

# BREAD AND ROSES ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON

By Andy Piascik

(In recognition of March as Women's History Month, we are printing this article celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Bread and Roses strike.)

One hundred years ago this month, in the depths of a brutal New England winter, the great Bread and Roses Strike began in Lawrence, Mass. Accounts differ as to whether a woman striker actually held a sign that read "We Want Bread and We Want Roses, Too," or whether that's a legend that has grown over time. No matter. It's a wonderful phrase, as appropriate for the Lawrence strikers as for any group at any time: the notion that, in addition to the necessities for survival, people should have "a sharing of life's glories," as James Oppenheim put it in his poem "Bread and Roses."

Though 100 years have passed, the Bread and Roses strike resonates as one of the most important in the history of the United States. Like many labor conflicts of the time, the strike of Lawrence's mill hands was marked by obscene disparities in wealth and power, open collusion between the state and business owners, large-scale violence against unarmed strikers, and great ingenuity and solidarity on the part of workers. In important ways, though, the Bread and Roses strike was also unique. It was the first large-scale industrial strike, the overwhelming majority of the strikers were immigrants, and most were women and children. For all of those reasons and more, the strike and the phrase that has always been associated with it hold a special place in the glorious history of our country's working people.

It is noteworthy that the Occupy movement shares many philosophical and strategic characteristics with the Lawrence strike—direct action, the prominent role of women, the centrality of class, participatory decision-making, egalitarianism, and an authentic belief in the principle that We Are All Leaders, to name just some. Facing conditions not so different from today, the have-nots of 1912 defeated the haves and in so doing provided us with both some possible historical lessons and inspiration that justice can triumph.

Lawrence's textile workers experienced most of the horrors that characterized early industrial labor. Workplace injuries and deaths were commonplace, six-day workweeks of 55-60 hours were the norm, and children as young as 10 worked full-time, deprived of schooling and any semblance of a childhood because families could not survive on the pay

of two adult wage-earners. It was a work environment, in short, that William Blake, writing about similar hellholes in England, captured perfectly with the phrase "these dark Satanic mills."

The conflict in Lawrence began on Jan. 11, 1912, when a group of Polish women employed at the Everett Cotton Mill walked off the job over a pay dispute. Disdained by the unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the mill hands immediately sought help from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and every mill in town was soon closed. Many strikers had experience with militant working class traditions in their native lands, experience the IWW, in contrast to the AFL, not only respected but cultivated. Committees of each of several dozen ethnic groups were formed and meetings, printed strike updates and speeches were translated into all of the major languages.

Perhaps the most important of the IWW's contributions were its emphasis on solidarity and its unshakable belief in the ability of the workers to do for themselves. Support from around the country proved invaluable, but it was the strikers who did the negotiating and made all the important decisions. Significantly, women were involved at every level and their leadership was absolutely crucial to victory.

It was women, for example, who moved to the front of many of the marches in an effort to curtail state violence against the strike (although the police and militia proved not at all shy about beating women and children as well as men). It was women who led the singing and spontaneous parading that were hallmarks of the strike. And it was women who decided to send children out of town to supportive families (including to Bridgeport) so they would be better cared for, a move that incurred the wrath of local officials and also drew national attention to the strike.

Through two bitterly cold months and despite two strikers killed, hundreds beaten and scores imprisoned, the workers achieved a settlement close to their original demands. Textile workers throughout New England soon won similar gains, as mill owners sought to avoid "more Lawrences." More

[continued on next page]

[from previous page]

broadly, the strike led to advances in the areas of workplace safety, minimum wage laws and child labor protections. Lawrence was also the first major industrial strike in the U.S. and the heroic efforts of those involved lay the foundation for the militant working class organizing of the 1930s.

In recent decades, Americans have suffered through the most radical upward redistribution of wealth in human history. That shift has been accomplished in large part by a vicious attack on the working class, including a concerted campaign to pit non-union workers against those in unions. The resulting race to the bottom has enriched the few and devastated millions of lives.

The ongoing global challenge to corporate tyranny gives hope that the tables are finally turning, and echoes of the Bread and Roses strike ring through that resistance as vibrantly as an Occupy drum circle. The Occupy movement also serves as an important counterpoint to a labor movement that for decades has more closely resembled the Textile Workers Union of 1912 than the IWW, one where union bureaucrats are as threatened by rank and file initiatives as any employer.

The totalitarian control of our economic life that corporate elites exercise has brought us to the brink of national (indeed, international) catastrophe, and collective resistance is as necessary as it was 100 years ago. As the 99 percent continues to challenge the super-rich, we will do well to celebrate and study the Lawrence strike of 1912. In so doing we can perhaps begin to create a world where everyone has both sufficient bread to eat and "life's glories" as vivid as the reddest roses.

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[from page 6]

discriminate (4.9.4). In other words, you can't single out a specific unit member for personal reasons or professional reasons that are not included in the contract as exceptions nor determine assignment for that member based on such reasons or based on criteria that were not applied equally. However, do not confuse discrimination with equality. You can schedule by seniority, by lottery, by systematic rotation or whatever combination of the aforementioned and/or other agreed upon processes that your division or department has chosen to apply to all. If your current process is causing numerous conflicts between unit members or complaints, however, your manager should be alerted as it may be necessary to reevaluate or amend it to maintain a collegial atmosphere. Union representatives trained in IBA can be called on to help moderate such conversations if departments or divisions are unable to do so on their own.

There are also many other protections that normally must be observed unless there is mutual consent between the unit member and management. Unfortunately, not all members are aware of such conditions and often accept assignments that they did not realize they could refuse. For example, did you know that you do not normally have to accept being assigned more than three different courses concurrently (4.4.1)? Were you aware that there are limits on distance or online instruction or that you may only hold a maximum of two online office hours in place of on campus hours per semester (4.7.2.2.1)? Have you heard that full-time counselors should have ten hours of professional development per week excluding peak periods (4.8.3.2)? Were you told that assignments on Sundays are by mutual consent only and that assignments on Saturdays should attempt to accommodate religious convictions and/or observances (4.7.2.5 and 4.8.4.1-2)? Did anyone communicate to you that preference will be used for staffing summer courses; however, for adjuncts summer term is not counted as a semester for purposes of obtaining preference priority (4.10.6.2)? To get a complete picture of what you may opt to consent to or not and in what special situations you may be assigned without consent, you should read more under your job heading in Article 4, available at [www.lrcft.org](http://www.lrcft.org).

Stay tuned for Round Two: Sticky Staffing Situations for more specific information based on recently reported disputes and queries. Don't worry, the farming analogy ends with round one. ■