

WA&HC

Workers Arts and Heritage Centre

Serving to preserve, honour and promote the culture and history of all working people.

The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre acknowledges that we are guests on the traditional territories of the HuronWendat and Neutrals, and later the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe and governed by the Dish With One Spoon treaty.

905-522-3003
wahc-museum.ca
workerscity.ca

PUBLIC HOURS

Wednesday to Saturday
10 am to 4 pm

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: WorkersArtsandHeritageCentre
Twitter: WAHC
Instagram: workersartsandheritage

WAHC thanks John Summers, Meredith Hayes, Siobhan Angus, Matthew Tegel, Hitoko Okada, Tara Bursey and staff member Daniel Hill, whose contributions were invaluable in the making of this exhibition.



ALL TOGETHER NOW!

BANNERS FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

Curated by Siobhan Angus

Labour banners demonstrate collective strength.

Carried in parades, brandished at protests and hung in union halls, they convey messages of common purpose, pride, unity and the dignity of work.

We are proud to share a small selection of our banner collection with you.

Let us know what you think - through twitter, Facebook or email!

UNITY

The earliest labour banners were used to identify groups of workers who did the same type of work. They were carried in parades and celebrations to communicate unity and solidarity. These banners often depicted handshakes to represent the unity of workers.

In later years, banners demonstrated solidarity with broader social justice issues and struggles as well as those of fellow workers.

The call for unity is as relevant today as it has ever been.

PRIDE

Labour banners communicated a worker's pride and the dignity in their work. Banners were made with great care and expense, intricately and colourfully sewn and painted. They also often feature tools of workers' trades to symbolize skill and common purpose.

Taking pride and having dignity in work is still as important today as it has always been.

**AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS OF AMERICA
AND AFFILIATED LOCALS 132, 211, 212, 216, 219, 222,
233, 235**

Early to mid 20th century
Embroidery on silk, metal wound fringe and trim
Donation of the UNITE Ontario Council
2003.2.3

The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) was formed in 1914 after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City killed 123 women and 23 men.

Most of the victims of the fire were female garment workers of Italian and Jewish descent. Despite this, the ACWA's membership was primarily male; women represented only about 5% of ACWA's membership in the early 20th century.

By the 1920s, ACWA was one of the largest men's clothing unions in the United States and Canada. At this time, ACWA manufactured close to 85% of all men's garments made in the United States.

Female workers were often not unionized and had little workplace protection. Some labour organizations feared the competition from 'unskilled' female labourers who worked for lower pay.

More women became involved in the labour movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

This banner represents amalgamated clothing workers from multiple Toronto locals. Some of these locals were known for its largely immigrant membership base, such as Local 235, which represented Italian tailors. Other locals represented pressers, sergers, pant makers and sleeve hangers.

**ENERGY AND CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION
(NOW PART OF UNIFOR)
CAROLE CONDE AND KARL BEVERIDGE**

1990
Cotton, applique, paint
Donation of the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union
2005.4.1

This large, richly coloured banner commissioned by the Energy, Chemical Workers Union (ECWU) was the first of a series of banners visual artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge produced for various union locals.

The ECWU was the Canadian breakaway from American Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union. The ECWU later merged with Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union which today is part of Unifor.

Like the earliest banners in our collection, this banner has images painted on both sides and a decorative fringe.

The design of the banner reflects the ongoing engagement with the traditions of banner design and production combined with modern designs and techniques.

The banner celebrates both the diversity of union membership and the assistance the union provides: collective bargaining, direct action, health and safety and worker training and education.

CLOAK, SUIT AND SKIRT FINISHERS UNION OF TORONTO LOCAL 94

Early to mid 20th century
Paint on silk, metal wound fringe and trim
Donation of the UNITE Ontario Council
2003.2.5

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) was founded in New York in 1900.

The ILGWU worked to improve both working and living conditions for its members through collective bargaining agreements, training programs, healthcare facilities, cooperative housing, educational opportunities and recreational initiatives such as union local sports teams.

Known as a "union of immigrants," the ILGWU provided assistance and counseling for immigrants, advocated politically for immigrant rights, and held classes to help immigrants adjust to living in a new country.

The ILGWU was one of few unions in the labour movement that maintained a consistent policy in support of undocumented workers.

While the ILGWU membership was overwhelmingly female, the international leadership was primarily male. As the racial demographics of the union changed in the post war period, the union was criticized for the relative absence of union leaders who were more recent immigrant members.

In 1995, the ILGWU merged with ACTWU to form the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)

HAMILTON UNION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

1980's
Cotton and paint
2003.73.1

The Hamilton Union of Unemployed was founded in 1978. The history of unemployed workers unions in Canada dates back to 1930, when the Communist Party of Canada formed the National Unemployed Workers Association (NUWA).

Organizing unemployed workers built community and solidarity between the jobless and advocated for political and economic reform.

Historian Bryan Palmer argues that "In creating one of the first truly mass movements of the unemployed... workers of the 1930s raised the demand of 'work and wages' at a critical point in history when such a claim to essential human rights necessary extended beyond the economic."

To combat the alienation of unemployment, banners helped jobless workers create a sense of belonging. Like the NUWA, the Hamilton Union of Unemployed supported strikes and participated in demonstrations, which is likely the reason this banner was produced.

TEXTILE WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA LOCAL 799, CORNWALL

Mid 20th century

Rayon and synthetic fibres

Donation of the UNITE Ontario Council

2003.2.8

Cornwall was a major centre for textile production in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Textile mills operated by Canadian Coloured Cottons Limited drove the local economy and provided the majority of jobs to the town's working people.

Canadian Coloured Cottons Limited closed these mills in 1959, the same year they shuttered their Hamilton factory in the city's North End.

Cornwall's textile mills reflect patterns of immigration. In the late 18th century, the workforce was primarily made up of French-speaking Québécois and experienced textile workers from New England.

By the 20th century, immigrants from Italy, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Japan, and the Netherlands, and people of Jewish and First Nations (Mohawk) descent formed the textile industry's workforce.

Women represented more than half of the workforce before the Depression. During the Depression, women were the first to lose work due to increased automation and the privileging of male workers. During World War II, women moved into higher-paid jobs that were traditionally the domain of men.

Cornwall's Textile Workers Union of America Local 799 was made up of rayon workers. The British-owned Courtaulds Canada Inc. opened a rayon manufacturing plant in 1924 which operated until 1992.

This banner, made of rayon (also known as "fake silk") reflects the unionized workers it represented.

JOINT BOARD CLOAK, SUIT AND DRESSMAKERS UNION LOCALS 14, 68, 83, 94

Early to mid 20th century

Paint and embroidery on silk, metal wound fringe and trim

Donation of the UNITE Ontario Council

2003.2.6

In 1912, sixty-five male sewing machine operators who were members of the ILGWU were fired by T. Eaton Company for refusing to do work which was traditionally done by female workers.

One thousand fellow workers went on strike in solidarity. The majority of the strikers were Jewish and roughly 1/3 of the strikers were women. The ILGWU sent two female organizers from the head office to organize female strikers.

The ILGWU attacked the working conditions "in this very kingdom of the Eaton Company" for employing "frail children of fourteen years" during busy seasons and forcing workers "at times to take 'homework' to do at night, after a long day in the factory."

The Eaton's Strike of 1912 is a rare example of male solidarity in support of women workers.

One of the slogans from the strike, "*Mir vellen nisht aroycenemen dem bissle fun broyt fun di mayler fun undzere shvester*" translates to "We will not take the morsel of bread from the mouths of our sisters."

CAW FLYING SQUAD, LOCAL 598, MINE MILL, SUDBURY

Date Unknown
Synthetic fabric
2003.75.1

This contemporary banner reflects the ongoing use of banners to show solidarity between unions and social movements.

Unions flying squads were created to participate in direct actions beyond a worker's own workplace. They show solidarity by supporting striking workers, non-unionized workers and the unemployed.

Flying squads first formed in the early 1900s by the Industrial Workers of the World. Flying squads draw from union membership but they have no formalized relationship to local and national unions.

Local 598 in Sudbury had one of the largest flying squads in Ontario. CAW Local 598 was the last surviving local of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and in 1993 merged with the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW), which is now Unifor.

“My dream is that anywhere an injustice is taking place, and people call for help, to have union members there in force to help them in their battles. A lot of repressive laws would become inoperable.”

*Steve Watson, Retired National Representative,
Education Department, Canadian Auto Workers
Union (now Unifor)*

CLOAK, SUIT AND SKIRT MAKERS UNION LOCAL 68, TORONTO

Early to mid 20th century
Paint on silk, metal wound fringe and trim
Donation of the UNITE Ontario Council
2003.2.7

The rise of industrial unionism launched two garment workers unions in New York at the turn of the 20th century: the United Garment Workers of America (UGWA) in 1891 and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in 1900.

In the 20th century, ILGWU worked to improve both working and living conditions for its members through collective bargaining agreements, training programs, healthcare facilities, cooperative housing, educational opportunities and recreational initiatives such as union local sports teams.

Known as a “union of immigrants,” the ILGWU established important programs providing assistance and counseling for immigrants, advocating immigrant rights through lobbying in congress and the state legislature in the United States, and conducting classes designed to enable immigrants to cope with the challenges of living in a new country. The ILGWU was also one of few unions in the labour movement that maintained a consistent policy in support of undocumented workers.

With the inclusion of the word “international” in its name, the ILGWU envisioned that Canada would become part of the union since its inception in 1900.

While the official founding of the Toronto union was in 1909, it was not until 1910 and 1911 when locals became formally established, the first being Cloak Local 14 and Pressers Local 92 in Toronto, and Cloak Cutters Local 19 and Coat Pressers Local 61 in Montreal.