

Women work hard.

And at the end of a lifetime of hard work – paid and unpaid – women deserve to retire in dignity and security.

Yet this is not the reality for many Canadian women.

Women still earn less than men, and are expected to shoulder unpaid responsibilities at home. Many experience interruptions in their career because of childbearing and caregiving. Many women work in non-standard, poorly-paid jobs, which offer little hope for a decent pension.

The wage gap at work follows women into retirement, resulting in high levels of poverty among senior women. In 2008, women aged 65 years and older on average received incomes that were 65% of those of men of the same age. In 2004, 7.3% of retired women lived in poverty, more than double the rate of retired men. An astounding 45.6% of single, divorced or widowed elderly women lived in poverty, according to a 2004 study.

Some think times have changed now that the majority of working-age women are on the job. But that isn't true at all.

Women still don't earn equal pay for work of equal value. Canadian women make 70.5 cents for every dollar men earn. As a result, they'll face challenges accumulating the same pension income as men. Indeed, women are told they need to save 8 to 10% more than men because they live longer through their retirement years.

Secondly, while expectations for working women have changed, caregiving expectations have not. Women still shoulder the bulk of unpaid caregiving work for children and seniors. In 2009, 72.9% of women with children under the age of 16 living at home were employed. In 2002, over 2 million Canadians provided personal care for seniors. Three-quarters of these caregivers were women.

The absence of affordable, publicly-funded child care and elder care has put working women in stressful and frustrating circumstances.

Equally stressful is the dominant role of women in low-quality, precarious work. 40% of women work in these kinds of jobs, and won't be able to accumulate much (if any) pension income.

Without question, Canadian women have made pension gains in recent decades. This is particularly true for women workers in the public sector, and women retirees accessing public pensions.

The number of working women with pension plans tripled from 1974 to 2004. During this period, almost all the increase in workplace pension plan membership came from women joining unions, and gaining decent pensions to boot.

But the vast majority of workers today (over 60%) don't have access to a workplace pension, so even women in good jobs can face pension challenges.

We can improve women's pension rights, and we can do it through pension activism.

Unions have been effective vehicles to fight for women's equality in pensions. There's no doubt about it, unions make a difference in women's lives.

The Canadian Labour Congress and its affiliates have been fighting hard to improve our public pension system. The CLC's "Retirement Security for Everyone!" campaign wants to double Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits, increase public pensions for poor seniors, and introduce a system of pension insurance.

These demands will help women increase their pension security, and get the dignified retirement they deserve. They will ensure no retiree, current or future, gets left behind.

Most of Canada's provincial finance ministers agree. They know the CPP is financially sound, a well-managed fund with low management fees, is fully indexed and transferable between provinces and territories.

Despite the consensus, the federal finance minister says now is not the time to expand the CPP. Instead, he has announced the establishment of a Pooled Registered Pension Plans (PRPPs) that people can join. It's a voluntary plan, and these funds are not matched by employers. They would be managed by banks and private financial firms, who charge the highest management fees in the world.

In June 2011, provincial, territorial and federal finance ministers will meet again to discuss the expansion of the CPP. Women need to mobilize to convince the federal government that expanding the CPP offers the best chance to reduce poverty among senior women and guarantee them dignity in retirement.



**With your help, we can win.
And here's how...**

Call your Member of Parliament. Tell them you support the plan to expand CPP. Tell them you will not vote for any candidate in the next election unless they support doubling CPP benefits. While you're at it, send the same message to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, and Minister of State (Finance) Ted Menzies.

Call your provincial representative. Ask them to support the plan to double the CPP. Thank them if they are already on side.

Talk to your co-workers in your workplace and ask them to call their MPs and provincial government representatives. Ensure this campaign is discussed at your union meeting.

Write a letter to your local newspaper. Call your local radio station. Show your support for expanding CPP by posting to the blogs you follow.

Find us on Facebook!

login to www.facebook.com then search for "Retirement Security for Everyone"

 Like  everybody likes this.

Follow the campaign on canadianlabour.ca to get the latest information and take part in the latest action.



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A Call for Dignity in Retirement
for Women

