



March 6, 2020

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.

The International Women's Day 2020 campaign theme of [#EachforEqual](#) shows that we all have a role to play in creating a gender equal world. How will you work towards gender equality?

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.¹

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.²

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 11:00 a.m., 30,000 union and non-union workers had walked off the job.

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 Union 435.

¹ IBEW History and Structure

² IBEW History and Structure



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 at our recent [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.

Coast to Coast, our IBEW Local Unions are beginning to start 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.

The Canadian Labour Congress launched a campaign two years ago on International Women's Day 2018, called [#DoneWaiting](#) which calls on the Federal Government to end wage discrimination, end sexual harassment and violence, and to fix the child care crisis. A fourth pillar, fair work, was recently added. I encourage all our members to add their voice and sign the [petition](#) to support the campaign.

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 the 2020 campaign theme of a [#EachforEqual](#) and their professional and committee goals within your Local Union.

Best wishes.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Reid".

Tom Reid
International Vice President

TR/ln

cc: International Representatives
IBEW, System Council #11
IBEW, CCO