

OPSEU Provincial Women's Committee

Provincial Women's Committee: The year in review

Building from the Women's conference

The PWC developed a monthly workplan following the last women's conference in 2001. It focused on Building Safe and Healthy Communities. The feedback from the conference participants helped the committee shape activities for 2002-2003.

Women at the conference plenary proposed resolutions on child care, a health and safety course for women and email trees in each region to develop and promote women's participation in the union in each region.

The committee worked as a group on a variety of issues, which are highlighted in this report. The team approach lets us support each other on specific issues, be inclusive and carry forward the mandate of working women. At the same time the committee remains fiscally responsible, making choices regarding our budget and the work to be done.

Examples of the issues and work of the committee:

- Lobbying for a National Child Care Program in concert with the Ontario Child Care Coalition and Campaign 2000.
- Representing OPSEU at forums organized by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). These included sessions on equity for women of colour and women with disabilities; organizing contingent workers; and organizing new workers into the labour movement.
- Lobbying for inclusion of access to affordable post-secondary education in the Peoples Charter developed by the OFL.
- Bringing issues, such as housing and income supplements that affect low income parents to the labour agenda.
- Participating in Run for the Cure for breast cancer.

Working with the labour community

Working with coalitions and affiliates, the PWC represents OPSEU at the Ontario Federation of Labour Women's Committee, the National Union of Public and General Employees Women's Advisory Group, Campaign 2000 on Child Poverty, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Cross Sectoral Violence Against Women Strategy Group.

Members the PWC have been on many picket lines and at peace rallies over the past two years, to represent OPSEU and speak on behalf of our members. This work is brought back to our members at regional educationals and on the convention floor in the form of resolutions.

Convention 2002

The PWC hosted a breakfast at the 2002 Convention, with Pam Cross from METRAC (Metro Toronto Action Committee on Violence) as the guest speaker. She told us how to conduct workplace audits to reduce violence. The Ontario Coalition for Social Justice performed excerpts from their road show "Unfit to Govern" on the effects of the budget cuts on women. Breakfast cereals were collected for the schools programs and money raised from a 50/50 draw was distributed to women's shelters across the province.

Within the union, working to change Ontario

Doris Middleton, EBM Region 3, has been our board liaison. She reported on board activities and took the PWC message back to the board. Doris has enabled us to work in an effective proactive way by speaking out at the board on behalf of the women in our union. In preparing for the anticipated provincial election, Doris has provided liaison between the board and the PWC political action subcommittee.

That subcommittee is developing material on the OPSEU Women's Agenda. We are researching each of the party's positions on health care, child care, dependant care, education and violence against women. We will get the results to members so they can know the party stands when they cast their ballots.

Making changes at the CLC

In June 2002, the PWC members were delegates to the CLC (Canadian Labour Congress) triennial convention in Vancouver. The PWC put forward a number of resolutions and spoke out on areas of women at work, the international struggle for workers rights, elder care, protection from domestic and workplace violence and the need for a National Child Care Program, all of which are now part of the CLC's policies.

CLC executive elections put women in two top positions, both as executive vice-presidents. Barb Byers was president of the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union, our NUPGE counterpart in Saskatchewan before becoming president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. Marie Clarke-Walker was the first Diversity Vice-President on the National Executive Board for the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Support and praise for women activists

The PWC is preparing a series of fact sheets on issues that affect our members. We anticipate that these will be a valuable educational addition to the OPSEU stewards' handbook Power Tool.

Convention 2003 saw our first International Bread and Roses Breakfast and a revision of the Bread and Roses Award to include emerging leaders in each region.

Our 20th anniversary

2003 is an historic year for the committee: our 20th anniversary. In a major project to be carried out in the next few months, the committee will identify the role women have played in OPSEU, the impetus and origins of the committee, as well as the contributions women have made to the development of OPSEU. We plan to release a publication this year at the women's conference recognizing 20 years of OPSEU "herstory."

In recognition of the Committee's 20th anniversary, the PWC designed a poster for International Women's Day, March 8, which was circulated to all locals. It is dedicated to those who have come before us and to those who will follow... "and still we rise."

URL: <http://www.opseu.org/committees/pwcboardreport2003.htm>

Direct OPSEU site: <http://www.opseu.org>