

Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
Prairie School for Union Women
Power, Privilege and People Workshop

June 8-12, 2014

I was extremely lucky to attend the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's "Prairie School for Union Women" in Waskesiu located in northern Saskatchewan.

I was registered in the Power, Privilege and People (P3's) workshop and we had 20 participants and 2 great facilitators. I chose this workshop to help me in my role of Union officer.

This course was designed to examine some of the root causes behind racism, sexism, classism...all the "isms" and what it means for the labour movement. We also looked at how new forms of power are being built due to demographic changes taking place within the Canadian population and the labour movement.

Racism - is the belief that one race is superior to another. It is the combination of racial prejudice and institutional power that is used to deny or grant people and groups of people rights, respect, representation and resources based on their race, colour or ethnicity.

Sexism - is the social, systemic, and personal assumptions, practices and behaviours that discriminate against persons according to their sex. Historically, in Canada, sexism has meant discrimination against women rather than men.

Homophobia - is the social, systemic and personal assumptions, practices and behaviours that impose negative value on and discriminate against homosexual women and men. Homophobic acts can range from name-calling to violence targeting lesbian or gay people to eliminating them from curriculum, or not providing legal and social supports. (We had a bit of a discussion on why they chose to use the word "Homophobia" when we were talking about "isms" and shouldn't we have used "Heterosexism"...they mean the same thing but homophobia is the term that is used more often and more widely known.)

Classism - is the social, systemic and personal assumptions, practices, and behaviours that often discriminate against persons according to their socio-economic level; and an economic system that creates significant inequality and causes human needs to go unmet.

Ableism - is the social, systemic, and personal assumptions, practices, and behaviours that discriminate against persons who have disabilities.

We touched on many subjects including the history of the labour movement which surprisingly we are still fighting some of the same issues (such as the "Head Tax") that we were many years ago...we've gained some grounds but the issues are still there. Did you know in:

- 1903 - The head tax under the Chinese Exclusion Act is raised from \$50.00 to \$500.00.
- 1929 - Women were declared "persons" under Canadian law

- 1940 - Women gained the right to vote in Quebec
- 1960 - Aboriginal women and men obtained the federal vote.
- 1971 - Canada accepted an equal number of female and male immigrants. In the same year Dauphin, Manitoba ceased to fire its female civic workers upon marriage.
- 1980 - A (1957) rule disallowing women fishers working with their husbands from receiving UI benefits was overturned.
- 1982 - NDP MP Margaret Mitchell was laughed at in the House of Commons when she raised the issue of violence against women. The outcry from women brought national attention to the issue.
- 1983 - The Canadian Human Rights Act prohibited sexual harassment in workplaces under federal jurisdiction. Before this, women in these workplaces had no legal recourse if their employers demanded sexual favours.
- 1988 - The first woman Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Bertha Wilson, wrote one of the majority judgements which struck down Canada's restrictive abortion laws. When she first applied to law school, a professor told her to go home and take up knitting.
- 1995 - A Right of Landing Fee, or Head Tax, of \$975.00 is imposed on immigrants and refugees entering Canada.
- 1997 - One of the first decisions by the Supreme Court dealing with the duty to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.
- 2000 - Refugees no longer have to pay the Right of Landing Fee or Head Tax but the fee remains for immigrants.

We talked about the Ladder of Oppression which includes bias, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and systemic discrimination and how our beliefs/attitudes and/or behaviours/actions contribute to this. We discussed how policies and practices need to be changed to be inclusive.

We also discussed the four elements of power...personal power, institutional power, social power and collective power. We talked about how they are all connected and how to make them work in a positive manner.

Communication was another topic we covered which included "inclusion" which is making sure in a "meeting" that you get everyone's ideas and thoughts and making sure everyone is able to give their opinion. We were given guidelines for "Giving and Receiving Feedback". We also did an exercise in the "elevator" speech...how to put together your speech, getting your point across and what your resolve is in 90 seconds or less. It was a good exercise to do.

I came away from the workshop with some good handouts, gained some tools and feel a little more knowledgeable about "isms".

It was an excellent workshop, very informative and helpful!

Respectfully submitted by,
Karen Carle