

## International Women's Day

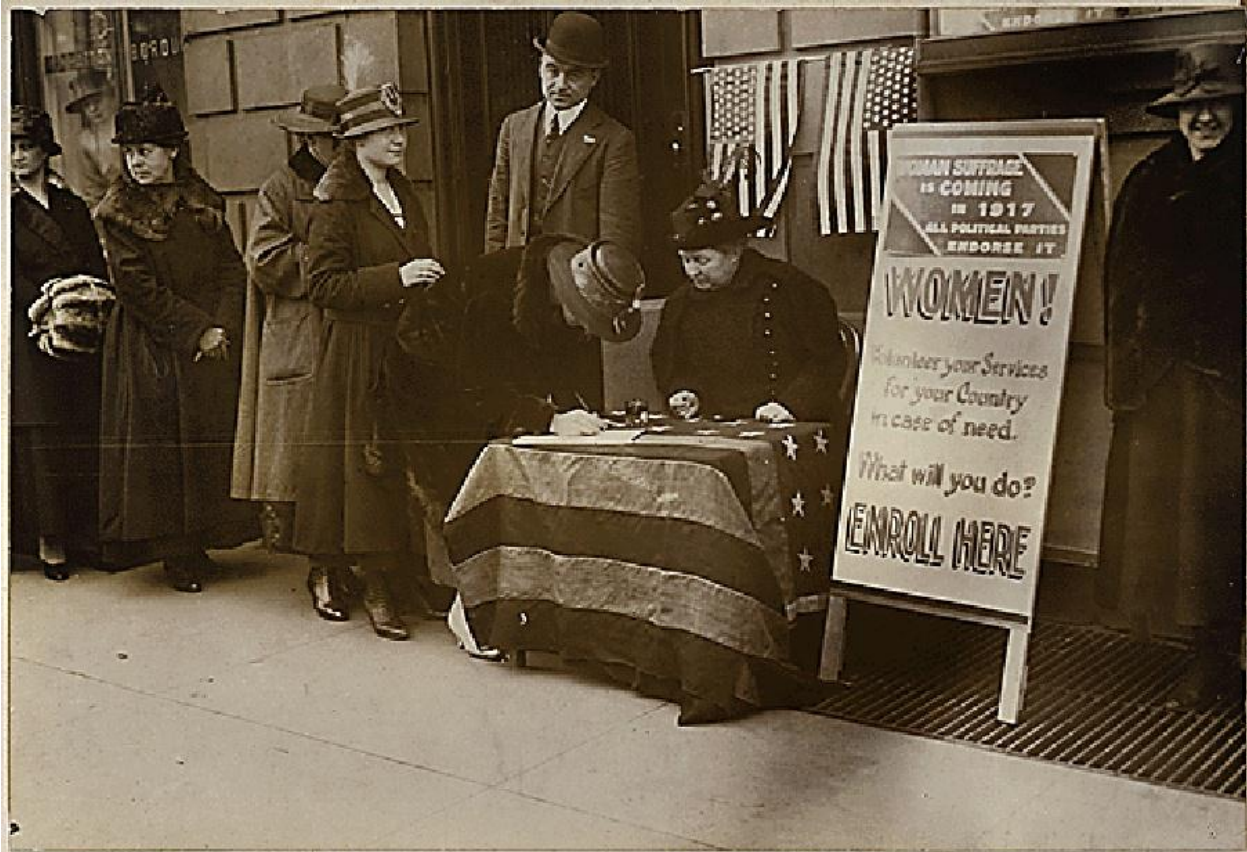
*International Women's Day (IWD) is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. In some countries like China, Russia, Vietnam and Bulgaria, IWD is a national holiday. The first IWD event was run in 1911 so 2011 sees the Global Centenary.*

The National Women's Loyal League was formed by Susan B. Anthony, who traveled extensively across the country lecturing for the women's right to vote, their right to own property, anti-slavery issues, and women labor organizations. Along with Susan Anthony was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who also was instrumental in the fight for women's rights and she was the primary architect for the women's suffrage movement. And out of the era of slavery and the Civil War, we have the only woman recipient of the nation's highest military decoration, The Congressional Medal of Honor. Mary Walker, whose life as a feminist, abolitionist, prohibitionist, spy, prisoner of war, and as a surgeon is absolutely remarkable to say the least. When we look at these heroes, we are looking at the roots of the women's movements and the observance of International Women's Day.



It is important to look at the history behind the IWD in order to grasp the growth of the movement because there were so many issues which were intertwined and instrumental leading up to the observance of IWD. On March 8, 1857, women working in the clothing and textile factories in New York

City staged a protest against the inhumane working conditions they were enduring and the low wages they were being paid. The women were met by police who attacked and dispersed them. However, in order to gain some level of basic human rights and for protection, the women formed their first labor union two years later.



It is reported, prior to their infamous strike in the early 1900s, that Samuel Gompers and a few other men, who led Local 25, made some very uninspiring speeches to the women in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. In response to the speeches by the officials of Local 25,

*Clara Lemlich asked to be heard. Speaking in Yiddish, she declared, I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in general terms. What we are here for is to decide whether we shall or shall not strike. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared now. Her statement made the crowd roar their approval and the chairman of the meeting rang out, do you mean faith? Will you take the old Jewish oath? Everyone threw up their hands in approval and in Yiddish, they all took the oath, If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge, may this hand wither from the arm I now raise! The battle cry of the women garment workers was, We'd rather starve quick than starve slow.*

The first observance of IWD in the U.S. was on the 28th day of February in 1909. Another relevant issue which the IWD commemorates is the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in 1911. Backed by the Socialist Party of America and the Socialist International, the IWD was established and spread throughout a large part of Europe and the demonstrations of the IWD in Russia is said to be the initial

stage of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The IWD has roots in the peace movements as far back as World War I and also in the movement for Women's Suffrage. Many have heard about Franklin Roosevelt and his advocacy of the New Deal as a means to recover from the depression, but few have heard of the importance of his wife Eleanor Roosevelt and her involvement in the women's movement. However, the prevalence of the movement dwindled after the depression era but was renewed by the feminist movement of the 60's, and women's continued efforts to gain equality and respect in not only the workplace but within the entire social structure of the people. The feminism of the 60's is often called second-wave feminism.

In the social turmoil of the civil rights movement of the 60's, the emergence of a stronger solidarity among women was seen. When the Bitch Manifesto was published in 1968, a new era began and women's voices began to be heard once more in unison and the fight for equality, justice, and respect was back in society's face! The strength of the feminists in the 60's shook the predominately male structures in place and shocked a public which had turned a blind eye to the injustices wrought on women throughout history.

*And Bitches must form together in a movement to deal with their problems in a political manner. They must organize for their own liberation as all women must organize for theirs. We must be strong, we must be militant, we must be dangerous. We must realize that Bitch is Beautiful and that we have nothing to lose. Nothing whatsoever.*

When Joreen Freeman published her manifesto, it raised many eyebrows but not near as much as the extremely anti-male militant publication of the S.C.U.M. Manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men). Now Valerie Solanas really got people's attention (especially the male of our species), and Valerie is best known for the shooting of Andy Warhol! Valerie scared the hell out of the testosterone poisoned male order who had been taught and believed nothing existed outside of masculinism.

*To call a man an animal is to flatter him; he's a machine, a walking dildo.*  
- Valerie Solanas, Authoress of the SCUM Manifesto

The women's movement of the 60's was an awakening for everyone and the feminist movement changed the face of society forever. Today the women's movement not only continues to fight for equal rights, but has moved into other controversial territories such as reproductive rights, military enrollment, clergy, affirmative action, pornography, sexual harassment, and even surrogate motherhood. All important and controversial issues which much be addressed and debated. Many within the feminist movement today proudly call themselves third-wave feminists who concentrate on expanding the common definitions of gender and sexuality. The fight continues today as women's salaries all too often remain lower than those of their male counterparts, and barriers against women's rights are continually being challenged. The remaining injustices are being tackled daily in the courts and conference rooms, the homes and organizations, workplaces and playing fields of America. There are many organizations of feminist activists who continue to work on eliminating discrimination and harassment in the workplace, schools, and the justice systems here in the U.S. The National Organization for Women(N O W) is the largest organization here in the states and they have been instrumental in

bringing about change in ending all forms of violence against women, eradicating racism, sexism and homophobia, and they continue to promote equality and justice within our society.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development is an international organization devoted to connecting, informing, and mobilizing people and organizations in the fight for gender equality, sustainable development, and women's human rights. Women who may not ascribe to the exact ideals or work of their predecessors, but who are just as dedicated to the spirit of the movement, which hasn't really changed. Coretta Scott King once said, "Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won; you earn it and win it in every generation."

### **Historic Events**

**1908** - Great unrest and critical debate was occurring amongst women. Women's oppression and inequality was spurring women to become more vocal and active in campaigning for change. Then in 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights.

**1909** - In accordance with a declaration by the Socialist Party of America, the first National Woman's Day (NWD) was observed across the United States on 28 February. Women continued to celebrate NWD on the last Sunday of February until 1913.

**1910** - In 1910 a second International Conference of Working Women was held in Copenhagen. A woman named a Clara Zetkin (Leader of the 'Women's Office' for the Social Democratic Party in Germany) tabled the idea of an International Women's Day. She proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day - a Women's Day – to press for their demands. The conference of over 100 women from 17 countries, representing unions, socialist parties, working women's clubs, and including the first three women elected to the Finnish parliament, greeted Zetkin's suggestion with unanimous approval and thus International Women's Day was the result.

**1911** - Following the decision agreed at Copenhagen in 1911, International Women's Day (IWD) was honored the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on 19 March. More than one million women and men attended IWD rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, vote, be trained, to hold public office and end discrimination. However less than a week later on 25 March, the tragic 'Triangle Fire' in New York City took the lives of more than 140 working women, most of them Italian and Jewish immigrants. This disastrous event drew significant attention to working conditions and labor legislation in the United States that became a focus of subsequent International Women's Day events. 1911 also saw women's 'Bread & Roses' campaign.

**1913-1914** - On the eve of World War I campaigning for peace, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February 1913. In 1913 following discussions, International Women's Day was transferred to 8 March and this day has remained the global date for

International Women's Day ever since. In 1914 further women across Europe held rallies to campaign against the war and to express women's solidarity.

**1917** - On the last Sunday of February, Russian women began a strike for "bread and peace" in response to the death over 2million Russian soldiers in war. Opposed by political leaders the women continued to strike until four days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote. The date the women's strike commenced was Sunday 23 February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia. This day on the Gregorian calendar in use elsewhere was 8 March.



**1918 – 1999** - Since its birth in the socialist movement, International Women's Day has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration across developed and developing countries alike. For decades, IWD has grown from strength to strength annually. For many years the United Nations has held an annual IWD conference to coordinate international efforts for women's rights and participation in social, political and economic processes. 1975 was designated as International Women's Year' by the United Nations. Women's organizations and governments around the world have also observed IWD

annually on 8 March by holding large-scale events that honor women's advancement and while diligently reminding of the continued vigilance and action required to ensure that women's equality is gained and maintained in all aspects of life.

**2000 and beyond** - IWD is now an official holiday in China, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The tradition sees men honoring their mothers, wives, girlfriends, colleagues, etc. with flowers and small gifts. In some countries IWD has the equivalent status of Mother's Day where children give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers. The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about women's equality and emancipation. Many from a younger generation feel that 'all the battles have been won for women' while many feminists from the 1970's know only too well the longevity and ingrained complexity of patriarchy. With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men. However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers, school girls are welcomed into university, women can work and have a family, women have real choices. And so the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives. Annually on 8 March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. A global web of rich and diverse local activity connects women from all around the world ranging from political rallies, business conferences, government activities and networking events through to local women's craft markets, theatre performances, fashion parades and more. Many global corporations have also started to more actively support IWD by running their own internal events and through supporting external ones. For example, on 8 March search engine and media giant Google some years even changes its logo on its global search pages. Year on year IWD is certainly increasing in status. The United States even designates the whole month of March as 'Women's History Month'. Globally there are many very large scale highly organized IWD events. So make a difference, think globally and act locally! Make every day International Women's Day. Do your bit to ensure that the future for girls is bright, equal, safe and rewarding. The International Women's Day website at [www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com) is a global hub for sharing International Women's Day news, events and resources. It provides a free service to women and organizations around the world wanting to share and promote their IWD activity, videos, opinions and ideas. Please feel free to submit gender-related items for the site that you consider relevant and useful.

### **2011** IWD Global Centenary Year

**2011** is the global centenary year for International Women's Day – 100 years since the first International Women's Day event was run. More than one million women and men attended rallies in 1911.

### **International Women's Day Trivia**

**Q:** The 2012 Olympics in London is expected to be the first in which women makeup roughly half the athletes. What percentage of the competitors were women the first time the Olympics were held in London, in 1908?

**A:** 1.8 percent (37 women took part alongside 1,971 men )

**Q:** Who was the first person to win two Nobel Prizes?

**A:** Marie Curie, in physics (1903) and chemistry (1911)

**Q:** How many women currently hold the position of president or prime ministers around the world?

**A:** 18. That's a new record.

**Q:** Who was the first female elected head of state in Africa?

**A:** Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

**Q:** Nujood Ali, of Yemen, grabbed the world's attention when filing for divorce in 2008. How old was she?

**A:** 10 years old