

149 Rose

New York City's infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire killed 146 people, nearly all of them young Italian and Jewish immigrants. This 1911 tragedy highlighted the consequences and ugly reality of the manual labor-based Industrial Revolution, and of the disposable employee. Factory workers died from smoke inhalation, fire or jumping to their deaths, because the owners had locked all but one door and the flimsy fire escape collapsed.

Rose Schneiderman, an early suffragist and prominent labor union organizer, focused on the horrific event in her tireless efforts to win voting rights for women, as well as safer working conditions for all. She specifically called out to women of privilege and is credited with coining the phrase, "The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too."

It took the city's deadliest industrial disaster, one of the worst in U.S. history, to begin to change the consciousness of America. The event directly influenced the birth of OSHA and played a defining role in women earning the right to vote in New York in 1917.

Dangerous Coats

Someone clever once said

Women were not allowed pockets

In case they carried leaflets

To spread sedition

Which means unrest

To you & me

A grandiose word

For commonsense

Fairness

Kindness

Equality

So ladies, start sewing

Dangerous coats

Made of pockets & sedition

I wrote this poem a little while ago now, but I still get requests from women all over the world to use my poem in a non-profit way, either to raise awareness of issues affecting women, or in their crafting groups. I am delighted & humbled to give permission. Thank you, everyone.

- Sharon Owens, January 7, 2020

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