

2009 Convention Report - Does AUPE Still Need a Women's Committee? (submitted by Local 002 Member)



I attended the AUPE Convention in October 2009. It was my third AUPE convention in the thirty years that I have worked for the Alberta government.

This month I will turn 54 years of age. I started working full time in June 1976, long before maternity leave, human rights legislation and right to say "you can't ask that question in a job interview." I began employment with the Alberta government in May 1980 and on this date became a member of AUPE. I come from a family who has long roots to the labour movement and in fact my mother was instrumental in organizing the secretaries who worked for a Board of Education in Ontario to join CUPE in the 1980's.

In the 1980's, I was a local council member for local 12 and was appalled at the language some of my male colleagues used. After a letter from my chapter president, the language changed – for the better.

I was sitting with my women colleagues as the report for the Women's Committee was presented at this year's AUPE Convention. All of us at table were very uncomfortable at what was presented. As presented in the *Women's Committee Report* "as of July 21, 2009 our membership consisted of 57,180 females, 15,320 males and 4,730 members whose names could not provide a confirmation of gender" and another resolution stated "Whereas over 79% of AUPE membership are women."

If women are the majority, then why is a Women's Committee still needed?" Also quoted in this report "*We continue to identify and to create solutions around the barriers that prevent us from becoming a more visible force within our Union.*" Please explain what are the barriers, because I, and many of my female co-workers, do not see them? I am a Local 2 council member and I was elected to Council and fully participate in my meetings and I do contribute.

Also mentioned in this report "When we fight, we fight for equality; we fight to be given the opportunity to make a living that will allow our families to participate fully in Canadian society." Who are you fighting? People – whether they are women or men choose how they wish to participate in society – I don't believe you can make someone participate unless they wish to.

Perhaps our Union should look at combining the Women's Committee with the Human Rights Committee. I truly believe we are ALL equal under the Charter and our Union and perhaps if a woman's voice is not being heard, it is up to the individual woman to rise up and be heard.

I have wondered why the Women's Committee does not lobby for the employer to top up maternity benefits. I see nothing about this mentioned in the report presented. This would be a tremendous benefit to women and their families. However, I do not believe it is the employer's responsibility "to fund an affordable, non-profit, quality Child Care Program." Why does it have to be non-profit? Child care workers are graduates from accredited post-secondary programs and deserve to be paid accordingly. I choose to have children and I choose to work and I believe child care is MY responsibility.

Perhaps people reading this may not agree with what I have written, but I believe women and women's rights have come along way since the 1970's.