

January 2012

TO ALL CUPE CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

MARCH 8 – INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

For over 100 years, International Women's Day has been marked throughout the world on March 8. It started in 1909, when women marched through the streets of New York, calling for shorter hours, better pay, and voting rights. The next year, at the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen, the delegates unanimously agreed to establish an international Women's Day, to honour the movement for women's rights and to call for universal suffrage.

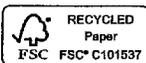
Some might ask, why do we still mark this day? Is it still relevant? Let's look at a few facts: In 1981, Canada ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), which meant that it legally committed the government to advancing the equality rights of women. However, over 30 years later, women in Canada have not yet achieved equality.

Among women whose youngest child is under six, 67 per cent are in the labour force. Seventy per cent of part-time workers are women, many of whom work part-time because they cannot find full-time employment or because of child care issues and other responsibilities. There is still no national child care program to support women's participation in the labour force.

Although there has been progress in terms of women making inroads into professional categories, the majority (67 per cent), still work in traditional female occupations such as teaching, health care, clerical, sales and service. There is still a pay gap in that women working full-time, full-year earn on average 70.5 per cent of what men earn although the pay gap is smaller in the public sector due primarily to pay equity legislation and higher rates of unionization.

Immigrant women, racialized women, and Aboriginal women are even worse off, with higher unemployment rates and lower pay. In retirement, women are more likely to face poverty in because, despite making up a majority of the paid workforce, women are disproportionately represented in low-wage, unstable and part-time employment, and are thus least likely to have a workplace pension plan.

.../2



Violence against women is still a major problem – over 600 Aboriginal women and girls have been murdered or gone missing in Canada and still the government refuses to establish an inquiry or adequately fund initiatives for better housing, health care and education for Aboriginal people.

When we look at these statistics within the overall context of the growing inequality in our country, we see that the situation for women is deteriorating. According to CUPE's recent *Economic Climate for Bargaining* report, income inequality is getting worse and at a much faster rate. Governments at all levels are planning major attacks on the public sector, which will increase the inequality gap and will have a particularly adverse effect on women as they are concentrated in this sector.

It is interesting to note that even groups such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have commented on Canada's growing inequality and have called for "More and better jobs that offer good career prospects and a real chance to escape poverty", as well as "freely accessible and high quality public services, such as education, health and family care".

We need to take opportunities like International Women's Day to organize and mobilize to fight for equality. CUPE members and locals have a crucial and valuable role to play in advocating for human rights for CUPE sisters and for all women. We urge you to:

- Get involved in the campaigns against public sector cutbacks and privatization, at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Concerted political action is critical to try to stop the impending attacks on our rights, which will worsen the inequality gap.
- Work with your local to plan to bargain women's rights protection into your collective agreement. Everything from ensuring that part-time workers join the pension plan to negotiating pay equity, to stopping privatization and protecting full-time jobs can improve our sisters' rights in the workplace.
- Keep up the pressure to improve Canada's public pension plan by participating in CUPE and CLC campaigns on retirement security.
- Actively support the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), other women's groups and social justice organizations through financial donations, volunteering and advocating in your communities.
- Participate in your community or local's International Women's Day events.

In a world where public services, social programs and workers' benefits are increasingly under attack, the activist role of CUPE members is more important than ever to make sure women's equality concerns continue to be a top priority.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CHARLES FLEURY
National Secretary-Treasurer