



March 7, 2022

## 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 are two years into the COVID-19 pandemic and we're seeing the long-term effects of it. With the ongoing closure of schools and daycares, families have adjusted their work-life to take on caring for their children. The majority of this work has fallen on women and has led to the stalling of their career development due to them withdrawing from the labour force either partially or completely.

International Women's Day 2022 focuses on highlighting the critical importance of care work in our economy. The pandemic has exposed just how much work needs to be done in this critical industry. We join Canada's labour movement in calling for greater support for care workers and investments in Canada's care systems. We all require care at some point in our lives – it's a universal concept. From childcare to eldercare to caring for those with disabilities, care work impacts all of our lives. Not only do we need to expand the care economy and make it affordable and accessible for all Canadians, we need to value care work and treat it like the profession that it is. We encourage our local unions to participate in the [CLC's campaign](#) on care work.

The IBEW is proud of being an early pioneer for women in the labour movement. 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.

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

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Two weeks later, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council appealed for a general strike in support of the metal workers. The response was overwhelming. By 11 a.m., 30,000 union and non-union workers had walked off the job.

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”, were the first to walk off the job at the end of their shift. Their replacements didn’t show up, virtually shutting down all telecommunication in the city. These women later became members of IBEW Local 435.

The IBEW continues its advocacy work of promoting and supporting women in not only the trades but all industries where our women work. Recently, we were able to hold our first in-person conference in two years – our [2021 IBEW Canadian Women’s Conference](#). The energy and enthusiasm that radiates from our sisters at gatherings and conferences is second to none. In addition to our sisters coming together for connection, growth and leadership development, male allies were also in attendance. They participated in a variety of workshops to help them better understand the issues women continue to face and how they can be better advocates and support them.

I am very proud of the strong, unique, and proud IBEW sisters I have met throughout my career in the IBEW. I have witnessed the passion, dedication, and solidarity displayed by our IBEW sisters, particularly throughout this pandemic. They continue to exemplify the values of the IBEW in their workplaces, their unions and their communities.

Coast to Coast, our IBEW Local Unions are also continuing to build 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.

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.

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