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"We are the lions, Mr Manager"

For Women's History Month's theme of celebrating women who tell our stories, Steph looks at some of the women who have inspired her with their stories.

Women fight for equity across the world from Afghanistan to the boards of blue-chip companies. In the union movement we can draw inspiration to continue our campaign by remembering and celebrating women who have gone before us with their courage, tenacity, and fight.

These are women who motivate me, from early pioneers through to more recent. Reading stories of women like Betty and Jayaben (see below), their strength is inspirational. They didn't back down, they stood up, were counted and their courage shaped female trade unionism in the UK.

In 1875, [Emma Paterson](#) and [Edith Simcox](#) became the first women delegates to the TUC. I'll say that again, the **first women delegates**. Emma was also the founder of the [National Union of Working Women](#) (NUWW) 1875.

Wonderfully subversive, [Beatrice Webb](#) co-founder of the London School of Economics (LSE) said: "if I had been a man, self-respect, family pressure and the public opinion of my class would have pushed me into a money-making profession; as a mere woman I could carve out a career of disinterested research." She also coined the term collective bargaining in 1891

[Margaret Haig-Thomas, Lady Rhondda](#) was a suffragette, played a major part in the recruitment of women during the first world war and after the war, as well as campaigning for the rights of women workers who did not want to be pushed back into the home, she also continued the fight for the final phase of women's suffrage which saw all women get the vote in 1928. A very successful

businesswoman and journalist, Lady Rhondda argued that women's voting rights must be accompanied by social and economic legislation; this included equality of opportunity in the civil service (what more can I say)..

[Betty Tebbs](#) radical hero (she is fab) was born in 1919. She started work at a paper mill, aged 14: "I was so pleased when I got my first wage until I saw the boy's wage, which was two shillings more than me - and yet we were doing the same work." She joined the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Works (now part of Unite). and by the time she left the mill 18 years later, she and her female colleagues were the best-paid paper mill women in Britain.

[Jayaben Desai](#), led a strike at 1976 of 100 mainly South Asian women in a dispute against the Grunwick photo processing factory in North London. She told the boss: "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo, there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your fingertips, others are lions who can bite your head off. We are the lions, Mr Manager."

We have come this far. Together we are stronger and together we can climb mountains. We are the lions. [Join PCS](#).

We are encouraging our women members to get more active. Please consider joining a women's regional or national members network. Contact the PCS equality department for more information at equality@pcs.org.uk.