



News Release

**For immediate release**

**March 4, 2009**

**International Women's Day**

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) pays tribute to the women of Saskatchewan on March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day (IWD).

IWD evolved after a series of strikes and demonstrations by female garment workers in New York City, beginning in 1857. The women organized for fair pay, the 12-hour workday, and an end to child labour.

By the early 1900's they were organizing for female suffrage as well. In 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, a sweatshop in New York, killing 145 female garment workers. So many women died because the fire escapes were locked to prevent women from slipping out for a break. 80,000 people came to the mass funeral.

A year later, 14,000 textile workers went out on strike and stayed out for nearly three months.

"Those strikes and demonstrations led by the women gave us International Women's Day, a special day to commemorate the women in our lives. It is a tribute to the hard work of women every day who continue the struggle for better pay and safe working conditions. We are proud to say that in our labour movement, women are at the forefront of the struggle: representing members, sitting on health and safety committees, bargaining contracts, and standing up for our rights," says Wanda Bartlett, Recording Secretary of the SFL.

"The challenges from a century ago are still with us, in part because we have two levels of government who are rolling back women's rights. The Saskatchewan Party government has passed two bills which make it more difficult to organize unions and to collectively bargain. An attack on union rights hurts women because unions make a huge difference in bringing up women's earnings and giving access to health benefits. Unions also take a lead role in fighting for social programs that women need, such as affordable childcare and an employment insurance that doesn't discriminate against women," says Larry Hubich, President of the SFL.

The SFL also condemns the Harper government's attack on pay equity in its recent budget. The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act will effectively eliminate women's ability to pursue pay equity complaints by forcing them to file complaints as individuals. The bill imposes a \$50,000 fine on any union that encourages or assists their own members in filing a pay equity complaint, leaving women to fight the system unaided.

"This kind of attack on women's human rights is completely unjustified, and certainly has no place in any legislation, let alone the budget," says Hubich.

"Women need economic independence in order to support their families, but also to ensure that they have the means to free themselves from abusive relationships. The problem of violence against women is still with us. And while women from all socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk of violence, we know that poverty is an aggravating factor. The SFL renews its commitment to struggling for a society where women achieve economic equality and security," adds Bartlett.

For more information on the Conservative government's changes to pay equity, go to [www.canadianlabour.ca](http://www.canadianlabour.ca)

The SFL represents approximately 95,000 unionized workers from 37 affiliated unions in Saskatchewan.

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