

FORBIDDEN THOUGHTS

I have been committed to equal rights for all for as long as I can remember. I have been an active advocate for minority rights, women's rights, gay rights (now called LGBT rights), immigrant rights (also called undocumented rights), prisoner's rights, rights of the disabled, the youth the elderly, etc. etc.

When I advocated for labor, I had forbidden thoughts about unions, their tactics and democracy.

When I advocated for civil rights, I had forbidden thoughts about inequities in some of the solutions put forward to end discrimination.

When I advocated for women's rights, I had forbidden thoughts about some of the arguments put forward to demonstrate the sexism that women endured.

Unions tended to be narrowly focused. Preserve the job of its members, even if the industry is producing products harmful to both society, and in an environment harmful to its members. In its commitment to protect its members, it may be protecting some who do not deserve to be protected. Perhaps the charge of corruption and nepotism is correct in a few cases.

Women rightly demand a rightful place in our history books. But since sexism goes way back, women were not in a position to take leadership in government, or business, or religion, or science, or unions. What we see more of these days, is a revision of the history books, bringing the overlooked women to the fore. In government, Cleopatra, Catherine the Great, Queen Elizabeth (the Virgin Queen) and Queen Victoria, and in the US: Dolly Madison, Frances Perkins, Eleanor Roosevelt. In my unions, Clara Lemlich, Rose Schneiderman, Rose Pesotta, Bessie Hillman, Joyce Miller.

I keep my thoughts to myself. Articulate them and you give ammunition to the enemy. They will jump at anything you might say that will confirm their racist, anti-union, sexist or anti gay position.

Yes. Some unions were gangster-controlled. The mafia or its equivalent, had a hand in some locals of the Teamsters or the Longshoremen. Some were Communist dominated. Some were less than democratic. The officers saw their union as their candy store.