

The Face of the Labor Movement: Women at the Front Lines

Women in Unions-Listed below are some of the most amazing women in the labor movement from yesterday to today

Sarah Bagley

Sarah Bagley worked in the Lowell Mills, organized the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, and later left the mills to work as the first female telegraph operator.

Linda Chavez-Thompson

An inspirational story of a woman of color rising from the cotton fields of Texas, working her way up the ranks in AFSME and then going on to help transform the American Labor movement by being the first woman and person of color to be elected to an executive position in the AFL-CIO. Chavez-Thompson is bridging to gap between organized labor and women and minorities.



For more information see:

Biography of Linda Chavez-Thompson. Gale Group. Washington, D.C., 2002. Available at http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/chh/bio/chavez_1.htm

"Linda Chavez-Thompson, Advisory Board Member." Welcome to the White House, Washington, D.C., 2000. Available at <http://clinton4.nara.gov/textonly/Initiatives/OneAmerica/BIO-LCT.html>

Dolores Huerta

Information on Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers union.

Mother Jones

Mother Jones (Mary Harris Jones) has been called the most dangerous woman in America. Taking up labor union agitation when she was sixty by her reckoning, she continued her activism into her nineties, working for the United Mine Workers, against child labor and in struggles including in Illinois, West Virginia and Colorado.

Women's Trade Union League (WTUL)

Organization that fostered women's trade unions, studied working conditions, and promoted protective legislation for women workers. Includes Sophonisba Breckenridge, Mary Morton Kehew, Helen Marot, Mary Eliza McDowell, Agnes Nestor, Mary Kenney O'Sullivan, Maud O'Farrell Swartz, Rose Schneiderman, Florence Kelley and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Frances Perkins

The political establishment and the press were stunned when Frances Perkins- New York's Industrial Commissioner of Labor from 1929 through 1932 – went to Washington to become to first woman cabinet officer in our nation's history.

During the Depression, Frances Perkins, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, joined Roosevelt's cabinet as an advocate for the poor and the exploited. She believed that the force of law was the best way to defeat industrial wrongs in the workplace and help make life tolerable for millions of "ordinary people" as they struggled from day to day.

Her wide-ranging experiences in the cauldron of New York politics had transformed that belief into a vision of what the American workplace should be. During her four years as New York's industrial commissioner, Perkins mobilized and expanded the Department of Labor's resources on behalf of "multitudes" of people who needed help.

Helping few the New Deal, Perkins would become the "mother of social security," playing an important part in gaining minimum wage for workers, banning child labor in factories, restricting work weeks, and setting up the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Her critics routinely assailed the onetime social worker, in part because of the fresh thinking she brought to Washington and in part because she was a woman in what had always been a man's world. But Frances Perkins and her revolutionary ideas prevailed during her twelve years as Secretary of Labor.