



WE WANT
ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR
CONVENTION 2015

13TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION
TORONTO • NOVEMBER 23-27, 2015

CONVENTION REPORT
WOMEN





CONVENTION REPORT: WOMEN'S ISSUES

13th OFL Biennial Convention • November 23-27, 2015 • 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.

15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, Toronto, Ontario M3C 1Y8
416-441-2731 • 1-800-668-9138 • info@ofl.ca
TDD: 416-443-6305 • FAX: 416-441-1893

www.OFL.ca  OFLabour  @OFLabour #OntarioWeWant

This document was proudly produced with unionized labour.



1.

WOMEN'S COMMITTEE CONVENTION REPORT: INTRODUCTION

**“ To gain equality and
achieve their goals,
women must work with,
as well as through,
their unions.
”**

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) 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, as well as through, their unions. History demonstrates that by organizing into unions, working people 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.

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

2.

WORKING WITHIN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Women's equality 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.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP WITHIN OUR MOVEMENT

In May 2015, over 170 women union and community leaders came together for the 2nd 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 its 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.

MARCH 8TH PROJECT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The Federation's March 8th Project was developed to build solidarity, pride and celebrate union women. Our 2014 and 2015 themes were "Rising" and "Sisters Sharing Solidarity." This Project continues to grow.

ACTIVISM IN WORKPLACES AND COMMUNITIES

Women need and want to be part of the labour movement. In all the work we do, women workers know that a union card is both a pathway out of poverty and the road to building a just and equal society. The threat of Tory leader Tim Hudak's "Working for Less" posed a significant barrier to women's economic equality. Women mobilized to defeat Hudak's Conservatives. Federally, we continued to support our federal sector sisters in standing strong against the Harper Conservative anti-equality, anti-union attacks. Mobilizing the vote for the federal election was our primary focus leading into the October federal election.

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, strike support, labour law reform, building social justice movements such as the Common Front and "Fight for \$15 & Fairness" campaign.

3.

CAMPAIGN INITIATIVES

The OFL 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:

FIGHTING FOR PAY EQUITY

Members have been actively engaged in pay equity actions to address women's low pay and economic insecurity. Since the 2013 convention, the Committee continued to work with the Equal Pay Coalition and our affiliates to press for renewed awareness and stronger enforcement of pay equity legislation. The Equal Pay Day 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 affiliates and labour councils, we assisted in coordinating a number of actions across the province. Committee members participated in meetings of the Equal Pay Coalition and Premier Wynne, Minister of Labour Flynn and Minister Responsible for Women MacCharles on the need for legislative enforcement, reform and a public education campaign. These actions led the government to establish a review and consultation process on "Closing the Gender Wage Gap".

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*.

This ongoing mobilization of labour and community partners led to the Ontario government's creation of a Sexual Violence and Harassment Roundtable where OFL Secretary-Treasurer, Nancy Hutchison, represents labour. Throughout late spring 2015, we assisted affiliates in mobilizing presentations to the consultations on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

On December 6, we mobilized workplace and community actions.

This year, the OFL joined a global movement - "ONE BILLION RISING" - demanding an end to violence against women and girls, an international day of action, dance and resistance on February 14, 2015.

The Committee strongly support community "Memorial Marches" to demand a National Inquiry into the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. A toolkit for actions was developed and distributed to affiliates and labour councils. The Committee also continued to mobilize in support of annual October 4th Aboriginal Women's Vigils.

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 women and girls' rights to be safe in their communities, their homes and their workplaces. Each year, committee members promote and support local events.

FIGHTING FOR 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 to demand a child care system that meets the needs of children, parents and child care workers. Our work includes 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 OFL 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 focused on making the creation of a national child care system a key election issue. Members participated in a national Child Care Summit leading into the federal election.

Vote Child Care 2015 became a key mobilizing tool to get out women's votes on October 19, 2015.

RECOGNIZING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

October is Women's History Month. Each year, the OFL Women's Committee develops materials to recognize women's historic contributions to the fight for equality and social justice.

CAMPAIGN TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE

Committee members continue their ongoing work to support the Fight for \$15 & Fairness 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 spokespeople have presented at Committee events. The demand to raise the base minimum wage in Ontario above the poverty line is a key demand in closing the gender wage gap.

POLITICAL ACTION

In both the 2014 provincial election and 2015 federal election, the Committee developed a mobilizing-the-vote toolkit highlighting issues critical to women and supported women candidates to elect a government that would implement an agenda of progressive change that would achieve full equality and participation in our society.

4.

CONTINUING OUR WORK

A COMMITMENT TO WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

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 to our movement.

Although there have been setbacks, women trade unionists can celebrate 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 6th events to mark the Montreal Massacre. We will continue our work with women's shelters to fight for funding to ensure women and children have a safe haven.

March 8th is marked every year as International Women's Day 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 8th 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. The OFL will continue to lobby both provincially and federally for a national, public childcare system.

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.

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 backwards. 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 working with the OFL officers, Executive Board and women's organizations to remove legislative barriers to join 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 2016, the Committee will come together in our Strategic Session to develop a work plan that reflects the direction set by Convention 2015 delegates.

OFL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Gogi Bhandal, CLC
- Debbie Carmichael, CUPW
- Patty Clancy, COPE
- Nancy Guzzo, LIUNA
- Ann Hawkins, VP-OECTA and Co-Chair
- Rosemary Judd-Archer, OSSTF
- Heather Kelley, VP-IAMAW and Co-Chair
- Lisa Kelly, Unifor
- Linda Koenders, PSAC
- Carmen Lint, ATU
- Yolanda McClean, CUPE
- Tracy Miller, The Society of Energy Professionals
- Diana O'Brien, UFCW
- Karen Pullen, IBEW
- Candace Rennick, VP-CUPE and Co-Chair
- Pearl Sawyer, VP-UFCW and Co-Chair
- Tracy Simpson, USW District 6
- Tricia Watt, TWU-USW
- Maureen Weinberger, VP-ETFO and Co-Chair
- Carol Zavitz, ETFO

OFL Officer and Staff:

- Nancy Hutchison, OFL Secretary-Treasurer
- Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL Human Rights Director

**NOTES
& IDEAS**

