Equality

Bread, peace and freedom: Marking International Women's Day

This International Women's Day it is important to recognise that while people around the world celebrate female political leaders, CEOs and law makers, the origins of the day are not about the girl bosses and the rich and successful few, but about recognising the struggles of the lowest paid working women.

The first women who were celebrated at this time of year were low paid textile factory workers fighting against 12 hour days and appalling poverty.

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As an official holiday, IWD first entered our calendars at the Second International Socialist Women's Conference in 1910 where socialist women from across Europe gathered together to debate voting rights for women, the eight hour day, welfare for working mothers and maternity leave. At the conference, Clara Zetkin and Kate Dunckner delivered a motion calling for a day every year where the socialist cause of women could be discussed and pushed forward. March 8th was decided upon as it was the day that women textile workers in Petrograd took to the streets calling for "bread, peace and freedom."

As women trade unionists, one of the most important things we can do to improve our own lives and those of other women is to refuse to treat each other the way patriarchy wants us to. We can refuse to compete with each other, we can refuse to dominate, bully, gossip and harass other women for not meeting the impossible standards society sets for us.

We can share power, respect, encourage, nurture and protect each other instead of reproducing discriminatory behaviours which make us feel small and insignificant.

We may all share a gender but no one of us is an expert - we all have something to teach each other and everyone has things to learn about the challenges faced by women. We continue to gather together around the important issues that unite us – low pay, precarious work, an impossible housing market, inflation, poor healthcare provision, lack of childcare and the burdens of unpaid care.

We can organise among ourselves to put a stop to generations of sexual harassment which has pushed us to the margins of our movement, enforcing our silence and preventing us from participating fully in the democracy of our trade unions.

This week, a GMB delegation will attend TUC Women's Conference where we will debate the cost-of-living crisis, women's healthcare, violence against women and the terms and conditions for women at

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work. Our GMB motion will address the issue of workplace injuries experienced by women and aims to address the disproportionate lack of access women have to financial benefit after injury at work.

As a GMB National Women's Strand, we are planning work on women's health and safety and on promoting women members' understanding of and participation in GMB democracy. We also continue to work with the growing Women's Campaign Unit to repair the generational damage of unequal pay and the exploitation of women at work through organising women, enabling women's access to true economic and political power through better pay, better work and a bigger role in our union.

GMB woman member? Think there are gender equality issues in your workplace? Contact your National Equality Forum member or Regional Equality Officer now

National Equality Forum contact info

Regional Equality Officer Contact Details

Press office

07958 156846

press.office@gmb.org.uk

Member requiring help?

Click to contact your local GMB Region

info@gmb.org.uk