

## **CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT**

At last year's CUPE BC Convention, the Women's and Gender Rights Committee – then called the “Women's Committee” – submitted a constitutional resolution to change the Committee name to the “Women's and Gender Rights Committee”. The Committee did this in order to ensure we would be inclusive of gender-diverse people, recognizing that not all CUPE members identify within the gender binary. The Committee was proud to receive overwhelming support for their constitutional resolution, which was passed at the CUPE BC 2022 resolution. This sends a message to gender-diverse CUPE BC members that they are welcome in our Union and on our Committee.

### **Community Engagements**

Committee members participated in two Red Dress events on May 5 and September 18, 2022. The May 5 Red Dress event was an inaugural event in honour of the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S). Both events were held at the beautiful Bear Creek Park in Surrey, BC and are held in remembrance of MMIWG2S and their families, who often lack closure around the loss of loved ones. The Committee would like to thank CUPE Local 728 for hosting the May 5 event and the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) for hosting the September 18 event.

Members of the Women's and Gender Rights (WGR) Committee have been active around women's issues in their communities and have worked hard to address the needs of impacted members who identify as women within our union. For example, our Committee chair Sheryl Burns participated in a meeting of labour union representatives with the Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity on August 11, 2022 to provide feedback on BC's Action Plan on Gender Based Violence as part of provincial consultations on gender-based violence. Significant feedback was provided, particularly relating to the high rates of violence inflicted on women and gender-diverse people from marginalized populations, including women and gender-diverse people living with disabilities. The Chair asked that marginalized groups and their needs be reflected in the province's Action Plan on Gender Based Violence.

Consistent with CUPE BC's commitment to recognize that sex work is work due to the passing of a resolution at the CUPE BC 2022 Convention, the Committee chair also urged the provincial government to recognize that sex work is work and that sex workers are often disproportionately the victims of gender-based violence. Moreover, Sheryl Burns called for increased and consistent funding for agencies serving women, as well as implementation of the \$10/day Childcare Plan, with childcare to be publicly

## WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT

provided throughout school districts by CUPE members. Poverty and the lack of affordable childcare keeps mothers experiencing gender-based violence in abusive relationships simply because they do not have the support they need to leave. Sheryl also acknowledged that increased isolation and unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased rates of violence, particularly among black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled and trans women and gender-diverse people.

Committee members participated in the December 6 Vigil to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. This event honours the 14 young women who were killed at École Polytechnique on December 6, 1989 simply because they sought education in a male-dominated sphere. This mass shooting was a stark reminder to women and gender-diverse people throughout Canada that the liberation of women had not been achieved. As already stated, gender-based violence is still rampant in our country.

### **BC Federation of Labour Standing Committees**

The Committee Chair also participated on the BC Federation of Labour's Women and Gender Rights and Human Rights Standing Committees. The BC Federation of Labour WGR Committee has focused primarily on:

- the decriminalization of sex work;
- the need for increased work/life balance;
- increasing rates of mental health challenges among public sector workers;
- gender-neutral language in our unions;
- pushing for a provincial sexual and domestic violence awareness month;
- continued lobbying for access to 10 days of paid leave for survivors of gender-based violence;
- access to and supportive health supports for trans and gender-diverse people; and
- pay equity and transparency legislation.

To this end, pay transparency legislation was introduced on March 7, 2023. This legislation is intended to help close the gender pay gap by requiring employers to include wages or salary ranges on all publicly advertised jobs as of November 1, 2023. Employers will no longer be able to ask potential employees for their pay history information and they will not be able to penalize employees who disclose their rate of pay to coworkers or potential job applicants.

## WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT

### Truth and Reconciliation

The CUPE BC WGR Committee is committed to Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation. In an effort to educate ourselves, Committee members have been provided with and read the 231 Calls to Action as contained in the Report of the MMIWG2S Inquiry, and *Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*. Additionally, at the beginning of each meeting, the WGR Committee reads one of the [94 Calls to Action](#) and one Article from the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#) immediately after the Territorial Acknowledgement and prior to the reading of the Equality Statement.

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to personally thank committee members Yvonne Desabrais and Shelley Saje Ricci for their emotional labour in educating our Committee with respect to the lived experiences of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. The education and insights they have provided have been invaluable to our Committee.

### Committee Action Plan

As part of their workplan, the Committee has committed to educating others with respect to gender-based violence, including its prevalence and resources to access help if one is currently experiencing such violence. To this end, the Committee will be providing bookmarks and whistles at their committee booth during the 2023 CUPE BC Convention. As well, Moosehide pins with accompanying postcards will also be provided at the booth to address the role men in our union have in the elimination of gender-based violence.

The WGR Committee is supportive of the CUPE BC Childcare Plan and has provided feedback with respect to the need for more culturally inclusive childcare for Indigenous and racialized children and for children living with disabilities. In her capacity as the Committee Chair and General Vice-President of CUPE BC, Sheryl Burns participated in a provincial childcare lobby that included NDP, Liberal and Green party MLAs on November 14 and 15, 2022. A number of other CUPE BC members also participated in this lobby, sharing personal childcare stories or success stories of having childcare provided on school grounds by school districts.

February 14 marks the Annual Women's Memorial March, intended to commemorate and grieve the loss of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Those who attend this march are to make space for the family members who have endured such loss. This march is held in different parts of the province, including Vancouver's

## WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT

Downtown Eastside and Maple Ridge. Our Committee chair and staff liaison were able to attend the Memorial March held on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, along with other women and gender-diverse people from the CUPE BC Executive Board and CUPE staff. Committee member Yvonne Desabrais created and started the annual Memorial March in Maple Ridge a few years ago and organized and attended this year's event there.

Our Committee elected to send at least two members to the CUPE National Women's Conference and were instrumental in ensuring that women and gender-diverse CUPE BC Executive Board members would also be able to attend. As a result, a number of WGR Committee members attended the CUPE National Women's Conference held from March 12 to 15, 2023.

The WGR Committee has identified a number of priority resolutions for the upcoming 2023 CUPE BC Convention to be held from April 26 to 29. The majority of this year's resolutions focus on issue unique to women, gender-diverse people and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. These priority resolutions are as follows:

1. Paid Miscarriage and Pregnancy Leaves
2. Medical Coverage for Infertility
3. Bargaining Menstrual Leave
4. Constitutional Resolution - Change the Name of the Sergeant at Arms Committee

Working together on the CUPE BC WGR Committee on shared issues is a demonstration of solidarity. Something to notice is that when you look at leadership and executive tables, we have many women leading the way at CUPE BC and in the labour movement in general. Leadership training, femtoring/mentoring and succession planning are all part of growing individuals into strong leaders. CUPE BC has a female President, three of four General Vice Presidents are female, the Canadian Labour Congress has a female President, the BC Federation of Labour has a female President and eight of eighteen officers at the BC Federation of Labour are female. What we don't see is noticeably Indigenous or racialized women in those positions, giving voice and actions to issues unique to us. As women, we see ourselves reflected in leadership, but as Indigenous and racialized women and gender-diverse workers, we do not see ourselves in prominent leadership roles.

Our WGR Committee Action Plan promotes the need for increased training for Indigenous members because historically, Indigenous members did not and still do not have equal access to education that leads to empowerment. Indigenous children still

## **WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT**

have the highest number of involvements in the child welfare system and the lowest graduation rates in the country. If education and knowledge are power, then we must provide opportunities for empowerment.

Equity deserving groups should have access to training that empowers leadership, not just human rights courses. Allyship is an important strategy in advancing equity, but it is slow-moving because the current leaders do not have the lived and ancestral experience to truly understand the struggle of Indigenous and racialized members. How will the labour movement adjust to create space for Indigenous and racialized workers to take the spotlight and privilege of leading our unions? When we have true inclusion in leadership, that is when our movement will see real change that advances equity deserving groups.

### **CUPE National Women's Conference**

CUPE 5523 sent three Women's Committee members to the 2023 CUPE National Women's Conference in Vancouver March 12-15. Below is a response received from one of the attendees:

"Thank you, sincerely and with wholehearted gratitude, for giving me the opportunity to attend the CUPE Women's Conference this week on behalf of the CUPE BC Women's and Gender Rights Committee.

I was thrilled to feel the power and strength of 600 women participants in one big ballroom, gathering with a universal voice to stand together and support each other. All the strong, powerful women and self-identified female panel speakers brought so much inspiration and motivation to face every challenge and never give up – to stand together as equals and to lift each other up, bringing out the strength of each and every woman.

Many stories were shared with familiar faces and new friends. I look forward to participating in the Women's and Gender Rights Committee for the next term too. Thank you so much to CUPE National and BC, for organizing and presenting such an amazing and powerful conference.

Thank you for the opportunity, Sheryl, CUPE BC and I am glad to be part of this powerful Committee making a difference in the lives of every woman and self-identified female."

## WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT

### Further Engagements

As retold by Local 4177 member Harjit Birdi:

"To commemorate International Women's Day on March 8, 2023, I sent an email to Fort St. James school district staff to "Celebrate strength, determination, resilience and accomplishments every day!" I ordered 100 stalks of roses and carnations from our local Save-On-Foods store, and the Manager generously matched my donation for all staff members identifying themselves as women in our school district in Fort St. James. It is an amazing partnership with the manager of this local store, recognizing the importance of inclusion and diversity of all identifying themselves as women. Each staff member was pleased and appreciated the thought and gesture for the recognition of this important day, unifying our strength and giving power to stand up for each other."

On Sunday, March 5, CUPE 5523 members participated in a ski and snowshoe event celebrating International Women's Day at Sovereign Lake Nordic Centre. The event served as a fundraiser for the Vernon & District Immigrants & Community Services Society, an organization supporting newcomers, immigrants, and refugees in Vernon.

The CUPE Local 5523 Women's Committee pledged their support for the North Okanagan Labour Council's *"Fill a Purse for a Woman in Need"* campaign, running in March. Essential items such as shampoo, socks, body wash, hand sanitizer, band-aids, hats and gloves, toothbrushes and toothpaste were collected, along with gift cards and cash donations, to be loaded into large purses or backpacks for women and youth in crisis. Women and youth flee violence and trauma with little to no personal items, and often have children with them. These donations provide dignity and comfort to those in need. Cash donations supported women's shelters, teen shelters, and outreach agencies in the Okanagan.

On Sunday April 2, CUPE 5523 Women's Committee members attended a screening of *"Women Lead Through Adversity"*, a documentary produced by Melissa Jacobs, featuring women from Vernon, BC. This film profiles a group of extraordinary women, aged 15-73, who led through adversity and were resilient despite hardships and challenges, including a world-wide pandemic. The screening also served as a fundraiser for Inspire Kindness Productions' *"Christmas in July"* campaign, supporting local families in need.

## WOMEN'S COMMITTEE REPORT

Respectfully submitted:

Sheryl Burns, Local 1936, Chair  
Patricia Skalozub, Local 3500, Co-Chair  
Tara Box, Local 4951, Recording Secretary  
Bridget Barker, Local 3338, Young Worker Appointee  
Lindy Pinson, Local 703, Shadow, Young Worker Appointee  
Rena Bens, Local 748  
Harjit Birdie, Local 4177  
Fiona Brady Lenfesty, Local 3338  
Yvonne Desabrais, Local 703  
Kim Doucette, Local 5523  
Sarah Kim, Local 23  
Laurie Lakusta, Local 403  
Theresa Pidcock, Local 728  
Shelley Saje Ricci, Local 728  
Sarah Cibart, CUPE National Human Rights Representative, Committee Liaison  
Kathryn Davies, Communications Representative  
Maja Bohinc, Administrative Assistant

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