" in memory of these brave sisters, its words are still relevant to us.

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Middle Eastern Feminisms

Our media is full of images and stories about Middle Eastern and Muslim women. We're encouraged to focus on their victimization and the fact that many of them wear some form of veil. But where do we get the stories of women who are organizing and fighting back in the Middle East?

When thousands of protesters gathered in Cairo in the mass demonstrations that toppled the dictator Hosni Mubarak last year, many of them were women and girls. In fact, one of the people who started it all was a young woman named Asmaa Mahfouz, inspired by the first uprisings in Tunisia, who spoke up in her video blog and on Facebook against apathy: "I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I'll stand alone and hold up a banner, perhaps people will show some honour... if we ...want to live in dignity on this land, we have to go down on January 25th, we'll go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights." Her video went viral and thousands heeded her call, leading the Egyptian government to block Facebook. The Mubarak regime ended on February 11th, just weeks later.

Women activists like Asmaa Mahfouz or Nobel Prize winner



Young Muslim female demonstrator, Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt, February 9 2011

Tawakkol Karman in Yemen have been leaders of the "Arab Spring" of revolutionary uprisings across the Middle East. Far from being the docile women portrayed by Western media who just need to be "liberated" by our armed forces, these women are actively speaking out, risking violence or jail time, and working to advance women's freedoms. Naomi Wolf writes that in Tahrir Square, women were not only "support workers," serving food and look-

ing after children, they were working on security, communications, strategizing and organizing. Wolf reminds us that the 2nd wave of women's liberation in the West followed the powerful freedom movements of the civil rights and anti-war movements. We need to be careful of taking the comparisons too far, however; it's important to respect the particular cultural contexts of the women who are organizing, rather than just seeing them as another wave of Western-style feminism. Islamic

feminists have been saying for a long time that the Koran gets misinterpreted to support sexist behaviour that is not in line with the principles of Islam. Now a new wave of women of the Arab Spring is pointing out that being participants, even leaders, of the uprisings is not gaining women equality soon enough. As feminists, we owe our Middle Eastern sisters ongoing solidarity in their tough uphill struggles.

Cindi Foreman, our 2nd National VP, is responsible for all matters dealing with equality programs, pay equity and human rights. Here are the

National Women's Committee members for 2011-2015

National

Gayle Bossenberry
Cindi Foreman
Rona Eckert
Cathy Kennedy
Jan Simpson

Atlantic

Toni MacAfee
Ruth Breen
Nancy Rogers / Jacqueline Robichaud

Québec

Cathy Verret
Manon Gagné
Dominique Morel / Audrey Bouchard

Metro-Montréal

Nancy Beauchamp
Mélanie Couture
Anny Lesage
Lise Desorcy
Sharon Diane Amesbury / Darly Aimé

Central

Lori Karas
Maddie Cleroux
Samantha Earle
Debbie Horne / Langill Rogers

Metro-Toronto

Catherine Kavadas
Jennie Butler
Bonnie Pollard
Lesley Turner / Meden Sabbun

Ontario

Debbie Carmichael
Olufunmilayo Olumade
Sue Markham / Brenda Laslo

Prairie

Rhonda Hilton
Robertta Mitchell
Linda Nyznyk
Lana Smidt
Jill Thornton / Joanne Freund

Pacific

Cindy Lee
Cindy McDonnell
Anju Parmar
Tami Brushey / Susan Chappelle

When Women Bargain

What do women bring to the negotiating table? We asked our Urban and RSMC negotiators what they thought.

I bring an ability to carefully, skillfully analyze what the Employer is trying to convince us is good for the RSMCs as a whole. I bring the ability to decompartmentalise the emotions that years of oppression have invoked. Most importantly I bring a strong nurturing ability and the will to fight for all RSMCs.

- *Shelley Sillers, RSMC Negotiator*

Women are often required to wear many hats at the same time, which explains their very analytical minds. They always look for alternatives and solutions to problems. The participation of women in a negotiation committee is as crucial as the participation of men, if we want to ensure that members are adequately represented. - *Nancy Beauchamp, RSMC Negotiator*

As a woman I am only too familiar with women's issues on the work floor, be it accommodation issues during pregnancy, being treated differently when you are a minority or putting up with condescending attitudes towards women by male bosses... What I brought to the negotiations as a woman was empathy for the workers on the work floor... the day-to-day conflicts, harassment, plight of injured workers, lack of training for temp workers, all these and more were issues witnessed and experienced by me personally. - *Asma Burney, Urban Negotiator*

I think women come to the table with more empathy!
- *Sue Wilson, RSMC Negotiator*

I put a gender lens on all of our positions, language or arguments. Examples of using a gender lens is when you look at new machinery or the multiple bundle method. As women are generally shorter, we need to look at whether the reach is harmful.... On the work of the committee, I have noticed a difference when we have negotiators who are women. Again either because women have the bulk of childcare or because there is too much societal pressure for men not to look weak, it was not until both CPC and the Union had women as negotiators that the parties started to talk about the committee's hours of work.

- *Cathy Kennedy, Urban Negotiator*

As a woman on the negotiating committee, I am empathetic to the many challenges being faced by RSMCs, whether they are physical, family, or personal. My experience of working as a rural RSMC in both CUPW and CPAA offices helps me to understand that the environment in these types of offices differs greatly.
- *Barbara McMillan, RSMC Negotiator*

We'll never forget... CUPW's Struggle for Paid Maternity Leave

During last summer's round of strikes and the lock-out of the urban bargaining unit, right-wing commentators either denied or downplayed the importance of our Union's role in gaining paid maternity leave for the workers of this country. Let's remember what women and our allies have accomplished.

In the old days, no parental leave provisions existed. Your return to work was neither guaranteed nor protected. Basically, having babies meant you would either never be hired in the first place or you would lose your job as soon as your pregnancy showed.

The lack of maternity leave reflected and reinforced the sexist idea that only men could be workers and "real women" were supposed to stay home with the kids. No parental leave for fathers also meant men couldn't spend time with and help look after their children.

In 1972, under pressure from women's organizations, the federal government began paying new mothers who had 20 weeks of insurable earnings 15 weeks of

benefits at 60% under UI (now EI, 55% and fewer qualify).

In 1979, a Common Front of unionized public sector workers in Québec won its fight for improved financial benefits, negotiating employer top-ups to supplement the UI/EI maternity benefits. At that time, this type of paid maternity leave for unionized workers was extremely rare; only about 5% of collective agreements had such provisions even though more and more women were entering the workforce.

Maternity leave was a central issue for our Union in 1981. Prior to this, postal workers could take up to 6 months of leave without pay. During this time, they stopped accumulating sick leave, vacation and pension credits. In 1981, postal workers stayed out on the picket lines for 42 days. Our fight for maternity leave was actively supported by many women's organizations. When the strike was over, we became the first national union to get 17 weeks of paid maternity leave and a top-up to 93% of our wages, paving the way for other workplaces to follow and related struggles such as child care.



Remember our proud history.
Nothing can take that away
from us.



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