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The Origins of 8 March - International Women’s Day

Instructions: Reconstruct the essay by putting the paragraphs back in the correct order.

\_\_1\_\_ A. The idea of creating an international holiday for women was first raised in the labor movement at the end of the 19th century in Europe and the Americas. In 1891 the 2nd Socialist International had declared May 1st as a permanent holiday for workers in every country in commemoration of the anarchist “Haymarket Martyrs”, executed in Chicago on 11 November 1887 during the struggle for the 8-hour workday. Socialist women like Clara Zetkin in Germany and their supporters in the international labor movement began to call for a similar holiday to recognize the double oppression of women, both as workers and as women.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. The 1912 textile strike of women and children in Lawrence, Massachusetts is another event often associated with the origins of IWD in the popular mind. A new Massachusetts law had reduced the working week for women and children under 18 from 56 to 54 hours, but the textile mill owners had cut their salaries as well. The successful strike lasted almost 10 weeks and involved some 20,000 multi-national workers, mostly women and children: Russian, Syrian, Italian, German, Polish, Belgian, Armenian, English, Irish, Portuguese, Austrian, Jewish, French-Canadian and Lithuanian. Union meetings and strike leaflets were translated into all the different languages.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. Then in February 1908 U.S. socialists organized national women’s day demonstrations in various cities for the right to vote and better working conditions for women. In Manhattan, on 8 March 1908, ca. 15,000 poor and working women, mostly East European and Italian immigrants in the garment and textile industry, left the sweatshops and tenements on New York's Lower East Side and marched to Union Square, where they held a militant rally. They raised the demand for the right to vote, but also for higher wages, shorter working hours, an end to child labor and better working conditions. In their speeches the women denounced the bosses, landlords and bankers, but also raised the slogan "Bread and Roses", with bread symbolizing economic security and roses a better quality of life.

\_\_\_\_\_ D. On 25 March 1911 less than a week later, the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in lower Manhattan took the lives of 146 working girls, mostly Italian and Jewish immigrants. The sweatshop owners had locked the exit doors, so the girls could not escape the deadly flames and smoke. The tragedy caused great public outrage and a silent funeral march [drew](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/story/introduction.html) more than 100,000 mourners. It had significant impact on labor legislation in the U.S.A., however, and from then on the tragedy became connected in the collective consciousness to IWD.

\_\_\_\_\_ E. As the second half of the 19th century proceeded, trade unions were forming, industrial conflicts were spreading, and masses of women, especially immigrants, were entering the labor market in the U.S.A. They were often employed in sex-segregated jobs, mainly in textiles, manufacturing and domestic services, where working conditions and wages were terrible. At the same time, the mostly middle-class suffragette movement for a woman’s right to vote was growing in strength. In 1903, the Women's Trade Union League (affiliated with the American Federation of Labor) was founded by women trade unionists and liberal middle-class suffragettes to help organize women in unions and to campaign for the right to vote.

\_\_\_\_\_ F. On 19 March 1911, as a result of the 1910 Copenhagen decision, IWD was celebrated for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and other European countries, with more than one million women and men attending rallies in numerous cities and towns. In addition to the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded the right to work and an end to discrimination on the job.

\_\_\_\_\_ G. In 1920 the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted women the right to vote. IWD continued to be celebrated through the ‘20s, ‘30s and ‘40s, but in the 1950s the Cold War repression and McCarthy’s anti-communist witch hunts resulted in the suppression of the celebration of IWD. In 1967 various women’s groups began to celebrate IWD once again, and by the 1970s, due to the successful mobilizations of the civil rights and anti-war movements, U.S. feminists and leftists began to revive the holiday’s celebration with events in most major U.S. cities. And finally during International Women's Year in 1975, IWD was given official recognition by the U.N. and since then has been recognized as a national holiday by numerous nations across the globe.

\_\_\_\_\_ H. Historical accounts differ as to the exact origins of International Women’s Day (IWD). According to some accounts, the inspiration dates back to 8 March 1857 when there was a demonstration in Manhattan of women garment and textile workers protesting low wages, the twelve-hour workday and poor working conditions, which was brutally broken up by the police. Many historians consider this to be a myth with no proof to support it, but still it has come to be connected in the collective mind to the history of IWD.

\_\_\_\_\_ I. On the eve of World War I, Russian women campaigning for peace observed their first IWD on the last Sunday in February 1913 (Julian calendar). On or around 8 March 1914 IWD rallies were held all around Europe. In 1917, with two million Russian soldiers dead in the war, Russian women again chose the last Sunday in February (23 February on the Julian calendar, but 8 March on the Gregorian calendar) to strike for "bread and peace". Male political leaders expressed opposition to the timing of the strike, but the women went ahead anyway and made history. Four days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and a provisional government granted women the right to vote.

\_\_\_\_\_ J. In August 1910, the 2nd International organized a Conference of Socialist Women which met in Copenhagen. Under the leadership of Clara Zetkin and with the support of Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollantai and V.I. Lenin, the proposal to establish an IWD was approved unanimously by the over 100 women from 17 countries attending the conference, representing unions, socialist parties and working women’s clubs. Zetkin and the other women were inspired by the struggles and demonstrations in the U.S.A. No specific date was chosen for the holiday, until 1913 when the date of 8 March was agreed upon.

\_\_\_\_\_ K. In May 1908, the Socialist Party of America designated the last Sunday in February for the observance of National Women's Day. In 1909, National Woman's Day was observed across the United States on 28 February. On 8 March 1909 some 2,000 people, including many immigrant women who several weeks before had just won a garment workers’ strike, attended a rally in Manhattan, again raising demands for better living and working conditions for women, an end to child labor, and the right to vote. In 1910 once more there were successful National Women’s Day commemorations in U.S. cities.