

## Celebrating Women: Past, Present and Future

International Women's Day message from BCGEU Treasurer Judi Fillion

Today, March 8, 2011, millions of women around the world are celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of International Women's Day (IWD). They're celebrating victories women have won, looking back and examining how past struggles turned into wins, and looking forward to ensure equality, justice and peace become an everyday reality for all women around the world.

One hundred years ago, women were demanding to have their voices heard, fighting for better working conditions, improved health and safety, better pay and the right to vote. It was not until 1917 that women in Canada gained the right to vote. And, it wasn't until 1929, that women in Canada were legally declared "persons".

Over the past one hundred years, women's collective action in the community, at the bargaining table, at the ballot box, on the picket line, and marching in the streets, took on many demands, including: equal pay for work of equal value, publicly funded child care, reproductive rights, paid maternity leave, protection against sexual harassment, access to post secondary education, the right to work in male dominated jobs, the right to hold office and the fight against violence against women. Women's collective action meant sisters in the union, in the workplace and in the community, were able to participate on more equal footing.

Without question women have made many gains over the last one hundred years and there's much to celebrate. However, conservative governments' cuts worldwide to public programs and services and discriminatory government policies and budget priorities are a direct attack on women's equality and have eroded many of the gains women have made.

For women in British Columbia, women's services have been under attack by both the provincial Liberal government from the minute they were elected in 2001 and the Harper Conservative government since they came into power in 2006. These cuts have had a devastating impact on women and their communities as they widen the gap between the rich and poor, and push more and more women into poverty and despair.

Clearly, our demand and action for women's equality must continue. As our sisters showed us so well, courage, collective action, and solidarity are critical to moving our issues forward. So, on this International Women's Day, let's celebrate the phenomenal accomplishments women have made over the last 100 years and recommit to continuing the fight until all women have achieved equality, justice and peace.

Happy International Women's Day!