



The Rose Vine

Newsletter of the National Women's Committee of Local 2002

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I am a woman – and legally I am a person too!

by Wendy Grant, Women's Committee, Pacific Region



Women have not had a lengthy political history. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that we were not even considered a 'person'!

I think of the feminist pioneers that fought for women's suffrage, and the legal struggles endured just to advance the legal rights for women - rights that many of us take for granted. It is important, especially on International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8th, to remember their stories and their victories.

"You are not even a person."

In 1916, Emily Murphy, a lawyer and a women's rights campaigner, became the

first woman elected as a magistrate in the British Empire. Before she was able to pass judgement on her first case, she was challenged by the defence lawyer who questioned her legal authority.

"You are not even a person" he quoted, referring to section 24 of the British North America Act of 1867 where women were not legal "persons" and so did not have any legal rights or privileges, although they could be subject to legal penalties.

Emily joined forces with four other activists: Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, Henrietta Edwards, and Nellie McClung to challenge the wording of the Act by filing the "Persons Case" with the Supreme Court of Canada.

Edwards v. Canada 1928

In 1928 the Court ruled against the case stating that: "women, children, criminals and idiots are not legally 'persons'". The court maintained that the word 'person' did not include women as no woman in 1867 held any political position, the founding fathers of the Act did not include them.

The Famous Five appealed that decision to the Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council, the final court of appeal for the entire British Empire, and in 1930 the Committee ruled the word 'persons' did in fact cover both sexes. That was only 79 years ago!

A powerful victory considering that Canadian women's suffrage had only been attained in 1918 – only 12 years before this landmark decision.

The Famous Five remembered.

In October of 2000, 5 larger-than-life bronze sculptures depicting these Famous Five women were placed outside the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. The monument is entitled "Women are Persons" and the newspaper that Nellie McClung is holding reflects some of the actual headlines of their historic legal victory. An empty bronze chair is an important feature of this grouping as it invites all those who pass by to join the group. It is inspirational as you walk among these bastions of female suffrage and a tribute to their efforts on behalf of all women.

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The women of the Congo: brutality is their reality

Tammy H, Moore, Atlantic Region

International Women's day is a day to remember and celebrate the powerful women from around the world that have made a difference and continue to make a difference in bettering the world around us. From their fight for equality to the care for their families, their battle never ends.

The Women of the Congo suffer unimaginable atrocities on a daily basis. Their fight for survival cannot go unnoticed for the sake of these women and children.

The Congo war has claimed more lives than any conflict since the end of World War II, yet receives almost no attention outside central Africa. An estimated 4 million people have died here since 1996, the vast majority by starvation or preventable diseases as they hide in the jungle to escape the fighting.

Rape has been a cheap, simple weapon for all parties in the war, more easily obtainable than bullets or bombs. This type of violence was designed to exterminate the population. Each armed group has a trademark manner of violating: the Burundians rape men as well as women, the Mai Mai (local defense forces) rape with branches or bayonets and mutilate their victims and Rwandan send groups of soldiers to gang rape women.

Women raped and massacred by these rebel military groups say that they are not women anymore. They are often too physically damaged to farm or bear children. There is such stigma associated with rape in Congo where female virginity is prized and the husband of a rape survivor is considered shamed. Rape survivors are routinely shunned by husbands, parents and their communities.

An estimated 30 per cent of the women raped in the Congo's war are infected with HIV; as many as 60 per cent of the combatants are believed to have the virus. This is yet another means of slow and painful extermination. The women that are able to bear children after these brutal rapes and mutilations are now destined to pass on HIV from mother to child.

Though more and more political activists are taking an interest in coming to the aid of these prisoners of war, they are still in dire need of aid. Awareness is the strongest weapon that I have to offer. I urge you to take the time to educate yourself further. With modern technologies, the world is not that big of a place anymore. The reality is that these forgotten women and children are not so far away.

They are daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers and they deserve our attention.

For more information please visit: <http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org>

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Purpose of the Committee

To provide all women of Local 2002 with support, information and education to inspire them to become more active in the union and in their communities.

Bouquet or Thorns

Let us know what you think of our newsletter or any other matter.

Contact us at:

women@caw2002tca.ca



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Cette publication est également
disponible en français.



National Child Care

by Sylvie Schmitt, Women's Committee, Western Region

Through activism, I have tried to educate my fellow Sisters and Brothers on the topic of why a National Child Care program is beneficial to all. I have to say that my petition was not always well received. Even today, some people feel that a National Child Care program is a waste of taxpayer's money.

While I was canvassing for signatures, I was greeted with comments like "I had to do without, so why can't this generation?" Times have dramatically changed in the last generation. For most Canadian families, to have a comfortable lifestyle, without any extravagancies or luxuries, it takes two incomes. For the working poor, it takes two incomes just to survive. Single parents, especially women, who want to re-enter the workplace – often face the obstacle of affordable, safe daycare.

Some working Canadians complain that too many able bodied people are on social assistance. The inability to secure daycare

placement perpetuates the cycle of poverty and dependence on social assistance. Every woman wants her child to be well cared for while they are at work. Access to affordable daycare and dependence on social assistance are closed related. Child care helps women stay in the labour force, access skills training, and compete for promotions.

In my own experience, I had to wait 3 years for my daughter to clear a waiting list at the licensed neighborhood daycare center. The current reality is that every daycare in town has a waiting list. Parents are advised to register for an available spot on a daycare waiting list the moment they become pregnant. I found it very difficult to return to work full time after my maternity leave. I was fortunate, as a result of shift trading and the help of family and friends, to have been able to return to work without a guaranteed child care space. It was very challenging and stressful at times. More and more grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren while the parents are at work.

Let me share a few statistics:

- Excluding Quebec, finding convenient, affordable child care is a challenge for most young families, regardless of where you live in Canada.
- In Manitoba, only 14.5% of children under the age of 13 have access to child care space. And if you can afford childcare, it will cost as much as \$7,280 to put an infant through daycare for one year.
- The national average is no better at 16% for regulated child care space.

Let's stop talking about it and find a real solution. Send a message to the Harper government that a national child care program is not a luxury for families but a necessity for working families. All Canadians deserve affordable daycare so they can work and contribute to society.

The Other Members of the Famous Five

Henrietta Muir Edwards

(1849 – 1931) An advocate for working women and founder of the Victorian Order of Nurses, Henrietta Muir was born in Montreal. Among the many causes she promoted were temperance, raising the age of consent, equal parental rights, mother's allowances and the reform of the Canadian prison system. Her knowledge of the laws pertaining to women and children were unequalled in the country. In 1875 she set up the Working Girl's Association that provided vocational training for women. She also edited the journal Women's Work in Canada, and in 1893 co-founded the National Council of Women.

Nellie Mooney McClung

(1873 – 1951) Initially a teacher and then a novelist, Nellie McClung was welcomed by the women's rights movement in Winnipeg as she was a lively and amusing public speaker. Through her work, Manitoba became the first province to enfranchise women. Nellie campaigned widely for legal and financial rights for married women, factory safety legislation and many other reforms. She also continued to write, and although her work was forgotten for a decade it was rediscovered by feminists in the 1960's. She was, however, a Eugenicist and an ardent campaigner for the sterilization of the 'feeble-minded' and 'immoral'.

Louise Crummy McKinney

(1868 – 1931) After marrying and working as a teacher, in 1916 Louise McKinney became the leading member of the Non-Partisan League, an agrarian movement fighting for public ownership of grain stores and flour mills. In 1917 she was elected to the Alberta Legislature as candidate for the League, becoming one of two women first elected to the House of Commons of Canada and the first woman on any legislative body in the British Empire. She was also a senior member of the Canadian Temperance Movement and campaigned for female suffrage.

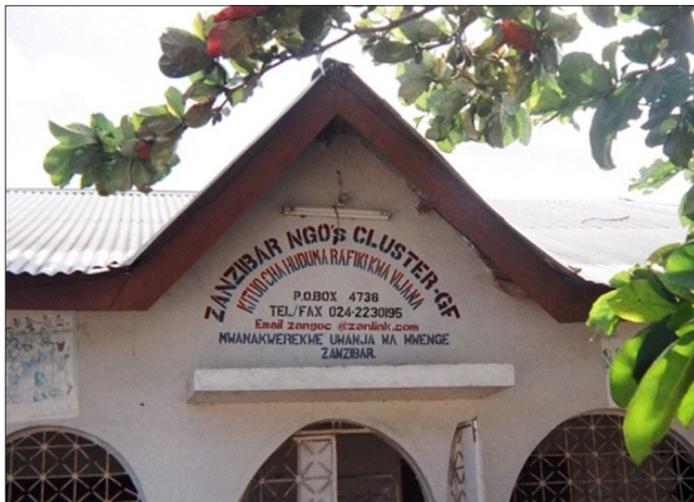
Irene Marryat Parlyb

(1868 – 1965) In 1913 Irene Parlyb set up the first women's group of the United Farmers of Alberta, by 1921 had been elected to the Alberta Legislature and then went on to become the first woman cabinet minister in Alberta. Always concerned with the interests of rural women and children, as President of the United Farm Women of Alberta, Irene campaigned to improve public health care and set up hospitals and mobile medical and dental clinics. In recognition of her contribution to the province of Alberta, Irene received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Alberta in 1935. She died at the age of 97.

Women Uniting

by Alice-Rose Mick

This summer I traveled to Tanzania with Global Youth Network and met women who inspired and surprised me. Through a fundraising effort and with the help of the CAW, I was able to contribute to a Women's Centre in Zanzibar.



Women across the world bear unique responsibilities and unique barriers are more likely to be struck by poverty. In Africa this is a common reality and Tanzania is no exception. Women in Africa are vulnerable to their own unique barriers, such as HIV/AIDS, death through childbirth or civil war. These barriers must be overcome for women's power to reach its fullest potential.

Given the education, equal opportunity, and emancipation, women will generously share their knowledge and power in an effort to better society. Investing in women has interest that goes well beyond the pursuit of specifically female well-being. Increased child health, intelligence, potential, and lower birth rates are a few of the many legacies attached to increased female well-being. Women contribute through their families and communities.

The first day at the centre, the women of Zanzibar and the women of Canada sat together and talked. We spoke about being women. We spoke about our lives, our troubles and best of all, our ambitions. We shared between each other sincerity. More than anything we surprised each other.

At first, we asked simple questions: What of your family? How is school? With enough dialogue, we began speaking of issues that linked women together. We spoke of violence against women, and reproductive education. The women of the centre were shocked to

learn that women in Canada experience inequalities. We shared many of the same worries concerning education, inequality, violence, and health. We shared the ambitions to become equal, independent, and in harmony with nature and society. We understood each other, not as women from Canada or Zanzibar, but as women.

The women of the centre were beautiful, intelligent and best of all ambitious. We were all women hoping for a brighter future, empowering each other as we work towards a brighter future.

We are women, united, all across the world.



Photo: Alice with two students from Nicaragua

Alice Rose Mick is studying political science and law at Carleton University in Ottawa. She speaks English and French fluently and is currently learning Spanish. "Nicaragua was spectacular; I had an amazing experience and felt that I really accomplished something. Practicing languages and communicating with people from around the globe can open many possibilities. Education is the most effective way to aid people that suffer from so many injustices."

The CAW Social Justice Fund provides solidarity assistance to non-profit and humanitarian projects within Canada and around the world. The CAW Social Justice Fund was first negotiated in 1990.

For more information, please visit: cawint@caw.ca