

UFCW Canada Women Working Together

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Winnipeg 2001

An overwhelming success!

Organizing Our Future was the theme of the UFCW Canada women's conference held in Winnipeg in September 2001, and attended by more than 200 delegates.



Following up on the success of the 1999 women's conference in Calgary, the majority of participants once again were women, including many first-time and youth delegates.

Workshops and plenary sessions focussed on topics of concern to women members, such as dealing with workplace violence and harassment, and

balancing work and family issues. Several sessions emphasized the importance of involvement and the necessity of organizing unorganized workers to protect and expand union wages and benefits.



Amongst the highlights of the conference, UFCW Canada Local 1518 was awarded the first-ever trophy for having achieved the most progress in involving large numbers of women members in the union.

“The objective of the conference was to provide members

with the skills they need to be more effective activists in their workplaces and communities,” says Louise Hinton, UFCW Canada coordinator for women's issues. “And the consensus was, we were very, very successful!”



'Don't Buy' fashion show a hit

Sweatshops are run by employers that pay wages so low that workers can barely afford the necessities of life. Sweatshop workers are often subjected to forced overtime, dangerous working conditions, and denied the right to form a union.

UFCW Canada is working to eliminate sweatshop labour. As part of its campaign, the UFCW Canada Women's Advisory Committee presented a fashion show during the Winnipeg women's conference last fall. This was sort of an anti-fashion show, however, with a theme of "what-not-to-buy", featuring models wearing clothing produced in sweatshops by companies such as Nike and The Gap.

The message? Don't purchase from brands that use sweatshop labour. The models wore clothes with price tags still attached – so they could be returned to the stores after the convention – a thrifty variation on the "buy union" principle.

Members interested in becoming involved in campaign to end sweatshop labour, or in joining the new *Disclosure Campaign*, can find out more by contacting Louisette Hinton at the UFCW Canada national office. More informational materials are also available at the CLC's Sweatshop Alert site (www.clc-ctc.ca/publications), or at the web site of the Maquila Solidarity Network (www.maquilasolidarity.org).

Young women show leadership

Women were well represented as both delegates and speakers at the first UFCW Canadian Council youth conference, held in Winnipeg last September in conjunction with the women's conference.

"The conference was about developing strategies to fully involve youth in UFCW Canada, and in the community," says Debora De Angelis, UFCW Canada National Training Program representative. She says many young women want to be more involved with their union but lack the knowledge or the network to get started. She urges more experienced women members to reach out and mentor young members.

"They're not just punks," she says. "they want to contribute, too."

Participants in the youth conference's *Where's My Movement?* panel discussion (pictured) are, from left to right, Nrinder Nindy Kaur Nann, CLC national representative on youth issues, Jaime Skinner, Manitoba NDP youth representative; Jesse Hajer, from the Council of Canadians; and UFCW Canada national representative for youth, Debora De Angelis.



Standing together for equity

Last summer, a class-action suit was filed against Wal-Mart as an employer, seeking equity for an estimated 700,000 current and former women workers. If successful, this case could surpass anything to date as the largest discrimination lawsuit ever brought against a private employer.

The suit contends that Wal-Mart – the largest employer after government – has effectively created two workforces with “women predominantly assigned to the lowest-paying positions with the least chance of advancement.” The suit cites data from government regulators showing that, although 72% of Wal-Mart’s hourly sales employees are women, only one-third of company managers are women, versus 56% women managers at Wal-Mart’s largest competitors.



A Wal-Mart spokesperson, in response to the allegations, attempted to defend the employer’s record, saying, “We don’t have policies and practices in place that promote discrimination of any kind.” That statement illustrates the problem. The spokesperson did not say that Wal-Mart has policies and practices that do combat discrimination – which is exactly what is needed to level the playing field for women workers.

There are, and always have been, employers who recognize and encourage the talent, dedication, and skills of women. Sadly, however, even in the 21st century, there are others who genuinely believe that women may belong in the workforce – but not in a position of responsibility. Organizations that don’t have proactive equity policies are especially vulnerable to systemic discrimination. They may not intend to

discriminate. They may not even have stopped to consider that their policies are discriminatory. But as long as employers continue to operate the same way they have for the last century, women will continue to be relegated to the lowest positions and pay scales – regardless of their skills and abilities.

That is why joining a union is so important for women. Belonging to a bargaining unit is an excellent first step in assuring equity in pay rates and in securing training and promotion opportunities. Women also need to be active supporters and volunteers within their unions, because it is the best way to ensure their voices – and their concerns – are heard and addressed.

It is essential that working women, as well as working men, continue to fight for what is right in the workplace – through collective bargaining, and through organizing other workers who need unions – to put an end to policies that abuse working people. Workers are the basis of our economy and, indeed, our way of life. They deserve the right to safe, healthy, and good-paying jobs, free from employer discrimination.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Michael J. Fraser". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michael J. Fraser
Director, UFCW Canada

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Women and literacy

“Literacy is much more than just reading and writing,” says Susan Jones, UFCW Canada National Training Program (NTP) literacy representative. “It requires



comprehension, too. It means having the essential skills for work and living.”

One of the new directions for UFCW Canada’s national training and literacy programs is “partnering”

with community organizations. This makes it possible for members who don’t work near a UFCW Canada training centre to learn the skills they need close to home.

Susan says acquiring new skills can be especially difficult for women who are juggling jobs and family responsibilities. “Our goal is to make training as easy and accessible as possible, for all UFCW Canada members.”



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Women fight globalization

When the Organization of American States (OAS) came to Windsor, Ont. for high-level international trade meetings last year, UFCW Canada members made sure the voice of workers was heard, and UFCW Canada women were front and centre. From left to right, they are Sue Yates, UFCW Canada national health & safety and labour education coordinator; Susan Neath of Guelph, Ont.; Teresa Magee, UFCW Canada Local 175 regional director; Dorothy Gossi, UFCW Canada national representative; and Linda Martin from Leamington, Ont. Behind them are (obscured) Brian Noonan, UFCW Canada national political action coordinator; Frank Curnew, UFCW Canada Local 1977 organizer; Bob Martin, then-UFCW Canada Local 459 president; and Paul Magee, UFCW Canada special assistant to the director.

Dates to Remember

March 8

International Women’s Day*

March 21

International Day for the Elimination of Racism

May 12

Mother’s Day*

June 3-7

UFCW Canadian Council Convention*
Westin Bayshore, Vancouver

June 10-14

Canadian Labour Congress Convention
Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre

June 16

Father’s Day, White Ribbon Walks Against Violence*

*Special UFCW Canada activities are planned in conjunction with these events, locally and/or nationally. Contact your local union women’s committee, or Louissette Hinton, national coordinator for women’s issues, at the UFCW Canada national office for further information.