

SISTERHOOD

WOMEN FOR
UNIONISM,
SOLIDARITY



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MARCH 8 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day will be celebrated by women worldwide during the week of March 2 – 8, 1998. This will be a time to reflect on our successes and speak out about the barriers and challenges that prevent women from achieving full participation in society.

What is International Women's Day?

International Women's Day was created out of protest and political activism. From the beginning of the twentieth century, many women in industrially developing countries were entering the paid work force. Women's jobs were segregated in textiles, manufacturing and domestic services. Working conditions were poor and the wages were meagre. These circumstances ignited many industrial disputes, involving both unionized and non-union workers.

Here is a chronology of some of the first labour struggles of women, the social unrest which gave rise to the observance of International Women's Day as we know it today:

March 8, 1907. In New York City, International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time. It commemorated the numerous labour strikes in the early twentieth century which involved thousands of women in many major centres such as Montreal, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. These women demonstrated for the right to vote, decent wages, an end to sweat shops and child labour.

The history of International Women's Day cannot be separated from the political life of Clara Zetkin who, between 1890 and 1915, promoted the interests of working class women in a German Social Democratic women's newspaper *Gleichheit* (Equality). In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women, she proposed that March 8 be observed as an International Women's Day celebration.

After 1915, there were years of sporadic observance of International Women's Day in countries such as Spain and China. Celebration was not revitalized in North America until the 1960s. In 1977, a United Nations resolution was passed calling for

all countries of the world to celebrate a day of women's rights and international peace. March 8 was not specifically designated in this resolution. However, many countries – including Canada – have chosen to observe the celebration on this day.

Although the origins of International Women's Day seem to be drawn from more than one historical event from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the purpose of the celebration has remained the same since 1910. International Women's Day is a day to celebrate and reflect on the status of women's progress and to consider future actions still required.

Women worldwide while celebrating the success of feminist pioneers over the past decade will take a moment to reflect on barriers and challenges awaiting us in the new millennium.

The B.C. Federation of Labour will join with women in Vancouver on March 5, 6, 7, 1998, in a Conference titled "Union Women: Visions of Equality" to acknowledge the importance of women achieving economic, social and personal equality and the vision and commitment required to make it a reality.

The Conference will feature guest speakers, films, workshops, There will be concerts, rallies and other activities to educate, inform, enlighten and entertain you.

The Conference opens on Thursday, March 5, 1998 at 7:00 p.m. at the Empire Landmark Hotel on Robson Street.

Delegates from the conference will join in a rally and march starting at 11:30 am

on Saturday, March 7, 1998, at the Vancouver Art Gallery and proceed to the Empire Landmark Hotel on Robson Street.

SOLICITOR GENERAL MEETS WITH EQUITY SEEKING WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

On January 23, 1998, the Solicitor General, Andy Scott, met women from the National Reference Group on Women's issues to discuss issues of Violence Against Women in policing and the corrections system in Canada. The session included members of the R.C.M.P. Police Parole Board and representatives of the criminal justice system.

Solicitor General, Andy Scott, stated his commitment to an open door policy for equity-seeking groups.

Issues raised included:

- Racism in policing
- Racism and discrimination in the corrections system
- The shoot to kill policies of the R.C.M.P.
- Lack of accountability in the system
- Closures due to decreased funding for women only half-way houses
- Lack of funding to women's organizations who provide services and programs to women prisoners
- Increased funding for transition houses
- Full funding for crime prevention

- Initiatives to End Violence

In summary, the Solicitor General was encouraged to use his power for radical social change not political opportunism.

WOMEN AND PAY EQUITY IN CANADA: 13 YEARS AND STILL STALLING

(from an article by Kay Sinclair)



On December 1, 1997, thousands of federal government workers left their workplaces and demonstrated across the country. Why? To protest the federal government denying pay equity to women in the federal public service for 13 years.

The Public Service Alliance (PSAC) filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) in December 1984 on behalf of the 50,000 mainly women members of the clerical workers bargaining unit. The complaint was filed under the equal pay for work of equal value section of the **Canadian Human Rights Act**.

The federal government reluctantly agreed to take part in a joint union-employer equal pay study with PSAC and other federal unions. The study took four years to complete and involved 4,300 federal government workers completing detailed questionnaires of their jobs.

Women's jobs were found to be paid 10-25 percent less than men's jobs of equal value.

In 1990, the government unilaterally paid equal pay adjustments to two of the female-dominated groups.

PSAC filed another complaint with the CHRC. In January 1991, a pay equity tribunal (three person panel) was formed.

The Tribunal heard testimony and evidence from 1991 to 1997.

In February 1996, the Tribunal ruled that the equal pay study results were valid. After that decision, the Tribunal heard arguments on how best to close the wage gap and on retroactivity, interest, damages and costs.

The hearings finally came to an end in January 1997. The Tribunal has been weighing the evidence since that time.

In April, the Liberal government leaked a story to the *Toronto Star* newspaper that it had made a pay equity offer to PSAC.

Negotiations started in May between PSAC and the Treasury Board. The Treasury Board made an offer of \$850 million while it was PSAC's position that the \$2 billion was required to close the wage gap.

It's not for lack of trying that PSAC members have not gotten pay equity. Members have filed thousands of grievances, sent countless faxes, letters and petitions, lobbied Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers, and occupied their offices. Members have worn pay equity ribbons in the workplace,

handed out leaflets and balloons and held pay equity barbecues and picnics.

Women's groups have also taken up the struggle – at the last annual general meeting of the National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women, the membership passed a resolution making pay equity part of NAC's Priority Campaign for this year.

"The way they have treated our pay equity complaint, the federal government shows no respect for women workers," says Carole Renaud, union activist. "We have subsidized the government long enough – where the hell is our pay equity?"

It is critical in whatever way the outcome is decided that the wage gap between women and men in the federal government is closed. Because of the scope of the case, achieving pay equity will fundamentally improve the economic status of many women in Canada, and besides, women have earned it.

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In honour of Black History Month, we are highlighting some of the women whose lives and writing have made a difference.

The Collected Poems – This is a collection of over 300 poems by Audre Lorde, a major and influential lesbian feminist poet.

Paradise – is written by Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison. The novel follows the lives of four women who take refuge in a former convent in a small town in Oklahoma.

Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent – Edited by Ayanna Black. This collection includes the short stories of over 15 writers of African descent. These are stories of romantic love, racism, sexual abuse and immigration, which capture an evolving Canadian African identity.

We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up – If your interested in a good non-fiction book on Black women's history in Canada, this is the one. It was edited by Peggy Bristow, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton and Adriene Shad. **For more information on these and other publications, contact your local library**

CLC RELEASES ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE REPORT

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has released their report "Challenging Racism: Going Beyond Recommendations". This report is the work of the CLC Anti-Racism Task Force set up in 1994 and chaired by CLC Vice-Presidents Ethel LaValley, Lynn Jones and Hassan Yussuff.

The Task Force held meetings with union and community activists across Canada to identify problems and solutions for ending social and institutional racism. Recommendations include structural changes, education, changes in hiring practices, more research projects on anti-racism in public policy and society, and increased work with organizations fighting racism.

"It is critical that the important recommendations held in this report are implemented," says Ontario Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer and Task Force member Ethel LaValley. "This

report cannot just be put on a shelf to gather dust. It provides a blueprint to end social and institutional racism".

The CLC is organizing regional follow-up forums across Canada. **For copies of the report or information on the regional forum, please contact your regional CLC office.**

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ABORTION IN CANADA: THE LAST 10 YEARS...

In January, women across Canada marked the anniversary of an important statement affirming women's rights to make decisions concerning our bodies and our lives. Ten years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a ruling which decriminalized abortions. Since then, abortions remain legal, but access to abortion services is limited for many women and may be in further jeopardy in the near future.

"WOW IS THE WORD"

WOW! was the word of the Women in Leadership class at the 1998 Canadian Labour Congress Winter School.

The course was held the last week of the Winter School and once again, proved to be both informative as well as inspiring.

Following tradition of the Winter School, there was a water wallyball (that's right wallyball) contest wherein classes are asked to form a team of both players and cheer leaders. Not one to back down from a challenge, the Women on Water (WOW) team from the Women in Leadership course took first place. A good time was had by all and it was rumoured to be heard from fellow sisters that "When I grow up I want to be a WOW".

This year, the class was asked to submit ideas for the logo to be used at the B.C. Federation of Labour Women's Conference entitled "Union Women: Visions of Equality". Staci Carich of UFCW, Local 777 submitted the winning entry, "**A WOMAN, A UNION, A VOICE**".

CARING FOR CHILDREN PARENTS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Are you a parent?
- Do you ever wonder about what kind of discipline is okay to use with your children?
- Do you wonder if a social worker can take your children from your home?
- Have you wondered what to do if a social worker thinks your child is being abused?
- What does the law say about parents' responsibilities?

In BC there is a law that protects the safety of children. It is called the **Child, Family and Community Service Act**. This law begins by saying that: "Parents (or guardians) are responsible for the care and safety of their children".

Children have a right to be safe from abuse and neglect. This means it is against the law for parents to abuse or neglect their children. It also means parents must protect their child from physical and emotional abuse, sexual abuse and sexual exploitations and neglect.

Getting Help as a Parent.

Many parents say that raising children is the most difficult job they do. Every parent has times when they feel frustrated, discouraged, overwhelmed, angry or just plain exhausted with their children. These feelings are normal for every parent.

For further information on Parents' Rights and Responsibilities and where to get help, contact the People's Law School at (604) 331-5400 and ask for a copy of the "Caring for Children" publication.

UPCOMING EVENTS



March 5, 6, 7, 1998

**B.C. Federation of Labour Women's Conference
Empire Landmark Hotel
Vancouver, BC.**

The BC Federation of Labour will join with women in Vancouver on March 5, 6, 7, 1998, in a conference titled "Union Women: Visions of Equality" to acknowledge the importance of women achieving economic, social and personal equality and the vision and commitment required to make it a reality.

March 7, 1998

International Women's Day Vancouver Art Gallery

The International Women's Day Committee in Vancouver is inviting women to join in celebrating our struggles and successes. Throughout the week of March 2-7, the committee is asking women's organizations and individual women to organize and participate in forums, workshops, concerts, theatre, movies and more.

Some of the topics being addressed are: violence against women, anti-racism, aboriginal women's struggles, health and reproductive rights, heterosexism and homophobia, women's unpaid work, feminization of poverty and the labour force, among others.

A rally and march will start at 11:30 am on Saturday, March 7 at the Vancouver Art Gallery and proceed to the Landmark Hotel and Conference Centre at 1400 Robson Street, followed by an afternoon of entertainment and information tables until 4:30 pm. **For more information, please call Ema Oropeza at Vancouver Status of Women, 255-6554. To book a table, please call 708-9491.**

March 5, 1998

International Women's Day at Capilano College in North Vancouver, BC

The public is invited to a full day of activities on Thursday, March 5, 1998 at Capilano College. **For full details, contact Capilano College at 984-4953.**

March 6, 1998

**International Women's Day Celebration
Dinner at Douglas College
New Westminster Campus**

The Douglas College Women's Success Course is presenting an International Women's Day Celebration Dinner at the Douglas College New Westminster Campus. Doors open at 5:30 pm. Cost is \$12.00 for students and \$17.00 for College employees and guests. **For ticket information and further information on Women's Day Events, please contact the New Westminster Campus Women's Centre at 527-5148.**

March 7, 1998

**International Women's Day
Surrey Conference Centre, Room 2
Surrey, BC.**

Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 728, Women's Committee invites you to their International Women's Day celebrations. There will be food, song and conversation featuring several keynote speakers. **For reservations, please contact Anna at 576-2873.**

March 20, 1998

**Day For The Elimination Of Racism
Richmond, B.C.**

The Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism, Human Rights and Immigration will be sponsoring a forum on "Challenging Systemic Racism" at the Best Western Inn, Richmond, BC to commemorate March 21, the "Day for the Elimination of Racism in British Columbia".

If you would like further information on this forum, please contact Pardeep Purewal at 660-2315.

April 1, 1998

**"Nice Girl/Bad Girl"
Capilano College in North Vancouver, BC**

The Capilano College Women's Studies Program Committee is presenting Sheila Norgate, Visual Artist, and her incredible true story of one woman's psyche or "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Slide Show Like This". Doors open at 7:30 pm and admittance is free.

Look for more upcoming events in future issues of Sisterhood.

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