

Gender, identity and solidarity

Multiple authors, *You Better Work: Queer/Trans*/Feminist Workers' Stories*, Twin Cities IWW, Issue 1: August 2014.

Bernadette Hyland, *Northern ReSisters: Conversations with Radical Women*, Mary Quaille Club, 2015.

Reviewed by
Molly Charboneau

In the age of social media and online campaigns, these two brief but powerful publications—addressing gender, identity and creativity in the building of workplace and community solidarity—remind us that printed pieces are still valuable organizing tools.

You Better Work: Queer/Trans/Feminist Workers' Stories* is a zine written by U.S.-based Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizers. This short work was inspired by *Lines of Work* (Black Cat Press 2014), a larger collection of stories about workplace resistance, some of them reprinted in the zine.

The zine's focus is the writers' lived experiences with gender and sexualized oppression at work and how they "found ways to fight back against patriarchy, homo/trans* phobia, and many other forms of oppression in their organizing," says editor FW/Colt Thundercat—vital information for today's organizers.

In "Bathrooms," Gayge Operaista describes not being allowed, while a university employee, to use the bathroom at work and having to walk up the road to use a library's facilities because "when you're genderqueer (or any sort of trans*, or visibly gender non-conforming in any way) random



people's comfort matters a hell of a lot more than your ability to carry out the basic functions of life." This timely essay gives a human dimension to New York City's recent order guaranteeing people access to facilities consistent with their gender identity at city-operated buildings.

Other essays are by authors who creatively fought sexual harassment and oppressive and hateful language and behavior at work; overcame the effects of domestic violence through the power of solidarity; and transitioned from intersex male to intersex female while active in community and workplace organizing.

In *Northern ReSisters: Conversations with Radical Women*, author Bernadette Hyland combines new interviews and past articles about "women who have taken part in some of the most important campaigns, including the women's movement, trade unionism, the peace movement, Ireland, Palestine, and campaigns against racism and fascism."

Hyland's focus is Northern England and its women organizers, but her message is universal: "to remind people that the working class has an honourable history of political activism."



Mixed in with articles on well known women, such as Irish activist and former MP Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, are compelling portraits

of lesser-known feminists, unionists, socialists and peace and social justice activists of all ages. Here we meet Betty Tebbs, still in the struggle at age 96; Pia Feig, a Jewish activist involved in the Palestine Solidarity Committee; Claire Mooney, a feminist and musician; Mandy Vere, a radical bookseller, and so many more.

Color photographs of these Northern women and their campaigns enliven each biographical sketch, and many of the articles include contact information so readers can join their struggles.

Though both works offer valuable lessons, they would have benefited from including the voices of people of color. "Without these voices, this project is far, far weaker," writes editor Thundercat of the zine's unintended omission. Hopefully this shortcoming will be remedied in future editions to strengthen these illuminating publications.

From the Editor:

This issue of the *Work History News* will be my last as editor. For the past four years, it has been my great pleasure to put this newsletter together. Now I am leaving this behind in order to work full time on the books I hope to write.

The good news is that we have a very talented person taking over, NYLHA board member and oral historian Leyla Vural. Thank you to all of the correspondents who contributed to the newsletter, to the New York Labor History Association for all of its support, and to Leyla, for taking on this mission, which is close to my heart.

—Jane LaTour