



March 8th, 2018

**Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour
International Women's Day Statement**

International Women's Day (IWD), March 8th, is a day when women the world over recognize, and celebrate, our achievements.

The theme for IWD 2018 is #PushforProgress, a nod to the growing global movement of advocacy, activism, and support surrounding gender parity and sexism. Inspired by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, the aim of the theme is to encourage people to continue the vocal fight for equality.

IWD is a Day when we remember those who have blazed the trail before us, inside and outside our labour movement.

In 1908, the seeds of International Women's Day were sown, when women from the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union went on strike; and demanded not just better wages and benefits, but better working conditions as well. Their demand for "Bread and Roses" has become the international theme for the women's movement around the globe.

We honour women like Florence Nightingale, who said in the mid 1800's, "Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better". What better describes our need to be and act politically, to #PushforProgress.

Women like Newfoundland's own Julia Salter Earle, known for her advocacy in the early 1900's, to improve the lot of the working classes.

During the depression, Julia led a march of 500 unemployed men to the Colonial Building in St. John's, to convince government to give them much needed jobs. A real leader, she devoted her political activism towards workers' rights, and the struggle against homelessness and poverty.

We honour those nameless #MeToo silence breakers, whom Time Magazine honoured as their "Person of the Year" for 2017. The millions of women the world over, who are speaking up and stepping forward, to call out the injustice they experience every day.

These movements are changing conversations, changing culture, and changing laws.

March 8th is also a day where women acknowledge the challenges they continue to face, in the quest for gender equality.

The term "The personal is political", was popularized in the late 60s and early 70s, to underscore what was happening in women's personal lives.



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Issues such as access to health care, being responsible for all of the housework, possibly being sexually assaulted in their own homes; were political issues of the day that inspired women to be politically active.

The reality is that the gains that make us more equal, have never just be given to us, they have all been taken though our struggles and our political action.... and that's why the personal is indeed political.

As a labour leader, I often hear the phrase that unions shouldn't be involved in politics.

Our lives are not confined to our workplaces, or our homes, we're much bigger than that. The truth is, we can't let politics alone, because politics won't leave us alone.

As long as gender inequality exists – we have no choice.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “It’s the action, not the fruit of the action, that’s important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time that there’ll be any fruit. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing – there will be no result.”

A true measure of democracy, I believe, is a society that is **inclusive, participatory, and committed to political equality, policies and laws**, that are really “for all people”. That is what our “movement” represents to me, and that is why we must act; with our voices, our heads and hearts, and sometimes with our feet and fists.

We need to give ourselves permission to be all that we can be.

That's all of our jobs.

So the question is then what are we going to do to use our power, our activism, and our voices; for the kind of progress we want to see in our communities, in our provinces, and in our country?

Unions have made tremendous gains in our workplaces and our communities.

And on this IWD, we continue to state loud that women need unions, as much as unions need women!!

The fair wages that unions negotiate, delivers almost \$574 million every week into local economies across Canada. Unionized women in Newfoundland & Labrador (NL) spend \$13.9 million more every week, earning on average \$8.46 an hour more than non- union women.



Collective bargaining gains have made a huge difference to union women, their families, and our economy.

Recent collective agreement protection, and legislative changes around violence in the workplaces in many unions, and in many provinces, and paid leave for DV@W recently announced in the federal government, is proof positive of this fact.

Union women have been essential to collective bargaining, and in making unions more inclusive and democratic.

Today, there are more women in unions in Canada than men. This is due to the high number of women who work in the public sector, which is largely unionized.

We understand that unions are part of a broader movement for social change, and that our struggle for equality extends far beyond the collective bargaining table.

We understand that union women must join with the broader women's movement, and our like-minded partners.

Never has this been more important than right now! Inequality, sexism, misogyny, and gender-based violence, are prevalent everywhere in our society.

We know that here in Canada, and NL, we are far from having achieved equality. Especially for women, Transgender, and non-binary folk; and those who are Indigenous, racialized, living with disabilities, or otherwise marginalized.

We continue to have a stubbornly high gender wage gap, 69 cents here in NL, and that wage gap is even higher for some groups of women.

Families continue to struggle to find and pay for safe, high quality child care.

Women, and yes all women, continue to experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence, every single day.

And too many women are dying because of male violence. Deaths that really could be preventable, if our society were to actually take violence against women seriously.

Every 6 days, a woman in Canada is murdered by her intimate partner.

On any given night, some 3,500 women and their 2,700 children, sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home.

It's staggering!



Our province has one of the highest rates of DV in the country, and we are one of the few provinces where domestic violence is on the rise.

86% of the victims of intimate partner homicides in NL, are women.

Trans and non-binary folk also experience high levels of violence.

Every 2 ½ days, LGBTQ2S people are victims of hate crimes, motivated by their sexual orientation. Indigenous women and women with disabilities continue to experience alarmingly high rates of violence.

One thing we have learned, in order to eliminate gender based violence, we need to address growing inequality in our society.

We continue to struggle to access safe abortion services, and the opponents of reproductive rights are relentless in their attempts to turn back the clock.

Women continue to be under-represented in every level of government.

This is not simply a societal problem, but a political one, which requires political will to change.

We are encouraged by the recent federal budget, and the commitment to move forward on Universal Pharmacare and pay equity. But that means, more than ever now, that we need to keep feet to the fire and keep up our political action.

Women in Canada have waited far too long for fairness. We will have to work with government to get this legislation right, and hopefully before the next federal election.

Our wish is that this will also create the will for similar legislation in NL. As we remain hopeful that the NL government, will now begin the process of fulfilling their plan for provincial pay equity legislation, that was promised last March 8th.

Another positive highlight of Budget 2018, and a real victory for workers after a long campaign led by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), was the federal government's commitment to five days of paid leave, for victims of domestic violence.

We have been lobbying the NL government for some time now, to create similar legislation at the provincial level.

We are asking for paid time off for the victims of DV@W, changes to the Occupational Health & Safety Act and regulations regarding DV@W, as well as changes to the Residential Tenancies Act.



I believe we are very close, and we are optimistic that we will soon join other provinces, and the federal government, to make this a reality for us here in NL.

It was also good to see the implementation of a long-standing call for dedicated leave for second parents. But I have to be honest, I had expected that child care would be more of a priority in a federal budget, focused on boosting participation of women in the workforce.

The evidence is very clear, the most effective way to remove barriers to women's participation, and address women's inequality, is with a universal childcare system.

We will continue to work on this very important issue.

We need a higher minimum wage and investments in quality public services, education, health care, housing, and strategies and policies to address the additional inequalities that exist for all women, for some women more than others.

Our list is long, but so has been our struggle, and our inequality.

Time is up - Today, let's issue a challenge to governments, community leaders, unions, employers, individuals, and to men...

We must do better...we need to step up to the challenge!

Women cannot fight alone. We need men to step up and join us in the struggle to end gender-based violence (GBV).

We need organizations to commit to changing policies and practices, and governments to enact policies and legislation.

We are done waiting, and we're not going to be satisfied with baby steps.

Our labour movement is committed to working with feminist organizations, the St. John's Status of Women Council, our allies, and governments at all levels.

Because we know that when we organize, we get results.

We also issue a call for more women to think about running for elections. In their community organizations, unions, municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

It will make a difference.



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For those of us who strive for social justice, equality, and an end to GBV, sexism, racism, and all forms of discrimination; it's hard to fathom how such hatred and violence can still exist today. It seems to be everywhere we turn.

So let's use that anger we feel towards such deplorable injustices, towards a renewed and strengthened promise to keep marching, to advocate, rise up, and use our voices and energy, to keep on being the change we want to say in the world.

Let's keep building this momentum together. Let's celebrate ourselves, give ourselves permission to be all that we can be.

Let's make our personal – political!!

International Women's Day is a time to reclaim, honour, and foster our feminism, recognize the important role of unions to make a difference, and recommit to building solidarity in our unions, and with our allies in the struggle.

Through our collective struggles, may we build a fairer and more equal world. A world where violence, racist, and sexist norms are no more. Where women have choices and control over their bodies. A world with better laws, access to justice for women; with pay equity, and strong social programs like public child care, where women have respect and space, a world where women don't die just because they're women.

As we recognize the challenges ahead of us, let's look for the joy in the struggle. Let's turn our anger into hope, and recognize that our biggest victory lies in our ability to use our collective voices, passions, and energy to rise up, act up, and be bold for change.

Thank you for your support and solidarity!

Happy IWD!

JR/MS
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