

# THE RED BERETS



— Helena Wehrstein

**International Women’s Day (IWD)  
Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, March 8, 1986**

## • RECORDINGS

A group of “socialist feminist women who like to sing” came together to form the Red Berets in Toronto in 1981. Their first gig was at the International Women’s Day rally held at City Hall on Saturday, March 7, 1981.

## • SONGLIST & LYRICS

The Red Berets sang regularly at benefits, rallies, demonstrations and picket lines in and around Toronto from 1981 to 1988. Singing feminist songs as well as traditional songs of solidarity and struggle, the Red Berets also wrote their own songs or rewrote lyrics to highlight current issues. A Red Berets pamphlet from the early years says:

## • GIGS

*We are a grassroots singing group dedicated to making music accessible by encouraging audience participation....While we sing about a wide diversity of social issues – workers’ rights, disarmament, anti-intervention, anti-racism, choice on abortion and sexual orientation – our emphasis is on integrating these issues with concerns of the women’s movement.*

## • PUBLICITY

## • GROUP DYNAMICS

Participation in the group was open, and numbers rose and fell over the years, but the group maintained a core of about twelve singers. The group resurfaced in 2002 and 2005 to sing at labour history conferences and in May 2014 to be themselves in the play, *Life on the Line: Women Strike at Eaton’s 1984-85*, by Pat McDermott. The Red Berets still sing together in protest from time to time. Eight Red Berets gathered to sing with others at the Toronto Harperman Singalong (“Harperman, it’s time for you to go!”) on September 17, 2015.

## • SINGERS

*The information on the Red Beret pages has been compiled from members’ collective memories, diaries, songbooks and other records. Apologies for any errors.*

## • PHOTOS

— Liz Martin, Jane Springer, & Helena Wehrstein

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# RECORDINGS



— Wally Secombe

**IWD, Harbord Collegiate, March 7, 1981**

*These are not professional recordings. They were originally made for rehearsal purposes, and are included just to give a sense of the Red Berets' sound and the kinds of songs they sang.*

## **A Si Katali**

Traditional Zulu, written on ANC picket lines  
Recorded Feb. 24, 1987: York University

*[Click here to listen](#)*

## **Fight Back**

Holly Near 1978, with permission  
Recorded Nov. 11, 1986: Workshop on Violence Against Women, Adult Learning Centre, Toronto

*[Click here to listen](#)*

## **Gonna Rise**

Susan Howlett (Red Berets)  
Recorded Oct. 1984: Red Berets rehearsal

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **It's My Body – Medley**

Based on three Leslie Gore songs, lyrics rewritten by Andrea Knight and other Red Berets  
Recorded Feb. 18, 1986: York University

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **Moving Mountains**

Arlene Mantle 1981, with permission, lyrics adapted by Red Berets  
Recorded Feb.18, 1986: York University

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **Oh Come All Ye Shoppers**

Traditional, lyrics rewritten by Red Berets  
Recorded Feb. 24, 1987: York University

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **Old Woman**

Michal Brody (formerly Michelle) 1973, with permission; lyrics adapted by unknown person  
Recorded Nov. 11, 1986: Workshop on Violence Against Women, Adult Learning Centre, Toronto

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **Union Maid**

Kerry Mills (Red Wing), lyrics adapted by Woodie Guthrie (1961) and Nancy Katz (third verse)  
Recorded Oct. 1984: Red Berets rehearsal

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **We Will Not Be Denied**

Jan Hillegas 1982, with permission, lyrics adapted by Andrea Knight (Red Berets)  
Recorded Oct. 1984: Red Berets rehearsal

*[Click here to listen](#)*

### **Women Walk More Determined**

Kristin Lems 1983, with permission  
Recorded Nov. 11, 1986: Workshop on Violence Against Women, Adult Learning Centre, Toronto

*[Click here to listen](#)*

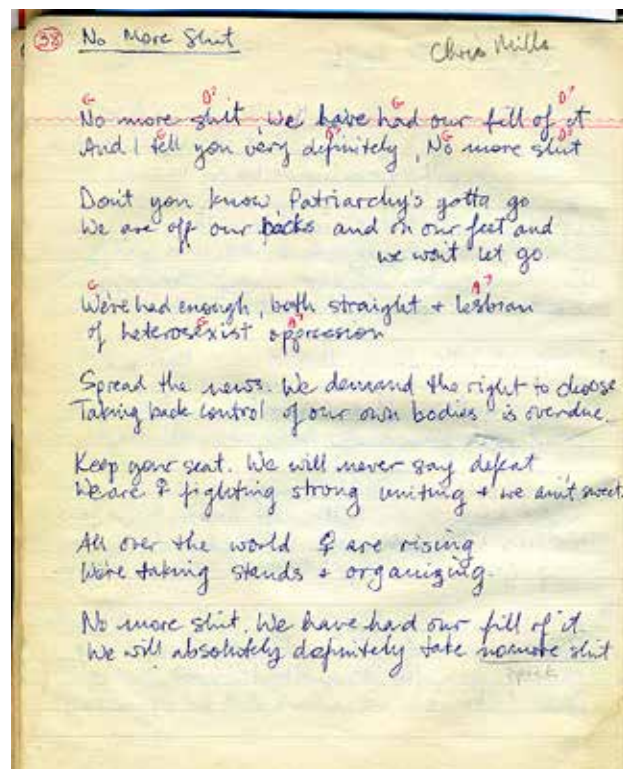
# SONGLIST & LYRICS



— Wally Seccombe

IWD, Convocation Hall, U of T, March 5, 1983

The Red Berets sang many traditional songs, and often modified the words to be compatible with a socialist feminist perspective or rewrote them to fit a specific occasion. Imagine the joy in replacing the first few lines of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman” with “Arise ye proletariat, let nothing you dismay/We all could buy more presents if we all got better pay”!



from a Red Beret's songbook

# SONGLIST

(\* indicates full lyrics in a booklet available [HERE](#) )

- \* **A Si Katali** *traditional Zulu*, written on ANC picket lines
  - Apartheid No** *Carole Rose Livingston* 1983
  - Arise Ye Merry Comrades** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
- \* **Bella Ciao** *traditional Italian folksong*, adapted by the Italian Partisans
  - Boys Will Be Boys**
- \* **Bread and Roses** *Mimi Farina* 1974, poem by James Oppenheim 1915, adapted by Red Berets
  - Carry It On** *Gil Turner*
  - \* **Cruise Blues** *Susan Howlett* (Red Berets) 1984
    - Cuanto Trabajo** *Gloria Martin*
  - Deck the Halls** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
  - Default Is the Fault of the IMF** *Bob Carty* 1984
  - Die Gedanken Sind Frei** *traditional*, adapted by Arthur Keveess
  - El Pueblo Unido** *Sergio Ortega* ca.1973, lyrics by Quilapayún
    - \* **Fifties Sound** *Kristin Lems* 1983
    - \* **Fight Back** *Holly Near* 1978
    - \* **For All Women in Struggle** *Kristin Lems* 1979
- Free Trade Song** (“Ca-na-da”) *Bobby Gimby* 1967, lyrics adapted by unknown author
  - Freedom Voices** *Patty Huntington*
  - \* **Gonna Rise** *Susan Howlett* (Red Berets) 1984
  - Harriet Tubman** *Walter Robinson* 1980
  - \* **Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida** *Holly Near* 1978
    - Hold On Women** *Frank Lynch*
  - Housewife’s Lament** *Anonymous*, mid-19th century from Sara A. Price’s diary
  - Hymn of Sandinista Unity** *Carlos Mejia Godoy*
  - \* **If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus** (“Oh Mary Don’t You Weep”) *traditional*, adapted by Charles Neblett 1962, and others
    - I’m a Friend of the Foetus** *Carole Rose Livingston* 1982
- \* **In Contempt** *traditional folksong*, adapted by Aaron Kramer and Betty Sanders 1950, to protest US House Committee on Un-American Activities
- International, The** *Pierre De Geyter* 1888, lyrics from poem by Eugène Pottier 1871
- \* **It’s My Body, Medley** *Based on three songs by Leslie Gore*, adapted by Red Berets
  - \* **Jingle Bells** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
  - \* **Joy to the World** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
    - Limpopo** *Human Condition*
  - Look to the People** *Ruth Pelham* 1982, adapted by Red Berets – zipper song
- \* **Love Me, I’m a Liberal** *Phil Ochs* 1966, updated by many singers over the years, including Andrea Knight (Red Berets)
  - MacGregor Don’t Allow No Striking Around Here**
  - March On**
  - Mayn Rue Platz** *traditional*, adapted by Morris Rosenfeld 1911
  - More than a Paycheque** *Y.M. Barnwell* (*Sweet Honey In The Rock*) 1981
  - \* **Moving Mountains** *Arlene Mantle* 1981 Red Berets – zipper song
  - Nicaragua**



- Nine to Five** *Dolly Parton* 1980
- \* **No a la intervencion** *Sabia*, a nueva cancion group in the 1980s
  - No More** *David Paul* 1982
  - \* **No More Shit** (“Ain’t She Sweet?”) *Milton Ager* 1927, adapted by Chris Mills (Red Berets)
    - \* **Oh Come All Ye Shoppers** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
  - \* **Oh Freedom** *Post-Civil War African-American song*, adapted by Red Berets – zipper song
    - Old Woman** *Michal Brody (formerly Michelle)* 1973, unknown adaptation
    - On Children** *Sweet Honey In The Rock*, poem by Kahlil Gibran
    - \* **Onwards Eaton’s Workers** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
    - Pa Donde** *Ixim Wanima*
  - Punch It In** (“Breaking Up Is Hard To Do”) *Howard Greenfield & Neil Sedaka*, adapted by Julie McCall
  - Same Boat Now** *Betsy Rose* 1983
  - Shameless Hussies** (“I Wish I Was In Dixie”) *Dan D. Emmett*, unknown adaptation
    - Shnel Loifu Di Reder**
    - \* **Silent Night** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
  - \* **Singing for Our Lives** *Holly Near* 1979, adapted by Red Berets – zipper song
    - \* **Smash the Right** *Arlene Mantle* 1982, from a collective song-writing session facilitated by Arlene Mantle
    - \* **Smash the Right** *Red Berets* 1981
  - So Let the Union In**
  - Solidarity Forever** (“Battle Hymn of the Republic”) *Ralph Chaplin* 1915, and others
    - \* **Stand Up, Oh Eaton’s Workers** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
    - Step by Step** *traditional*, arranged by John McCutcheon
    - Still Ain’t Satisfied** *Bonnie Lockhart* 1974
    - \* **Superwoman** *Cathy Miller (the Singing Quilter)* 1982
  - \* **Swing Low, Sweet Paddywagon** (“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”) *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
    - Testimony** *Ferron* 1980 (for *This Movie Is About Rape*)
  - There Was a Young Woman Who Swallowed a Lie** *Alan Mills* 1952, adapted by Meredith Tax 1970
    - \* **Twelve Days of Christmas** *traditional*, adapted by Andrea Knight (Red Berets)
    - Two Good Arms** *Charlie King* 1978
  - Union Maid** (“Red Wing”) *Kerry Mills* 1907, adapted by Woodie Guthrie 1961 and Nancy Katz (third verse)
    - \* **We Have a Little Problem** (“The Dreidel Song”) *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
    - \* **We Shall Not Be Moved** *African-American spiritual*, adapted by Red Berets
    - \* **We Will Not Be Denied** *Jan Hillegas* 1982, adapted by Andrea Knight (Red Berets)
      - \* **We Won’t Go Back** *Chris Mills* (Red Berets) 1983
    - \* **What Shall We Do** (“Drunken Sailor”) *traditional sea shanty*, adapted by Red Berets
  - Which Side Are You On** (“Lay the Lily Low”) *traditional*, adapted by Florence Reece 1946
    - Who Gave You the Right** *Bob Carty*
    - Whole World, The** *traditional*, adapted by Red Berets
  - Will the Circle Be Unbroken** *Charles H. Gabriel and Ada R. Habershon*, Red Berets – zipper song
    - Woman Am I**
    - Woman Time A Come**
    - \* **Women Walk More Determined** *Kristin Lems* 1983, adapted by Red Berets
    - Working Girl Blues** *Hazel Dickens* 1986

(As done by the Red Berets)

**WE WON'T GO BACK**

By Chris Mills

The right-to-lifers wan-na turn the cl-ock back to the so-called good old days,  
 When a wo-man who got pray- want had the e-xact a-mount of choice could af-  
 ford to pay. If she was rich she got a doc- tor who would do any thing for greed;  
 If she was poor, just a back street bu- tch-er or else one more mouth to feed.

**CHORUS**  
 On sis-ter mo-ther daugh-ter lo- ver, fight-ing to-ge-ther we ~~can't~~ <sup>cannot</sup> lose  
 And we won't go back to the back streets. We do mend our right to choose.

2. Ask your mother, ask her mother,  
 How many women have they known  
 Who lost their lives or their fertility  
 On a dirty kitchen table or at home alone.  
 Women bleeding, women dying,  
 Sister, listen to them cry.  
 Well, I say any is too many  
 Don't want one more woman to die.

Chorus

3. Well, they threaten, attack and harass us;  
 They wanna run us into the ground.  
 And they didn't hold life so precious  
 When they set the fire that burned our women's bookstore down.\*  
 You know violence against women  
 Has been around more years than you can count.  
 If it hasn't stopped us yet,  
 It sure as hell ain't gonna stop us now!

\* The third verse was written after a Right-to-Life fanatic set fire to a building which housed Toronto's first free-standing abortion clinic (a test case for federal law which forbids abortions outside hospitals and in strictly limited circumstances. The other tenant of the building was the Toronto Women's Bookstore which was completely gutted in the fire.)





# GIGS



**IWD, Toronto City Hall, 1981**

*The list of performances was put together from songbooks, diaries and agendas (members' copies of the Women's Press Everywoman's Almanacs were indispensable in the research).*

## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>1981</b>		
March 7	<b>International Women's Day (IWD) Rally</b> 11 am (practice at 9:30), Toronto City Hall and Harbord Collegiate	Bread and Roses
May 10	<b>Mother's Day Pro-Choice Rally</b> 12:30 pm, College and University	
May 13	<b>Domitilia Barrios de Chungara, Bolivian Woman Speaker</b> Settlement House	
May 31	<b>Riverdale Action Committee Against Racism (RA-CAR)</b> 1:30 pm, Greenwood Park	
June 20	<b>El Salvador Demo</b> 11 for noon, Queen's Park	
June 28	<b>Gay Pride Day</b> 3 pm, Grange Park	
Sept 26	<b>Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE)</b> 1-3 pm, Yonge and Eglinton, NW corner	Moving Mountains, In Contempt, Gentle Angry People, Love Me I'm a Liberal, Still Ain't Satisfied, What Shall We Do
Oct 8	<b>Irwin Toy Picket Line</b> 7 am, Etobicoke	
Oct 16	<b>Action Daycare Rally</b> 5:15 pm	



## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>1982</b>		
Feb 6	<b>Marxist Institute Party</b> International Students Centre	
March 6	<b>IWD Rally, March and Fair</b> City Hall, Toronto	<i>March:</i> Which Side Are You On, Oh Freedom, Bella Ciao, Internationale, Still Ain't Satisfied, Hay Una Mujer, 9 to 5, Moving Mountains, Bread and Roses. <i>Fair:</i> Will the Circle Be Unbroken, There Was a Young Woman, Testimony, Woman-time A Come, Solidarity
April 1	<b>Canadian Union of Educational Workers (CUEW) Rally</b> OISE	
April 6	<b>Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) Rally, Metro Labour Council</b> 4:30 pm, King/Bay TD Centre	
April 13	<b>Anti-Cruise Missile</b> Bloor Street United Church	
April 15	<b>OFL Solidarity Picket</b> 6 pm	
May 1	<b>Fight the Right Demo</b> 11:30 am, Harbord Collegiate	Which Side Are You On, Still Ain't Satisfied, Bella Ciao, Love Me I'm a Liberal, Internationale, Fight the Right
May 16	<b>Control of Our Bodies March</b> 12:45 pm, North side of Queen's Park	
June 27	<b>Gay Pride Day</b> 3 pm	No More
Sept 15	<b>Ontario Nurses Association (ONA)</b> Steelworkers Hall, Cecil Street	Which Side Are You On, Solidarity Forever, Moving Mountains, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Hold On Women, Working Girl Blues, Union Maid
Nov 6	<b>Women's Press Book Launch of <i>Still Ain't Satisfied</i></b> 7:30-9 pm, Cecil Street Community Centre	Still Ain't Satisfied, Hold On Women, Teen Angel, Testimony, Bread and Roses
Nov 18	<b>Morgentaler Event</b> Practice started at 7:45 pm, OISE	In Contempt, We Shall Not Be Moved, Moving Mountains, What Shall We Do, Still Ain't Satisfied, Bread and Roses
Nov 21	<b>Launch of Laura Sky Film, <i>Good Monday Morning</i></b> Science Centre	Union Maid, Which Side Are You On, Solidarity Forever
Nov 29	<b>Miniskool Picket Line, Mississauga</b> Cawthra Road, just north of Dundas	
<b>1983</b>		
March 5	<b>IWD Rally</b> Convocation Hall, University of Toronto	<i>Intro:</i> In Contempt, Internationale, Hay Una Mujer, Bella Ciao, Hold On Women, Back of the Bus. <i>Main Set:</i> For All Women in Struggle, Nicaragua, Fight Back, Teen Angel, Women Walk More Determined, Bread and Roses

## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>1983</b>		
April 23	<b>Against Cruise Testing (ACT) Demo</b> Practice at 12:45 pm for 1 pm Queen's Park	Oh Freedom, Down by the Riverside, Moving Mountains, Gentle Angry People, What Shall We Do, We Shall Not Be Moved, Will the Circle Be Unbroken
May 5	<b>New Trojan Horse Café Opening</b>	
May 8	<b>Mother's Day Midwife Demo 1 pm</b>	
June 22	<b>Abortion Rally 7 pm, City Hall</b>	
June 26	<b>Gay Pride Day</b>	
July 1	<b>New Trojan Horse Café Benefit</b>	
Sept 29	<b>Abortion Meeting</b> 8 pm, International Student Centre	In Contempt, Bread and Roses, I'm a Friend of the Foetus, We Won't Go Back, Testimony
Oct 1	<b>Pro-Choice Rally 1 pm, City Hall</b>	Fight Back, Swing Low, We Won't Go Back
Oct 20	<b>Cheryl Walker, Women in South Africa, TCLSAC</b> 7:30 pm, International Student Centre	
Oct 21	<b>Book Launch</b> Steelworkers Hall, Cecil Street	Bread and Roses, Hold On Women, Which Side Are You On, Union Maid
Nov 19	<b>Arlene Mantle's <i>On the Line: Songs for Social Change</i> Book Launch</b> 7 pm, Steelworkers Hall, Cecil Street	Moving Mountains, Still Ain't Satisfied, Teen Angel, A Si Katali
Dec 9	<b>Women's Vigil for Nicaragua</b> 5:30-7:30 pm, US Consulate	Singing for Our Lives, Nicaragua, Hay Una Mujer, Moving Mountains, A Si Katali, We Shall Overcome, Oh Freedom, Carry It On, Internationale, Still Ain't Satisfied, Bella Ciao
<b>1984</b>		
Feb 4	<b>Marxist Institute</b> 8:30 for 9:00 pm	Internationale, For All Women in Struggle, Bella Cao, Still Ain't Satisfied, Oh Freedom, Women Walk More Determined
March 10	<b>IWD</b> OISE	Harriet Tubman, We Won't Go Back, Punch It In, Gonna Rise, Bread and Roses, Women Walk More Determined, Carry it On, Cruise Blues, A Si Katali, We Will Not Be Denied, Still Ain't Satisfied
May 4	<b>Trojan Horse</b>	A Si Katali, Cruise Blues, Harriet Tubman, Punch It In, Fight Back
May 13	<b>Ontario Coalition of Abortion Clinics (OCAC) Mother's Day Picnic 12-3 pm, Queen's Park</b>	
July 20	<b>OCAC Rally Morgentaler Clinic</b>	
Oct 15	<b>York University Support Staff Picket Line</b>	
Oct 17	<b>Library Picket</b>	
Nov 16	<b>African National Congress (ANC) Women's Conference 7:30 pm, OISE</b>	
Nov 29	<b>Library Workers' Benefit 8 pm, OISE</b>	

## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>1984</b>		
Dec 15	<b>Eaton's Strike Support</b> 10 am, Yonge and Dundas picket line	
Dec 22	<b>Eaton's Picket Line</b>	
<b>1985</b>		
Feb 2	<b>Eaton's Strike Rally</b>	
Feb 18	<b>Cafe Sandino</b> 7 pm, Trojan Horse	Women Walk More Determined, Hay Una Mujer, Nicaragua, Cuanto Trabajo
March 2	<b>Eaton's Picket Line</b> 11 am	Which Side Are You On, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Oh Freedom, Union Maid, Solidarity Forever, Women Walk More Determined, We Shall Not Be Moved, Bread and Roses
March 9	<b>IWD</b> Convocation Hall, University of Toronto	Old Woman, Limpopo, More Than a Paycheque, Same Boat Now, Cuanto Trabajo, Still Ain't Satisfied, Bread and Roses
March 21	<b>Emily Stowe Benefit</b> 8:30 pm, Trojan Horse	Women Walk More Determined, More Than a Paycheque, Old Woman, Superwoman, Same Boat, Gentle Angry People, Fight Back
March 28	<b>Picket at T. Eaton's House</b>	
May 11	<b>Ontario Working Women (OWW)</b> 7 pm, Jorgenson Hall, Ryerson	
Nov 5	<b>Public Research Group (PRG) DEC Hall</b>	
Dec 14	<b>Visa Strike</b>	
<b>1986</b>		
Jan 31	<b>Trojan Horse</b> 9 pm	
Feb 16	<b>Visa Workers' Benefit</b> 3:25 pm, A Space	
Feb 18	<b>The Power of Music: Singing for Social Change</b> 8:30 pm, York University	Women Walk More Determined, Moving Mountains, Punch It In, Limpopo, Harriet Tubman, No A La Intervencion, On Children, Old Woman, It's My Body Medley, Bread and Roses
March 8	<b>IWD</b> Convocation Hall, University of Toronto	No A La Intervencion, Limpopo, Whole World, Bread and Roses
May 3	<b>Socialist Network Party</b> 7 pm, The Battery	Whole World, No A La Intervencion, On Children, It's My Body Medley, Which Side Are You On
Oct 2	<b>Morgentaler Rally</b> District Courthouse, 361 University Ave.	You Don't Own Me, What Shall We Do, Swing Low, A Si Katali, Gentle Angry People
Nov 14	<b>Women's Press Book Launch</b> 6 pm, Canadian Hearing Society	On Children, Old Woman, Look to the People
Nov 22	<b>Rape Crisis and the Y: Workshop on Violence Against Women</b> 9:30 pm, Adult Learning Centre	Fight Back, Old Woman, Women Walk More Determined, Look to the People
Nov 29	<b>Sheila Rowbotham Talk</b> Stanford Fleming Building	Bread and Roses, A Si Katali, Moving Mountains, Look to the People



## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>1987</b>		
Feb 24	<b>Meg Luxton's Women's Studies Class</b> 8:30 pm, York University	Punch It In, For All Women in Struggle, Women Walk More Determined, Leslie Gore Medley, Hay Una Mujer, A Si Katali, Old Woman, On Children, What Shall We Do, Swing Low, O Come All Ye Shoppers, Harriet Tubman, Bread and Roses
March 7	<b>Homeless Women's Breakfast</b> Community Centre	Women Walk, Old Woman, What Shall We Do, Bread and Roses
March 7	<b>IWD Ryerson Fair</b>	Punch It In, A Si Katali, 9 to 5, Harriet Tubman, Shameless Hussies
April 25	<b>Against Cruise Testing (ACT) Demo</b> Queen's Park	Will the Circle Be Unbroken, A Si Katali, Oh Freedom, Old Woman
May 30	<b>Arms Around Queen's Park Daycare Rally</b> 1 pm, Queen's Park (9:45 sound check)	Old Woman, Moving Mountains, On Children, Bread and Roses, Women Walk More Determined, A Si Katali, Shameless Hussies
May 30	<b>Greenham Common Benefit</b> 7 pm, Hamilton (Women Folk)	Punch It In, For All Women in Struggle, It's My Body Medley, A Si Katali, Old Woman, Shameless Hussies
June 11	<b>Opportunities for Advancement Benefit</b> 7 pm, 427 Bloor St. W.	Punch It In, For All Women in Struggle, Women Walk, Harriet Tubman, Daycare Equal Pay
June 24	<b>Education Wife Assault General Meeting</b> 7:30 pm 427 Bloor St. W	Punch It In, Bread and Roses, It's My Body Medley, A Si Katali, Old Woman, Shameless Hussies
<b>1988</b>		
Feb 28	<b>OFL Women's Caucus Brunch</b> 12 pm – 3 pm Steelworkers Hall, Cecil St.	Step by Step, It's My Body Medley, More Than a Paycheque, Free Trade, Bread and Roses
March 5	<b>IWD</b> Convocation Hall	Old Woman, It's My Body Medley, Shameless Hussies, A Si Katali, Bread and Roses
<b>2002</b>		
May 26	<b>Labour History Conference (Learneds)</b> Labour History Museum, Hamilton	Which Side Are You On, Union Maid, Internationale, Silent Night, Oh Come All Ye Shoppers, A Si Katali, Hay Una Mujer, Bella Ciao, Harriet Tubman, Old Woman, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Bread and Roses, Solidarity Forever
Sept 21	<b>Benefit for Striking Guatemalan Electrical Workers</b> Labour History Museum, Hamilton	Which Side Are You On, A Si Katali, Bella Ciao, Old Woman, Pa Donde, Bread and Roses, Union Maid
Nov 3	<b>Left Words</b> New College, University of Toronto	Which Side Are You On, A Si Katali, Bella Ciao, Old Woman, Pa Donde, Bread and Roses, Union Maid

## Red Berets Gigs

Date	Event	Songs
<b>2005</b>		
Oct 1	<b>Labourizing Feminism and Feminist Working-class History in North America and Beyond</b> Munk Centre, University of Toronto	Union Maid, A Si Katali, Two Good Arms, Which Side Are You On, Punch It In, Old Woman, Mein Ruhe Platz, Bread and Roses
<b>2006</b>		
March 8	<b>IWD Daycare Rally</b> City Hall	Bread and Roses, A Si Katali, We Shall Not Be Moved, Old Woman, Which Side Are You On
<b>2014</b>		
May 23	<b>Participated (as Red Berets) in play, <i>Life on the Line: Women Strike at Eaton's 1984-85</i> by Pat McDermott</b> 8:15 pm, Berkshire Conference of Women Historians Hart House, University of Toronto	Union Maid, Which Side Are You On, Oh Come All Ye Shoppers, Silent Night, Arise Ye Proletariat, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Bella Ciao
<b>2015</b>		
Sept 17	<b>Harperman Singalong</b> Noon, Queen's Park	Moving Mountains, Harperman (including feminist verse by Red Berets)

# PUBLICITY



*Toronto Clarion*, March 12, 1983

Included here is an article about the Red Berets from the 1983 *Everywoman's Almanac* and two brochures outlining "who we are" and "what we sing," written for groups who wanted the Red Berets to perform at an event.





Atkinson College  
Office of the Master  
667-8434

## The Power of Music: Singing for Social Change

# THE RED BERETS

The Red Berets are a group of socialist feminists who like to play about:

- Women's rights
- Peace
- Solidarity with women's struggles around the world.



**TUESDAY**  
**FEB. 18th**  
**8:30 p.m.**

Fellows' Lounge  
004A Atkinson

Refreshments will be served

CO-SPONSORED BY THE WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM, THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE OFFICE OF THE MASTER, ATKINSON COLLEGE

# The RED BERETS

## Who we are

The Red Berets is a women's singing group which sees music as a powerful tool in the movement for social change. We first got together to sing at International Women's Day in 1981, and since then we've been singing songs of solidarity and struggle at benefits, rallies, demonstrations and picket lines. We are a grassroots singing group dedicated to making music accessible by encouraging audience participation. We've found that singing together generates a strong sense of solidarity.

## What we sing

While we sing about a wide diversity of social issues — workers rights, disarmament, anti-intervention, anti-racism, choice on abortion and sexual orientation — our emphasis is on integrating these issues with concerns of the women's movement. We sing both traditional and contemporary songs. When we have time, we like to write our own songs or rewrite the lyrics to other songs to fit a current issue.

## If you want us to sing

You can get in touch with us by calling one of the following numbers (evenings and weekends):

555-5555 • 555-5555 • 555-5555

Depending on the type of event, we would like at least 2 weeks notice. If the event has been organized quickly, we can sometimes organize something within a few days. We don't charge a fee, but sometimes accept donations which we use to buy equipment or to pay for other expenses.



## The Red Berets

### WHO WE ARE

The Red Berets are a group of socialist feminists who like to sing. We first got together to prepare songs of solidarity and struggle for International Women's Day in March, 1981. We liked the idea of raising issues of concern to women in a form that was both popular and accessible. We were well received that day and began to have a feeling for the effectiveness of the form we had chosen when we demonstrated with about 300 others against a "pro-life" rally that evening. The Red Berets led the group in the songs we had been singing all day and we were delighted to see that everyone was singing with us.

It became clear very quickly that not only did lots of women want to sing, but that singing was a useful and lively way of generating a sense of solidarity. We kept singing — with new members all the time — because we kept being asked to sing at benefits and rallies and demonstrations and on the picket line.

Now, our priorities are still the same: we are a singing group dedicated to raising issues of concern to women in a popular way. We continue to invite the participation of all interested women. We are not professional entertainers (though we do have a couple of pros in our midst).

### WHERE WE'VE SUNG

During the past year, the Red Berets have sung at a number of events: rallies, picket lines, demonstrations, public meetings and benefits.

Following is a list of some of these appearances:

- International Women's Day 1981
- Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE) Day
- Fight the Right Forum (Sponsored by IWDC)
- Pro-Choice Rally, Mother's Day
- Domitilia Barrios de Chingara
- Riverdale Action Committee Against Racism (RACAR) Rally
- Lesbian and Gay Pride Day
- Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) Picket
- Parkdale Action Committee Against Racism (PACAR) Rally
- Library Workers' Benefit
- El Salvador Demonstration
- Anti "Positive Parents" Rally
- Action Daycare Rally
- Tel Air Strike (Oshawa)
- Canadian Union of Educational Workers (CUEW) Picket Line (York University)
- Irwin Toys Picket Line
- Women's Press Book Launching (for *One Proud Summer*)
- Marxist Institute Benefit

### WHAT WE SING ABOUT

The Red Berets sing about women's oppression — in whatever form it takes — and this involves a number of different areas, although we stress the relationship among them all. The songs we sing include the following issues:

abortion, daycare, domestic labour, international solidarity, lesbian rights, police harassment, racism, reproductive rights, the rise of the right, sexism, songs of unity and struggle, union struggles, women united and working conditions.

When we are asked to sing, we bring our entire repertoire with us. We are prepared to emphasize a particular theme or issue on request, but it is the connection between these various areas of struggle that we have come together to sing about.

### HOW TO GET IN TOUCH WITH US

If you would like us to perform for an indoor event, we would appreciate having at least two weeks' notice. We have a more spontaneous response to singing at outdoor demonstrations, rallies or picket lines and try to ensure there are at least six Red Berets in attendance at these events.

To contact us, call (416) 555-5555 or 555-5555 or write to 115 Spadina Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 2T1.

The  
RED  
BERETS





**Sunday  
SUN**

TORONTO March 7, 1982  
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**50¢  
FINAL**

**Metric:  
Protest  
trickle  
now a  
flood**  
Page 5

**POD THE CHAMP**



The Final  
Races:  
Page 69  
 The Man:  
Page 72

**Danger  
doesn't  
worry  
nuke  
town**  
Page 42

**5,000  
women  
on the  
march**

TOMORROW is International Women's Day, and to get in the mood 5,000 women marched through downtown Toronto yesterday. Story: Page 4.

# WELL PROBE WAS FIXED: SCIENTIST

*Gov't rigged Stouffville water results, says chief tester: Page 2*



*Toronto Sun, March 7, 1982*



— Helena Wehstein

## SINGING ALL TOGETHER

*Born in Spain, Mariana Valverde came to Canada when she was thirteen. She writes, teaches at York University, and has been active in the women's movement for a number of years. Mariana is a founding member of the Red Berets, a Toronto-based singing group with seventeen members.*

I had thought for a long time that there should be a group to sing at demonstrations and events like that, to make things more lively. In other countries I've been in, singing has been part of the culture of the left. That's not really the tradition here. So a few of us pulled together a group of women, mostly socialist feminists, in early January 1981. We were so happy to discover that we could all sing a lot of the same songs — "Union Maid," "Bread and Roses," "Solidarity Forever" — and happy that we didn't need to have elaborate practices and a lot of theory. We made our debut on International Women's Day. Everyone thought it was wonderful because nobody had offered that kind of music before. People are used to having one person do his or her thing, but they're not used to a group of people who will put in the energy to motivate everybody to sing.

We decided to have a distinctive symbol, so that people could identify us. It had to be something we could wear in all seasons; it couldn't be a T-shirt because in the winter everyone is wearing coats. Someone hit upon the idea of red berets — a stroke of inspiration, because now people can recognize us immediately, and when we're at a demonstration or a picket we can see who of our partners is there. And it adds a touch of revolutionary tradition. We want very much to recover for ourselves some of the cultural traditions of the left, whether it's singing "The Internationale," carrying red flags or wearing red berets.

We're a rather ad hoc, free-flowing group. In deciding where to sing, we don't usually sit down to argue the merits of each case. It's more a matter of people wanting to go. And we don't go en masse to everything. We come from a variety of musical backgrounds: church

music, both traditional and of the Catholic left, Yiddish socialist influences, and of course folk music and the more recent women's music. As far as skill is concerned, we're a mixed and democratic group. We walk a fine line between wanting to improve, sing four-part harmonies and so on, and staying accessible to anyone who wants to join. I find it a very non-competitive group. We see one of our functions as the building of connections between all the different movements. We've sung at an El Salvador rally, an anti-Klan rally, and union benefits, as well as women's events. We basically present all our issues at all the events we go to. If we're at a trade union event and we're doing a song that has a stanza about gay rights, we'll leave it in. Sometimes we get flak about this. If people ask us to sing specific songs, of course we will, and we do shift our repertoire depending on the audience, but we will not eliminate issues altogether.

Because we are a feminist group, we change sexist lyrics. In the song, "Which Side Are You On," there's a verse that goes, "Will you be a lowly scab, or will you be a man?" We changed this to "... or will you take a stand?" We also encourage the writing of new songs, or adding new stanzas to songs. Different people write material about different struggles, and the Red Berets can act as the channel. For example, the Communications Workers in Oshawa can learn what the Steelworkers were singing at Irwin Toy.

It seems to me that in North America, the revolutionary movement has been a little too intellectually oriented. It hasn't given people those cultural manifestations they can really identify with. Singing is one of the most powerful of these and one of the most accessible. I've always thought that it's an incredible impoverishment and alienation when people say they can't sing. Not many people will be chefs, but we can all have basic cooking skills. It should be the same with singing. To me, the fact that it isn't is very much a sign of what consumer capitalism does to you. You think that music is something you buy. It is important that we reclaim singing, and singing together.

Group singing does impose certain limits on our choice of music. The tunes should be easy to carry, and people must be able to understand the words when we sing. Folk songs and church hymns usually meet these requirements, because that's what they were designed to do. The music for a lot of early trade union songs came from hymns.

## JANUARY

Singing all together can be very powerful and moving. I remember being in Spain in 1977 when the country had free political expression and free elections for the first time in forty years. On a train after a political rally, coming into the station, thousands of people singing "The Internationale," knowing the words and singing together — it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life.

We really have a good time in the Red Berets. Sometimes it seems like a hassle to get to practice, to make one more meeting, but whenever I go, I'm always in a good mood when I leave. It's the kind of group that breaks down the barriers between the woman who shares our ideas but isn't a member of any political group, and the heavy politico who goes to meetings all the time. It's a fun group.

SAT

New Year's Day

1

SUN

2





the photo — Jenny Callmor

An International Women's Day rally held at Convocation Hall last Saturday attracted femi musicians and women's groups. The event is held annually at UofT and across North America.

IWD, *The Newspaper*, March 13, 1985



Red Berets t-shirts and berets

# GROUP DYNAMICS



—Jane Springer

## **RED BERETS: NOTES FROM A DISCUSSION**

*June 10, 1984*

The Red Berets began as a small support group singing mainly on picket lines and at rallies. As we were increasingly asked to sing on stage in concert-like situations, there was pressure to be more accomplished and well-rehearsed.

These notes are from a discussion held by 12 Red Berets in June 1984. The discussion went around the circle, allowing everyone a chance to speak. The different voices reflect a tension between strengthening the support group role and wanting to be a more polished performance group.

Many members expressed a desire to widen the membership. Any woman was welcome to join. But members expected a minimum commitment – as the discussion makes clear – of attending the previous practice in order to sing at a more formal event.

- The rule of a practice before the performance shouldn't apply to demos. We're something new, not a professional choir, and that's good. We shouldn't be overly critical of our members.
- It's good to be serious about the group. I agree we're not professionals but we should still be well prepared.
- Why do we attend some events and not others? It's frustrating to be at times a support group, and at other times a performance group.
- There should be collective leadership – we should all take responsibility rather than have one person who's watching for quality control.

- Everyone should take a bit more initiative, not just leave it up to the real musical types.
- We should be able to do picket-line support on our own initiative.
- I favour the support side, singing at demos. Perhaps with time we could become more professional.
- I'd like to see our status clarified, and for us to be more polished.
- I would hate to see the group closed so that people couldn't keep joining. I don't see the contradiction between being more professional and having fun.
- People are in the group for different reasons. I'd like a stronger sense of collectivity. We need to find a way to be more honest with each other.
- I like the idea of bringing groups their own music. Let's recruit women from groups we'd like to support.
- We should make more links with women of colour and other groups.
- Let's remember how far we've come. We now have a built-in quality control and we should encourage new members – they're what's made us great.
- We need help with our presentation – let's have a workshop from some director.
- We have a basic standard that we must all be in tune. We need some way of ensuring we're in tune, of telling people when they're not.
- We could use more instruments because it would improve the sound.
- I don't like being the only guitarist because I don't have enough time to practice.
- We should have a portable sound system. It's a drag having to be "good sports" when the sound systems are rotten.
- I enjoy performances and would like to develop a facility and ease on stage.
- It would be great to get away from churchy, hymn-type music.
- We need a checklist for performances and for strike support.
- We should have some colour coordination in clothes for our performances.
- We could get Red Berets t-shirts.
- We need to learn how to teach songs to people.
- Teaching songs requires a lot of confidence.
- Womanly Way gives workshops on how to use mics, etc.
- Doing workshops would require a lot of time that people probably don't have.
- In performances, our hearing isn't always as acute because we're nervous.
- Someone should bring a tape recorder to every practice so we can tape and critique our singing at the next practice.
- We have 16 people, whereas we used to have 25 or 26. We've always benefited from "new blood." Let's see if we can get more people committed for the next year, beginning in September.



# SINGERS



— Liz Martin

IWD, Toronto City Hall, March 6, 1982

*These women sang with the Red Berets at one time or another between 1981 and 1988, and agreed to have their names appear.*

Alison Griffith  
Andrea Knight  
Ann Lacey  
Ann Manicom  
Arlene Mantle  
Betsy Alkenbrack  
Brenda Roman  
Carole Houlihan  
Catherine Goetz

Catherine Silverglen  
Chris Mills  
Deni Wise  
Ellen Passmore  
Enid Moscovitch  
Ester Reiter  
Faith Nolan  
Frumie Diamond  
Helen Lenskyj

Helena Wehrstein  
Jane Adams  
Jane Springer  
Joan Malcolmsen  
Judy Blankenship  
Karen Wehrstein  
Katherine Arnup  
Liz Martin  
Lynn Mantle

Mariana Valverde  
Marm Goldstein  
Naomi Binder Wall  
Nuala Doherty  
Roberta Rivers  
Ruth Perkins  
Susan Howlett  
Terry Dance

# PHOTO GALLERY



— Wally Seccombe

Toronto City Hall, March 7, 1981



— Wally Seccombe

IWD, Harbord Collegiate, March 7, 1981

—Helena Wehrstein



IWD, March 7, 1981

—Liz Martin



Our fearless conductor





—Helena Wehrstein

IWD, March 7, 1981



—Helena Wehrstein

IWD, March 7, 1981





— Helena Wehrstein

**IWD, March 7, 1981**



— Helena Wehrstein

**Gay Pride Day, Grange Park, June 28, 1981**



—Helena Wehrstein

**GLARE Fight the Right Day, Sept 26, 1981**





—Helena Wehrstein

**GLARE Day, Sept 26, 1981**



—Helena Wehrstein

**IWD, March 1982**



— Wally Secombe

**Control of Our Bodies Rally, Queen's Park, May 16, 1982**



— Helena Wehrstein

**Queen's Park, May 16, 1982**





— Helena Wehrstein

Queen's Park, May 16, 1982





— Helena Wehrstein

IWD, Convocation Hall, March 5, 1983



— Wally Secombe

IWD, Convocation Hall, March 5, 1983





— Helena Wehrstein

**Against Cruise Testing (ACT) demo, April 23, 1983**



— Wally Seccombe

**ACT demo, Old City Hall  
April 23, 1983**



— Liz Martin

**Rehearsal, 1984**



—Helena Wehrstein

**Rehearsal, October 28, 1984**



—Helena Wehrstein

**Rehearsal, October 28, 1984**





IWD, Convocation Hall, March 9, 1985



IWD, Convocation Hall, March 9, 1986

— Wally Seccombe





— Liz Martin

**Hamilton Labour History Conference, May 26, 2002**



— Helena Wehrstein

**Feminist Working-Class History Conference, U of T, October 1, 2005**