

Letter to the Editor

Celebrating International Women's Day

February 27, 2008

In 1977, Canada declared March 8th International Women's Day. For 31 years, women have gathered on this date to celebrate successes in advancing women's equality.

Girls and women have far more choices and more control over our lives today than ever before. But make no mistake, we have not yet achieved equality. In the midst of the celebrations, we are keenly aware that the struggle for women's equality continues and there's a great deal of work still to be done. It's a kind of bittersweet day.

We have some terrific women in the House of Assembly and on municipal councils, but we aren't even close to reaching 50 per cent of elected office. Women are not equally represented in management or other leadership positions. The glass ceiling continues to press down.

No one can force a woman to quit working when she gets pregnant. But how does she pay the bills when EI maternity benefits are only 55 per cent of her earned income? How can a woman go back to work if she can't find any child care? What does she do when the only child care available costs nearly as much as she makes?

Women can enter any field of training and employment. The job ads are no longer separated in to "Help Wanted-Men" and "Help Wanted-Women." But there is still discrimination in the workplace and the wage gap between women and men in our province is growing. Women continue to make up the majority of low-wage earners and, on average, earn about 60 per cent of what men earn.

Women stopped being the property of men a long time ago, and a good wife isn't expected to "always know her place." But thousands of women in our province are controlled and abused by men who don't believe women are equal. We'll never achieve equality or end violence until these attitudes disappear.

Women have the right to own property. But many don't have a safe, affordable, accessible place to live. Women are entitled to a share of the assets when a marriage ends. But many spend months or years waiting for access to legal aid lawyers and court dates when they have to fight for their share of the assets.

Women are working hard on these and other issues. Women's centres, transition houses and shelters and coalitions against violence are doing wonderful work. Women are working on issues within their unions, churches and various associations. Women's groups are striving to help advance women in skilled trades, technology, science and engineering. Many women have been involved in advocating for a higher minimum wage. Child care advocates won't rest until we have a national program.

Name an issue and you'll find women working on solutions. That's our strength, and that's our future.

Take time to join the International Women's Day celebrations in your community. Attend an event at your local women's centre, attend a dinner, gather friends for an evening or have lunch with your colleagues. Share stories of what it was like when we didn't have the rights we have today. Keep those memories alive and well. Our rights are still fragile and we need to protect the gains we've made.

Happy International Women's Day!

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Leslie MacLeod
President, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women