



March 5, 2021

## TO ALL IBEW FIRST DISTRICT LOCAL UNIONS

Greetings:

March 8 is recognized as International Women's Day, where individuals around the world will come together in solidarity to celebrate the gains made in women's struggle for equality. It is a time to reflect and take stock of women's accomplishments over the past year and for all of us to renew our commitment to ongoing change. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly tough on women. Women have experienced an increase in gender-based violence due to working from home and have taken on the majority of unpaid care work with children learning virtually and the closure of daycares.

The International Women's Day 2021 campaign theme of **#WeAreTheRecovery** serves to raise awareness about the biggest challenges facing women in Canada, and to put pressure on decision makers to put women's economic justice at the centre of recovery plans. This theme builds on the [#DoneWaiting](#) campaign launched by the Canadian Labour Congress on International Women's Day in 2018. The campaign calls on the Federal Government to end wage discrimination, end sexual harassment and violence, to fix the child care crisis and make work fair for women.

At the 1892 National Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (NBEW) Convention, the first women became members of the union. Four years later, when only one organizer was on the NBEW payroll, a second, Mrs. Mary Honzik of St. Louis, was hired. This development gave our Brotherhood the distinction of being the first union to have a female organizer on its staff.<sup>1</sup>

The demographics of the union began to change as women joined the IBEW in larger numbers; and in 1897, Local Union 80—the first all-women's local union—was chartered in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>2</sup>

On May 1, 1919, Winnipeg's building and metal workers went on strike for higher wages.

Two weeks later, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council appealed for a general strike in support of the metal workers. The response was overwhelming. The first to walk out were the "Hello Girls," Winnipeg's telephone operators. By 11 a.m., 30,000 union and non-union workers had walked off the job.

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<sup>1</sup> IBEW History and Structure

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A strike committee was formed and for six weeks, it virtually ran Winnipeg. Elevators shut down, trams stopped, postal and telephone communications came to a halt, and nothing moved without approval from the strike committee. Sympathy strikes were breaking out across the country.

In fact, Canadian Women in the IBEW played an integral role in the Winnipeg General Strike, where over 500 telephone operators, better known as the “Hello Girls”, walked off the job at the end of their shift and their shift replacements didn’t show up. Virtually shutting down all telecommunication in the city. These women later became members of IBEW Local 435.

The IBEW also hit another milestone in 2020 with the appointment of Gina Cooper as the first female International Vice-President. Sister Cooper was appointed to fulfill the unexpired term of Fourth District IVP Brian G. Malloy after passing away from a heroic battle with lung cancer. Sister Cooper brings with her a wealth of experience, having worked with nearly every branch in the IBEW.

I am very proud of the strong, unique, and proud IBEW sisters I have met throughout my career in the IBEW and of late in my current role as International Vice President for the First District (Canada). I have witnessed the passion, dedication, and solidarity displayed by our IBEW sisters at a variety of conferences including our [2019 IBEW Canadian Women’s Conference](#). The energy and enthusiasm that radiates from our sisters at gatherings and conferences is second to none and can only continue to make our organization a better and more inclusive one for everyone. While the COVID-19 pandemic has put on hold all of our in-person events, our sisters have continued to remain active in their local unions and the greater labour movement by supporting their communities through charitable work and engaging in virtual meetings and conferences.

Coast to Coast, our IBEW Local Unions are building Local Union Women’s Committee’s so that our sisters can gather and discuss issues important to them and their respective industries, jobsites and provide peer-to-peer support. These committees have been actively involved in their communities and Local Unions in various capacities and I hope to see this trend continue to grow across the country.

Most recently, Filomena Tassi, the Federal Minister of Labour, held a roundtable discussion on the challenges faced by Women in the Electrical Trades. I was joined by International Representative Cheryl Paron, Sisters Becky Lupton and Stephanie Jang – both Executive Board members from IBEW Local 213 and First District International Women’s Committee Representative Angie Camille from IBEW Local 993 who clearly outlined the barriers women still face and the supports the government needs to put in place to ensure the retention of all women who enter the skilled trades. The government of Canada sought out our union for this discussion because of the strong women leading the IBEW.

It is my desire that the IBEW in Canada double down our efforts to attract and retain more female members, and that can only happen with the positive support and recognition that we as an organization can provide to our current female members.



Please take the time on International Women's Day and in the coming weeks and months ahead to thank our sisters of the IBEW and support them in their efforts to achieve their professional and committee goals within your Local Union.

Best wishes.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Z. Reid".

Tom Reid  
International Vice President

TR/ln

cc: International Representatives  
IBEW System Council #11  
IBEW CCO