

March 8, 2021 - No. 14

**March 8 - International Women's Day**

## **Call for Women Workers to Lead the Work for Political Renewal to Empower the People**



### **Interviews with Women Who Lead by Example**

- Sarah-Jane Shaw, Steelworker, Operator on Z-line at Stelco in Hamilton
- Shannon Horner, Steelworker in Ontario.
- Geneviève Royer, High School Remedial Teacher
- Marjolaine Aubé, President of the Union of Workers at the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Laval (CISSS de Laval-CSN)
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## March 8 -- International Women's Day

# Call for Women Workers to Lead the Work for Political Renewal to Empower the People



March 8, 2020. International Women's Day, Montreal

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) greets March 8, International Women's Day, with full confidence that women workers will continue to take the lead in the work to renew the political process and the society, which require the people's empowerment. Communist women have proven in this period, as in the past, that they take up the question of gender discrimination as a question of emancipating the working class. The mobilization of women workers for the renewal of the political process is a step in this direction.

The present period is one of retreat of revolution which is witnessing a brutal anti-social offensive, nation-wrecking and the pursuit of an agenda of aggression and war on the part of governments and the imperialist interests which dominate them. Far from losing its leading role, it is the working class which has to provide an alternative to the retrogression which is being imposed on the society. Women workers are playing a crucial role in this, first and foremost, by ensuring that they do not get diverted or dissipate their energies on issues which do not put them at the centre-stage of the developments. They must, as is the case with all the workers, be political, work out their program, and take the same to all sections of the society.

International Women's Day is a fitting occasion this year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic for women workers to pledge their adherence to the cause of their own emancipation which is linked to the emancipation of the entire working class. In the course of the developments which have been taking place, women with positions of power and privilege have declared they will protect women, but they do not shed a tear over the plight of women workers at home and the world over who bear the brunt of the attacks which are taking place so as to make the rich richer. None has pointed out that reforms are needed to improve their working and living conditions, and not to make them even worse.

The imposition of what are called liberal-democratic institutions on countries whose resources the imperialists covet has increased their enslavement. Women workers do not entrust others to represent their concerns because it is a waste of their energies.

On the contrary, they have been raising their own demands, speaking in their own name and fighting for their rights within the context of fighting for the rights of all. Only in this way can all women be emancipated. Advanced women workers should join the Party, organize basic organizations for the emancipation of women at the workplace, inclusive of all fellow workers, irrespective of gender, and excel in taking up political affairs under the banner of the democratic renewal of the political process.

CPC(M-L) takes this opportunity to express its full support for all women fighting for emancipation on the world scale and to hail the increasing participation of women in political affairs. The Party condemns all racist attacks and acts of police impunity and other acts of oppression and humiliation of women, condemns kidnappings and rape and other forms of brutality and terror practised by the ruling circles against them, demands the release of all those imprisoned as a result of their political actions, and demands that all those committing crimes against women be punished.

With optimism and confidence in the abilities of communist women and all fighting women workers, we send women everywhere our militant greetings and regards.



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### **Interviews with Women Who Lead by Example**

## **Sarah-Jane Shaw, Steelworker, Operator on Z-line at Stelco in Hamilton**



We are still fighting for equality in the workplace in terms of being given opportunities that men are given. There is still a perception that women can't do jobs that men can do and so we are still fighting that. Stelco is a predominantly male workforce with women in the minority and we are still treated differently and not given the opportunities that men are given. Things are getting better but we are not where we need to be yet. We have about 500 production workers here now and only about 40 are women.

I have personal experience in this fight. The company trained men who were junior to me for jobs that I wanted to be trained for. They could do that because we are all paid the same rate, so they

can pick and choose. We fought, filed grievances and won and I got the training but that still goes on. It wasn't until the grievances were filed that I was allowed to train on jobs.

My union, local 1005, is excellent at giving women training opportunities if they choose to do so.

Generally, in industry, women are intimidated to even apply to some industrial workplaces because of the history of what has gone on in the past. And it is not for everyone. I have friends who I know would not fit into that environment because it is predominantly male, catered more to men than women because there are so few of us. One example is our change house. It is greatly in need of upgrading. It was originally for men and was condemned years ago but that's now the change house for the women. It is a dilapidated facility. They have supposedly ordered a new change house which was to be commissioned last fall but we haven't seen it yet.

As women in a predominantly male work force we have come a long way based on our own work ethics but I believe we still have a long way to go. Some of the women at Stelco have been very involved in the fight against Stelco's bankruptcy and all the battles over the years and are active in the union and all the battles that 1005 has fought.

I am hopeful that the future holds change and better opportunities for those starting now. I have 21 years seniority and I want things to be better for the new women based on all the work we have been doing.



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## Shannon Horner, Steelworker in Ontario.

For women workers in the steel industry and all heavy industry, health and safety is one of the main concerns. It's a male dominated environment and sometimes it is not up to the times in terms of the inclusion of women workers in health and safety plans. We are working towards solutions but it's a slow moving train. I think that women provide great value, are an incredible asset in industrial settings. We bring different viewpoints to this kind of industry and provide good role models for our daughters and our sisters.

One of the things that concerns women workers is humanizing the industry and the world. We have some different perspectives, bring what are called soft skills, to the industry. I'm not saying men don't have soft skills but women do focus more on issues like mental health. The steel industry is not known for being a very nurturing industry but the world needs change, needs humanizing.

Health and safety in industrial settings is complex and there are problems. Health includes mental, emotional and physical; you have to be healthy in all three to be productive and safe. Historically mental and emotional health has not been given high priority. The world is changing and we need to make changes and look at people holistically. Mental health has to be a priority globally. Women are playing an active role in helping humanity evolve, in humanizing society.



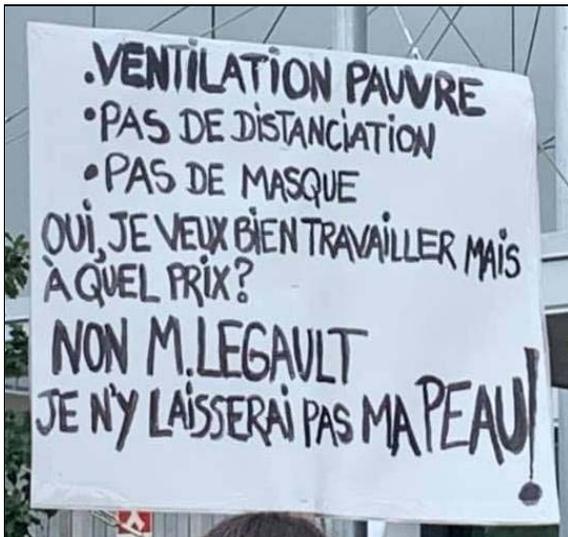
I look at the example of how health care workers, who are mostly women, are under-valued although they play a vital role. I am a single mom with four kids including one with complex special needs and I know the value of the health care workers that we turn to in times of crisis, like the pandemic. I think the human spirit is resilient and together we can envision change in the world and bring it about.



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## Geneviève Royer, High School Remedial Teacher

In Quebec, with the pandemic, we face even greater needs in the education system to ensure the health and safety of students and staff and also to create a feeling of safety and confidence among students who face even greater learning difficulties and delays in the chaotic situation that exists in education. We must intervene on the spot, collectively, and not as individuals in front of management, to correct the problems that arise. We must act more quickly than before, on a daily basis. More than ever, the demands we have been making for years, such as reducing class sizes and improving services for students with difficulties, are necessary to stabilize the situation, but they are still being ignored.



We have to do all of this in the midst of negotiations for the renewal of our collective agreements. We face continued state restructuring of the education system to serve private interests, and this restructuring deprives teachers of a voice in determining working conditions. With the pandemic, governance by decree has been strengthened. At the tables, negotiators representing the government still tell us that they have no mandate to negotiate on the basis of our demands, and this after 67 negotiation meetings.

The teachers are discussing our situation passionately at the moment because we can see that we need to re-examine and re-think the traditional forms of the state-led bargaining, such as conciliation-mediation, followed by reports, then strike mandate votes, and after that strike notices, etc. The pandemic itself is forcing us to re-think these things. We are discussing how to hold discussions and actions among the public to mobilize public opinion and hold the government accountable for its rejection of our demands, when we are in the best position to know what arrangements are needed to deal with the crisis in education, a crisis that is aggravated by the pandemic. Our voice must become influential in decision-making on matters that concern us and that are important to the education system and the well-being and future of youth.

Women make up 76 per cent of the teaching staff in primary and secondary schools, and they are most active in all aspects of the struggle, including the current discussion on how to move forward under the conditions of the public health crisis.



## **Marjolaine Aubé, President of the Union of Workers at the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Laval (CISSS de Laval-CSN)**

In the health network, more than three-quarters of employees are women. We're the ones holding up the health care system against all odds. We treat our patients like our families, but we want to be treated properly too. Just in terms of wages, there hasn't been progress in about 20 years. We are not even keeping up with the cost of living. Women make up the majority of low wage earners in the health care system. Yet, working in the health care system requires devotion. You really have to take it to heart. If you take my CISSS, we cover all aspects of the health network, called missions.

We take care of everyone from the time one is in the mother's womb to the end of their lives. We work in the family-child/youth mission, the hospital mission, the youth center mission, the mission for autistic patients with the rehabilitation centre for people with intellectual disabilities (CRDI), the rehabilitation mission with the Jewish Rehabilitation Hospital, the residential and long-term care centres (CHSLDs), the local community service centres and all the home care services, and more. All segments of society are represented and it is mostly women who take care of them.



I think that what we do is no longer valued. When I started in the network 34 years ago, my position was respected. Everyone envied me. I had a good wage and good working conditions. In all these years, I have not even had a ten dollar raise. I look at my co-workers and so many of them are single mothers. I myself raised two children without alimony, only with one single wage.

We have to start recognizing women's work, give them good conditions, a good wage so that we can continue to take care of all the people who are part of the population and who are like members of our family.

*(Photo: CSN)*

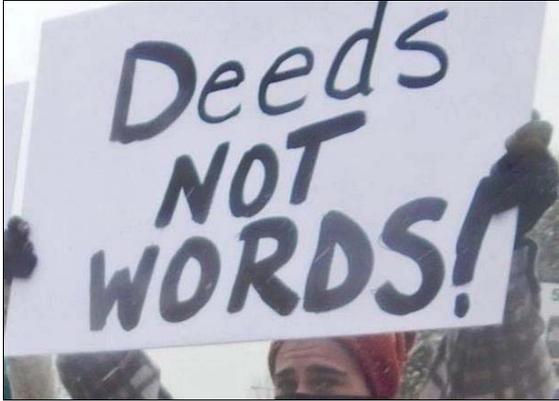
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## **Anne-Marie Taylor, Receiver/Tank Farm Operator, Calgary International Airport**

The airport is like a ghost town. Our aviation fueling area of the airport is run by a consortium of the major airlines and some of the cargo haulers. It controls the facilities and all the equipment. We are responsible for fueling all the planes, driving trucks, working in the office and in a below surface area called the tank farm.

In spite of the fact that these big companies are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the facilities, we as individual workers took on the issue of safety during the pandemic. I don't let any safety issues slide. I am a member of the Teamsters Union and was active in my union in the telecommunications industry.

Behind the scenes the consortium is calling the shots and there are constant attempts to erode our working conditions.



Health and safety conditions have been nonexistent until very recently. Our most vigilant employees have been women. Right from the beginning, a woman part-time employee at the tank farm set an example by wearing a mask. I brought in cleaning supplies and disinfected every possible surface. On our own some of us started wearing masks, but neither our company, nor the consortium, nor the government at that point made mask wearing mandatory. As the pandemic progressed, parents of some of our co-workers died from COVID-19, and later on

some of our co-workers and their spouses contacted COVID-19. At that point some safety procedures, some of which were not practical within our workspace, were brought in, and still no mask mandate.

We have contact with each other and other airport employees and with the truck drivers delivering fuel. Hundreds of truckers lost their jobs, and those still working deserve to be safe. I alerted all the truckers that I could when we had a tank farm worker who tested positive, so they could take precautions. I encouraged my co-workers to do the same. Every trucker was told until the employee who had COVID came back to work. That was at the time of the first case we had. Again, no responsibility was taken by our employer or the consortium! Finally some safety procedures were put in place.

It has only been in the last few weeks that a safety audit regarding COVID-19 has been put in place. Training courses have taken place on safety but in confined spaces, well into the pandemic, where the contract trainer was not even wearing a mask. Those of us who realize the necessity continue to lead by example, and will continue to do so.

What has also been helpful is the example set by Air Canada workers, who always follow the safety protocols. We interact with them on the tarmac and I am pretty sure that they helped to get the consortium to finally enforce stricter measures in our area. It shows how we all have to work together and stand up for each others' rights.



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## **Kathleen Mpulubusi, Edmonton Letter Carrier**

I work as a letter carrier, so I am speaking mainly about what happened in my depot. When the pandemic first hit, Canada Post (CPC) wasn't really taking it seriously. The union called for masks and social distancing from the beginning. Initially masking wasn't a huge issue, it was about getting things clean. Handling mail is a dirty job, there is so much paper dust, and our workplaces are filthy, never properly cleaned. The union demanded hand sanitizer and disinfectant at every work station, proper cleaning supplies, masks, gloves and a protocol for sanitizing our vehicles. CPC understood we would exercise our right to refuse unsafe work if necessary, as we have done before. Canada Post also agreed to our request to hire additional cleaners to come in during the day.

I am a member of the depot health and safety committee. We spent a lot of time talking to our

fellow workers about what we should be doing. Our facilities are quite crowded, particularly in the morning. The union proposed splitting up the working groups from two start times to four, with no overlap between shifts. We settled on a checkerboard arrangement so that when working at your case, you would not have anyone beside you or behind you.

In the plant, there were a lot more issues with cleaning and social distancing so measures included staggering coffee and lunch breaks, spacing people out in the equipment, and cleaning. Masks were not mandatory until August or September. We did have some shutdowns, especially in the plant, where they would bring in specialized cleaning crews, clean the plant and then send everyone back to work. But overall in Edmonton we have been relatively spared, compared, for example, to Toronto where they have very large outbreaks and a worker died.



The key factor in keeping us safe has been our local getting very proactive right from the beginning and forcing Canada Post to get serious about adopting protocols. Canada Post was looking at the dollar signs, and were not prepared to pay out to provide what we needed. For the future, we have shown the value of keeping our workplaces clean. The air is better, there is not as much dust.

I have been involved twice in my depot where we have organized a mass right to refuse unsafe work, and our local management knew we could do it again if needed. We have invoked this right over forced overtime, and also when Canada Post brought in a new double bundle delivery method where we were expected to sort mail while walking our route to reduce sortation time at the depot, lengthen the routes, and cut staff.

*(Photo: CUPW)*



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## **Laura Chesnik, Elementary Teacher, Co-Host of Education Is A Right and MLPC Candidate in Windsor, Ontario**

For our own mental health we need to make our No actually be No!

The decision of the Ford government to postpone March Break from March 15-19 to April 12-16 in Ontario was one more in a series of government decrees with which educators are being hit over the head day after day. There is no predicting what the government will do, as they refuse to involve the people concerned at any level. This trickles down into our schools as schedules, classes and routines are all upended from one day to the next. You cannot plan or predict -- as an individual or as a teacher or education worker or as a parent with kids -- when this is the situation. It leads to immense stress for us and the kids, and then makes our stress even more intense because we are worrying about our students. A lot of people are taking stress leaves as a result of having physical symptoms caused by this situation.

The government's main argument for the postponement of March Break was to "limit opportunities for congregation." They alleged that congregation outside the school is what has caused previous

spikes in COVID-19 cases in school-aged children. But where are the basic public health measures such as guaranteeing proper ventilation and mass testing -- not this targeted "wherever we decide" testing, but mass readily available testing? Where are minimum standards for distancing in schools? Where are the paid sick days so families can readily comply when they need to stay home when they or their children are symptomatic? Without providing these conditions, for the government to claim moving March Break was to keep COVID-19 out of our schools is disingenuous to say the least and, in my view, criminal when one considers that they are blaming the students and their families for the spike in cases instead of taking up their duties to the people.



Obviously, cancelling March break contributes to our stress as the break would have been a chance to stop and think. Parents are also at the mercy of decisions made without them, such as being forced to choose, at the height of the second wave, which learning model (face-to-face or virtual or paper packages) their children would participate in for the rest of the year. You can guess that many additional families chose virtual, which then led to classes being reorganized, students changing classes, bringing in new teachers and staff, etc...

In the face of all this, we are not going to let ourselves be victims of this virus or of our government's criminal indifference to our health and safety, including our mental health. There is no end in sight if we rely on the government or just reduce ourselves to complaining about how bad they are and waiting for an election. No means No! Educators are making demands for changes in our working conditions in our schools, such as proper PPE including N95 masks, proper testing, proper ventilation in each of our rooms not just the school as a whole. So far, we are being told that the school "meets or exceeds standards" without answering our specific questions so that we can have peace of mind or take measures.

Where demands are not being met or are out of the control of the school or the school board, refusing to accept what is unacceptable is more and more becoming a way to affirm our humanity. In this respect the starting point is our right to refuse to go along with things which are clearly unsafe. It is a matter of affirming our right to freedom of speech and conscience to take a stand for our own health and safety which upholds the rights of all to health and safety. As things move forward I think more and more teachers and education workers will find ways to say No! under these difficult circumstances. Taking sick leaves and doing some breathing exercises are not solving the problem. We are protecting our own mental health by taking up our social responsibility to make our No mean No!



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