



Women's Committee Report  
September, 2018

With Summer rolling into Fall, it is time to roll up my sleeves and get to work!

**WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2018**

I would like to thank the Local for sending Pauline and myself to the 2018 Women's Conference. The conference was held August 5-8<sup>th</sup> at Port Elgin and once again the conference was a huge success with almost 400 Women attending. The conference opened with a land acknowledgement and keynote speaker Angela Robertson. Angela Robertson, a social justice activist and advocate for women's and low-income people's rights, paid tribute to her mother, grandmother and great grandmother, who nurtured her as a young feminist in the Toronto Black Women's Collective, and to the men in her life who work to undermine patriarchy.

Monday morning, we attended a workshop to discuss how change happens and how to take on the challenges as women. This common workshop got us to think critically about the hurdles to our participation, what prevents our equality and what compromises our mental health and physical health.

Then we looked at feminist approaches to mental health and addictions with Cynthia Langill. Cynthia is an addictions councillor at Renascent, a local rehab centre. She taught us that being an ally means providing solidarity to someone at a vulnerable time in their life. Namely listening to what they say and what they aren't saying. Reminding them that they are not alone while helping to point them to the support and resources that they need. And most importantly to respect their right to confidentiality. She also challenged us to be mindful of what we say because words hurt and can have a big impact on someone who is suffering with mental health issues.

Pauline and I took separate workshops in the afternoon. I took "You've formed a Women's Committee, now what?". It provided me with some ideas on how to engage women in the Local's Women's Committee and taught me how to run a meeting as the Chair of the committee.

The next day I took the workshop "Women at work-getting our worth". It taught us about the wage gap and how we could work towards narrowing this gap. It gave me the tools to explain how the wage gap occurred so that I may advocate for this change within the Local and community.

The afternoon had a panel of the Women who rock Political Action- Joie Warnock, Lana Payne and Naureen Rizvi ( Regional Directors). They gave us an update on the victories and struggles across the country that our members have faced. Then we split into our Regions to talk about our own regional issues. There were 32 delegates from the B.C. and Prairie Region in attendance. It was here that we learned that the 2019 Women's Conference would be held Regionally. The reasoning behind moving regionally was a hope that more women would attend if it was closer to home. Also challenges that each region faces are unique and requires specific education. Why learn about autoworkers when you are not one? Seems to make sense.

To top of the day, our president Jerry Dias addressed the conference and spoke of a bright future for Women within our organization. He spoke of how as an organization we must walk the talk that we use when approaching other organizations. It has been noticed that our leadership is not gender equal with the top 3 positions being held by men and maybe a woman would one day be President. He noted that the National Executive board is almost gender equal with our Regional Council Executives following suit. But when we come to the Local level this is not always the case. He suggested that during the upcoming elections that this could be rectified with Brothers supporting Sisters either through electing Sisters to office or offering to mentor Sisters for these positions for future elections. Jerry then opened the mike for Sisters to expose their barriers within their own locals. Many Sisters took the opportunity and used it to inform Jerry of the struggles they were facing.

Pauline and I felt the solidarity of the Sisterhood from the moment we touched down in Toronto. With a problem arising at the car rental agency, Caramelle-a Sister I had met at a previous conference, offered us a ride to Port Elgin. Every morning a Sister from another Local would offer us a ride to the centre from the hotel. All our transportation needs were taken care of by the Sisterhood. And when we left Port Elgin, we took the opportunity to walk a picket line at Owen Sound. Again, Sisters were being locked out by greedy doctors, a situation like Port Arthur, but only a different Union. The Sisters were happy to see us and surprised that Unifor sisters from Alberta had come to offer solidarity.

### **Canadian Council 2018**

It was a celebration of five years of activism as National President Jerry Dias recalled the foundation of Unifor in his address to more than 1,300 participants at Canadian Council at the Halifax Convention Centre.

"It was a vision of a bold, brave, inclusive new union that was big enough, smart enough and determined enough to change the politics of this country," said Dias.

In his speech, Dias said that political action has been a key part of achieving that vision, enabling Unifor to become a union for all working-class people – a union for everyone.

Major bargaining victories of the past year were highlighted, including those in the gaming and hospitality, aviation, pulp and paper, and shipbuilding sectors.

"We can never lose sight of how critical a tool collective bargaining is for workers to take back our share of the wealth that we help create," Dias stressed. "I firmly believe that it's our collective bargaining that builds the union, it's a moment when members are the most engaged, it's an opportunity to communicate, and it's a platform for mobilization."

Paying credit to striking and locked out members, Dias specifically acknowledged 65 members, all women, who just endured a 129-day strike at the Port Arthur Health Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

“These women walked that picket line not just for themselves, but the millions of precarious workers in Canada. They fought not just for better working conditions, but to build a union that is rooted in its community.” The chain, lock and bolt used to barricade Port Arthur Health Authority was given to the National along with a signed Strike placard signed by every woman who walked this picket line.

He went on to call on governments to legislate strong and enforceable anti-scab laws in every jurisdiction in the country. Unifor is re-inventing how to run a picket line and get employers back to the bargaining table when scabs are used to prolong strikes and lockouts.

“As a result of our sisters and brothers coming from across the country to help shut down these workplaces down, we forced employers back to the table in both Goderich and Port Arthur,” said Jerry Dias, Unifor National President. “This is the new normal and this is how we deal with scabs going forward,” said Scott Doherty, Executive Assistant to the President. The canoe that was used to carry in scabs to the Local 16-O worksite to undermine the picket line at was presented to Jerry at Council. It was freshly painted and renamed “The Scab Hunter” with each of the workers from the mine signing it.

The National President’s keynote speech covered a variety of issues including women’s rights, federal pay equity legislation, climate change and just transition programs. Speaking to the union’s decision to disaffiliate from the Canadian Labour Congress Dias insisted that workers must maintain full democratic control over their representation.

While commending the achievements of the union Dias also called for continued vigilance and activism, pointing to the rise in political conservatism and ongoing international trade threats.

Dias ended by encouraging delegates to keep up the fight and to make the next twelve months count telling them “We have made history and we’ll continue to make history. Our future is still being written and you are the ones that are writing it.”

With every Council and Conference we always strive to leave the community in a better place than when we arrived. During Canadian Council many charities were supported by the delegates.

- \$80, 000 was raised by a cruise raffle and contributions from the CCF (Canadian Community Fund) for the Mi’kmaq Friendship Centre
- Monies were raised for 2 agencies that support Youth Suicide prevention (one in Halifax and 1 in Manitoba)
- Monies were raised for Women’s Shelters in the area
- Monies were raised for Spinal Bifida through 2 50/50 draws
- Monies were raised for Youth Pride camps through the sale of baseball caps

Just to name a few.

## **Sons of Odin Rally**

On Labour Day as the Edmonton District and Labour Council was setting up for it's annual BBQ, the Neo-nazi group, Sons of Odin, were setting up shop at the Mustard Seed under the guise of feeding the homeless and giving them soap. Hate will not be tolerated in our city and members from various Locals were in attendance with Karen and myself. Although we were prepared for conflict, after 90 minutes of unanswered questions and a lot of arguing, the Sons of Odin packed up shop and left. We had won for the moment but need to keep an eye on the activities of this group.

### **Pharmacare Lobby**

As a result of signing a petition online to secure a National Pharmacare Program, I received an invitation to a round table being held by my MP, Mike Lake, on September 4<sup>th</sup>. During this round table, 14 other conservatives attended and surprising we had a great meeting. We talked about the need for pipelines to get to tide water, NAFTA, dairy and supply management, youth and politics, temporary foreign workers and pharmacare. Although I was the only NDP supporter in the room, I was given plenty of opportunities to offer my opinion without opposition. The topic of pharmacare was left for last. After giving my pitch and handing out information pamphlets to all the attendees, Mike Lake replied that this was outside his jurisdiction, and suggested I contact Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health, at the provincial level. I did receive support from other guests who also thought pharmacare was an idea worth exploring. At the end of the round table, MP Mike Lake extended an invitation to future round tables and said it was great to hear from people outside his party at these discussions.

### **Planning Ahead**

As Chair of the Women's committee, I am finding it difficult to organize a committee. This pain is felt by all the chairs of our equity groups and I am left wondering how to connect with our members. Maybe an Equity Audit needs to be performed for our members to give them a chance to identify with the committees? I would suggest that a document be drafted by our Executive containing contact information for all the chairs and have it sent to all our members. This would give all the members a chance to participate in the committees if they choose to do so. Also, I would suggest that the chairs of the Equity committees join to support one another in the various events and activities that each committee would attend. Just some thoughts.....

In Solidarity,

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