

LEAF *let*

The newsletter of West Coast LEAF
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Women's suffrage: *Has the war been won?*

by Sarah Hentschel and Alison Brewin

From 1916 to 1960, women across Canada fought hard and were successful in winning the right to vote. The right was won by Euro-Canadian women firstly in Manitoba in 1916 and lastly in Quebec in 1940. First Nations women and men only won the right to vote without giving up their status under the Indian Act in 1960. Despite these achievements, women are still largely under-represented in legislatures across the country and Parliament in Ottawa. Currently, only 19 of the 79 MLAs in British Columbia are women.

Why is this? There are a number of socio-economic factors that influence the election of women, not the least of which is the continuing primary role women play in family care-giving. Women are also less able to access the financial resources necessary for electoral politics. In addition, the style of the parliamentary system as partisan, adversarial and aggressive is challenging for the few women who do get elected. While some women have no difficulty with this and many men find it challenging, the latter reality is one that is generally more suitable to male behavioral norms than female.

But regardless of socio-economic realities, the factor contributing to women's under-representation in elected politics that can be amended for the better through law reform is a structural one: the electoral system itself. There is statistical evidence from around the world showing that countries with at least an element of proportionality in their electoral systems have a larger number of women in their Parliaments and governments.

Federally and provincially in Canada we have an electoral system commonly referred to as "first past the post" (FPTP) which does not translate votes into seats in a proportional way.

Many democracies around the world that have FPTP are making changes to their systems and opting for a modified or pure proportional system. West Coast LEAF is exploring the benefits of a modified proportional representation system such as can be found in Germany and New Zealand. In those countries, at the federal level, each citizen gets two votes. The first vote is cast, as in our system, for a person representing a party from one's own constituency (which preserves the local element of our current system). The second vote is cast for a particular party.

The votes that are cast for a particular party are then tabulated and each party may select the number of candidates representing their proportion of the vote. The parties can keep their list of candidates closed or open (public). A closed list is one provided by the party and in which the top names are elected first – the bottom names

on the list are less likely to be elected. An open list allows voters to pick the names on the list and vote for them. Statistics indicate that women are more likely to be chosen by their party (from a closed list) than by the electorate at large (open list).

Here in B.C., the government has constituted a Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, a random draw of 160 non-partisan citizens from all over B.C. tasked with considering changes to the provincial FPTP system. Their mandate is to assess the current electoral system and make a recommendation to the provincial government to either retain the existing system, or change it. If they recommend change, that change must be consistent with The Constitution of Canada, and The Westminster Parliamentary system.

West Coast LEAF will be making an oral submission on May 29, 2004 in Vancouver to members of the Assembly. The focus of our submission will be on sections 15 and 28 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the importance of developing an electoral system that allows women's full and active participation.

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INSIDE West Coast LEAF



WELCOME TO ADDY KGOMO, Office Coordinator. Before joining West Coast LEAF, Addy was an Executive Assistant to the CEO of the Healthy Heart Society. She brings knowledge and skills acquired from working with a variety of community organizations. Addy replaces Doina Buculei who, after three years, left to pursue other opportunities. Thanks to Doina for her many contributions to West Coast LEAF.



WELCOME TO AISHA SYED, our new Program Assistant who will provide support and coordination of all our education and community programs. She replaces Interim Education Coordinator, Amber Dean. Thanks to Amber for her great work and congratulations on her acceptance to a Ph.D. program at the University of Alberta.



GOODBYE TO CHRIS BASQUE, Fund Development Coordinator. Chris has only been with West Coast LEAF a short time, but has been a tremendous boost to our fund development program. We wish her well in her new endeavours and look forward to her continued participation in West Coast LEAF as a member of the Fund Development Group.

IN VICTORIA

West Coast LEAF has been hosting a Person's Day Breakfast in Victoria for nearly a decade, but the organization has begun an effort to bring program activity to the island as well. This spring, Program Director Alison Brewin met with a small group of law students interested in helping West Coast LEAF bring its Family Law Legal Aid affidavit campaign to Victoria. The students arranged a mail out to community services in town, and hope to promote the program throughout the coming academic year.

In addition, the program Transforming Our Future: Legal Strategies in the 'New Era' will be held in Victoria in June. Transforming Our Future was designed to provide front-line community workers with an understanding of equality rights and practical skills for identifying and building legal strategies for change.

Alison will also be speaking in Victoria over the May long weekend at St. John's Anglican church as part of their discussions on the issue of same sex marriage. If you are interested in these programs, or others, please call West Coast LEAF's toll-free line 1-866-737-7716 to register.

IN KAMLOOPS

West Coast LEAF has spread its activities to Kamloops. This spring we were

lucky enough to have two social work practicum students, hosted by the Kamloops Women's Centre, working exclusively on spreading the word about our Family Law Legal Aid campaign. Cathy Warren and Kathy Starzyk have spoken to every social service agency in town, learning a great deal about the inaccessibility of legal advice in B.C. Their report describes a day in the life of a women struggling with the court system, and again highlights the key role legal aid plays in many women's lives.

IN NANAIMO

Nanaimo has been one of the most active West Coast LEAF centres outside of Vancouver for many years now. Adding to their annual Breakfast, Nanaimo members and community activists have begun developing a Nanaimo-area version of No Means No. Education Coordinator Amber Dean trained a group of adult and teen volunteers who hope to be presenting workshops in the next school year.

IN NELSON

Amber also made a trip to Nelson this spring, training a small, dedicated crew of adult and teen volunteers. No Means No workshops will be available in Nelson to elementary schools in September.

West Coast
LEAF
Around the
province

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Thursday, June 17, 2004 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

YWCA Hotel Residence, 733 Beatty Street, Vancouver

Guest Speakers: Frances Kelly – Lawyer and Junie Desil – Community Activist

Frances Kelly and Junie Desil will speak about the impact of cuts to social programs in BC on single mothers and the legal strategies that West Coast LEAF is preparing to address them.

Join us for light refreshments, mingle with friends and learn more about the work of West Coast LEAF. Call (604) 684-8772 or email info@westcoastleaf.org to RSVP by June 11.



Thank you to our Equality Breakfast contributors

West Coast LEAF's 17th Annual Equality Breakfast held on March 5, 2004 was another tremendous success. Thanks to all our guests, sponsors, in-kind contributors and volunteers who helped make the event possible.

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It's All Fun & Games	Trees Organic Coffee		
Just Ladies Fitness			
Kidlets Clothing Company			

Special thanks to those who offered their time, services and talents to promote or otherwise make the event a success: Sign language interpreter Susan Masters for her services at the event and to Pete Digiboy for his design and production services. Thanks also to all the event volunteers, Breakfast Committee members, West Coast LEAF board members, and others who helped with ticket sales, soliciting auction items, door prizes or otherwise supported the event.

Nanaimo Fundraising Breakfast

West Coast LEAF's annual Nanaimo Fundraising Breakfast was held February 28, 2004. Thanks to all the community volunteers and supporters who helped make that event a success.

DOOR-PRIZE CONTRIBUTORS

Clarins @ The Bay	The Dorchester Hotel Restaurant
Meg Rintoul	The Quilted Duck
Sucha Ollek, Lawyer	Thora Howell
The Bookstore on Bastion St.	

Thanks to the following volunteers who donated their time, energy and talents to promote or otherwise make the event a success: Donna Lynn Bolanger ♦ Diane Brennan ♦ Terre Flower ♦ Charlotte Faust ♦ Maria Gomes ♦ Barb Hourston ♦ Thora Howell ♦ Leonard Krog ♦ Joy Leach ♦ Signy Madden ♦ Meg Rintoul ♦ Sharon Speevak ♦ Jane Templeman ♦ Sandy Thomson ♦ Jan Thorsen ♦ Vera-Marie Wolfe ♦ Susan Yates

Thank you!

Special thanks to those donors who give to West Coast LEAF every month. Your contributions increase the sustainability of our work.

Thanks to the following funders who have recently made grants to West Coast LEAF to assist with upcoming projects:

- BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch
- The Simon Fraser University FREDA Centre
- HRDC Summer Career Placements Program
- VanCity Savings Credit Union
- Vancouver Bar Association

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* Due to space limitations donors contributing via Vancouver Breakfast ticket purchases are not included.

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LEAF is a national organization committed to promoting women's equality before Canadian courts, government agencies and human rights commissions; and to providing public legal education on the issue of equality rights for women. West Coast LEAF is supported by:



WEST COAST LEAF
 (LEGAL EDUCATION AND ACTION FUND)

YES, you can make a difference!

- become a LEAF member
- make a donation
- volunteer your time

Are you interested in volunteering with LEAF? What is your area of interest?

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