

## 8th March - Sell or Forget!

*International Women's Day emerged from labor history, now floating in commercial obscurity or has sunk in oblivions*

[Zdravka Todorova](#) Mar . 08 . 2004

If you hear about the 8th of March today, it is more likely that you read about a marketing campaign to "mark" International Women's Day with the launching of a new cosmetic line. Such a "tribute" in a marketing campaign of course will make sense only outside the U.S. - in Canada and Europe, as the U.S. mass consumers are oblivious of the Day. This is ironic, because events in U.S. labor history deserve to be invoked today on the 8th of March.

There are debates about its exact historical origins, but the Day is related to the strike of women garment workers in 1909 in the U.S., where 20,000-30,000 shirtwaist-makers protested during 13 winter weeks for better pay and working conditions. Further, after the Triangle Fire in New York City (March 25th 1911) took the lives of more than 140 working girls (most of them Italian and Jewish immigrants) the working conditions leading up to the disaster were invoked during subsequent observances of the International Women's Day. By this time, German activist Clara Zetkin had already called for women throughout the world to focus on a particular day each year to press for their concerns.

"Make your dreams take flight, because you're worth it!"- Day's motto of a popular marketer of women's cosmetics surely fits the concerns of significant numbers of "emancipated" ladies today. Dreaming about buying the newest type of mascara or even about the individual success of becoming a Chief Executive Officer were not, however, the steppingstones of working women's movements related to the International Women's Day. Even in socialist countries where the holiday was a celebration of "the heroic woman worker," the Day became commercialized. Women were presented with flowers, perfumes, and/or something like a blender; and were getting the message to somehow manage being productive socialist workers, housewives in patriarchic families, and beautiful consumers.

Looking at the labor history, however, we see women fighting against inhuman working conditions and low wages. Have these concerns already been answered? Those who study the "global" and domestic economies would not believe so! "Flexible labor markets" - with low wages, lax work contracts, and scanty benefits are being promoted as a way for increasing investment and growth. This assumption comfortably sets the tone domestically and globally, and does not leave space for serious discussion about women's (and generally workers') concerns.

Women's role as consumers seems much more "suitable" to be emphasized on the International Women's Day rather than addressing concerns about conditions of participation in the production and reproduction process as initially intended. It is in such marketing manner that 8th of March is "celebrated," floating in commercial obscurity; or it is forgotten, sunk in oblivion!





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