

**12<sup>TH</sup> OFL BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
NOVEMBER 25-29, 2013  
TORONTO, ON**

**OFL CONVENTION REPORT**

# ***WOMEN'S ISSUES***

**RISING  
TOGETHER**



**ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR**



**Convention Report: Women's Issues  
November 25, 2013 • Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)**

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) represents 54 unions and one million workers.  
It is Canada's largest provincial labour federation.

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# 1.

## **SISTERS RISING: AN OVERVIEW**

***Union sisters show incredible resiliency, creativity and strength in confronting the myriad of issues they face in the workplace while balancing their community activism and family lives.***

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The Ontario Federation of Labour Women's Committee works with grassroots women's groups, community coalitions and other trade union committees dedicated to social and economic equality and the advancement of equality for women. To gain equality and achieve their goals, women must work with the community as well as through their unions. History demonstrates that by organizing into unions, working women have achieved better wages, better working conditions, benefits and job security.

Over the past two years, our activities took place in the political context of sustained attacks against working people and their unions by austerity programs promoted by governments and employers. These regressive legislative and policy changes have collectively turned the clock backwards by decades on women's rights and equality.

Our work went beyond the issue of women's representation in the union to include the struggles of women for economic security and decent work. We acknowledged the different needs and experiences of diverse women including lesbians, transgender women, women with disabilities, women of colour and Aboriginal women.

Union sisters show incredible resiliency, creativity and strength to confront the myriad of issues they face in the workplace while balancing their community activism and family lives.

## 2.

# **WOMEN WORKING FOR CHANGE WITHIN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT**

Women's equality issues must be addressed within the labour movement. The labour movement as an organization must be seen as open, transparent and accessible to the diversity of all its membership. The OFL has a history of implementing structural changes to better address the changing needs of its members. The 2013 convention marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federation's constitutional change to establish Affirmative Action Vice-Presidents for women. We were the first labour body in North America to do so.

The OFL's Equity Retreat and Equity Conference provided a space for the Women's Committee members to join with OFL equity committees in open dialogue and strategic planning to fight back against austerity and move an intersectional equality agenda forward.

In December 2012, over 120 women union and community leaders came together for the first ever OFL Women's Leadership Summit. Under the banner "Sister to Sister", women activists shared skills, strategies and experiences in working together to challenge inequality. The Summit focused on the need to build stronger unions, ensure diversity within the leadership and strengthen partnerships with community allies in the struggle for a more just and equitable society.

Strategies and an action plan were developed to address the gains and concerns of women. This builds on the ongoing work of activists through OFL committees, convention resolutions and work in and with community organizations. The Committee holds its annual spring strategic planning session each year to develop our work plan. Sisters from the OFL Executive Board and Council and community leadership are invited to participate in the sessions. This broader range of leadership voice and vision provides a more diverse coming together and identifies positive changes and actions.

The Federation's March 8<sup>th</sup> Project was developed to build solidarity, pride and celebrate union women. This project continues to grow.

Women need and want to be part of the labour movement. The threat of Tory leader Tim Hudak's "Working for Less" poses a significant barrier to women's economic equality. We continue to support our federal sector sisters in standing strong against the Harper Conservative anti-equality, anti-union attacks. The Women's Committee members believe that a key role of the Committee is to assist with supporting and mobilizing women in OFL central campaigns such as rallies on Bill 115, strike support, building a social justice movement such as the Common Front, Democratic & Economic Rights Campaign and the People's Budget.

### 3.

## CAMPAIGNING FOR ALL WOMEN

The Women's Committee continues to join in sisterhood with our affiliates and labour councils as well as community organizations and women's advocacy groups, to tackle critical issues facing women in the home, workplace and society. Women's equality is a labour issue and the gains we have won are due to our integral work with community partners and the broader community. The OFL has a long history of working with the wider community on issues of mutual concern. Seeking opportunities to talk, listen and work together creates opportunities for positive change. This process must be ongoing.

Over the last two years, members have developed a number of labour and community campaigns:

### **EQUAL PAY DAY!**

Members have been actively engaged in pay equity actions to address women's low pay and economic insecurity. Since the 2011 convention, the Committee continued to work with the Equal Pay Coalition and our affiliated unions to press for renewed awareness and stronger enforcement of pay equity legislation. In April 2013, we launched a new campaign - April 9, Equal Pay Day. The campaign focused on public awareness of women's economic rights under Ontario's *Pay Equity Act*. We developed an action toolkit for affiliates and labour councils. Through our unions and labour councils, we assisted in coordinating a number of actions across the province. Committee members participated in a meeting of the Equal Pay Coalition with Premier Wynne on the need for legislative enforcement, reform and a public education campaign.

### **ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Eliminating violence against women has been a key focus of our work. Working with other OFL equity committees, we continue to build awareness of workers' rights on anti-harassment, violence and domestic violence under the *Occupational Health & Safety Act*. On December 6, we mobilized the workplace and community actions.

This year we joined a global movement to demand an end to violence against women and girls. "ONE BILLION RISING" was an international day of action, dance and resistance on February 14, 2013. Our actions focused on the demand for a national inquiry into the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. An action toolkit was developed and distributed to unions and labour councils.

### **TAKE BACK THE NIGHT**

Take Back the Night marches are critical community events where union and community women join together to stand up and speak out on the right of women and girls to be safe in their communities, their homes and their workplaces. Each year, Committee members promote and support local events.

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## **CHILD CARE**

We have long acknowledged child care as a cornerstone to women's equality and a key economic issue. Our work with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) and our affiliates continues in demanding a child care system that meets the needs of children, parents and child care workers. Our work includes standing with the Peel community in fighting child care centre closures; supporting child care workers' fight for pay equity; joining with OCBCC in the demand for funding and presenting a brief on reforming Ontario's *Day Nurseries Act*.

The Federation is a sponsor of Child Care Worker & Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day. In our struggle to create a child care system, we take time to recognize the dedication, commitment, hard work and education of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) and all staff who work with young children. The day also calls attention to the fact that child care staff are underpaid and undervalued for their work and that Ontario families need more affordable, safe, licensed, high quality child care in order to support their families.

Nationally, the Committee is active in the CLC and national women's groups' campaign – Rethink Child Care. The campaign focus is the creation of a national child care system.

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## **CAMPAIGN TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE**

Committee members continue our ongoing work to support the Workers' Action Centre's (WAC) campaign to raise Ontario's minimum wage. Campaign materials have been distributed through our networks, members have mobilized within their affiliates to build participation in community rallies and WAC spokespersons have presented at Committee events.

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## **CELEBRATING WOMEN'S LABOUR HISTORY**

October is Women's History Month. This year, the OFL Women's Committee has launched a new initiative to recognize women's contributions to history and as part of that history, women's fight for equality as a powerful social movement.

## 4.

# CONTINUING OUR WORK

In ever increasing numbers, women are taking on leadership for change. Young women and women of equity-seeking groups have brought new ideas and vitality into our movement.

Although there have been setbacks, we can count a number of victories and achievements in organizing at the bargaining table, in the workplace and in the labour movement overall.

We will continue to educate and mobilize to eliminate violence against women through our participation in the One Billion Rising Campaign, Sisters in Spirit Vigils, building awareness of our health and safety rights to a violence-free workplace, mobilizing community Take Back the Night marches and December 6<sup>th</sup> events to memorialize the anniversary of the 1989 Montréal Massacre of 14 women. We will continue our work with women's shelters to fight for funding to ensure women and children have a safe haven.

March 8<sup>th</sup> is marked every year as International Women's Day (IWD) to celebrate and assess equality gains. We remember Bread and Roses and women in the struggles before us to make a better world for our daughters and other loved ones. The Committee will continue to produce our popular March 8<sup>th</sup> Project poster and pins. We will participate in IWD events around the province including marches, festivals and annual community IWD breakfasts.

Women's economic equality is under direct attack by both governments and employers. We will work with our affiliates and the Equal Pay Coalition to press for enforcement of present legislation and needed reform to recognize that Ontario's wage gap is not only based on gender but race as well. We will work through provincial and local action to build awareness and promote Equal Pay Day.

Child Care will be a priority for the Committee in the coming two years. Upon the endorsement of the Ontario Child Care Coalition's \$10 a Day Campaign, members will work with our affiliates, labour councils and with the OCBC and community allies to mobilize to ensure child care is a key demand in the upcoming provincial election.

During Women's History Month in October, we will continue to appreciate and highlight the "herstories" of women's activism throughout Ontario and across Canada to address discrimination and create positive social and political change.

In the upcoming provincial election, the Committee will develop a mobilizing-the-vote toolkit highlighting issues critical to women and supporting women candidates to elect a government that would implement an agenda of progressive change that would achieve full equality and participation in our society.

The struggle for women's equality continues both inside and outside the labour movement. While we have made progress, the analysis of the current state of women's equality is that we have reached a plateau or that we are actually moving backward. There is no doubt that austerity programs threaten each and every equality gain that we have made and any future movement forward.

As we use our activism within unions to advance women's equality, we cannot ignore the intersection between the struggle for women's equality and the fight for a more socially-just world - free of racism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia and poverty where we create a just and equal society.

Our struggle continues and we must find ways to engage our members, our unions and our communities. We must deliver on our commitment to train, mentor, support and inspire new leaders within both the labour and broader equality movement.

A union card is a pathway to decent wages, benefits, pensions and access to equality rights. Studies show that women and workers of colour want to sign a union card. The Committee is committed to continue our work with the OFL officers, Executive Board and women's organizations to remove legislative barriers to joining unions.

Convention resolutions reflect the concerns, priorities and actions required as identified by activists in addressing women's equality in Ontario. In the spring of 2014, the Committee will come together in our Strategic Session to develop a work plan that reflects the Action Plan that is adopted by Convention 2013 delegates.

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## **A COMMITTEE HARD AT WORK**

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At the time of publication, the membership of the OFL Women's Committee is as follows:

- Carmen Lint (ATU)
- Gogi Bhandal (CLC)
- Ashmeela Ahmad (COPE)
- Gina Gignac (CUPE)
- Yolanda McClean (CUPE)
- Debbie Carmichael (CUPW)
- Karen Pullen (IBEW)
- Leslie Forge (IFPTE)
- Nancy Guzzo (LIUNA)
- Suzette Clark (OSSTF)
- Vivian Binnion (PSAC)
- Helen Kennedy (Toronto & York Region Labour Council)
- Tricia Watt (TWU)
- Diana O'Brien (UFCW)
- Rehya Yazbek (UFCW)
- Barb Dolan (Unifor)
- Josephine Petcher (Unifor)
- Julie White (Unifor)
- Tracy Simpson (USW–District 6)

### OFL Officer & Executive Board Members:

- Nancy Hutchison, OFL Secretary-Treasurer
- Candace Rennick, OFL VP–CUPE
- Maureen Weinberger, OFL VP–ETFO
- Heather Kelley, OFL VP–IAMAW
- Ann Hawkins, OFL VP–OECTA
- Pearl Sawyer, OFL VP–UFCW

### OFL Staff:

- Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL Director of Women's Rights

The Committee would like to thank all those who participated since the last convention.









