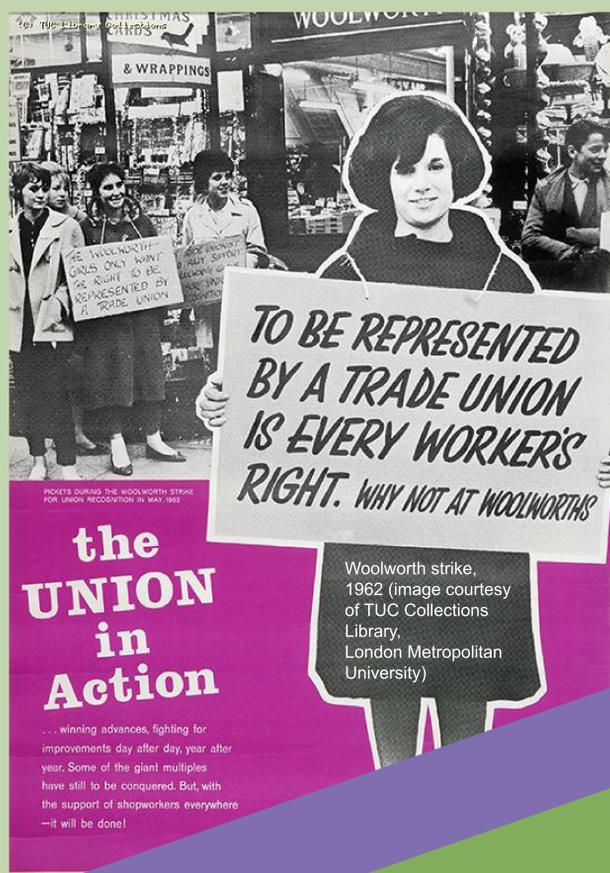


The 1888 strike by the women who worked at the Bryant and May match factory in Bow began the trade union movement as we know it today. It was the start of the New Unionism movement which recruited unskilled and semi-skilled workers and employed industrial action which the craft unions had tended to avoid.

During the 1970s the leaders of trade unions were almost exclusively white men. Women and Black and Asian workers found that their strikes for better pay and conditions were not supported by their unions.



*“...the number of women General Secretaries is pitifully small all the teaching unions have got a woman General Secretary, um, but I mean really women are not represented in proportion to their numbers at all”*  
 (Professor Mary Davis)

# Women in Trade Unions

*“...a lot of younger women don't necessarily identify the need for women's structures 'cause they feel that they've got equality for themselves so we're having a really hard time now trying to keep it all going”*  
 (Louisa Bull, Trade Union Officer for Unite)\*\*\*\*\*



Pinks' Jam Factory Strike, Berrymsey, 1911 (image courtesy of TUC Library Collections, London Metropolitan University)

The combination of the privatisation of many industries and legislation brought in to curb the power of the unions by the Conservative government in the 1980s, led to a decrease in union membership across the board, not just for women. By 2011 only 27% of the work force was unionised. The figure is similar today.

By 2014 the figure of trade union members that were women had risen to 55%. Despite this only 15 of the 54 trade unions in the UK are led by women.

*“...back in my day unions were very, very male and there was certainly a huge culture of them being opposed to women coming into the workplace in some industries because they thought they would undermine their pay, you know, obviously women's work you pay less and therefore they would get women to do it and then the men would be suffering, there was a lot of that sort of culture around and there was a lot of men on the committee, women make the tea and sell the raffle tickets, all of that going [on]”*  
 (Wendy Davis, Save the Women's Library campaign and Rooms of Our Own)



Future That Works Campaign, October 2012 (Image copyright of daliscar1, Flickr)