



An Evolving Image of Organizing

Honoring the Art of Solidarity

by Lincoln Cushing

Graphic images do not drop from the sky. Like most forms of human expression, they spring from a myriad of conscious and unconscious cultural influences, and take form through the personal style of an individual. Often certain iconography becomes repeated because it succinctly and unambiguously represents certain themes, such as the use of gears for “labor” or doves for “peace.”

The graphic accompanying the WILPF calendar in this newsletter is an excellent example of this process. The version you see on that page has been slightly modified from my clip-art graphic in the top left column.

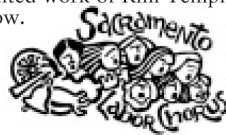
Which, in turn, I adapted from a silk-screen poster I produced as “insurgent squeegee” for the (A) *Oppression of Youth of Color* conference held in San Diego, CA, 1980.

I consciously derived the poster illustration composition from an image by the German artist Käthe Kollwitz. Her lithograph (B) “*Solidarity-The Propeller Song*” was created in 1931-32 while visiting the Soviet Union.

This choreography has clearly become appropriated into “resistance and solidarity” culture. Recently I came across this photograph with people posed in the same manner (C) Photo by Jon A. Kouns, from the *March for Jobs and Freedom*, Washington, D.C. 1963

To the left is another example of a graphic using the same composition for the (D) *National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice* by Ricardo Levins-Morales of the *Northland Poster Collective*:

Much of the artwork used in political work has no artist’s credit. Sometimes this is inevitable especially with logos and clip art, since space and design aesthetics usually preclude additional text, and sometimes this is a deliberate effort on the part of the artist to challenge the mainstream artworld mania for personal glory. A good example is the pervasive and uncredited work of Rini Templeton shown below.



Sometimes it is innocent oversight and sometimes not. However, I would suggest that regardless of the circumstances, documenting the sources of our art makes our movement deeper and richer.

Because of the difficulty in tracking down such sources, I have begun to build a national reference list of labor graphics collections. Ideally, this would be complemented by similar efforts in related peace, social justice, women’s, and other movement communities.

Several archives, such as the *Center for the Study of Political Graphics* in Los Angeles, have also undertaken the challenge of gathering the images that illustrated our movements.

Our history should be no mystery, and documenting it is an essential part of making it.

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EDITOR’S NOTE at the lower left are two more local images of people linking arms in unity from the files of George Elfie Ballis.

(E) Julio Hernandez next to Dolores Huerta and her children at an evening rally of the United Farm Workers in Delano, 1966.

(F) Students Against Sweatshops protesting the GAP’s sweat shop policies just before their arrest in front of Fashion Fair, Fresno, 2000.

Most political art is done out of passion for social justice, not for pay. That is probably why there is not more of it.

Generating new images is not easy. A good graphic or image can really be worth more than 1,000 words in instant impact, and we are becoming a more visual culture.

We agree that movement creatives need to be credited whenever it is possible. A credit line is the least we can do to demonstrate that we value their work.

