In honour of Loretta Saunders

By DARRELL LEROUX

Trigger warning: this article deals with the death of Loretta Saunders, an Inuk woman who was found murdered on February 26 in Salisbury, New Brunswick.

I woke up early this morning, unable to fall back asleep. As you may imagine, the past 10 days or so have been extremely difficult, for a number of reasons that I never could have predicted.

After hearing about Loretta's murder, I walked home, the loneliest walk of my life, braving onlookers who were no doubt puzzled at the tears streaming from my eyes and the sounds emanating from my body. I came home, lay in bed, and ignored all attempts to communicate with others for several hours, I couldn't move. I ended up speaking with a few friends and family members before falling asleep from exhaustion, my heart heavy with sorrow and my head aching.

I'm still in shock, at the news, and especially of her final resting place. That image hurts beyond anything I could say in words.

And I refuse for that to be the last image I have of Loretta, given her remarkable spirit.

Even as I write this, the tears wrack my body and the letters on my keyboard blur, none of this seems real. I was always so worried about Loretta. She presented all of the vulnerabilities to which Indigenous women are prone, through no fault of her own. I read her thesis proposal last night and was reminded of how deeply she was aware of being a product of a Canadian society intent on destroying and eliminating Indigenous peoples. That last word, "eliminating," may seem extreme to some, but it is a fair characterisation of the way in which...

Lying in a ditch along the Trans-Canada Highway, I simply cannot understand how.

So many friends want to discuss the details of the case with me, they want to dissect it like they were the lead detectives on a drama. I care. I want to personally promote the incarceration and elimination of Indigenous peoples. I care. But to read the columns of Loretta's death. What is the world makes somebody think that I want to listen to them piece together Loretta's murder. "Darrelly, do you think they read me?" you might ask. This is not a crime drama, you are dead. Murdered. What is wrong with those people?

I've been thinking. If it's not friends acting like sleights, it's the media acting like buzzards, circling and picking over the bone...more than five minutes go by between the police announcement of Loretta's murder and my inbox and email being filled with requests.

If you're reading this, take it as my statement, a tribute to Loretta, and a call out to her death. What do I know is that our society has discarded Indigenous women and girls in such the same manner for generations. But not for some. For some, it's a race...for some, it's a pass...for some, it's being ignored. But even in our own society, we cannot allow her to be ignored, we cannot let her story be lost.

Co-operative Atlantic Newsroom

Romana Sehic, a Fredericton-based group home worker, spoke about the need for pay equity for group home workers at Bread & Roses with the Alex Bailey Swing Band: an International Women's Day Event, Workers Appreciation Night and Fundraiser for Pay Equity on March 13 at Conception Arc in Fredericton. Photo by John Albert Martin.

Group home workers may see pay increase, pay equity advocates demand more

organized at group homes.

"We work with our hearts. Group home workers make a great living. We work for just about minimum wage. It is hard to demand fair wages because we are considered not to have the time. We work a shift and then must go to another. It's not a rude awakening when we find that we work $10 an hour when your client who we take care of makes $14.17 an hour. Anyone earning more than $14.17 an hour was considered to be already paid fairly! Clearly something was wrong with the process. Pay equity...." says Sehic.

Romana Sehic works at a group home in Fredericton that specializes in caring for men with traumatic brain injuries. She is also the President of the Council of Group Home Unions that represents a number of CUPE locals.

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - The government of New Brunswick quietly released results of a long-awaited pay equity study for workers in group homes (also known as community residences) on March 19. Adult caregivers in group homes who make an average $11.96/hour will have their pay adjusted to $14.80/hour within four years.

Danielle Scott, a Saint John-based group home worker, and pay equity advocates were among those gathered at the Women's Equality Branch in Fredericton to hear the New Brunswick government's pay equity adjustments for group home workers.

Scott says, "I'm disappointed that the wage increases for group home workers are as low as they are. We are not really that much further ahead when you consider inflation and the cost of living. We could very well be making near the minimum wage in five years."

The NB Coalition for Pay Equity, which has active committees in Fredericton, Moncton and Edmundston and volunteers across the province, is working towards adequate legislation for pay equity, which would guarantee equal pay for work that may be different but of the same value. "Right now, too many predominantly female jobs are underpaid," says Johanne Perron, executive director of the NB Coalition for Pay Equity.

The pay adjustment amount, if any, a group home worker will receive depends on their current wage rate, which may be higher or lower than the average hourly rate and/or "fair wage," according to a statement from the NB Coalition for Pay Equity.

"Alarm bells went off when we found out the government released the results for transition hour increases. We and the home workers in June 2012. The 'fair wage' rate calculated for the eight female-dominated jobs was just $14.17 an hour. Anyone earning more than $14.17 an hour was considered to be already paid fairly! Clearly something was wrong with the process. Pay equity..." says Sehic.

Romana Sehic works at a group home in Fredericton that specializes in caring for men with traumatic brain injuries. She is also the President of the Council of Group Home Unions that represents a number of CUPE locals.