

Women's Conference

Sheraton Centre, Toronto

March 6-9, 2013

I would like to thank the Union for allowing me to attend the CUPE Women's Conference in Toronto. This is the first time I've attended the Women's Conference and did not understand at the time the importance of an all-woman venue. After spending a few of the workshops consisting of smaller groups, I came to understand that some of the participants could never have opened up with a male presence due to the nature of some of the discussions; some included abuse either witnessed or personally experienced, repercussions or ridicule.

With all the different points of view on such discussions as the lack of equality women and in particular minority women experience is astounding in this day and age. Women continue to receive an average of 28% less than men for equal work; women continue to have primary responsibility for family and home and thus, are not able to participate in Unions and when they are able to attend, the CUPE Women's Task Force confirmed women feel uncomfortable with the loud, aggressive and confrontation behaviour experienced in some local meetings.

One topic covered the top 100 paid jobs in North America and within that group, only one person was female... astounding. Women continue to be more likely than men to live in poverty, more likely to work part-time than men but on the better side, women employed in the public sector are paid an average of 4.5% high than women doing similar jobs in the private sector.

This Conference was not about bashing men but to make us more aware of the situations and problems experienced now and how we can start to make a change. An election of the Women's Committee for 2013 was completed bringing some new blood onto the Committee; Andrea Horwarth, leader of the NDP gave an uplifting speech about what the NDP is doing to bring about change, Paul Moist also gave an enlightening speech about the economics of the Unions, the importance of debating and involving your executive regarding women's initiatives in By-laws, and having a safe place for members to discuss Women's issues without fear of repercussion or ridicule.

April 9 is being recognized as "Equal Pay Day" and CUPE is asking members to:

- Wear Red
- Have a Bake Sale – sell baked goods and charge men \$1.00 but only charge women \$0.72. Give any money made to a shelter or food bank in your local area.
- Movie Night: watch a movie with friends or co-workers (ie: Made in Dagenham" showing the hardships of equal pay struggles
- Create Awareness: Post "Equal Pay" posters in the workplace to start a discussion!

The conference was an enlightening and fascinating time where we all laughed, cried, traded stories and made friends.

Thank you again for allowing me to attend – it was a great experience!

Yours in solidarity,

Marg Lemoine