

5c – “Bread and Roses”

About a decade after the strike at Lawrence, Wobbly writer James Oppenheim commemorated the event with this poem. He said it was inspired by a woman striker who carried a sign during one of the protest's that read, "We want bread and roses too: " He thought this sentiment captured the essence of the mill workers' struggle to escape some of the hardships of factory life. The poem, like the strike, became world-famous. It has since been put to music and workers have embraced it as their own rallying cry during later labor protests. Today, because of the poem, the 1912 walkout in the Lawrence mills is remembered as "the strike for bread and roses. "

As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,
And touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,
For the people hear us singing: "Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"

As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,
For they are women's children and we mother them again.
Our lives shall riot be sweated from birth until life closes;
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead
Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.
Yes; it is bread we fight for - but we fight for roses, too!

As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.
No more the drudge and idler - ten that toil where one reposes,
But a sharing of life's glories; Bread and roses! Bread and roses!

*This article is reprinted by from the Teaching Tolerance curriculum kit
A Place at the Table.*