

CUPW Women are Sisters in Spirit

On the evening of October 4th 2009, we stood with friends holding candles in the darkness on Parliament Hill. We were attending the Sisters in Spirit Vigil, one of 72 gatherings across the country to honour the lives of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Women came together to remember, to grieve and to share their stories of personal loss. Families held up pictures of their loved ones and spoke of their unending pain.

Women stand together at vigils, we march together in memory of stolen sisters, we walk together on the streets of our towns and cities and we take back the night. We mark days on the calendar to commemorate the losses and we become activists for women's rights. These are acts of self-preservation, ignored by our governments, law enforcement agencies and the media. In a society that is increasingly hungry for "reality television," there is little appetite for news of the daily reality of violence against women. Here are some of the facts about violence against women in Canada:

- * Every minute of every day, a woman or child is sexually assaulted.
- * 1-2 women each week are murdered by a current or



Photo of the Sisters in Spirit vigil in Ottawa, October 4, courtesy of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

former partner.

- * Half of women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.
- * More than 500 Aboriginal women and girls have gone missing or been murdered in Canada over the last 30 years.

The statistics are staggering. So where do we start? What can we do as women to advocate for our sisters and ourselves? We're already doing great work, but we must do more. Whenever there is an opportunity to address violence against women, we must seize that opportunity. Attend rallies and events, march with

your sisters, write letters to your representatives and exercise your right to vote. Consider organizing a Local Women's Committee to take on the cause. Women united are a powerful force.

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CUPW 1979

December 6th is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Women and the Economic Crisis

How are women across Canada coping with the economic crisis? Women are the majority of minimum wage earners. Women heading lone-parent families, retired and senior women are often very poor. In an economic crisis, these women are severely affected.

Work

Women's jobs are being hit hard by the economic crisis. In the auto industry, while large numbers of men have been laid off, proportionately more women in that sector have lost their jobs. Many women are employed in the service industry. As the economy shrinks, people cut back on services such as travel and restaurant meals. This has resulted in many women either losing their jobs or having their hours cut back.

Benefits

Employers are using the economic crisis as an excuse to attack benefits ranging from sick leave to pensions to extended health plans.

EI

Only 39% of unemployed women compared to 45% of unemployed men are currently receiving EI benefits. Women earn less on EI than men because women's wages are lower.

Childcare

In the best economic times, finding good, affordable childcare is difficult. In these times, many families simply cannot afford to pay for childcare. This makes it harder for women to find and stay in jobs.

Family Life

Declining incomes mean less money for "extras," and tighter food and clothing budgets, putting additional stress on women.

Violence

Calls and visits to shelters and crisis lines have increased in the past year. For example, in June the CBC reported an increase of more than 50 per cent in demand for Charlottetown's women's shelter. The numbers of women reporting spousal abuse and violence have multiplied.

Any Good News?!

Women are fighting back. We are saying we did not cause the economic crisis and we should not be forced to bear the brunt of it. In Nova Scotia, communities are organizing for a provincial childcare program. In Québec, the World March of Women is preparing for 2010. In Ontario, women providing home care to special needs clients struck for better wages and working conditions. In Saskatchewan, the Prairie Lilies are celebrating the history of women in that province. In B.C., women are fighting to improve the lives of domestic and farm workers. As the crisis continues, union women are calling for a better economic future for all.

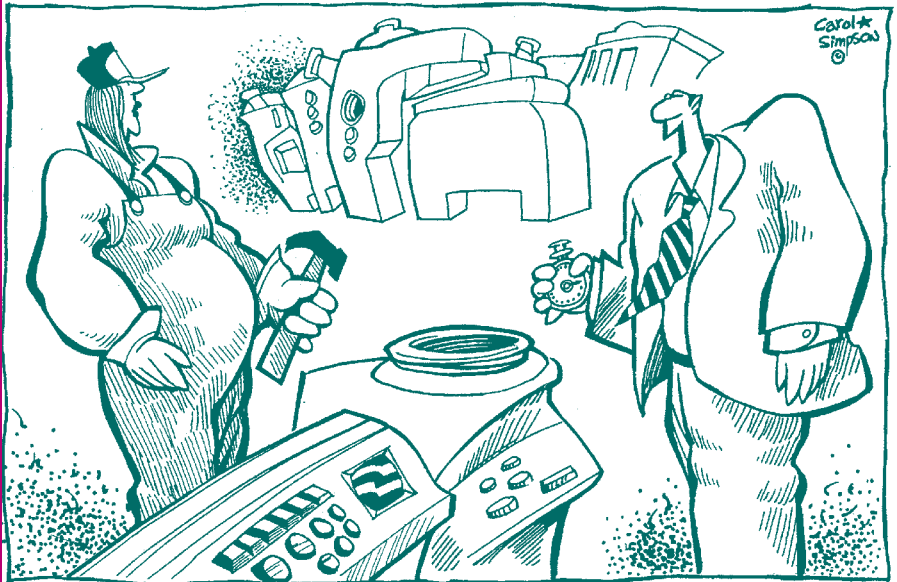


CUPW Women vs. Manulife

I was a dispatcher in the parcel plant and the Chief Shop Steward when I first found out I was pregnant. I was so happy. My pregnancy was easy. I didn't have any morning sickness; I felt great. I never had to ask for light duties at the post office, I just did my normal work. About six and a half months into my pregnancy, I submitted a medical note notifying the employer of my expected due date. Canada Post accepted my note and I thought that would be the end of it. Was I wrong! A few days later, I was given a list of questions to take to my doctor. One of the questions was:

Expected Time to Make a Full Recovery?

I was really annoyed. I photocopied the questions and started answering them. In response to the stupid question about recovery time, I wrote that I would NEVER fully recover. After I had the baby, there would be new issues to deal with. I'd have a little mouth to feed, I'd have diapers to change, midnight feedings to tend to; once I got out of that stage there would be new issues like potty training; getting the child prepared to go to school; teaching them values about the world; preparing for graduation and the big one: getting them to move out of the house! After I finished filling out the questions, I photocopied my answers and handed it out to my co-workers. Everybody thought it was hilarious. Interestingly, I received no further questions...



"It's only one tiny little contraction, Ms. Buckley... can't you take next Thursday off instead?"

Imagine this scenario. You get the news you're going to have a baby. You're ecstatic! You do everything in your power to remain physically and mentally healthy and to protect the growing life inside you. Now you are in your sixth month of pregnancy and getting a little uncomfortable. Your regular duties keep you standing by a machine for most of your shift. You put in a request to be accommodated to sit down every other hour. You follow all the procedures. Then along comes Manulife, Canada Post's insurance provider with an AMI (Acquisition of Medical Information) form. They ask you lots of awkward questions, such as: **How much weight have you gained since becoming pregnant? What is the proper amount of weight you should gain? Is there something else wrong with your legs?** Now you're stressed out. You wish you had never put in the request. Sisters, this is a true story. Manulife did not get any further medical information in this case, but at what price? It took a couple of weeks for the union to get them to back off at what should have been a joyful time for the worker. The employer claims they care about families so they ought to be ashamed of this intrusive process. If you're ever in a similar position, make sure you know your rights and contact your Union.

Do you have a story about Manulife and pregnancy accommodations? Share it by visiting the Feedback web page at:
<http://www.cupw.ca>

A sister needs our help

Many of us know somebody who is fighting cancer. This is a disease that strikes people regardless of their age, race, colour, sex, ability, marital status or financial situation. Marie-Hélène Dubé is a young mother and worker who has had to fight cancer for the third time in the past five years. While struggling with this disease, she has also had to cope with the resulting medical costs and other financial responsibilities. Marie-Hélène used EI sick leave benefits for times when she was unable to work. But now that she's exhausted her 15-week sick leave period, she currently has no source of income, and doesn't have any for

the foreseeable future.

Marie-Hélène has decided to undertake the huge task of showing the federal government that the public wants the Employment Insurance Act improved. Urban postal workers are entitled to disability insurance and sick leave credits to help offset any lack of income resulting from an inability to work. However, rural and suburban mail carriers, as well as temporary workers, don't have the same protection as members of the urban operations bargaining unit, and would find themselves in the same situation as Marie-Hélène, without any source of income.

Can we abandon our sisters and brothers suffering from serious illness? Of course not.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

if you have cancer or another serious illness, you're entitled to only **15 weeks** of Employment Insurance benefits?

600 hours during the previous 52 weeks are required to get these benefits?

these benefits are **taxable, lower** than regular employment insurance benefits, and haven't been indexed to reflect inflation since **1971**?

unless you recover quickly, you'll never be eligible for any other benefit?



"I am so grateful for having so many fantastic people around to help," says Marie-Hélène. "This illness is really awful, but it's also been an extraordinary opportunity for me to grow as a person. I've had to find my own way of coping with it."

Act now and help Marie-Hélène in her struggle to improve the Employment Insurance Act.

Ask MPs to support future bills to improve employment insurance benefits.

Sign the petition...

<http://petitionassuranceemploi.com>