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A black and white photograph showing a group of people, primarily women, walking outdoors. In the foreground, a woman in a light-colored dress walks towards the left. Behind her, another woman in a light-colored dress walks towards the right. In the background, several men in dark clothing and hats are visible, some appearing to be in conversation or walking in the same direction. The setting appears to be a public square or a wide street with a building in the background.

**Women
in Action**

BY SASHA SMALL

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WOMEN IN ACTION

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AMERICA TODAY

MILLIONS of women in America today are still slaves to their homes, their jobs, their children and the idea that "woman's place is in the home" and that politics and trade union organizations are "men's affairs". But hundreds of thousands of women in America today are part of the whole upsurge of the toiling masses against the sharp attack on their living standards—rebellng against their slavery and taking their places in the ever widening procession which has marched onward through the years towards emancipation of the entire working class—the only way of emancipation that will lead to complete freedom and equality for the women of America.

LAST YEAR

1934—Textile strike. San Francisco General Strike, Minneapolis, Toledo, The very words conjure up pictures of clouds of tear gas, flashing bayonets and marching, singing, shouting, picket lines. Hundreds of thousands of workers—men and women—fighting for the right to live. Striking for the right to organize into unions. Striking against the squeezing fist of the N.R.A. clenched to sweat the last drop of strength and profits from the lives of underpaid, half-starved wage slaves.

In front of every struck factory and mill, women and girls took their places, battling cops and tear gas. Sixty per cent of the textile strikers were women and girls. Terror did not drive them back. From Rhode Island to the Carolinas many women were wounded by buck shot and bayonets. In Saylesville, R. I., women

led the charge that resulted in one of the fiercest pitched battles in the whole strike. They rushed at the head of hundreds of enraged strikers into the barbed wire barricades behind which guardsmen waited with vomit gas and bullets. *The Girl in Green* who rallied their scattered forces after the first barrage of fire, reorganizing the picket lines, cheering the disheartened, became a symbol of courage and fearlessness.

In Georgia, 28 women were among the captives of America's first concentration camp. But these girls sang their strike songs from behind the barbed wire fences and shouted their jeering contempt at the deputies who were guarding them. Two young women from Atlanta now face death sentences on the same charge and under the same slave law used against Angelo Herndon as a result of their activity in the textile strike. These sisters, Annie Mae Leathers and Leah Young (who has five young children) were arrested for distributing leaflets on the picket line. That's called "inciting to insurrection" in Georgia and punishable by death under a law passed before the Civil War! They served three months until they were released on bail. Further action in their case has been halted until the U. S. Supreme Court decides whether or not Angelo Herndon is to be sent to his 18-20 years death sentence on a Georgia chain gang for organizing the white and Negro unemployed.

During the truck drivers' strike in Minneapolis, a strike marked by savage brutality against the pickets, women fought beside the men against the police and hired gangsters and thugs. But that is not all the women did here as well as in all the other strikes. They spent hours organizing strike relief kitchens, gathering food, preparing it and serving steaming coffee and sandwiches to the men on the picket lines.

The self-sacrificing energy expended in this plodding work is sometimes overshadowed by the blazing acts of battles. But then men on the picket line have plenty to say in gratitude and appreciation to the women who saw to their needs.

In Toledo, women were in the picket lines that swelled to 40,-

000 at times and fought for hours, filling the air with bricks and bottles against the superior force of machine guns and gas. Swarms of girl pickets surrounded the police and prevented many arrests.

During the West Coast marine strike, the wives of striking longshoremen demonstrated on the docks against the loading of munition ships to Japan and in solidarity with their men.

But it was not alone in the spectacular battles of the class struggle that women were to be found on the firing lines. They have taken an active part in strike committees, planning, organizing, rallying workers—men and women alike—for activities in the strike.

In Southern Illinois the miners' wives have carried on a consistent and well-organized struggle against oppression. In the small town of Nokomis, Jan Wittenber, one of the 14 Hillsboro criminal syndicalism defendants recently rescued from long prison terms by mass defense, was speaking at an open air meeting. Like buzzards hovering over their prey, deputized thugs began crowding around the platform. But there were women in the crowd. "Let that speaker alone or we'll tear your eyes out", one of them shouted. "No drunken thugs even if they have stars are going to beat up our speaker", added another, so effectively that the meeting proceeded unmolested. After the 14 were arrested the women added their forces to the defense. They travelled all over the coal fields organizing support. They visited the men in jail, bringing them food and words of comfort. Five thousand of them marched on the city hall demanding their release.

In Bridgeton, N. J., when the agricultural workers, whom Charles Seabrook rules like a feudal lord, went on strike, the most militant battles were led by a group of Negro women and young girls. In spite of barrages of tear gas, electrified wires to bar them from the picket line, attacks by vigilantes, these Negro women, by their unflinching bravery in taking the offensive, spurred all the workers on to victory. In the face of one of the greatest displays of force in strike history, three Negro girls rushed a truck loaded with scab beets and began to pull them to

the ground. One of them was attacked by a thug with an axe in his hands. But the example of these girls had fired all of the pickets with determination, and they not only came to their rescue but routed the thugs completely.

In York, Pa., 1,500 girls, cigar makers, went on strike. The boss thought he could get scabs to run his factory. He did. But the girl pickets threw themselves in front of the trucks that tried to take the scab goods out of the factory and tied up the plant for days.

Among the 57 workers killed in economic struggles during the year 1934, two were women—one a Negro woman shot down before a relief station in Cleveland during a demonstration and the other a Filipino agricultural worker in California, burned to death in her house because she was one of the militant strikers in Salinas and the vigilantes had singled her out.

This same indomitable bravery was shown by a group of Negro women during the ore-mine strikes in Alabama. They massed to block the entrance to the mine pits and prevented scabs from going in. They threw themselves on the railroad tracks to block trains carrying scabs.

One of the outstanding accomplishments of American women during the year 1934 was the campaign against war and fascism, carried on in the shops, organizations, on the farms and even in back yards all over the country which resulted in a delegation of 40 women, representing almost half a million American women from every walk of life, at the International Women's Congress Against War and Fascism held in Paris, in August. Here they met together with women from all the European countries and worked out a concrete program of action for organizing the women in the fight to counteract the carefully worked out plans of the war mongers, clearly stated by Major General Hanson E. Ely of the U. S. Army in April, 1931:

"Women will play a greater part in future wars. . . .
Woman power will in some instances supplant and in other
cases supplement man-power in the next war. . . . The struggle

was so gigantic (in the last war) that for the countries involved war-making became a national industry."

The events of 1934 have drawn a veil over equally sharp struggles of recent years. The first strikes in 1933, after the Blue Eagle spread its wings and scattered codes that nine times out of ten discriminated against women, brought thousands of women out of the factories into the streets. Activity in the 1933 steel strike in Pa., particularly marked by bloodshed and violence in Ambridge, sent one woman, Emma Breletic, to the workhouse for two years. Her husband was an unemployed steel worker and Emma was one of the most active organizers of the strike kitchen. That was enough to put her on the bosses' blacklist and she was framed on the charge of striking a deputy. The armed thugs who wounded dozens and killed one striker in cold blood, testified against her at the trial.

The mine strikes of 1930-31-32 in Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania pay a tribute to the dauntless courage of the miners' wives and daughters. They battled the company police and the deputized thugs on the picket lines and defended their miserable company hut-homes when the deputies broke in and attacked defenseless families.

In Canonsburg, Pa., Stella Rasefske, 19 years old, and her mother Anna served two-year sentences in the hell-hole of Blawnox Workhouse for their activity in supplying relief to the striking miners and fighting beside them on the picket line. At Cassandra, Pa., 300 women, whom the deputies labeled "Ladies from hell", gathered on the road and almost tore to pieces trucks bearing about 60 scabs. In Kentucky, six women, strike and relief organizers, served long sentences in the smelly jail because of their work among the strikers. One miner's wife in Pineville, explained for her sisters, "We've been starved into it. That's what it is seein' our little babies going naked in front of our eyes and hungry. It's enough to turn your blood. The women here is solid as strong as the men and we'll be on the picket line every morning until we win."

During the Briggs Body strike of the Detroit auto workers, women were almost completely in charge of organizing the very effective relief machinery, one of the big factors in winning this splendid strike.

In these same years the textile workers, North and South, were involved in a great wave of local strikes. Several personalities emerge from these battles in sharp outline. First among them is Ella May Wiggins, shot down by deputy sheriffs in Gastonia, N. C., on her way to a strike meeting while she was singing one of the beautiful songs she composed and sang to the strikers. Ella May had 5 little children to feed on the starvation wages she made during the long hours of night work. She sang about her own kids in her simple moving ballads, but she sang of them in such a way that they became symbols of all that ruling class greed was doing to trample down their lives, and her songs became banners behind which the textile workers marched.

In South Carolina, another woman textile organizer was becoming such a force among the exploited workers that the mill owners hired thugs to kidnap her. They took Clara Holden out on a deserted road near Greenville and flogged her mercilessly. They threatened to kill her if she went back to her work. She went back!

Up in the North, in Lawrence, another young woman was arrested for leading the textile strikers there in their fight for a decent life. She was brought to this country as a very young child, grew up here, determined to throw in her lot with those who toiled. She was arrested twice and is still threatened with deportation to fascist Poland. Her brutal treatment in prison, against which she carried out a heroic hunger strike, resulted in the complete breakdown of her health. The warrant for Edith Berkman's deportation is still out, hanging like a sword over her head to keep her from going back into the fighting ranks where she belongs.

Described as "Labor's Joan of Arc", "Flaming Ann", and various other picturesque titles in the bosses' newspapers, Ann Bur-

lak has won the admiration and confidence of thousands of textile workers, men and women, during her years of work among them. She was born in 1911 in the shadow of the Bethlehem Steel Mills and went to work in a silk mill at the age of 14. From that time on she began to fight against the inhuman conditions forced upon the textile workers and her husky voice has carried the message of unity and organization to hundreds of thousands of embattled workers.

A broad procession formed of millions of working women marches through time. There are days filled with drudgery in the factories or in their homes, filled with troubled hours, but like milestones along the highway their bravery in action, their heroism in times of strike shine out to light up their way along the road to freedom.

The procession leads far back into the past, all the way to the early beginnings of the last century. It passes the battles of the early years of the 20th century, among them the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand", as the general strike of the shirt-waist makers of New York was called. These girls fought for 13 bitter weeks, enduring evictions, hunger, cold, slugging, arrests and prison sentences. It passes Fannie Seelins, murdered in August 1919 in the Black Valley district along the Alleghany River during the great steel strike. She was killed by deputy police officers who opened fire on a picket line. She went to protect the children. "Kill the goddam whore", shouted the deputies and she was shot three times.

The procession leads through the great textile strike in Lawrence in 1912 led by Bill Haywood. The terror was so fierce in this strike that Big Bill advised the women to stay off the picket lines. A woman striker answered him:

"Mr. Haywood can't keep us ladies from the picket line in the morning just because the cops will be there. We must win this strike. The men are all right but they're not so brave in striking as the ladies."

The outlines of the procession grow dimmer as it winds back into the middle of the last century where women fought beside the men to establish the beginning of the organized labor movement in this country. Mother Jones marched the maimed child laborers from Pennsylvania to President Theodore Roosevelt's lawn at Oyster Bay. It leads back to the Civil War and the years immediately before it when women worked with the abolitionists against the brutal scourge of slavery. Two personalities shine out of these years—heroic Negro women, slaves themselves, who stood in the forefront of this emancipation movement. One of them, Harriet Tubman, was one of John Brown's first lieutenants. Braving death at the whipping post, she stole among the plantations of the South, bringing courage and the promise of freedom to the slaves. Sojourner Truth was another.

Back in 1848, 2,000 mill workers in Alleghany, Pa., (mostly women) came out on strike against a cut in wages and for the 10-hour day. When scabs went into the mills on the old 12-hour schedule, great crowds of workers tried to bar their way on the outside. When this failed, a woman seized an axe and broke down the mill gate. Led by the women, the strikers entered the mill by force, beat up the scabs and the deputies and officials who were guarding them and held control of the mill until they won at least part of their demands—the 10-hour day.

The line grows fainter and fainter but it reaches back steadily into the 1820's when the "Tailoresses of New York" and the "Female Society of Lynn and Vicinity for the Protection and Promotion of Female Industry" and other organizations whose names carry the quaint fragrance of history, organized the women to strike for better wages and more human working conditions. And strike they did, marching through the streets singing songs like:

"Oh, I cannot be a slave
I will not be a slave
For I'm so fond of liberty that I cannot
Be a slave."

They struck terror into the hearts of the mill owners and the authorities who guarded their profits. The *Philadelphia National Gazette* (January 7, 1829) reports:

"The great strike and grand public march of the female operatives in New Hampshire exhibit the Yankee sex in a new and unexpected light . . . the governor may have to call out the militia to prevent a gynocracy [a government ruled by women—Ed.]."

The procession halts with the first recorded strike involving women in American history in the spring of 1824 in Pawtucket, R. I., over the same soil that saw the fierce battle of the general strike last fall.

OUR HEROINES

All the heroic deeds performed by women are not confined to picket lines and strikes. Our heroines are scattered over the whole field of our every day life. Mother Mary Mooney, until the last day of her life, spent the last drops of her falling energy in the battle to free her son, Tom, from behind the walls of San Quentin. The last 18 years of her hard working life, years in which she should have enjoyed a well-earned rest from toil and drudgery, were spent in travelling back and forth across the country and even to Europe, speaking at meetings, calling on officials, pleading for the life of her innocent son.

There are the six Scottsboro Mothers, simple working women, striving only to make their children's lives a little happier and easier than their own had been. They have left weeping and moaning for their boys behind them and are doing everything in their power to aid actively in the fight to free them. They have spent days and nights traveling around from city to city helping the defense. Mother Ada Wright, mother of two of the boys, has been to 18 European countries, has sampled the brutal treatment of European jails while mobilizing the millions behind the struggle to free her boys and all the others. Besides them stands

Ruby Bates, who braved death to tell the truth about the Scottsboro frame-up.

Housewives, whose identity will never be known, have defied police in conducting long-drawn-out rent strikes, in organizing resistance to the high cost of living, fighting for low enough prices so they could give their children the milk and the bread that is theirs by right.

Negro women in the Black Belt where terror stalks at every turn in the road have joined their voices in protest against their slavery. In Birmingham, an unknown Negro housewife, whose protest had reached the ears of the K.K.K., showed them their nightshirts could not frighten her. They set up a burning cross before her house, their flaming threat. And she walked right out into the road with a bucket of water in her hands and put it out before their back were turned. Many other Negro women are quietly helping to organize the Negro masses in the South into action against their slave-like conditions.

Out in California, during the Olympic Games, one of the biggest international circuses prepared by the bosses to divert young people's minds from the realities of the class struggle, a group of young people led by a young girl, Ethel Dell, dared a shining act of heroism. Ethel jumped into the arena, in full view of many thousands of wealthy sport fans, dressed in running shorts and a jersey on which was printed the blazing slogan "Free Tom Mooney". Police had to chase her half way round the stadium before they caught her and arrested her.

Girls and women have chained themselves to lamp posts in many American cities with slogans sewed or painted on their clothes demanding freedom for Ernst Thaelmann, Dimitroff and other leaders of the international working class.

Farm women have stood in the foreground during foreclosure sales, rallying their neighbors to prevent a family from being sold off the land they had tilled for generations to meet the greed of the banks and mortgage holders. Sheriffs have learned to tremble before many of these descendents of the pioneer women who

braved the wilderness to build a better life for their children.

These examples could be multiplied by the hundred—women, young and old, Negro and white, daring heroines ready to brave every danger.

We women of today have a splendid heritage of struggle behind us. We can draw courage from what has been before, for carrying on the battles to come. We must gather strength and rally around us those who still hold back—millions of American women who still hide their slavery by their fire-side, timid, fooled by hateful lies to chain them to their present drudgery. Our work has only begun.

In the words of 73-year-old Mother Bloor, veteran fighter in the class struggle, in whose personality perhaps all the tireless energy and enthusiasm of women in the American labor movement is embodied: "Tired?" she answered someone who marveled at her strength, "This is no time to be tired. Why, we've only just begun."

* * *

The heroic struggles described here are not and have not been confined to America alone. Throughout the world, millions of women are struggling daily, slowly, sometimes painfully, but unceasingly towards freedom.

America gave the world its international working class holiday—May Day. But May Day is not the only day of struggle that was born in the United States. In the early years of the 20th Century, when "*Votes For Women*" was the battle cry of a militant movement, the women in the American Socialist Party originated the idea of an International Women's Day. It was first mentioned at a special women's conference in 1904 and was definitely adopted as a day set aside for agitation for women's suffrage in 1908.

In 1910, Clara Zetkin, already one of the most outstanding and courageous leaders of the working class, introduced a resolution at the International Congress of Women Socialists held in Copenhagen, setting aside March 8 as International Women's

Day in every country of the world. The resolution was adopted. During the years that followed splendid beginnings were made, special publications for women—*Gleichheit* in Germany, edited by Clara Zetkin, and *Rabotniza* in Russia, edited by Ulianova, Lenin's sister. But the World War and the sell-out of the Socialist leaders to the war-makers of their respective countries almost snuffed out entirely the first faltering steps.

On March 8, 1917, the Russian women marched out of the factories into the streets demanding "bread and an end to the imperialist war"—a heroic action in itself in those last days of the tsar's murderous rule and a forerunner of the triumphant October revolution.

In 1919, when the Communist International was established, one of its important decisions was to adopt International Women's Day as a day for mobilizing working women for active participation in all the struggles of the working class. Since then it has been observed every year in almost every country on the globe.

This year it will come upon a world filled with misery, hunger and the ever-closer rumble of the thunderclouds of war, upon a world in which millions of women are crushed beneath the barbaric rule of fascism, which closes to them every access to culture, takes them out of economic life and aims to make of them nothing more than machines to produce sons for the armies of imperialism.

In Germany, before Hitler came to power, hundreds of thousands of militant working women carried through splendid fighting actions on March 8. Today many of them are tortured in concentration camps or suffering the even more intense torture of thinking of their loved ones, husbands, sons, fathers behind the barbed-wire torture chambers of Hitler's Brown Cosacks. But thousands of them are in the fighting ranks of heroes whom no torture, no threats, no misery can stop from fighting fascism. They are working in the ranks of the illegal Communist Party, organizing, teaching, spreading literature,

building up strength for the final open battle against Hitler and the capitalist masters whom he serves.

In Spain, the women of Asturias and other sections of the country who fought on the barricades and in the streets, just as their Austrian class sisters did a year ago against their native fascists, will not allow temporary defeat to crush them with despair. In spite of jails and the heart-rending difficulties of bringing up their orphaned children under the shadow of fascism, the courage they showed with guns in their hands during the uprising will give them strength to continue the daily struggles for the right to live.

In the colonies of international imperialism, in China, in Cuba, in South America and Africa, where working women and peasant women are harnessed to the double yoke of native and imperialist slave drivers in the rice fields, on the sugar plantations, in the silk mills, the fight against oppression is spreading and gathering might. In these countries, too, the women are joining the ranks of the battle, throwing aside their heavy chains of ignorance and superstitious fear. Women lead battles in China's Red Army and carry banners in hundreds of anti-imperialist demonstrations.

IN THE SOVIET UNION

In only one country, women have won complete freedom and equality, a country whose workers and farmers are building it into a new world. In the Soviet Union women have taken their places in every field of economic, political and social life. They are building the new world of socialism side by side with the men—on the basis of complete equality. There is no difference in wages paid to men and women for the same type of work, whether they work in industry, on the land, in offices or in schools. Six thousand women are members of the governing bodies of the U.S.S.R., the Soviets, and many of them are members of the executive committees. More than 4 per cent of these

women are members of the executive committees of various Soviet Republics, members of the Councils of People's Commissars and even of the leading body of the Soviet Union, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets.

International Women's Day in the Soviet Union is a day of celebration for women who have already won their freedom, who know that their children have equal opportunity to grow into healthy, happy useful citizens of the new world—built by the workers and farmers, ruled by themselves, in their own interests for their own welfare. It is a holiday celebrated by women who leave their jobs in steel factories, railroads, scientific institutions, homes, and not only enjoy their own victory but demonstrate their solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the capitalist world who are still fighting a bitter but unflinching battle. They call to their sisters in the other world—the world of capitalism and misery—and say to them, "We have already won our freedom. We have marched through the years since 1917 when we destroyed the very basis of our misery and slavery—the whole system that denied us the right to live. From the first moment of victory we became equals in the ranks of the builders of socialism. We know of your struggles and stand beside you calling to you and to those who have not yet joined you, to follow our example—to join the battle of all the workers and farmers for the final victory all over the world—a victory which alone can bring you the freedom that we have won."

* * *

Today we celebrate International Women's Day in America with the glowing living inspiration of the women in the Soviet Union before us. And we have the inspiration of the great tradition of our native struggles.

There is much that is inspiring in our past for the tasks that stretch before us. But there is more than inspiration. Every struggle, every strike, no matter how small, has been another step towards unity and power. Every battle has added to the

forces of organized, class-conscious labor striving always to better its conditions, to strengthen its position for the final battle.

We gather strength from those who came before us, because their actions laid the foundations for the huge powerful wall of solidarity, a human wall of men and women together against the common enemy—the ruling class—which oppresses us all.

And we have one force of guidance and leadership that those who came long before us did not have to coordinate their activities, to direct their heroism, and their energies towards the accomplishment of our final aim—complete freedom for the whole working class. And that force is the Communist Party in whose ranks thousands of women are already working daily. The Communist Party is the only party which fights for equal rights for women, equal pay for equal work, social insurance, all the everyday needs of working women, farm women, housewives of every nationality and color. It is the only party that carries on the traditions of struggle, that leads this struggle towards a system of society where strikes and picket lines will not be needed, where hunger and misery will be impossible, where children will be assured of healthy, happy lives. Women of America, join the Communist Party and march shoulder to shoulder with all the toiling masses towards a Soviet America.

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