



Newsletter

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FEDERAL WOMEN COUNCIL OF THE NDP

The current issue highlights the biographies of two strong women leaders of the NDP: **Rebecca Blaikie**, the President of the Party and **Anne McGrath**, the Executive director of the Party.

On March 8, 2014, many of our representatives have taken part in activities marking International Women's Day. You can read two articles of our members from British Columbia. Also in this issue, you'll find the congressional report of the NDP of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I hope you will enjoy reading this Issue and I encourage you to submit short papers for future issues.

Christine Paré - Co-chair of Federal Council of NDP and Editor.



National Director of Canada's New Democrats and Campaign Director for the next federal election, Anne McGrath brings extensive experience at all levels of the NDP and as an activist in the labour, student, and women's movements.

Anne has served as the Party's president, Director of Operations in the leader's office, Chief of Staff to Leaders of the Official Opposition Jack Layton and Nycole Turmel, and was strategic advisor to Tom Mulcair.

Anne provided critical strategic advice as part of the core team that led to the historic NDP breakthrough in the 2011 election and shepherded the growth of the NDP caucus staff to a team of more than 700.



Rebecca Blaikie is the President of Canada's New Democrats. A long time party activist, Rebecca was first elected as National Treasurer at the NDP's Halifax convention in 2009. Recently named as the party's Quebec Campaign Director, Blaikie helped to lay the groundwork for the party's Quebec breakthrough when she worked to elect Tom Mulcair in 2007 in the Outremont by-election in Montreal.

UNIONS TAKING ACTION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

March 7, 2014
An Article by
Anne Davis

*Region 1 Director, Health Sciences Association
B.C. Federation of Labour Women's Rights Committee Member*

Every day in Canada 3,000 women and 2,500 of their children seek shelter in transition houses across Canada. Many of those women are employed and struggle to hang on to their jobs while their lives are turned upside down.

Paid work can mean independence and the ability to make choices leading to safety.

While violence in the workplace has long been recognized as a problem, particularly in female-dominated sectors such as health care, social services, retail and education, only recently has attention been paid to the impact of intimate partner violence on the workplace.

We've all heard the statistics. Half of Canadian women will experience at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. At least once a week, a Canadian woman is murdered by her current or former partner. Aboriginal women are three times more likely to report being the victim of a violent crime and are much more likely to be murdered. Is it any surprise that some of this spills over into the workplace?

As a long time worker in the women's anti-violence sector, I have heard many women describe their experiences of being harassed by an abusive and controlling partner, or ex-partner, while at work. The lucky ones had supportive employers who took steps to protect them. Too many, however, lost their employment as a result of receiving non-stop phone calls at work or because their partner created a scene in the workplace. A worker represented by a union would not likely lose her position for this reason, but in a non-union workplace it's all too likely that a woman whose confidence has already been eroded by years of abuse would not have the energy to fight this particular battle on her own.

It can get much worse. Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. Not all workplace homicides are the result of intimate partner violence, but too many are.

Co-workers can also be caught in the crossfire. Several years ago, Tony McNaughton, the manager of a Starbucks in downtown Vancouver, was fatally stabbed while trying to protect a female co-worker from her husband.

WorkSafe BC has developed Domestic Violence in the Workplace recommendations for employers. The recommendations outline employers' responsibilities and include strategies for keeping everyone in the workplace safe when an employee is experiencing violence, including moving the employee's work station to a less visible location, reminding all staff to never give out personal information about the whereabouts of a co-worker, and arranging to accompany

the affected employee to her vehicle at the end of the work day. The materials on WorkSafe BC website are worth checking out, including some short videos. Some of us, however, don't think this goes far enough. Helping a woman to stay safe at work is critically important, but what if she has to leave her home and seek shelter in a transition house? What if she needs medical care or counselling following an assault? What if she needs to attend appointments with police and a lawyer? What if her children are traumatized by what they have witnessed and need to attend counselling?

In Australia, unions have negotiated paid leave for employees experiencing intimate partner violence, as well as flexible work arrangements if needed. More than one million Australian workers are now covered by these provisions. This could make a difference in Canada as well.

It would also make a difference if the WorkSafe BC recommendations became regulations and all employers had to have policies in place to deal with the impact of domestic violence on the workplace, just as they are now required to have bullying and harassment policies.

The Canadian Labour Congress is carrying out a survey of Canadian workers to determine the impact of domestic violence in Canadian workplaces. This is the first research of its kind that has been carried out in Canada. I would like to encourage readers of this column to take the survey, whether or not they have been personally impacted. The link is:

<http://fluidsurveys.com/s/DVatWork>.

Everyone is impacted by intimate partner violence and everyone has a role to play in preventing it. Women can't do this alone; we need men to speak out and challenge their peers. That's a key message of the Be More Than a Bystander campaign created by the Ending Violence Association of B.C. (EVA) and the B.C. Lions. The campaign has consisted of public service announcements and presentations to schools and sports teams.

The B.C. Lions received their training from Jackson Katz, a leading anti-sexist male activist, educator and film maker, and from the Ending Violence Association of B.C. A critically important element of the training was the leadership of women from the anti-violence sector, represented by EVA.

A couple of months ago, I attended a presentation by members of the B.C. Lions and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, who had also been trained in this campaign. It was very interesting to hear those large men describe their fears about challenging their peers when they made derogatory comments about women. They found over time, though, that they developed more comfort in speaking out and that the conversations in the locker rooms changed as a result.

Unions affiliated to the B.C. Federation of Labour have committed to providing \$95,000 to support the Be More Than a Bystander campaign. These funds will mean that more schools and universities in B.C. will receive presentations.

Personally, I'm really proud of the labour movement for, once again, taking a leadership role on an issue that has the potential to make a profound difference for women and their children and for society as a whole.



REMEMBERING WOMEN FARMWORKERS

By **Irene Lanzinger**

Secretary-Treasurer

B.C. Federation of Labour

BC Women's Representative to NDP Federal Council

On a very rainy International Women's Day in B.C, I drove out to Abbotsford to the heart of the rich agricultural land in the Fraser River Valley. Members of the local community gathered there to honour three women who died in a tragic van accident on the way to their work in the production of our food.

On the morning of March 7, 2007, Sarbjit Kaur Sidhu, 31, Amarjit Kaur Bal, 52, and Sukhvinder Kaur Punia, 46, were killed while travelling to work in a 15-passenger van. The van was overloaded, carrying 17 people. It had only two seatbelts and wooden benches had replaced the stock seats. It was being driven dangerously by the van's owner, a labour contractor, who did not have the proper driver's license.

The subsequent RCMP investigation led to 33 recommended criminal charges. However, all the charges were dropped except 2 minor driving infractions. In the end the driver paid a \$2,000 fine and had a one year driving suspension. The employer was fined \$69,000 by the Workers' Compensation Board but the fine was never paid.

Given the tragic loss of their loved ones, the families were outraged by this lack of justice and worked with the B.C. Federation of Labour to call for a Coroner's Inquest into the incident. In 2009 a Coroner's Inquest was held and the jury investigating the crash made 18 recommendations aimed at cleaning up unsafe working conditions for farmworkers. The government has ignored or side-stepped many of the recommendations. However, they have initiated more roadside inspections which lead to some improvements in the safety of farmworker transportation.

Every year, on the anniversary of this tragedy, the families and community gathers for a candlelight vigil. They remember the women and mourn for their loss, but they also pledge to continue the struggle for safe working conditions for farm workers.

THEY ARE WORKING ON A PROJECT THAT WILL BE A LASTING MEMORIAL, A BEAUTIFUL 22 FOOT GOLDEN TREE DESIGNED BY LOCAL ARTISTS. THE GOLDEN TREE IS WILL STAND AS A FITTING LEGACY TO SARBJIT KAUR SIDHU, AMARJIT KAUR BAL, AND SUKHVINDER KAUR PUNIA, AND AS A MONUMENT TO ALL FARMWORKERS WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED OR SERIOUSLY INJURED WHILE WORKING TO PUT FOOD ON OUR TABLE, HONORING THEIR SACRIFICE.

The Golden Tree is a twisting apple tree that merges into three subtle female forms forming a “female trinity”. The female trinity represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

The Tree is an important symbol in every culture. It reminds us of nourishment, endurance, unity, community and diversity, making it an appropriate symbol to represent farmworkers.

The Tree will be built with the generous support of donations from government, labour organizations, business, community groups and individuals. On International Women’s Day, it seemed fitting to honour these women whose work was embedded in nourishing others both in their daily work in a Fraser Valley nursery but also in their work as mothers, sisters, daughters and community women.



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REPORT FROM NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

By **Marilyn Porter**
(outgoing representative)

Newfoundland and Labrador New Democrats held their Convention a little earlier than usual – May 16-18 2014 – in order to include a Leadership Review vote. 151 delegates attended on the first fine long weekend of spring. The main event was the Leadership Review; an overwhelming majority of 75% voted NOT to hold a leadership convention, indicating confidence in the current leader, Lorraine Michael. Apart from the leadership issue, delegates discussed constitutional changes, passed some well thought out and important resolutions, heard from many excellent speakers and had some lively debates on issues of concern. Speakers included Jack Harris (St. John's East) and Ryan Cleary (St. John's South Mount Pearl), Federal NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair (by video), Mary Shortall President NL Federation of Labour, and Kelly Roche Canadian Labour Congress NL Regional Representative. NL NDP Leader Lorraine Michael addressed the delegates in an Order of the Day speech on Saturday morning. Wayne Lucas of CUPE and Mike Goosney of USW brought heartfelt greetings and messages from their respective unions during our two luncheons. Convention also elected a new executive, who have a hard working two years ahead of them, including a Provincial election (probably in Fall 2014).

The Women's Caucus met at lunchtime on Saturday and heard a thoughtful speech from Sheilagh O'Leary, a candidate in the recent by-election in Virginia Waters. We also elected Meaghan Barnhill as returning Women's Caucus chair and Alana Cahill as our new representative on the Federal Women's Council. Both these women will also sit on the new Provincial Executive. The Women's Caucus meets monthly and both Alana and Meaghan will report to members at these meetings.



PHOTO



International Women's day parade in Montreal - March 8, 2014

For future issues, please send us short papers about your activities in your respective provinces. We can share them with all the other NDP's women.

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