

Remembering the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

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Today, the Workmen's Circle commemorated the 106th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire at a ceremony at the site of the fire near Washington Square Park, at which I spoke and called upon our New York State and local elected officials to "pass State and City laws to ensure that New York City remains a sanctuary city and New York is a sanctuary state." Here are my full remarks:

From our founding in 1900, when we served as an immigrant rights organization, through succeeding decades, when we worked to help build the union movement in America, the Workmen's Circle has been a progressive Jewish social justice organization passionately committed to standing up against intolerance, inequity, and bias.

In 1911 our members stood side by side with our brothers and sisters in the labor movement and mourned our members and friends who died in this tragedy—146 workers—mostly young women—Jewish and Italian immigrants—forced to work in sweatshops where their lives were valued less than the shirtwaists they produced. A tragedy brought on by bigotry, criminal negligence and corporate greed. And in 1911, our members joined in the call to action that led to today's union movement and Safety and health laws.

We again are facing a massive attack on our human rights, civil liberties, and worker protections. Over the last months, we have witnessed government-driven assaults spearheaded by President Trump with the goal of rolling back workers health and safety, hours, wages, and job security. We are here today to again answer a call to action and commit to fight at every opportunity - efforts to divide us. We will fight attacks on workplace safety. We will fight attacks on our right to collectively bargain. We will fight at every turn the Trump agenda whose goal is to strip workers of all rights and protections in favor of corporate greed.

We call upon our New York State and local elected officials to pass state and city laws to ensure that New York City remains a sanctuary city and New York is a sanctuary state. That we provide support for our undocumented immigrants and protections for all our workers!

Next month, Jews across America will celebrate Passover—one of the greatest stories of workers collectively rising up against their oppressors and undertaking an exodus to their "Promised Land." Today we must fight to keep the United States as the 21st century "promised land" for everyone—for workers, for immigrants, and for the people whose diversity make us a country of opportunity for all. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire brutally ended the lives of 146 workers. Today in their names we remember, we commemorate, and we continue to answer the call to action for immigrant rights, worker safety, and civil liberties started more than a century ago and make sure that history doesn't repeat itself.