

Happy International Women's Day 2019! Happy International Women's Day 2019!



In 2015, at GMB Congress in Dublin, I moved a motion to put International Women's Day (IWD) into all GMB diaries.

Bread and Roses

This motion was never going to change the world, but given that GMB diaries always have the date of the FA cup final, my branch felt that it was just as important to acknowledge and remember this



important event in our calendar – as part of our labour and trade union movement history.

Some people will ask, what is the point of IWD and what does it mean? It is certainly not a day invented by the card industry. Its origins go back over 100 years ago, when two key issues united women across Europe and the USA.

Those two issues were: the struggle of working class women to form trade unions and the fight for women's right to vote.

In March 1908, thousands of women marched in New York City, demanding shorter working hours, better pay, the right to vote, and an end to child labour. The slogan 'Bread and Roses' emerged; bread representing economic security and roses for better living standards.

The Socialist Party of America then decided that each year the last Sunday in February would be National Women's Day, and so the very first one was celebrated in the USA on February 28th 1909.

In 1910, a German woman named Clara Zetkin proposed the motion at the International Socialist Women's conference in Copenhagen calling for a Woman's Day.



As a result of this motion, IWD was marked with rallies and protests for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on the 19th March 1911. During the First World War in 1917, women in Russia protested for 'Bread and Peace' on the last Sunday in February.

IWD began being celebrated on 8th March when the United Nations deemed 1975 as International Women's Year.

Today, IWD is a time to reflect on the progress made over those years, whilst at the same time highlighting the challenges women continue to face in all areas of daily life. It is a time to show



solidarity to women worldwide and to applaud the acts of ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their communities, countries and organisations.

Only recently, for example, have we acknowledged Eleanor Marx as the co-founder of our union. For a long while she was written out of our history.

It was at the same GMB Congress in Dublin that our union resolved to hold an annual GMB Eleanor Marx Day in January (her birthday month) to celebrate and remember her achievements and to link them to current struggles. Each year in Congress we now give an Eleanor Marx award to an inspirational GMB woman. Having met many such women at various GMB conferences around the UK since becoming President, I am looking forward to presenting this award at Congress in June.

This January, my own GMB branch, celebrated young women at secondary schools within the London Borough of Lewisham (where Eleanor lived and died) by holding the first ever Eleanor Marx award for an inspirational young woman. The winner was a young carer; part of a much overlooked group of children and teenagers under the age of 18, who on a daily basis have to balance their own needs with the physical and emotional needs of those they care for.

IWD has always been about struggle, which is why its origins need to be remembered, the day celebrated and inspirational women around the world recognised for their achievements.

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