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REPORT OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

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CUPW NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT FOR THE 2019 NATIONAL CONVENTION

INTRODUCTION AND HERSTORY

The mandate coming to a close was marked by wonderful accomplishments and some remaining challenges for the National Women's Committee (NWC). The decision to hold regional conferences resulted in meaningful encounters and conversations among sisters on a range of subjects, and encouraged solidarity bonds to flourish. In terms of CUPW, the decision on pay equity for RSMCs was welcomed, and is a victory of no small measure for these workers who are, for the majority, women. More broadly speaking, attention was finally paid to the unacceptable levels of violence against women. The Government of Canada established an inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), which helped put this ongoing tragedy firmly on the radar. The last two years gave birth to the #MeToo campaign, which put a focus on the breadth of men's violence against women. The NWC continues to work toward combatting this and other inequities (such as work/life balance and mental load) that remain for working women. More specifically, the committee strives to involve more sisters at all levels of the Union, and to encourage them to be active in their workplace and in the community.

The NWC was created in 1990 with the goal of fighting for equality, respect and female representation within the Union, and to oppose attacks on women's rights in the broader society and by governments. In that time, members of the NWC have been very active both within and outside the Union in promoting women's rights, participating in local and national activities such as "Take Back the Night", International Women's Day, Sisters in Spirit, and other events. The NWC publishes *The Rose* twice yearly with articles written by women, using a gender lens. The National Women's Committee is made up of one elected woman from each region, as well as all women elected to a national or regional position. There are also three additional vacancies for women from the following groups: private sector units, LGBTQ and differently abled women. The current NWC counts 47 women.



The CUPW National Convention in May 2015 brought significant changes to the NWC. Instead of meeting twice a year, the committee now only meets once. Each region was mandated to hold regional women's conferences at least once during the mandate. There were also changes to the 7.58 funding process. This funding is to be used to assist women regionally to attend events. The 7.58 funding was capped at \$40,000 per year per region. Any overage goes back to the general fund.

GOALS OF THE MANDATE

At the first meeting of the NWC held February 27 and 28, 2016, the question was asked, "In your opinion, what should the National Women's Committee be doing at the national, regional and local levels this mandate?"

The common concerns discussed were:

- Assisting and supporting sisters in being elected to union positions at all levels
- Removing barriers to women's participation in union activities
- Improving communication among all levels of the union (local, regional and national)
- Defining the role of women's committees at all levels
- Working on how to address women's issues in the workplace, union and community.

The Committee discussed issues ranging from childcare, funding for parental leaves, to pay equity, and bargaining over the course of the mandate. In addition, the Committee continues to publish, *The Rose*.

Here is a snapshot of some of the guest speakers and presentations we had this mandate:

CHILDCARE

CUPW's Child Care Coordinator Shellie Bird gave a presentation on our Child Care Fund. We were provided with an overall history of childcare to the committee, and an explanation of the fund's objectives, which is primarily to help members who have a hard time finding childcare. The need to work with community partners was emphasized, and to work with communities in rural areas where childcare may not be accessible. A think tank was put in place for any concerns that were not discussed during the presentation. Some of the outstanding issues such as extended hours, overtime and shift work were identified as key childcare related issues.

The Rose

The Rose is a publication put out by the National Women's Committee with assistance from CUPW's communications specialist.



It was decided that one edition of *The Rose* should remain in its traditional format in order to reach the sisters in the union, while the second edition would be included in *Perspective*, and reach all members regardless of gender.

MEDIA TRAINING

Kimothy Walker and Eric Collard from the Ottawa Media Group provided the Committee with media training, including mock interviews. The training focused on building confidence, and teaching how to deliver messages through social and traditional media. The focus helping to show that equity was needed in media. There is a strong need for women to be in the forefront of CUPW's media plan, especially with the ongoing negotiations.

TASK FORCE ON CANADA POST

We received an overview of the promised Liberal Task Force that would evaluate Canada Post, as announced May 5, 2016. The task force gathered facts about Canada Post's future, with recommendations such as:

- Charging for door to door delivery
- Moratorium cuts
- A reduction in labour costs
- Dismissing postal banking.

A parliamentary committee would review the recommendations and gather information from public hearings. CUPW mobilized to fight these possible cutbacks, with more CUPW members participating in these public hearings than in the past. CUPW sent letters to 5,000 municipalities and councils to participate in the Task Force survey. There was also an E-consultation process on government web pages that ended October 21, 2016.

Many sisters across the country represented CUPW in all phases of the review.

NEGOTIATIONS AND PAY EQUITY

This mandate, the participation of many sisters at the bargaining tables and the pay equity process has demonstrated how beneficial women's leadership is to our struggle. We need to ensure that, going forward, we continue to build on this type of representation, and we are confident that, just as we have seen success this time, especially with respect to pay equity, the engagement of more sisters at these levels of the Union will continue to be of great benefit for the entire membership.



EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Canada has a piecemeal leave and income support system for workers who experience life events such as paternal leave, compassion care, sick leave, maternity leave and domestic violence leave. This system functions for both short- and long-term leave from paid work. Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) held a meeting that covered issues surrounding paid and unpaid leaves, and which are covered by EI or other programs. We learned that Employment Insurance in Quebec is much better than the equivalents available in other parts of Canada.

SOCIAL MEDIA

A social media workshop was given which covered the use of social media platforms such Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and more. There was a focus on the effectiveness and drawbacks of different types of social platforms and how best to engage members in using them. The sisters opened a Facebook page.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Sharon Lupton, National Director of Labour Programs and Services, gave a presentation on the United Way Centraide Canada's partnership on the Labour Program and Services project. This involved a brief overview of the project, and four components of a healthy community: jobs, policy, the economy and good leadership.

MARCH 8 – INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The National Office's graphic designer gave a presentation on how posters are created at CUPW, the impact they have in society and awards they won. At this meeting, we created a concept for the 2018 edition of March 8 International Women's Day. When CUPW creates posters, it tries to bring to light a message around a current issue that is happening in society.

GRASSROOTS

The National Women's Committee made recommendations to NEB to make donations, and in regards educating and encouraging locals to support and become involved in community campaigns such as: MMWIWG, gender inequality, the pay gap, #metoo, the importance of using an intersectional lens on our work, domestic violence, and various bills and government initiatives that have attacked the rights of women and girls.



REGIONAL REPORTS

ATLANTIC REGION

The Regional Women's Conference was held June 8-10, 2018 at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. There were sisters participating from all over the region with a mix of new and active sisters.

There was a good variety of speakers and workshops focusing on the impact of unions on the lives of women; on how far we have come in society, and on current events affecting women and MMIWG, which involved a presentation with the Redress Project and an honour song.

We discussed the herstory of CUPW sisters and women in leadership roles. We also discussed ways sisters can get involved in CUPW and how we can each find a role.

We talked about the barriers for women in the labour movement. We discussed the role of committees within CUPW and how they function. We also held open discussions to allow sisters to ask any questions they wanted in regards to CUPW.

We broke down the different obstacles, such as systemic barriers, both within CUPW and at Canada Post. There was a lot of discussion on health and safety issues. We also discussed resolutions for the upcoming National Convention and what issues we should be focusing on to encourage more sisters and to further break down barriers to having more sisters involved.

The goal of these conferences is to empower sisters to find their voices within our Union and to challenge themselves to take on a role. Most of us have taken the skills we have developed through our union into our own lives; therefore, our education empowers us beyond CUPW. We also know that amazing things happen when sisters come together; as we support, challenge, and allow space for us to learn from one another. We hope we offered that to the sisters in attendance at our conference.

We look forward to the next one!



QUEBEC REGION

The Quebec region aimed for encouraging the involvement of women in union solidarity and union life. They participated in the World March of Women, October 2015, in Trois-Rivières. Scarves were made and distributed among the women of the Metro-Montreal and Quebec Regions who partook in the walk. The Marche mondiale des Femmes was launched in 2000 by the Fédération des femmes du Québec.

The Quebec Region also produced a Women's School Seminar—a five-day women's school entitled “L'école des femmes” which took place from September 9 to 14, 2016. It reviewed the overall history of women and the history of women in CUPW. We had various guest speakers including the author of *Les 7 clés du leadership féminin* (The Seven Keys to Women's Leadership), Janie Duquette. Fourteen women participated in the school and of these, more than half are now active in the union. The goal for the current members is to establish 15 local women's committees. To date, nine such committees have been created in locals.

The Facebook page “Groupe de femmes de la région du Québec” (Quebec Region Women's Group) was created in 2015 and now has close to 400 members.

These committees help with the drafting of *Vision-Elle*, a newsletter, which has been reestablished. In addition, this committee helped with encouraging women to participate in International Women's Day, the October 4 vigil for MMIWG and other activities happening in the community.

A Regional Women's Conference was held August 26 and 27, 2017 with the Metro-Montreal Region. The theme was “Together, let's reclaim our place”. More than 60 women participated, and discussed topics such as feminism, Canada's great women, Indigenous women and the Highway of Tears, and pay equity. There was discussion around barriers to women's involvement in the union structure and an attempt to find solutions.

The conference helped build a sense of unity among the sisters of the Quebec region as well as to help build an understanding of the difficulties faced by sisters within the union.

METRO-MONTREAL REGION

Sisters of the Metro-Montreal Region participated in the Women's March in October 2015 with sisters from the Quebec region. The two regions also took part in the joint Regional Women's Conference in August 2017. The two-day conference was an opportunity to reflect on issues and the sisters who attended left the meeting feeling more empowered, experienced and aware of different realities across Quebec.



The Metro-Montreal region held a day of reflection, before the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec's (FTQ's) biennial Women's Conference in September, 2017. NDP MP Karin Trudel spoke about her background and work-life balance along with Sister Giuliana Fumagalli who ran a mayoral campaign. The subject of mental health was discussed as well as the upcoming negotiations. Women from several unions partook in the Biennial Conference. The theme was "Let's be part of change." Issues such as domestic violence, the \$15 minimum wage, women's issues, women's power in the FTQ and many other topics were discussed with regard to how the workplace impacts women's lives.

At the local level, the Montreal Local Women's committee meets regularly. Every year on March 8, there is an activity - ranging from a demonstration, to a conference or a wine and cheese reception.

Due to the funding provided under section 7.58 of the National Constitution, two sisters attended the FTQ Convention in one case, and another went to an education session sponsored by the *Cahiers du Socialisme*.

One sister is involved as a representative on the FTQ Status of Women's Committee in Montreal, and another representative at the UNI-Americas Women's Conferences and on UNI's World Executive Board. Promoting the place of women in various forms and in society is always important. It is our personal mission to promote the unity of women globally, and to continue the fight for women.

CENTRAL REGION

During the 2015 - 2019 mandate, the Central Region held two Tri-Regional Women's conferences; one in January 2016 and the other in August 2018. Each event had 75 sisters from the three regions (Central Region, Metro-Toronto Region and Ontario Region). The sisters participated in activities, shared experiences and listened to guest speakers. There were donations made to several charities supporting women: such as Juliette's Place Homeward Family Shelter, and the Kabeshewin Women's Shelter, Saugeen.

Currently 40% of the local presidents are women. In order to encourage sisters' participation in the locals, a slide presentation was created and distributed among the locals describing various committees in order to prepare for the elections to be held at this year's Pre-Convention Regional Conference.



METRO-TORONTO REGION

The Metro-Toronto Region is one of the most diverse regions in CUPW, with sisters from many multicultural communities. Our foremost goal has been to encourage the participation of women at the local level. Seeing more shop stewards who are sisters would benefit the union. Giving courage to sisters on our diverse, multicultural work floor who would like to be involved in the union is a mission that the Metro-Toronto Region Women's Committee has always put at the forefront of its goals.

The Metro-Toronto region took part in the Tri-Regional Women's Conference in both 2016 and 2018.

The sisters participated in skits that showed the difficulties of workplace violence and how to support sisters and other co-workers who may have experienced or witnessed this happening in the workplace. During the first conference, which was held in Toronto, sisters in attendance donated household items and financial contributions to Juliette Place Women's Shelter. This shelter opened in 1990 and continues to be one of the largest women's shelters. In 1994, it became unionized and continues to provide shelter for abused women and children.

There was discussion about supporting our sisters, and fostering an understanding of cultural differences.

We also heard from various speakers such as the Barb MacQuarrie, Director for the Centre of Research and Education, Vicky Smallman of the CLC, Andrea Horwarth Leader of the Ontario NDP, and Emily MacDougall, a registered nurse.

The speakers presented their views on gender specific violence, challenges women face at home and at work, the importance of self-care and work life balance. A multicultural event was held in the evening. It allowed sisters to learn about various cultures and their customs.

For the second Tri-Regional Women's Conference, we had a focus on the MMIWG. We were given a presentation by Elder Shirley John of the Saugeen First Nation. Elder Shirley told us about the Water Walking Movement, and helped describe some of the important issues that are faced by Indigenous people. Her presentation emphasized that the water walking movement was a way for the Indigenous people of Ontario to connect to nature.

We contributed to the Faceless dolls project, the purpose of which is to highlight the lack of coverage of MMIGW and all the sisters attending this conference found it an emotional experience. Emily MacDougall also returned to speak about self-care, something that affects women on a daily basis on the work floor. The emphasis on self-care for women is something that all of the locals should be discussing with their members, especially when considering the difficulties of having a work and a home life balance.



We held a silent auction, where we raised \$2,100, which was donated to an organization within the community. We also had another cultural exchange night because of the success of the first one.

There were many different presentations for the remainder of the three-day weekend: Sister Elaine McMurray, a retiree, on pensions and preparing for retirement; skits about being voiceless versus having a voice in the workplace were presented; Sister Patty Coates from the Ontario Federation of Labour, about the culture of consent, intersectionality and diversity, and gender inequality.

There was an “Escape Room” challenge to show people how to think outside of the box.

This event had the benefit of bringing the sisters from the three regions together and overall help them understand the different realities of women. This encounter composed of women of different ethnic communities and cultures gave us an opportunity to create a safe space of understanding. We absorbed so much information over the weekend on self-care, pay equity, and raising our voices. It is clear from the conference that we work better together, united, as women of CUPW.

ONTARIO REGION

There are locals already working towards the empowerment of sisters in this present mandate.

Leadership was born in the Amherstburg Local as a sister stepped forward willing to help form that local's committee. Empowerment begins and we look forward to encouraging the Amherstburg Local Women's Committee.

The Hamilton Local has organized food and toy drives around Christmas and Thanksgiving. Some of our ideas for the future are a silent auction based on the success we saw at the second Tri-Regional Women's Conference. We have also discussed teaming up with the Solidarity committee to have the proceeds from a 50/50 draw at a solidarity event with those proceeds going to a women's cause, such as a shelter.

Finally, we debated having a potluck or a coffee and tea night for the Sisters in the local to attend, talk, and share what is going on within their lives.

During this current mandate, the Ontario Region was an integral part of two Tri-Regional Women's Conferences, which also included the Metro Toronto Region and the Central Region. Think about it: taking three regional women's committees and expanding it to hold a conference that would cover the entire Province of Ontario.



Sisters who attended the conference were asked to bring items that would be collected and presented to Juliette's Place, Homeward Family Shelter. The response was overwhelming. As sisters, we gathered no fewer than three vans full of items. The conferences were a huge success and had a lasting impact on the sisters who attended.

The 2016 Tri-Regional Women's Conference left sisters wanting more, so we obliged by adding a full extra day to the 2018 agenda. All three days were filled with knowledge, discussions and life changing experiences.

Through the Silent Auction and the 50/50 draw, the sisters were able to collect \$2,221.00 for the local Saugeen Shores Women's Shelter, a big thank you to all that helped this event be the success that it was.

PRAIRIE REGION

The Prairie Region is a very large region geographically with many small and large locals in Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina. Each of the larger locals also take in large geographic areas beyond their city boundaries. The Edmonton local has the largest geographical area of any local in Canada. This makes it difficult to organize committees and activities that include the entire membership of the locals. However, Prairie sisters are strong and many women activists delete come from the Prairie region. A high percentage of local presidents are women and there is a high percentage of women local officers.

In a recent survey of locals, it appears that most locals do not have active women's committees. Only Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon have active or recently active committees. The Calgary local committee is active in supporting local charities focusing on women's issues. There are also plans for workshops of interest to women. In Edmonton, women participated in the International Women's Day March, Take Back the Night and have organized a local women's retreat, "The Equinox" for over 15 years.

However, overall it does appear that sustaining and organizing local women's committees is difficult and often not a priority among locals. Women lead busy lives: if a woman is already involved on the local executive or being an active shop steward, then being active in a local women's committee is often too time-consuming despite good intentions.

The Prairie Regional Women's Conference was held from April 6 to 8, 2018 in Edmonton. Thirty-eight women attended from all over the Prairie region with special guest, the 1st National Vice-President. We had many informative workshops including mental health in the workplace, dealing with bullying and harassment, domestic violence and the current state of the women's movement.



These workshops were balanced with activities including yoga, Zumba, line dancing, meditation and crafts. For many it was their first time at a union-sponsored event and they found it a positive experience. It was agreed that these conferences are worthwhile and should be continued. A Facebook group was established after the event and sisters have been very active on the group. The conference is a great way to establish connections between like-minded sisters and build a support network across the region. Many thanks to the sisters who worked to organize the conference.

PACIFIC REGION

The Pacific region was very busy organizing and attending events, some of the highlights of which include the #MeToo movement, a memorial march for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Women's retreat and the regional conference.

A women's march was undertaken in January to highlight the #MeToo movement and this was well attended by CUPW members. An event that honors the murdered and missing women in Vancouver and their surviving friends and family included a march that went through streets and alleys in Vancouver's downtown eastside stopping at the sites where women were found or last seen. Offerings of prayer, song, and drums honour each one of these women. This memorial march was attended by many CUPW members, despite the fact that banners and flags were not allowed at this event.

For International Women's Day, the Vancouver District Labour Council hosted a dinner organized many CUPW sister volunteered and helped make the event a success. Both the Vancouver local and the Regional office bought a table to this event. It was well attended by many CUPW sisters and male allies. A strong CUPW contingent also marched with other unions at the Vancouver Pride Parade in August.

A highly successful weekend retreat at Zijac Ranch was organized predominantly by the women at Regional office and the sisters on the NWC. Both sisters from the NEC attended. The swag was amazing especially the pussy hats! Group presentations of notable Canadian women were inspiring and fun. Yoga, Karaoke, pillowcase painting were highlights. We also had a silent auction where we raised over \$760 for a battered women's shelter in nearby Mission. We were honored to have a gender-neutral youth participating. Re-learning pronouns, feminism, diversity, and empowerment were just a few of the things we learned. This retreat is a fun, empowering and mind-expanding event that needs to roll out every year. We also held a regional conference in November at which, among other highlights, we collected women's hygiene products and donations for women in the DTES. . It was hugely successful and we suggest that other regions follow our example.



CONCLUSION

At the start of the mandate for this committee and previous committees, goals were set and concerns identified. In reviewing these from the 2011 and 2015 NWC, we can see that concerns have not changed.

These are very busy times within the labour movement and even more so for sisters, who balance family and work commitments on a daily basis. How can we, as a National Women's Committee, assist sisters at the local level in creating local committees, getting involved at all levels of the union and helping to empower each other?

It is recommended that for the next committee:

That we engage tools to measure whether and how concrete actions contribute to meeting our broader goals.

That regional conference be continued given their overall resounding They are an excellent gateway for women to become involved in the union and go even further in building stronger networks across the country.

1. Educational resources that can be used including the following:

- A resource package on organizing regional women's conferences with workshop ideas, names of organizations from which to find potential guest speakers and all the best practices to put on a successful conference.
- Resources on how to run a successful women's committee. It is pertinent to survey the active women's committees and get the best ideas to share with other regions and locals.
- Fact sheets and educational packages on identified issues that are of general concern to CUPW women. Common issues could include identifying and dealing with sexual harassment, childcare, work/life balance, maternal and caregiving leaves. These resources could be used for women's committees or for one-to-one, face-to-face work at the local level. If there are important and/or precedent-setting arbitrations, at all levels, involving women's issues, then those decisions and analyses could also be provided.



- Educational resources developed to be placed in an accessible online area such as Member Resources in the CUPW national website as a Women's Issues section or another shareable platform. Paper resources can also be mailed out to locals and regions.
- 2. The roles and duties of the elected regional representatives of the NWC need to be clearly defined and outlining expectations of the work that needs to be done. Union leave for the representatives who undertake committee work that is not part of their paid work must be given and a number of hours defined. At the NWC level, if elected representatives volunteer or are tasked to do work, then paid union leave must be given to allow work to be done.
- 3. Regular monitoring of the percentage of women in the membership and the percentage of women in elected positions at the local, regional and national levels. This information could help to identify areas of concern.

The NWC is an integral part of CUPW and must continue to be at the forefront of the struggle, along with our allies, for equality and equity. With the diverse membership that CUPW represents, we must create a movement in which we all see ourselves as an integral part.

It was a privilege and an honour to work with dedicated sisters from across the country in demanding that our voices be heard.

In Solidarity,

The CUPW National Women's Committee

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