

Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Women Achieving Right to Vote **January 28, 2016**

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the first province, Manitoba, in Canada to grant women the right to vote and be elected. Unifor is marking this anniversary and encouraging continued political action.

On January 28, 1916, white, middle and upper class women in Manitoba finally had the right to vote in provincial elections. Of course the right to vote wasn't granted to all women and to be accurate, it wasn't granted, but achieved after a long, hard-fought period of activism spearheaded by the Political Equality League.

In 1914, Nellie McClung was part of a delegation to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. She made it clear that the delegation had come not to beg a favour but to obtain simple justice.

“Have we not the brains to think? Hands to work? Hearts to feel? And lives to live?” she demanded. “Do we not bear our part in citizenship? Do we not help build the Empire? Give us our due!”

The Conservative premier at the time, Sir Rodmond Roblin, advised that nice women weren't interested in the vote and that if women had the right to vote, it would break up the home. He was defeated in the next election and women continued to mobilize and agitate until legislation was finally passed in 1916. Two years after the victory in Manitoba, the Federal government granted rights for some women to vote in 1918, and the right to vote continued to roll out through the rest of Canada up until 1960. Despite gains starting in 1916, most racialized women including women of Asian or East Indian origin were prohibited from voting at the provincial and federal level until the late 1940s. Shamefully, it took until the federal election in 1960 for Aboriginal women to be able to exercise their right to vote when the government extended the franchise to all Aboriginal peoples.

As trade unionists, we know that political activism is vital to defend and strengthen working women's rights, and that labour women are fundamental drivers of any equality agenda. We must continue to be active agents of change in electoral politics.

Unifor is proud of the exemplary women activists who have been elected from our own union, including: Peggy Nash former MP Parkdale-High Park in Ontario and Joy Langan former MP Mission-Coquitlam, British Columbia; currently in government is Carol R. Hughes MP in Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasin, Ontario; newly elected Tracey Ramsey MP in Essex Windsor, Ontario and Shannon Phillips MLA for Lethbridge-West in Alberta; along with Mable Elmore who is MLA in Vancouver-Kensington. We are

currently working to elect our sister Niki Lundquist on February 11 as the new MPP in Whitby-Oshawa, Ontario.

On this January 28th, Unifor encourages women of the union to recommit to being active in political campaigns: from the by-elections in British Columbia and Ontario, to the provincial elections in Manitoba and Saskatchewan this spring. Remember - we must never take the right to vote for granted.

Stay connected, subscribe to the Unifor Women's list – email women@unifor.org. For more info on the history of women's suffrage in Canada please visit:

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/womens-suffrage/>

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