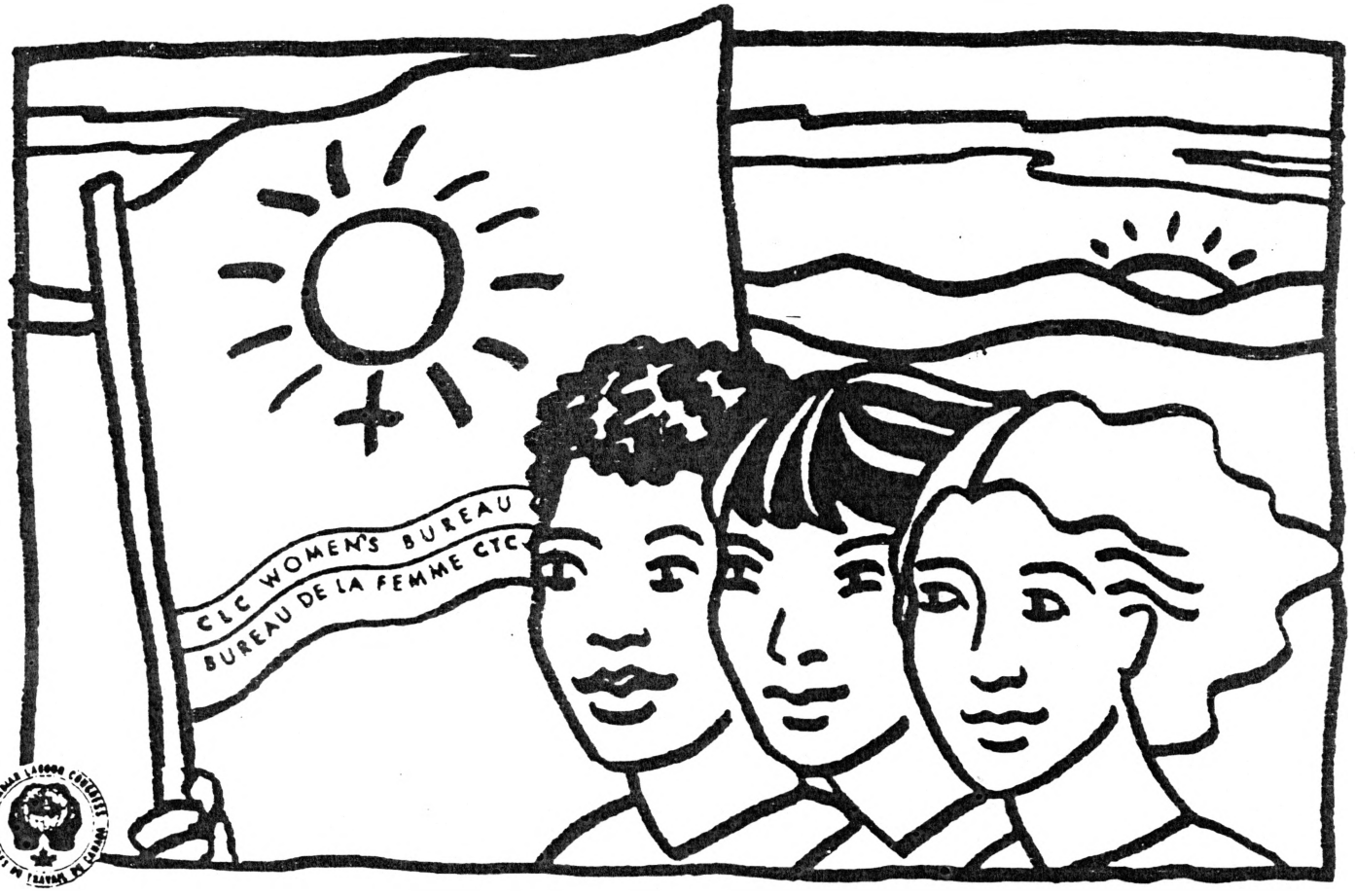
Empowering Union Women:



Toward the year 2000

Report from the 7th Biennial CLC Women's Conference
Ottawa, November 19, 1990

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Purpose

As we move into a new decade and toward the year 2000, it is important to take stock of our progress in the struggle for women's equality, and to prepare for the future. What do women want unions to look like in the year 2000? How will women achieve power? In alliance with whom?

In plenary sessions and in workshops, participants will discuss the response to women's demands for equality over the past decades and will assess the impact of organizing efforts to increase women's participation in unions.

The conference will focus on developing strategies to ensure increased empowerment through collective action in our unions, in the workplace and within our communities.

Programme

Wednesday, November 14, 1990

4:00 p.m. **Registration**
7:30 p.m.

4:00 p.m. **Orientation**
6:30 p.m.

7:30 p.m. **Conference Opening**
Welcoming Remarks
Nancy Riche
Executive Vice-President, CLC

Greetings from the OFL

8:00 p.m. **Opening Address**
Shirley G.E. Carr
President, CLC

"Celebrating Our Achievements"
Panel presentation and discussion

9:00 p.m. **Social/Cash Bar**

Thursday, November 15, 1990

8:30 a.m. **Late Registration**

9:00 a.m. **Guest Speaker**
Audrey McLaughlin
Leader, New Democratic Party

10:00 a.m. **Women and Unions: The Challenge Ahead**
Panel Presentation and discussion

12:00 *Lunch*

Thursday, November 15, 1990 (cont'd.)

1:30 p.m. **Working Groups**
5:00 p.m.

8:30 p.m. **Social/Cash Bar**
Cultural presentation

Friday, November 16, 1990

9:00 a.m. **Working Groups** (cont'd.)
12:00

12:00 *Lunch*

1:30 p.m. **Working Groups** (cont'd.)
5:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 17, 1990

9:00 a.m. **Plenary Session**
Summary and Recommendations

11:30 a.m. **Women, Protest and Power**
Judy Rebick
President of National Action Committee on the Status of Women

International Guests

12:30 p.m. **Farewell and Adjournment**
Nancy Riche
Executive Vice-President, CLC

"We're the women of the union and we've just begun to fight."

Union women have clearly come a long way; we are now an ever-growing force. We are transforming our unions in both outlook and structure.

Identifying the issues, gathering strength and moving forward, we realize that change towards equality does not happen overnight.

This conference has provided a crucial impetus to the further empowerment of women.

In our workshops, we talked about power and empowerment: What is it? How do we get it? How do we keep it?

How the workshop participants defined power often depended on their own experiences, both as women and as trade unionists. Some were initially uncomfortable even talking about the issue, because power was something they had not discussed before.

For others, the concept of power was frightening, evoking images of control, domination, and physical violence; something masculine, something negative, something external to their experience. Many questioned whether power was even something women should want.

But when asked to look at both the positive and negative aspects of power, we discovered that power indeed has two sides. If power can be defined as domination and oppression, it can also be defined as influence, confidence, and the ability to control one's own life and one's own destiny. Perhaps most important, having power gives women the ability to make positive changes, bringing us one step closer to our goal of equality.

After considering these issues, many participants came to the realization that power is not negative or positive in itself, but that it can be used in a negative or a positive way. It was also recognized that there is a need to change the existing power structure, which favours those who are rich, white and male. The inequality perpetuated by this power structure is doubly felt by our sisters who are visible minority, native or immigrant women, disabled women or lesbians.

Thus, there were aspects of power we wanted to keep, and aspects we wanted to change. For the most part, we wanted to change the abusive and manipulative aspects of power, and the traditional notion that if you give power to one person, it means you're taking it from another. They wanted to keep the power of self-esteem, the power to make positive change, and the power of collective action.

Most agreed that women tend to use power differently from men. Women's power is more likely to be shared, rather than hoarded. At the same time, there was concern that not all women subscribe to this brave new world of power-sharing. Some talked about women who were not supportive of other women; others mentioned political figures like Margaret Thatcher, who has used power to promote policies that go against the interests of women and working people.

We also discovered that power is not just something for the workplace, the union, or the political arena. Many women talked about power and powerlessness in their own personal lives; about their inability to convince their spouses to share domestic chores; and about family resistance to their union involvement.

In many of the workshops, sisters talked about the difference between "power" and "empowerment." One definition was that "power is something that's taken, while empowerment is something that's given." Once the concept of empowerment was fully understood, there was a consensus that when women have power, they should use it to empower others.

The workshop participants told of their own experiences in gaining power and empowering others. We hear stories about women running for union office for the first time, often in a male-dominated workplace — and about women who quit their former jobs to enter non-traditional occupations. One women said she first felt a sense of power when she took karate lessons: developing her physical abilities gave her confidence in other areas as well.

Another woman illustrated the concepts of power and empowerment with a story about her 12 year old daughter, who felt her school was not giving her an adequate education, and that she was being put down by her teachers. The youngster called the office of Ontario Premier Bob Rae, and told a member of his staff about her problem. A few days later, the Premier called her mother, and suggested a school she should contact.

Both mother and daughter were empowered by the experience. They learned that if you believe in

your own power, you can have the ability to change your life.

There was some controversy at the conference about the decision to place male delegates in a male-only workshop. It was clear that many of the men, and some of the women, felt the workshops should be integrated to allow the men to hear women's concerns. Others felt strongly that men need to talk with other men about their role in the struggle for women's equality, and that women should be able to deal with the often-painful issues of power and powerlessness amongst themselves.

While the controversy generated some tensions, it also allowed both male and female participants to deal with the larger question of the role of men in the empowerment of women. No consensus was reached on the issue of male-only workshops, but it was roundly debated. If there was one area of agreement, it was that separate men's and women's workshops — or women's conferences for that matter — would no longer be necessary once women achieve full equality.

The men's workshop also discussed a number of issues relevant to women's experience, including the nature of sexism and sexual harassment.

There is no change without resistance. Women are taking collective action and becoming empowered, and there have been reactions against us. We must have the tools to deal with this backlash, so it does not hinder our progress toward equality.

There were many examples of backlash mentioned in the workshops. They included:

- Violence, or threats of violence.
- Funding cutbacks for women's programmes and other equality initiatives.
- The ongoing attack on reproductive choice.
- The organized political backlash of groups such as REAL Women and the manipulation of so-called "Family Values".
- The divisive way in which some employers have implemented employment equity, so that it is destined for failure.
- Racism.
- Homophobia.
- The repeated attacks on pay equity by the business community.
- Overt hostility toward women's fight for equality, such as the male reaction to a campaign against date rape by women students at Queen's University.

Trade union women are well positioned to lead the fight against this backlash. We already have in place the necessary support networks and organizational clout to bring about change. Women who are already active in their unions must reach out to their sisters and empower more women to accept the challenge.

It is also crucial for the labour movement to organize the unorganized. The fastest-growing sector of our workforce is the largely non-union service sector, and the majority of these workers are women.

In order to do that, we must develop organizing strategies specifically aimed at women workers. We must also make a conscious effort to recruit and train women organizers, who have a first-hand understanding of the problems working women face.

Some of the other strategies suggested in the workshops included:

- Education — We know that one of the main components of backlash is ignorance, and one of our main tools is education. From informal networking to the use of leaflets, videos and newsletters, we must get our message across with better, clearer information, in language that is understood at every level.
  We must also obtain and communicate more statistical information about women in the labour movement. We must find out the percentages of women in our unions, and the statistics on the number of those women who hold union positions, attend conventions, and participate in education programmes.
- Collective bargaining — Union women have had some success improving their situation in the workplace through the collective bargaining process. We must step up our efforts to ensure that contract language deals effectively with such issues as sexual harassment, same-sex spousal benefits, child care, women's health and safety issues, and leave for family emergencies.
- Public awareness — More work must be done to focus attention on the issues that affect women. We must generate more positive stories in the media about women in unions and in society.
- Union structures — Women's committees must continue to be established by unions at all levels, not just for expediency, but as legitimate, recognized elements of the decision-making process. These committees must be given adequate budgets to carry out their activities.
  But developing women's committees is not enough to lift the structural and systemic barriers that prevent women from having equal power in their unions.

We must review the structure of our union executive boards and other decision-making bodies, and find ways of making those structures more representative of our women members. We must also review such things as the times and locations of union meetings, to determine whether they present a barrier, particularly to women with children.

- Coalition-building — Union women are not the only ones in society who are fighting for women's equality. We must join forces with other progressive organizations, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, to gain support for our goals.

We need look no further than our home lives as children to see women role models as power figures. Mothers and grandmothers were often the decision-makers, the problem solvers and the financial managers. But the experiences and abilities of women are not always recognized in the union, the workplace and the community.

Women feel a lack of control over their own lives. Barriers making it difficult for us to feel or use power include:

- sexism, racism and homophobia;
- a lack of access to quality, affordable child care;
- a lack of respect from men and other women;
- a negative portrayal of women in the media;
- the right to choose to have children, or not to have children;
- violence against women in the home, in the workplace and on the streets;
- physical and verbal harassment;
- pornography;
- fear of power, because of a negative image of power figures;
- unequal division of tasks in the home;
- lack of leave for family responsibilities and families in crisis;
- lack of education and skills and lack of access to education and training.

Change can come about in many ways, from simple acts like voting to broader challenges, like changing deeply-entrenched attitudes.

The union movement gives us tools, such as support networks, to implement change, not only in the workplace, but in society as a whole. Women's committees, for example, are the backbone of the progress made in the labour movement.

We must also actively work to empower ourselves and other women, by running for election in our unions and at all levels of government. As voters, we must work to elect more women to public office, and support candidates who share our goals.

We must use our support networks to continue the fight for better pay equity legislation and affirmative action programmes; for child care, paid maternity leave and family responsibility leave; for the elimination of sexist language and against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

We must demand better access to education, including consciousness-raising courses and skills training, not only in unions but also in the schools. We must ensure that the education of our children reflects equality, starting in kindergarten.

Women's conferences, such as this, charge our batteries because they give us strength and optimism. We have to put this energy to work. We need action: locally, regionally and nationally.

We must:

- speak out — go to union and community meetings and be heard;
- support women in positions of power at all levels;
- get involved in our children's education;
- say "no" to sexist, racist or homophobic jokes;
- support "No Means No" campaigns on university campuses;
- set guidelines to deal with violence against women, harassment, discrimination, filing complaints;
- have an ombudsperson to deal with complaints of harassment at CLC functions;
- develop CLC publications on women's issues;
- encourage participation of lesbians and native, immigrant, visible minority and disabled women at all union functions.

Many of the issues we have discussed at this conference have been around for decades, but the difference now is our growing determination to exercise our power to bring about change.

"We're the women of the union and we've just begun to fight."

Nancy Riche

Executive Vice-President

Canadian Labour Congress

I'm very pleased to welcome all of you to the 7th Biennial CLC Women's Conference. (This is an easy crowd: all you have to do is say "welcome" and they applaud!)

For some people in this room, this will be the seventh women's conference they have attended. Some people in this room organized the first conference. Some organized the things that came before.

This is going to be a night of firsts. You are going to hear from women who had been the first in their field, in their careers, in their political careers in the trade union movement.

It is important that we start the 7th Biennial Women's Conference with celebration. Because, even in the midst of perhaps the greatest backlash women in this country have seen, there are some things to celebrate. The stories of our union sisters, our pioneers, are among those things. This is our history.

The theme of this conference is called: "Empowerment to the year 2000." We are still trying to be gentle. Once you get empowerment, you get power, and there you go! We should have skipped right to the Power part!

We have a long head table here and some of you recognize all the faces. Some of you who are attending the women's conference for the first time may not recognize all of the faces. But I know when you leave tonight, you'll know that all of those faces belong to women who have led the way for us — for you and me and our children, and our grandchildren.

I have a number of introductions and I am going to make them throughout the night. But I would like to ask the CLC Women's Committee to stand up. I'm not going to introduce them. They are large, they are many, they are the best.

Let me first call upon one of our first women of firsts to bring greetings on behalf of the Ontario Federation of Labour. Her first started with being the first women in CUPE to go from a secretary to a staff representative position. Then the first ever, to date, full time office of the Ontario Federation of Labour and currently the first women secretary-treasurer of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Sister Julie Davis.

Julie Davis

Secretary-Treasurer

Ontario Federation of Labour

On behalf of the officers and staff of the Ontario Federation of Labour, I'm very happy to welcome you here tonight to NDP Ontario!

September 6th, as you all know, we elected the first NDP government in the history of Ontario. The first we hope in a long line of provinces electing NDP governments — dry runs you might say for the big one — the federal election in 1992-93 where we will elect the first NDP government federally — and — the first woman Prime Minister in the history of Canada — Audrey McLaughlin.

Funny isn't it, prior to September 6th, when I made remarks like that, we would have all clapped and cheered — but seriously — not many of us would have really believed it possible, with the possible exception of me — but then as anyone who knows me — knows I believe in Santa Claus and when you get to the part in the story of Peter Pan, that if we all clap, maybe Tinker Bell won't die — well, I always clapped.

However, as important to me as winning the government, is the fact that we elected another first when we elected the largest number of women to any parliament in the history of Canada — with 19 of them being in the NDP caucus. The fact that over half of the total of 74 members we elected have strong trade union ties and backgrounds, making our government truly the most representative of working people in the history of Ontario — maybe in the history of Canada.

Remaining true to our Party's drive for gender parity — 11 of the 25 cabinet ministers are women — six of whom come from the trade union movement.

At a conference like this one, it's important to take just a few moments to reflect on how we got to this important point in history.

A few weeks ago looking through some old files, I came across an OFL women's conference report from 1966. That report outlined the barriers that women were facing in achieving equality and the solutions to removing those barriers.

One of the solutions identified was for women to become politically active and become leaders within their locals and within the broader labour movement. The chair of that conference was Sister Grace Hartman, who later became president of CUPE, and one of the workshop recorders was Sister Shirley Carr who, as we all know, is now president of the CLC. These women have had a tremendous impact on shaping the labour movement over the last two decades.

A decade from now, the new leaders of our movement are those who are attending women's conferences like this one. A number of you here are already today's leadership and a number of you here will go on to become the union leadership of the future. You will build the labour movement of tomorrow.

This conference will enable you to assess where you are now and plan strategies for that future. Planning that will enable us to use our greatest strength — our members — most effectively and ensure that we are not driven by the daily crises.

Part of that planning will be political action.

Today we are poised on the brink of a new political reality for Ontario. On November 20, a new session of government will begin and I have no doubt that the 11 women in cabinet will ensure that women's issues are in the forefront of the government's agenda.

Many of these women are trade unionists who at one time began on their road to activism by participating in women's conferences as you are today.

Frances Lankin, who I affectionately call Sister Minister, is Minister of Management Board and Government Services — a provincial negotiator for OPSEU and, at one time, the equal opportunity co-ordinator for OPSEU and a member of the OFL Women's Committee.

Anne Swarbrick, who is Minister for Women's Issues, was executive assistant at the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region and a member of the OFL Women's Committee.

Evelyn Gigantes, Minister of Health, was NUPGE's national representative (women's issues) and a member of the CLC Women's Committee.

Shirley Coppen, Minister without Portfolio, and Chief Government Whip (she describes this as being chief shop steward for the Legislature) was an RNA and a member of SEIU and also president of the Welland and District Labour Council.

Shelley Wark-Martyn, Minister of Revenue, was a social worker and a member of CUPE. She has also been an active member of the ONDP Women's Committee before becoming MPP for Port Arthur.

Zanana Akande, Minister for Community and Social Services, a school principal, active in the Federation of Women Teachers' Association of Ontario and the first Black woman in the history of Ontario to hold a seat in the Legislature and to be appointed to a cabinet post.

It's important I think to understand that our participation in politics is not just something we do because it's nice — it is quite simply essential if we are to build the kind of better world to which we and our movement are committed.

A world that gives priority to eradicating hunger and to housing the homeless and yes, a world where women and men are treated equal — regardless of their race — or creed — or sexual orientation and where women have control over and own their bodies from the skin in.

There is a power in women that cannot and will not be stilled.

We do have the ability by working together with our sisters in the community and within our unions to indeed change the world.

The hand that rocks the cradle can make a ballot — sign a union card — write convention resolutions — sign cabinet documents and yes indeed, run this country.

In closing, let me congratulate Penni Richmond and the CLC Women's Committee on their planning and hard work. These conferences are so important for the continued growth of our unions and for the empowerment of the delegates.

I know from my personal experiences — unions who build strong women, build strong unions — or put another way, strong women build strong unions.

Shirley G. E. Carr

President

Canadian Labour Congress

It is a genuine pleasure for me to be here with you today as we open the 7th Canadian Labour Congress National Women's Conference. A record number of you have registered for what I believe will be a tremendously successful event, an important step forward in our uncompleted journey towards equality. I can feel the energy!

I think it is still early enough in the history of our struggle for equal status for me to greet my sisters here as pioneers: I like to think of us as building civilization together in the Tory wilderness. In this spirit I must salute two friends who have truly earned the right to that title: Sister Grace Hartman, and Sister Huguette Plamondon, the first woman to serve on the CLC Executive Council. Please welcome these ground-breaking union women!

It is my duty to try to set the tone for our conference; that is what keynote addresses are meant to do. But this is no easy task. Our theme is power and empowerment in the 1990's, a hopeful concept, but one which will require every ounce of creativity, commitment and solidarity that we possess if we are to make it a reality. I am an optimist by nature — I've had to be — but I know only too well how hard one has to work to justify one's optimism, particularly in these grim times. I want to share with you my sense of hope and confidence. But to do so, I must also share my anger and frustration at the slow pace of change, and my grief for the victims of prejudice, discrimination and hatred.

To know where we're going, we need to know where we've been, and assess where we are now. To move ahead, we need to determine what barriers remain, and then work together to remove them. That requires power; and, since power is not likely to be handed to us, we need to empower ourselves. The purpose of this conference is to collectively explore ways and means of doing this.

In the past two decades, women have certainly made significant gains.

- Maternity leave is now enshrined in law and in collective agreements. As a result of a Supreme Court decision since our last conference, men have access to parental leave, which is very important; but women's right to maternity leave has become clear and stronger in law.
- Just last week, a decision in the Supreme Court of Ontario made illness related to sexual harassment a legitimate claim under WCB! This is a tremendous victory for all of us. A victory made possible by the hard work, the determination of women across Canada to fight against the degradation of sexual harassment.
- Equality is recognized in the Charter and in human rights legislation — also hard-fought for gains.
- Advisory councils on the status of women prod provincial and federal governments. Employment equity, not fully realized by any means, is nevertheless well launched, as is pay equity.

But, in many ways, we haven't come a long way — sisters. Twenty years ago, when the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was published, women earned 60 cents for every dollar a man earned. Today, that amount has risen — to 66 cents! Abortion, a criminal offence then, is about to be made a criminal offence again. Isn't that absolutely unbelievable?

We have a government in power which has cut back funding for battered women's shelters; cut off support for women's publications; broken its promise to establish a national child care policy; and by means of the free trade agreement, enlarged the minimum-wage service sector ghetto. It has refused to institute mandatory measures to enforce employment equity. Retrogressive economic policies, which have now led to a made-in-Canada recession, have accelerated the feminization of poverty: the number of working poor women in Canada increased by 160.4% between 1971 and 1986, compared to a 28.3% increase in the number

of working poor men. The deliberate erosion of the social safety net by the Tories has hit women hard, and aboriginal women, visible minority women, disabled women and poor women, have been hit the hardest.

Violence against women continues unchecked, whether this violence is verbal (the epidemic of campus sexism, for example) or physical (the Montreal murders, or the scores of women killed in domestic assaults or on the street). The government expresses its concern through platitudes. But this concern appears to have no substance — they have ignored the calls of women and men in Canada to establish December 6 as an offical day of commemoration for the victims of such violence. That, too, is incomprehensible.

Yet there is, I believe, a silver lining in this terrible cloud. The New Democratic Party is rising in the polls, and has a woman leader. Ontario has an NDP government, one openly and proudly committed to equality and to addressing women's concerns, such as pay equity.

A significant, unprecedented discontent with the old ways and the old values is evident all over the country.

Coalitions are springing up, unionists, and native people and women and environmentalists and visible minority and disabled people, community organizations are joining together to oppose oppression and exploitation and waste. Concerted action is winning back some of our losses; funding for women's shelters has been partially restored, for example, after a campaign of sit-ins and publicity.

Women are joining unions at a much faster rate than men, and our presence in the labour movement is being increasingly felt in terms of policy, collective bargaining demands and day-to-day operations. Mulroney, watch out — Canadian trade union women, like all Canadians, are mad as hell and we're not going to take it any more. And Canadian trade union women are some force to be reckoned with.

But where do we go from here? Mary Collins, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, has one approach, as set out in her recent speech to a Vancouver symposium marking the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commision on the Status of Women. This lawmaker tells us that we should be trying to change attitudes, not laws. According to her, we should abandon militancy, because it turns people off and makes men angry. Small wonder that one observer at the symposium remarked, "She's telling us to be good girls."

My approach — our approach — is a little different. Attitudes are already changing, but only because so many women are refusing to be "good girls". We know from experience that militancy has been, and continues to be, the most effective means of getting the changes we want — laws and friendly court decisions follow. The winning back of some core funding for women's centres came about after a campaign of unladylike occupations and sit-ins. Abortion clinics have been kept open by determined women escorting their sisters through anti-choice mobs.

Women across the country this past summer demonstrated their support for Canada's besieged native people, whose own militancy, by the way, is likely to result in a more rapid settlement of outstanding land claims. Quebec women have played a leading role in demanding recognition of the distinctiveness of their society. Women across Canada have organized and walked picket lines with their brothers, taking the same risks, suffering the same injuries, and winning the same victories.

None of these women, by any stretch of the imagination, were "good girls". None worried a whole lot about turning people off, because they knew, as we all know, that real change always creates a reaction. We expect it, we plan for it, and, if we work together, we triumph over it.

We should no more be afraid of the "militant" label than of the "feminist" one. What is militancy? Involvement, commitment to change. Not accepting the fate that others define for us. Doing, rather than merely dreaming (although dreams have their place). Resisting, collectively those forces which hem us in, impose roles and stereotypes on us, exploit and use us. Why should we be afraid of being militant? Our lives and our freedom depend on it.

To accomplish the changes we are seeking, however, we need to understand power and empowerment. Those who stand in our way, have no end of power, and they use that power to try to make us powerless. One example — the flow of information and ideas is being blocked or discouraged by the federal government: native and women's publications shut down, native radio stations closed, the CBC budget drastically reduced, and — to celebrate the Year of Literacy, no doubt — the applications of the GST to books and magazines, which could well be a death blow to the Canadian publishing industry. One remembers that slaves were punished for reading, and one has to ask — are the Tories deliberately trying to create a docile, ignorant, unorganized workforce? Or is all this

simply coincidence?

Whether by accident or design, we find our forward progress increasingly hampered. But we are not without resources, energy, intelligence and skills of our own. The labour movement is a powerful impetus for postive change, as we discover and rediscover every time we win a good contract clause, organize an effective strike, demand and obtain rights in the workplace. Our movement is a social movement, and in that sphere, too, we can be effective, particularly when we ally ourselves with other progressive forces — the women's movement, environmentalists, community groups and so on.

Solidarity with our sisters empowers us at work and at home. But this doesn't just happen. We have to make it happen, now more than ever, considering the forces which confront us. That is where *empowerment* comes in.

In our unions, we empower ourselves by being active in our locals, demanding our rightful place,by networking and by bringing about structural changes which help us get more involved and work together more easily and effectively. In the workplace, we empower ourselves by being organized and supportive, staying aware of the issues, sharing information and establishing bonds of trust and support. In the home, we empower ourselves collectively by refusing to put up with domestic violence, by establishing shelters, by helping and supporting each other. Our increased involvement in our unions, in the community, in social change, all part of our demand for equality, makes it essential that work in the home be equitably shared: our unions have a major role to play in educating our brothers to assume their responsibilities in this regard.

In our communities, we can and we do empower ourselves with Take Back the Night marches, coalition building and other involvements. In the political sphere, we can ensure more victories like the Ontario election, which will open the doors of opportunity even wider.

Empowering ourselves, in the final analysis, depends upon our willingness and ability to work collectively towards our common goal of equality. As unionists, we already have the advantage of experience in collective action; those of us active in the women's movement have similar experience. We cannot only play a significant role in bringing about change, we can play a *leading* role.

We can do it. We are doing it. Conferences such as this one, with such numbers and enthusiasm, are an indication that we are well on our way, that we *will not* be turned back. I am proud to be here, and I wish you a productive and joyful conference. Together we are strong. And we will win.

Huguette Plamondon

Past Member of Executive Council, CLC

United Food and Commercial Workers' International Union

I will try and speak in both languages. Sometimes it's hard to do.

One thing I would like to announce this evening, because I think a woman's right to have an abortion is very important, is that today Dr. J. Morgentaler opened the first clinic in Newfoundland.

Last year, 1 200 women had to go out of the province, to leave Newfoundland, to have a normal abortion. Now, it won't cost these women — and I'm not saying that they have to have an abortion, but that they want one — it won't cost them any more than it does other women. They will have a clinic that operates normally, legally, with specialized physicians and qualified staff. So I think that's something worth mentioning, because if there's one place that needs this, it's Newfoundland, and it's in St. John's, Newfoundland.

The reason I'm here is that I knew I would not be speaking just to the leaders this evening. I'm speaking to the workers, to the grass roots, as they say, but who are extremely important to the development of society and who also belong to labour unions. Because when there are no labour unions, there is no democracy.

When there is no union, and when unions are not allowed to operate, there is no democracy. There is no country that has democracy unless they let the labour unions operate in a normal way.

I also want to show the female workers who are here, and the male workers, because I have seen a few, that you are welcome. I would even have liked to see more of you. Because sometimes you need to be given hell, and when you are not here you cannot be given hell. Now we have unemployment and they are going to start looking for reasons, to say it's because of the women who work. So we will tell them that is not so.

But one of the reasons is that I think I would like to show you that Huguette Plamondon and all the rest are no different from you. If you want to, if you put in the time, the energy, if you believe, you can do what we have done and you will be the ones who will open the doors in the year 2020. Because 1991 is my last year. I will picket with you if you ask me to but I will be through opening doors. I have opened a few, and I must tell you I was proud to be doing it.

I started May 12, 1945. I began working for the Packing House Workers — a small union, but a damn good one! Let me tell you: militant, aggressive, dynamic, and it did not pay lip service to the protection of workers' rights. We believed in them and went after them. I must tell you something — when I began working in Montreal, it was a good union, but we had no members. We were just starting out. It was early on.

We were beginners. I grew with the union. We had no members. We had about some 236 members that had been given to us by the Steelworkers at the time. They were generous. As I had quite some time on my hands, I used to go to the plants to help other unions distribute leaflets, talk to the guys about joining a union, being on the picket line.

In 1953, I was appointed international representative for the Packing House Workers. At that time, I was the first woman in Canada for our union. I was very pleased with it because this was, as I said, not a big union but a damn good union.

In 1955, I defeated a lawyer as President of the Montreal Labour Council. That was a big kick, let me tell you. These are the things that make your life giggle a little bit, spicy or bubbly like champagne.

Then after that, again, the two central labour bodies, the TLC and the CCL had decided to merge. Because the TLC was bigger, they had a right to two members in Quebec and the CCL one. I decided I should try it, and believe it or not, that was against the thinking of the leadership of unions. You know, I beat the slate. That's something. I was elected by workers.

Unfortunately, you women did not have the chance to vote for me but you see what we have achieved at least. You are here tonight because there were women like me and Shirley and Grace, and I won't name them because I'll insult somebody that I may forget. When I see this meeting tonight you do not know how good it is because it shows me that we have done something. We did not sit on our fanny. We must have done something right for you to be here tonight.

When I was chosen by the caucus in Quebec, they went to my boss in Toronto, Fred W. Dowling, whom I must say was behind me 100%. (We always say there is a woman behind a big man, but there were some good men behind me. Believe me. I couldn't do it alone.) They went to him and said: "Fred, you have to tell her to resign because if she stays, you won't be able to be on the Board. You won't be Vice-President for Ontario." He said: "For once, I've done something right and I'm not going to undo it." And he was not elected as Vice-President of the CLC in 1956, although his place was to be there. You see, I was a Packing House worker, and we could not have two Packing House representatives. But, that showed he was a short man but a great human being. Believe me.

Then after that, I was alone with about 26 men and some of them were saying: "You still have your diapers. You are still wearing your diapers." You know, very nasty remarks. And I had to take it — not long. The first time you think it's a joke but the second time... You tease a dog the first time he may not bite you, he'll bark, but the second time he will bite. Then after that, Grace Hartman came on the Board. That was a relief. Then after that, we started to have caucuses for women because we did not have a Women's Bureau. And then after that, would you believe that I chaired the first women's conference and as Grace said, the platform was big enough to hold all the women that we had. See the difference. That's what it's all about...

We had a convention in 1968, and passed a resolution that abortion be decriminalized and that a woman should have a right to have an abortion whenever she wanted. That was passed: not one vote against. Don't forget. Unanimously at the Convention. Usually when resolutions are passed you have to do something about it. You don't really put them in the book and say that's good enough, it's in the book. You have to at least try to do something. I said: "When are we going to do something about it?" Finally, we said we would appoint a committee, and we would draft something. But then came the time, nobody wanted to present the brief.

I said: "Look I'm a Catholic, and I'll present the brief. I believe in it and I should be able to." And the leadership said: "But you know you are a woman". This was in 1968 and I'm not exaggerating.

If I don't tell you those things you won't think you have to fight. You will say, once you are there, things are easy. It's not easy when you have people who don't believe. Usually we see when it's passed at a convention, it's law. But that thing was far from being law. Anyhow, we finally presented the brief, and let me tell you, the only province that did not talk about our brief was Quebec. We had a good press coverage all over except in the province of Quebec because it's still very Catholic, not now maybe, that was 22 years ago. It was very Catholic. I have copies up to today. I don't know if the CLC has them, I should donate them because last night I read those letters, some of them giving the CLC hell for presenting the brief. Some of them saying that Huguette Plamondon had no right to use the platform of the CLC. I did not use the platform of the CLC. It's true, I believed in it, but that was the CLC that passed it at the Convention....

The labour movement, it's true, is the group that does the most in society. But as for ourselves, to preach is one thing, but sometimes you have to practise what you preach. We had not done so well with women in 1968. It was pitiful, very few unions had women representatives. Very few unions had even administrative secretaries. They would take a man. You didn't see women going higher up. It's refreshing to be here and see that.

So, we had the other brief to present to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Anyone who knows Donald MacDonald knows that he was a very stiff president, looked like a banker — very severe and for those who didn't know him, it's too bad.

MacDonald read the brief and the chairperson, Florence Bird, said: "Do you have anything to add?" I had something. I thought Brother MacDonald was going to have a heart attack, believe me. And I said: "You know, I want to tell you one thing too — the labour movement has done a job but it has not done the job it should have done. We are far from showing the example." He had a good heart. That time, we were more people and it was very good and very nice.

I have represented women also and I always try to do a good job. I would never want to deprive

another woman of going somewhere because I have done a bad job. I had the pleasure and the honour to represent you at the ILO and even the CLC didn't want to send me because, you know, I'm controversial. I may not behave properly. I did not behave properly on the first day in 1964, but the rest of the conference, I behaved good. I behaved badly because the employer's representative was a priest who said that the role of women was to make children. I got mad. I did not know the parliamentary procedure and I got up and I said: "I didn't fly 3,000 miles to be told that I have to make babies. I decided what I want to do and I'm not going to stand here." And that night Kalmen Kaplansky was mad at me, Joe Morris was in good humour and I had a delegation of employers coming to see me and apologizing for what had been stated in the afternoon, that that was not the intent. After that I followed the rules of the conference but, you know, when you are being told that... In 1965, I went back, and in 1970, I represented you again on women's technological problems, and married women at work. I was not married but I know the problems. I fought for you. I represented you at the British Trades Union Congress, also represented you at the ICFTU. All the time, trying to do my damn best so that other women could go and you see I did well, eh, Shirley went back. Look at that. She's a Vice-President, and she represented you at the ILO for five years, and I'm sure she did a damn good job. Now you know that anything is possible. I've done it and you can do it. I don't come out of a planet or anything. I just went to school. I didn't speak English very well. I learned it. That is something I had to spend some time on, and I hope that everybody in Quebec will learn English so that they can travel and don't feel they are in the ghetto whenever they travel. This is not the viewpoint of the Quebeckers, of many Quebeckers, but I have my viewpoint and I feel I have the right to say so. I want to thank you. I think I have taken more than 10 minutes. Let me tell you, whenever you have a problem, I'll be around. I have not changed. It's not because I'm 64 years of age that I have stopped barking, believe me. I can still bark and bite, and I want to thank you.

Grace Hartman

Past President

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here. I know my time is limited too. I don't have very many opportunities when I have a captive audience, so if I run over my time, Nancy, just tell me.

I'm sure glad that Huguette talked about that presentation to the Joint Senate Commons Committee on Health where she presented the abortion brief. The next day, the newspapers talked about this volatile woman, this feisty woman, and the exchanges she had with some of the members of Parliament. She said to me: "What does that mean?" I said: "Believe me, it's good."

Many of you have drawn my attention tonight to the picture of Shirley Carr and I dressed up for a Klondike night in Edmonton. That was at a CUPE Convention in 1971. At that time, I think we passed a policy paper called "The Status of Women in CUPE." I think that was the first policy statement of that kind in any of the unions of the Labour Congress. It was not easy. However, by threatening the president — telling him not to put a timer on us — we both were able to make fairly extensive presentations, and the policy paper was passed.

Over the last few years I began to think, with the things that have been said and written about me, that the only thing people are going to remember is that I was one of the labour leaders who went to jail. I went to jail alright. I can tell you that was an experience in itself. We were angry, we were frustrated, and not a little apprehensive about what might happen to us once we got in there. However, Lucie Nicholson was with me for the first ten days. We sort of began to learn the ropes by that time and were able to lean on one another.

The first Sunday we were there, we were sitting. She was doing a crossword puzzle, and I was doing some needlepoint. Yes, it was Sunday morning. We had done our mopping, and we handled the big mangles, and the washing, and all that stuff too. Lucie said to me: "I'd like to watch Coronation Street." Lot's of you must know Coronation Street. We said: "I wonder how we get the television turned on?" We asked someone, and they said: "You have to speak to that young woman there." They did not say woman but girl. She was 16 years old, and was in for breaking and entry. We very politely asked her if we could have the television on and she said no. It turned out that she was the equivalent of a Shop Steward in there. We sure learned about seniority and that sort of thing there, I want to tell you! We went back to our puzzle and needlepoint. It was an interesting time. I did learn to mop floors with those big cot mops, and I did learn to use the big mangle for the sheets and pillow cases.

One day, when they handed us the men's underwear to fold — the men's jail was up the roadway — we refused. We didn't know what was going to come out of this but we said: "No way." We were not going to fold the men's underwear. If they wanted them folded, let them do it themselves. The man in charge of the laundry, who was a very kindly man, came to me and said: "I'll give you something else to do, but please, don't make a fuss." I thought OK. I think we got pillow cases and towels to fold.

There were a lot of things that happened in that period of time. Now I can look back at them. I can laugh at some of them. Others were not so funny. I sure learned a little bit about the injustice system, how judges, in one place, hand down sentences of maybe two months for a particular misdemeaner, and someone else hands out 14 for the same thing. It was a learning experience. It was not one I wanted, however I got there.

Coming up through the ranks in my own union, and I started in CUPE in 1954, I did not experience the discrimination that I did later on. I have no answer for that because I certainly was not elected by women. I was elected by men. It probably

changed by the time I was elected secretary-treasurer in 1967. At that time, I found it was other unions that were questioning "this" woman. They didn't call me a woman, they called me a broad. How did she ever get to that position when she had never been a full-time officer in her union? It was just a different structure and different kind of union. CUPE was very new at that time. It was only four years old in its present structure. It was being torn apart by internal political strife. In spite of all these things, we were beginning to elect women to our executives. You could see by another picture there at the back, they elected two: Shirley Carr and I. All the rest were men. Gradually, even that was broken down. Even at that time I did not think — like so many of the younger men would think then and today — that I would become president. I just thought of doing the job I had to do there, and it was a big job. As anyone who has handled the money in a union knows, there is never enough to go around, and that was a big job. Also, I felt that, while I didn't have all the power and the decision-making, at least I could make some changes. And I did. I'm not sure of the dates. I am sure of the fact that I had a great deal to say in the decision to hire Cynthia Wishart and Julie Davis. I am very proud of those decisions. Not so proud of some of the others, but I am very proud of that.

Shirley was elected, as you know, executive vice-president to the CLC in 1974. When she decided to run for that office, I was able to use the power I had then — by appointing a staff person to act as her campaign manager or assistant. When I went to the president to tell him that, he said: "Oh, I wouldn't even have thought of doing that." I thought, well that's right, you wouldn't. But, it was now done. It is wonderful to see how many women have been and are being elected to office in the labour movement. Like Huguette, I feel that we have nudged those doors a bit for you. We have pushed them open in some places. It was not easy. I am not sorry for one bit of that time because I do see the accomplishments.

When I was elected president of NAC, as they told you, and was able to introduce some of the trade union thinking there, I was also appointed in 1974 as the only trade unionist on the Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I don't think I made much impact there because when I got up to speak I could see all these women from the middle class women's organizations turning me off. However, I persisted.

I think a memorable day in my recollection is Thanksgiving Day 1975. That is a day I will not forget and it had nothing to do with Thanksgiving. I was driving back to Ottawa from having spent Thanksgiving with my family in Toronto. It was a dark and rainy night. Over the radio came those dulcet tones of the voice of the Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau. What he was doing was breaking his promises, his pre-election promises, and introducing wage and price controls. I am sure there are a lot of you that will remember that period of time.

Exactly a week after that, CUPE's convention opened in Toronto. I was elected president at that time. I was starting out my presidency with the Prime Minister establishing the agenda. Because, believe me, those were days of struggle. At that time, the postal workers were on strike. Our convention was in the Royal York and they were across the street at the post office. We took the convention across the street at noon hour, and we protested the wage controls and we supported the postal workers.

I have been on a lot of picket lines and a lot of demonstrations. I don't remember ever seeing as many plain-clothes policemen. They think you can't identify them. My God, they were there. We learned it was not just that they were going to keep an eye on us because when we returned to the hotel, we found that Pierre Trudeau and Margaret were just leaving a luncheon where he had been speaking to a group of business people about the merits of the wage controls. There was a little bit of shouting and jostling. The next day, the papers wrote up how these CUPE delegates had pushed Margaret around. I don't think anybody got within ten feet of her. However, that was what they said. That was a tough way to start in a job like that.

There were so many important decisions to be made about the wage controls. How we would handle them. What we would do. We had so many low-paid workers to protect and I could see that the small gains that we were beginning to make in wage equality going down the drain. I knew it was going to take a great deal of struggle and a great deal of that militancy Shirley talked about if we were just even going to hang on. It was a time of travelling back and forth across the country, with no time for vacations or days off. Just trying to do what you could to help our members and staff fighting these controls. We talked to provincial politicians about getting out of controls. We were not very successful with that either. It was a very difficult period for women. As I say, our struggles for equal pay were

really set back at that time.

A lot of the women in the women's movement, not necessarily in the trade union movement, thought that now that I had that position, I could cure all the ills, I could correct things overnight. Just the same as they are saying about Bob Rae in Ontario now. You know, like we want this yesterday. It does not work like that as most of you know. How I was only one vote, an influential one for sure, but we struggled on.

Just after being elected president, I was a novelty, a token women, and all that stuff. Yes, a broad, right. Lots of the phone-in shows and the interview shows wanted to talk with me. I remember being interviewed by Judy Lamarche. Some of you who are old enough will remember Judy Lamarche as a sort of a rebel in the Liberal Party. Probably the first and only woman ever to call Pierre Trudeau a "son-of-a-bitch" on television. She was defeated and she had a television programme. The first question she asked me was: "Grace, what are you going to do with all this power you now have?" I looked at her and said: "Power? I always thought of that as a male word. I don't have it yet. I have some, and I won't use it." I thought it was a funny way to start an interview. What are you going to do with all this power? I thought, if I have all the power she thinks I have, I better get busy and use it.

There have been some disappointments along the road. It was not easy. There are no magic solutions. There are no magic methods to obtaining equality. When I was on the National Executive Board at CUPE, the percentage of women on the executive was equivalent to the percentage of women in the union. When I retired, it went down. I was really discouraged. I told them so in my swan song to the convention. However, that has changed. Things have changed.

As most of you know, CUPE now has a woman secretary-treasurer. One of the two top officers is a woman again. However, there have been great changes elsewhere in the local unions, in the councils, in the federations of labour, in the labour councils and in the CLC. Those changes are reflected here today and will be reflected no doubt in the discussions that take place and in what happens from here on in.

While the road was not always smooth, it was certainly great to see women taking their place in the struggles. It has been mentioned several times tonight but I know how I felt when I saw a number of my friends and trade unionists elected in Ontario and assuming those positions in Cabinet with all the confidence and aplomb of any man. There is no one who could be any more sure of what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. They still need our help, they still need our support, and I know it will be there for them.

Nancy laughed when I said I was doing needlepoint in jail. I was. The interesting part of it was when we went in, Lucie also had a piece of needlepoint. They wouldn't let her take hers in because she had already started work on hers. I had not started on mine so they let me take mine in. Now if you can explain to me why, I am willing to listen.

Anyway, just before I left home, I had a phone call from an old friend of mine to tell me she had just picked up a book on knitting. It's called Canada Knits. It is just a history, it is not knitting patterns and that sort of thing. She said: "Grace, you'll get a paragraph in it as a notable who knits." So you see, you go down in history in many ways. Where I want to be known is here with the women in the labour movement. I wish you well and I hope to see lots of national presidents, etc., from this group in the not too distant future.

Thank you.

Audrey McLaughlin

Leader

New Democratic Party of Canada

Good morning sisters. It is great to be here...

The theme of your conference is empowering women. So let me start with a definition... To me, empowering women is about women having control over our bodies, having control over our lives, having opportunities to lead full lives and make full contributions to the world around us.

And for all this to happen, women must have physical and economic security, and our voices must be heard where political decisions are being made.

I want to look specifically today at those political decisions — how we can affect them, how we can shape them so that they mean better policies for women.

The best way to accomplish this, of course, is to have more women — feminist women — in electoral politics and positions of power.

Women have always played an important role in social movements and advocacy groups such as environmental and peace groups, community groups and unions.

The fact that we are here today is proof of the important role the labour movement plays in promoting women's participation and equality.

The success of women in the labour movement is reflected not only in the fact that the CLC has a great woman leading it, that other great women lead various unions and provincial federations, that hundreds of others serve on executives, and thousands of others as shop stewards...

It is also reflected in the gains union women have made and will continue to make, in attacking the problems of sexual harassment, discrimination, and ghettoization, and in the strides you have made in employment equity and pay equity.

The bottom line is that unions mean better wages and better working conditions for women. And the progress we have achieved is thanks to all of you and to the women who came before you — women like Madeleine Parent who led the Quebec Textile Workers in standing up to Duplessis, like Eileen Suffrin who led the first Eaton's drive, like Grace Hartman who became the first woman to head a major union...

I want to thank all of the women who came before us and I want to thank you for all of your work on behalf of the women of Canada.

So women have played an important role in advocacy politics. In electoral politics, the record is less successful.

Electoral politics is really a culture of its own. It has its own language, own dress code, own rules. And it is male.

The result of this is plain to see. The political system reflects the values of males, an elite group of males at that. And the policies that result are consequently policies which serve the interests of these men.

We consequently live in a society which makes room for great inequalities, a society where women earn only 65% what men earn, where women do not have control over their own bodies and where the government pays for armament while it forces women to hold bake sales to finance shelters for women. Why not change things around?

There is little question that we need more women in politics and political leadership. We have to break into that exclusive culture and reshape it. We have to challenge old assumptions, break old myths, and rewrite the rule book.

Women like Nellie McClung, Agnes McPhail, Therese Casgrain, and Rosemary Brown — these women challenged old assumptions. They challenged the most fundamental assumption — that there was no role in politics for women.

I remember a story about Nellie McClung speaking at a rally in Winnipeg in 1915. A heckler yelled out at her, "The Prime Minister would quit politics if a woman were ever elected." To which Nellie replied, "This proves what a purifying effect women would have on politics."

These women left us a wonderful heritage but

we know that there remains so much to do. We have to break the myth, for example, that women's experiences do not count.

We have to develop the idea that women who are single mothers, trade union activists, social workers, nurses, bring with them experiences that are exactly what is needed in political life... Their experiences are just as valid and often more relevant to politics than those of corporate lawyers.

And at a more basic level, we have to change the whole idea about what a leader looks like — because our mental picture of political leaders is still one of affluent, white men.

I do see some progress here, e.g. Tony Penikett, the President of Iceland.

Are we ready for a woman leader? Well if the people of Ireland of all places can elect a feminist woman as president, surely we have got to be ready...

Having said all this, however, the issue is more than about having women in office.

Margaret Thatcher is a woman and we have all seen the harm she has done. And here in Canada we have examples of our own...

We have the Minister of Employment, Barbara McDougall, promoting policies like privatization, deregulation, the trade deal — policies which are destroying women's jobs.

We have the Minister of Justice, Kim Campbell, who professes to be pro-choice, enthusiastically promoting legislation that will turn women who choose abortion into criminals.

We have the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, Mary Collins, telling us to stop raising a ruckus, to be nicer, to compromise, and everything will be all right.

The issue, then, is not just about electing women. It is about having women in office who represent the values of women, who care about how policies affect women, who promote the equality of women, and who want to create a more just and humane world.

In a nutshell, it is about having feminists in office. Real feminists, who are more concerned about empowering other women than with empowering themselves.

If the price of admission to the corridors of power is the compromise of principles, then the price is too high. Maybe the women presently in cabinet can afford it, but the women of Canada cannot.

As feminists, as workers and as union women, we are in a privileged position to make changes. Because we are social democrats and union women, many men support us: men who share our values, who understand our problems and who fight, with us, to help us achieve our goals.

What kind of action are we going to take to empower women? First of all, we will give the economic policies of this country a new direction in order to redress our economy.

Then, we will change the order of priorities and put economic growth and economic equality on an equal footing.

Whether this government wants to admit it or not, there is a serious recession in this country. Women who have lost their jobs, 41,000 in the last month alone, women who cannot afford child care, women who have to line up at food banks — they know there is a recession. They do not need to study the latest economic indicators, they live them.

The most angering aspect of it all is that it is a made-in-Canada recession. One brought on by the Canada-US trade deal and by the high interest rate, high dollar policies of this government.

Now we are looking at the GST and expanding the trade deal to Mexico. The government has killed our economy — now they want to bury it.

As social democrats and workers, we know that a trade deal with Mexico would mean not only a further threat to the jobs of Canadian workers — to women in textiles, clothing, in the service sector — but it would also mean continued exploitation of our sisters and brothers in Mexico, workers who are faced with four-dollar-a-day wages and deplorable, devastating working and living conditions.

As social democrats and trade unionists, we cannot and will not allow our economy to be built on the backs of Mexican workers. We will not allow our sisters and brothers to be exploited. International social contracts, with guarantees of basic environmental standards, human rights, workers' rights, and decent wages are something we must fight for. And until they become a reality, a trade deal with Mexico is out of the question.

We want an end to free trade with the United States, no free trade agreement with Mexico, lower interest rates, a fair and progressive tax system, a full employment policy, and a series of measures to boost the Canadian economy, all of which should also improve women's economic conditions.

By themselves, however, these policies would still not bring equity to women in the workplace, nor in our society as a whole.

If women are to gain equality with men we not only need policies of economic growth but also

policies of economic justice: mandatory, enforceable employment equity and pay equity legislation with targets and timetables; a quality national child care programme that is accessible, affordable, and non-profit.

These programmes are not frills. These programmes are fundamental if women are to have equality. These programmes reflect the kind of values we need in the system — values that say that the work women do counts, that children count, that choices and opportunities count.

Equality for women is not just a question of changing attitudes, it is also a question of changing legislation.

Very often, it is legislation that brings on a change of attitude and values. The right to health care was not very popular at first. It did meet with fierce opposition. However, once the law was passed, people realized its merits.

The whole history of social progress is filled with examples like that:

- They said that you could not abolish slavery — the economy would fall apart. Well it was abolished and the economy survived.
- They said that you could not abolish child labour. The economy would fall apart. Well it was abolished and the economy survived.
- The same thing happened with the minimum wage, the forty-hour week, maternity leave, every gain we have made.
- Now we are told that, yes, we would love to pay women more... Yes, we think there should be more women managers... Yes, we have to have more child care spaces... But, you know, the economy would fall apart.

These programmes will not hurt the economy — they will strengthen it. And the fact is, if we can afford to pay top-level corporate executives an average of $450,000, we can afford these programmes. What we cannot afford is to let another generation of women go without.

Let me close by saying a few words about the years ahead.

Often, we as women are fighting just to protect gains we have made in the past.

Last week, I spent a day with women textile workers in Quebec — poor women, many of them immigrants, just fighting to maintain their livelihood.

This year, we took a step backwards on many occasions. We witnessed terrible tragedies. There is still a great deal of sexism in our society: on university campuses, at work, in our legal system and on TV.

It is easy to be discouraged. And we have all at times been discouraged. But as women, in whatever we do — whether we work the assembly line, or head a political party, or run a computer, or raise a family — we share the knowledge that we can count on each other and, together, we can move forward.

Even with the setbacks we have seen, I do think we have made some progress, and I feel optimistic about the future.

I look at the record number of women enrolled in the Université de Montréal's engineering programme this year and I am moved, moved by the memory of those women whose lives were taken away, and moved by the strength and courage of those students today.

I look at the Ontario Government Cabinet, with 11 marvellous women — many of them trade unionists — who have a chance to make a real difference... and I know they will.

I look at how women won the restoration of funding women's centres after it was so stupidly cut by this government.

Our victory there underlined something fundamental: nobody is going to give us a thing. It is women ourselves who got funding restored — women who joined together in one voice to say that cuts were unacceptable.

And we did not do it by being nice and quiet and agreeable either. The history of our gains is a history not of women keeping quiet, but of women speaking out.

Finally, I am optimistic because I look at the changes taking place in this country. People are looking for a new kind of politics. Where everyone's voices — women, aboriginal Canadians, workers, minorities — where everyone's voices are heard and everyone's solutions sought.

Canadians are looking for a different kind of leadership — where leadership is not about control but cooperation. Where leadership is not about how much power you can get, but how much power you can share.

With solidarity and sisterhood, I believe we can provide that kind of leadership. We can create a politics that is about caring, about equality, about empowerment — about dignity for all Canadians.

Thank you.

Muriel Collins

Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 79

When I was asked to talk to you, I did not hesitate to accept the invitation. Today, I will share with you some of the ways my local union has worked in the struggle to end racism and sexism.

Our local is Local 79 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. We are a municipally-based local with 10,000 workers at Metro Toronto, the City of Toronto and Riverdale Hospital. Our members include 1,800 part-time workers in Metro's homes for the aged — the biggest bargaining unit in Canada made up of only part-time workers.

My local's work, in the fight for social and economic justice, has been practical and straightforward. Our achievements have not only benefitted the women involved, but have also helped our local, our national union and our community. Three examples of our work deal with:

— organizing women;
— the fight against turning full-time jobs into part-time jobs; and
— lobbying for better access to human rights protection through the grievance procedure.

The first story is about the fight to organize part-time workers in the homes for the aged in 1983. Metro Toronto has eight homes for the aged in Toronto and the surrounding area. Ninety percent of the workers in these homes were women, mostly Black and Asian women, working part-time or casual hours with no security of a full-time job. To break barriers to getting a full-time job, we ran a quick and quiet organizing campaign. We spent two careful months getting the names of casual workers. Before the campaign even began, we had collected the names and departments of every casual worker. When the campaign finally started, fifty members of the union took confidential letters explaining the campaign to every casual worker. We signed up over 700 casual workers. This was done in three weeks. We met at McDonalds, coffee shops, restaurants, in their homes, outside the workplace and even at the bus stops near work.

Bargaining was hard. The employer refused to move. One of their arguments was: "Why give women a full-time job? The money will be spent buying boats and cars." In the meantime these women, many of them single mothers, were barely able to keep a roof over their heads.

We won! It took two years and we had to go to arbitration, but we won. It was a blow to the discrimination in the system. What we ran up against, when we were organizing, shows the problems of unionizing part-time workers in Ontario. Metro's use of casual workers is part of a big trend in Canada towards more and more part-time jobs, instead of full-time, permanent jobs. This is especially so in health care and service jobs — the jobs that are the most common for Black women.

This leads me to my second story: an example of the fight against converting needed full-time jobs into part-time hours. This example concerns nursing attendants.

Today, 96% of Metro Toronto's nursing attendants are women. And over half of us are Black or Asian women. Three quarters of those of us who work part-time *want and need* full-time jobs. Some have been waiting for seven, eight, nine years for full-time jobs!

In 1987, we discovered that Metro Toronto was planning to phase out 71 full-time nursing attendant jobs as those jobs became vacant and planning to make these jobs part-time hours. We decided to change their plans. This was an important employment equity issue, and we weren't about to let Metro get away with their tricks.

I have to say that in the beginning, I thought that this was a loser issue, and that we had to fight, but we would never win. But I didn't think that it would be hard to get people to see that a chance for full-time work is a woman's issue, and especially, an issue for Black and Asian women. I was wrong on both counts. We won our fight, but Metro never admitted that racism and sexism were the problem.

We found out what Metro was up to when part-time workers called the union to say that vacant full-time jobs were not being filled. Several part-timers filed grievances. During the grievance hearing, Metro's management let on that Metro was deliberately not filling vacancies and that this was a change in Metro's staffing policy.

We were in trouble. To win the grievances, we would have to convince an arbitrator that Metro was getting rid of vacant full-time jobs in order to undermine the provision of the part-timers' collective agreement that gave them a chance for full-time jobs.

When the 1987 Metro budget report came up, our worst fears were confirmed. Metro was trying to get rid of full-time jobs, and Metro was doing this in contradiction to its own equal opportunity report.

We leafleted at International Women's Day, phoned and wrote organizations in the Black, Filipino, Chinese and Hispanic communities, contacted women's groups and pensioners' groups, and we organized petitions and letters to Metro Council.

We got very strong support. This showed the bureaucrats and the politicians at City Hall that we had strong backing, that we could mobilize our communities.

Our fight to keep full-time nursing attendant jobs was also very much a fight for the old people in our care. We reached out to and got support from pensioners' organizations and advocacy groups for the old.

By the time the budget was passed by Metro Council, we'd won most of the jobs back. At arbitration, Metro offered to settle by coming up with even more full-time jobs.

My third and last example is about our local's work to protect our members' right to use the grievance procedure and go to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Over the past couple of years, we've been pushing the Ontario Human Rights Commission not to support employer-run Human Rights' complaint systems. In these systems, the employer sets up an internal complaint procedure for employees who have a discrimination or harassment complaint. Basically, it is a system in which management investigates itself.

We've written the Commission many times and met with them. We've argued that allowing the employer to investigate himself is like asking the fox to guard the chicken house. Metro Toronto has even used its labour law firm to "investigate", supposedly on behalf of workers. We have strong no-sexual harassment and no-discrimination clauses, and we tell our members to grieve. We know it's hard to win these. We're pushing the Commission to try to get the labour laws changed to make the *Human Rights Code* part of every collective agreement in the province. We've gotten very good community support on this, too.

These are some of the ways my local has advocated for women. Our organizing drive, our fight for full-time jobs for women and our priority on human rights issues have made a difference to the lives of many of our members. These struggles have also linked us to community groups fighting for the same causes, but in a different way. Because of this work, more of our sisters are active in our local. Our executive board and committees include many sisters who are representative of our members: Black, Asian, Filipino, White.

We've shown that we can get community support in the fight against management's racist and sexist policies, that we can mobilize and we can win. But we need to keep up this fight. We have to remember always that racism and sexism are so linked that you'll hardly ever find one without the other. If we don't fight both, we can't beat either.

Thank you.

Nicole Désormeaux

Service Employees' International Union, Local 298

Introduction

First, let me tell you how proud I am to have the opportunity of reporting the results of a study conducted by the Quebec Federation of Labour on equal opportunity, more precisely on the number of women in leadership positions within affiliated unions and within the QFL. Not that I can report that women have achieved equality. Far from it: we still have a long way to go.

In fact, the sense of pride I get from presenting this report is mostly due to the fact that the QFL, which in the past has always been a male-dominated organization, has now taken an important step forward in recognizing the importance of women's participation in leadership positions. By agreeing to undertake a survey on the presence of women within its structures and on the barriers to women's participation, and by agreeing to include to their convention agendas, topics such as objectives for equality and programmes for the promotion of women's participation in the future, the QFL has shown a desire for change.

As a member of Local 298 of the Service Employees' Union, where 75% of the membership are women, I am all the more happy to report on the situation. The steps taken by the QFL gives us hope. It makes us believe that young militant women will not have to overcome the obstacles we face today and that it will be easier for them to get elected in leadership positions and to hold influential positions.

Inception of the Study

Before reporting the results of the study, I would like to give you a brief explanation on the inception of the study. Of course, the QFL's concern for equality for women goes a lot further back than the study "The place of women in union structures" which was completed in 1989. Over the past 15 years, the QFL conventions have adopted policies and resolutions dealing with the increased presence of women in the workplace and within union structures.

The 1981 QFL Convention adopted a policy statement on the presence of women in the labour movement. At its 1983 and 1985 conventions, and at a seminar on the subject, the QFL dealt more specifically with employment equity and adopted resolutions aimed at encouraging affiliates to implement affirmative action programmes in the workplace and equal opportunity programmes within union structures.

In 1986, the QFL Executive Committee and Executive Council created an Equal Opportunity Committee and gave it the following mandate:

— to develop and analyze a picture of women's involvement in all QFL's structures;
— to identify the discriminatory aspects of union practices and develop an equal opportunity programme within the QFL.

The 1987 Convention delegates adopted the committee's interim report on equal opportunity and gave the QFL and the committee the mandate to pursue their work by undertaking a follow-up to their survey of locals and unions.

My report is a summary of the follow-up work as well as an update on the action taken.

Results of the Study

In 1988 and 1989, the QFL conducted a survey of its affiliates, including locals, unions and labour councils, in order to have a full picture of women's participation within union structures. The survey was conducted by means of questionnaires sent to all locals as well as interviews with union and labour council executives. I want to point out that the response was excellent.

On the whole, the results indicated that women accounted for 30% of the QFL affiliates' membership. This proportion was then compared with the presence of women in the various structures of the QFL.

Based on the questionnaires returned by *affiliated locals*, 33.4% of the total membership are women. However, this proportion is not the same in all possible areas of intervention.

For example, at the executive level, women hold 36.8% of the positions, which is higher than their proportion within the membership. However, within committees, their proportion (28.8%) is lower.

Moreover, women are concentrated in certain positions. For example, a greater proportion of women are found in recording secretary and secretary-treasurer positions, and in women's committees, while there is a lower number of women in grievance committees, health and safety committees, shop steward positions and union representative positions.

The Equal Opportunity Committee has noted an increased number of women in local executive positions and in most committees except the grievance and the health and safety committees. There is still a serious lack of representation in full-time paid positions and within convention delegations.

Within *affiliated unions*, the survey indicated that the proportion of women is different in each of the 70 unions surveyed. For example, in the building and construction trades, the presence of women is almost non-existent, while it is very high in the service sector, in the clothing industry and in clerical positions.

The committee also noted that 30 unions out of 70 (42.79%) achieved proportional representation in decision-making positions (elected positions, union activities, convention delegations and full-time paid positions). However, in 27 of those unions, the proportion of women does not exceed 25%, and they represent barely more than 10% of the QFL's total membership.

In fact, it seems easier to achieve proportional representation in unions where the percentage of women is low. This is partly due to the fact that a low percentage of women means that proportional representation is achieved by the presence of one woman or a few women.

As for the *presence of women in the QFL's structures*, the results of the study are as follows:

— Within *labour councils*, women's presence varies considerably from one region to another. The committee noted that in certain labour councils, women are under-represented in executive positions, in committees and especially in union representative positions and in delegations. For example, in a large majority of councils, delegations are exclusively male. None of the councils, save one, have union representatives other than their QFL regional representative, and all of them are men.

— The committee also noted that the presence of women within the QFL has increased only in the area of paid positions. At all other levels of intervention, there is still room for improvement, and a regression has been noted in certain instances, such as convention delegations and executive positions.

On the whole, the survey indicated that since the early 80's, there has been a certain improvement in women's involvement in union structures. However, there is still a lot of work to be accomplished in order to achieve full equality at all levels of our structures.

For example, the increased participation has not been felt outside the local and regional structures, and the proportion of women in decision-making positions is still very low, especially in unions where 25% of the membership or more are women.

Having compiled and analyzed statistics in order to identify the structures and areas of intervention where women are under-represented, the study then attempted to determine why.

Barriers to Women's Participation in the QFL's Structures

The most important aspect of the QFL's study is the identification of barriers to women's participation within the QFL structures. This was achieved by analyzing the data that was collected by means of interviews, meetings and questionnaires filled by 375 participants. Two main categories of obstacles emerged from the study: 1) social and economic barriers; and 2) barriers within the union.

Social and Economic Barriers

All people interviewed at the various levels of the survey clearly identified parental, family and household duties and responsibilities as the greatest hindrance to women's participation in union structures. The sharing of tasks and duties is far from being achieved, as confessed by men themselves, and the sharing of responsibilities has not even started, according to women. Everyone pointed out the even greater problems encountered by single mothers. And their numbers are only rising.

The fact that men do not assume their equal share of family duties and responsibilities considerably reduces the availability of women and, therefore, their participation in union activities, since they must carry a double and sometimes a triple burden, with that of work outside the home.

In the category of social and economic barriers, the second impediment to women's involvement was education, tradition and prejudice based on sex, in other words *sexist stereotyping*.

In many people's minds, union involvement is a masculine activity. This stereotyping is often the cause of rejection of women by people close to them and it also gives rise to problems with some employers, according to militant union women.

Sexism also poses a credibility problem for women. It is a serious obstacle in that it creates a

desire to overachieve, a sense of obligation to be everywhere at the same time or a feeling that they have to do more than their brothers... to be better. This adds to an already heavy workload.

Finally, the women interviewed pointed out that men and women probably have a different approach to their work, which could be an impediment to the advancement of women within the union structures.

The third problem in the category of social and economic barriers is the *concentration of women in a few occupational groups*. This uneven representation has serious repercussions on the involvement of women in union structures. The major obstacle is the fact that militant women often have to assume the cost of their participation in union activities.

These costs are real and have been recognized, since many unions have expense accounts for their officers or a reimbursement system for meals, gas and other expenses. Women, however, because of the parental responsibilities they assume, have extra expenses such as babysitting costs, and this is particularly true for single mothers.

The second obstacle that arises from the concentration of women in a few occupational groups is the non-application of contract clauses on leave for union business. Several people have pointed out that the employers' current production restrictions reduce the chance of employees from the same section or classification of being granted leave at the same time.

Barriers within the union

Two barriers have been identified within this category: the conditions of access to union positions and to the performance of union functions.

The *formal and informal conditions required to have access to union positions* vary from one union to another and from one level to the next. They can even be different for elected and for paid positions. However, most of the people interviewed mentioned that union experience was a necessary condition of advancement in union structures.

To acquire this experience and to have access to union positions, women must first have a greater opportunity to participate and to integrate the many aspects of their lives: their work life, their union life and their family and domestic responsibilities. This is particularly difficult to achieve for women who very often have to assume family responsibilities and domestic duties either because

The numerous representations officers and representatives are called upon to make, inside or outside the union structures, involve travelling within the province as well as outside.

Most people interviewed agreed that the demands and obligations involved in the performance of union duties don't often allow for a "normal" personal and family life, and the presence of young children is an added difficulty.

However, the men interviewed did not consider this a major impediment, although they all said that it could explain why it is difficult to recruit union activists. Women reacted differently, since, for the most part, union work was not adapted to their situation.

This sums up the barriers to women's participation in the QFL structures identified by the study.

Measures to Promote Women's Participation

The study helped the committee identify a series of coherent measures aimed at removing the barriers it identified. However, since time does not allow, I will only report the main measures that will be taken at the various levels of the union structures and in the workplace, and I will concentrate mostly on the former.

The most important recommendation made by the Equal Opportunity Committee is that the evaluation of women's participation in the QFL and its affiliates in setting an objective will be based on the following criteria:

> "That a fair representation of women in our structures and in union activities be based on their proportion within the membership of the structure involved."

To reach that objective at all levels of union activities, the committee suggested to affiliates and proposed to the QFL that specific measures be taken to remove the obstacles that were identified in the report. These measures include:

- A review of the constitutions and by-laws and of informal regulations in order to bring out obstacles that could lead to systemic discrimination against women (for example, conditions of employment in certain trades or sectors).
- Action to guarantee that women will not be segregated in certain positions, but will be

representations such as public demonstrations organized by the labour movement or by other community groups.

Those are only some of the proposed measures. One thing is certain: to remove the barriers and to achieve our objectives, we will have to work on all fronts.

Women's Challenge Within the Labour Movement and Society

When asked to present the results of the QFL's study, I was also asked to deal with the following question: Can women's challenge in achieving effective participation and access to leadership positions in the labour movement be compared to that of women in society in general?

No one is an island. Women, as well as men, participate in union activities (or don't) in a wider social context and have to deal with their particular situation within society and at work. In fact, this was mentioned under the subject of barriers, to explain that many aspects of our lives have a real impact, whether directly or indirectly, on the participation of women in union structures.

In fact, the labour movement has most, if not all, the elements found in society, including prejudices with regard to women's role, place and fields of competence. We may like to think that they are not as deeply rooted in a movement which advocates human rights, justice and equality, as the ideals on which it is founded. However, although we cannot possibly measure how deeply entrenched these prejudices are, one thing is certain: we find within the labour movement the same kind of men we find in society, with the same type of education and the same values. The labour movement, by its very nature, has allowed for a faster evolution but, at the same time, I think it has simply forced some to be more subtle in the expression of their beliefs and values. This is part of the problem, because it has made it even more difficult to identify the problem adequately. The context of our battle within the labour movement may be different, but the challenge and the barriers to women's involvement in leadership positions are the same.

Women in the labour movement and in society in general face another challenge: the redefinition of power. The power women want is not power over others, because that means nothing to women. What we want, essentially, is to be in a position to being committee members and by defending our ideals. Having power means to be able to instil our values, to change the world, and not to become like men. Women's notion of power is rarely one of "power for the sake of power." Most of all, women have no desire to be assimilated to the masculine way of thinking. Our wish for power is instilled by our desire to achieve our objectives. Otherwise, it means nothing and it is not worth our efforts. However, women still have a double task: to redefine power and to exercise power. It is indeed a challenge, because we often have to deal with the way men exercise power.

In all areas of life, we have to work with men who are used to one form of power and, not surprisingly, don't understand our conception of power, so much so that we sometimes have the feeling they think we don't really assume leadership.

Finally, we have to make all possible efforts, in all areas, to increase our numbers, because the task is that much more difficult when we are only a few. We must constantly prove ourselves to men, we are closely watched by men as well as by women, and are often labelled as feminists, with negative connotations.

In brief, as long as we are only a handful, our task will be a solitary one, and it could take its toll on those few who already are in a position to influence our society's vision of power.

Conclusion

As a democratic organization dedicated to the proposition that all workers must participate in the development and improvement of their working and living conditions, the labour movement must provide conditions that will help all members, men and women, become militant which, in turn, will encourage them to fully and actively participate in the achievement of the objectives of all groups.

The task undertaken by the QFL in the sphere of equal opportunity will undoubtedly contribute to the attainment of that objective and to the removal of existing barriers. The labour movement, as well as our society, will only be strengthened by it.

Peggy Nash

Assistant to the President

National Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers Union of Canada

Introduction

Thank you Sister Chair and good morning sisters and brothers.

It is encouraging to see so many union sisters here and so many women increasingly demanding opportunities to meet together and strategize for the future. The CLC Women's Department is to be congratulated for accommodating so many local union women activists at this conference — nothing better to recharge batteries than the energy and support of so many women.

I will focus my remarks today on the question of bargaining affirmative action and examine how the CAW has put equality on its agenda, what we have been able to achieve at the bargaining table, and how we see the challenges that face us for the future.

I. Who we are

The CAW is a union of about 160,000 members of whom about 32,000 or about 18% are women. So while we are still a male-dominated union, the percentage of women has been steadily growing over the last few years.

We have national bargaining units under federal legislation, such as the airline industry, where our members, mostly women, work in cities from coast to coast. We bargain in the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada, telecommunications industry in a few provinces, and in several male-dominated industries such as aerospace, auto assembly and auto parts. We bargain in just about every legislative jurisdiction in the country.

From the outset, I want to be clear that when speaking of gains we make in collective bargaining, they are of course uneven. What we can bargain for some of our members we cannot always achieve for all. Where we have a lot of bargaining power we can, when we are committed to certain issues, make pension plan. So while there is progress in some locations, this progress can be uneven.

II. Affirmative Action

How did the goal of affirmative action get on our union's agenda?

In speaking about affirmative action, what I mean is the whole question of addressing barriers to equality in the workplace; equality in hiring, in access to training, treatment on the job, in promotion, etc. It also means addressing barriers to equality within our own organization.

The push for affirmative action developed over a number of years gaining momentum in the late seventies and into the eighties. It was due to several factors:

- An increasingly strong and vocal women's movement generally in society including in the labour movement played an important role. The Ontario Federation of Labour women's committee was militant and energetic. They held conferences and training workshops that helped women get organized.
- A couple of committed women staff members in our union, and there were only a couple of women on staff then, became a strong political voice for women. Their very presence raised the expectations of our membership. They were plugged into the broader women's movement, and kept equality issues on the agenda.
- Union women's committees. We had the provision for local union women's committees in our constitution since the 1960s. In the seventies, we established our national council women's committee charged with keeping a focus on women's rights at our quarterly council meetings which bring together about 350 local union leaders three times a year. We hold an

Ontario, where in 1978 women waged a war against the company and the police force, just for the right to belong to a union, galvanized the support of women and men for equality at work.

- Finally, we were fortunate to have progressive male leadership that heard the demands of women both inside and outside the union, and were smart enough to want to lead the change rather than oppose it.

In 1970, we established a national women's department to coordinate activities that promote women's equality. This department is now part of the office of the president of our union. In the mid-1980s, we also amended our constitution with an affirmative action measure to require that there be at least one woman on our council executive and our national executive board.

Bargaining Affirmative Action with the Big Three

In 1984, we put affirmative action on the bargaining agenda. It officially became part of the bargaining programme adopted at our bargaining convention that year.

The union national representative for the General Motors chain was strongly committed to affirmative action. In bargaining with GM later that year, he got the company to agree with affirmative action language.

GM at that time saw affirmative action as a chance to look like a good corporate citizen without fundamentally altering its hiring practices. We put the issue of hiring quotas on the table in 1984, but needless to say, GM was not having any.

The language required joint union/management affirmative action committees in all GM locations. At least one of the union committee members had to be a woman.

Our goal with affirmative action was to identify and then attack the barriers to full participation in the workforce. The contract language included four target groups: women, visible minorities, native people and the disabled. We initially focused on women, and then later brought in the other target groups.

Women by their sheer numbers will be the main beneficiaries but we could not just focus on women and ignore injustices to others. We had to fight for all groups.

In most GM locations, the representatives got 12 hours a week to carry out their duties.

The union put together and delivered a training

Our members on the committees put their heart and soul into making the programme work, and they ended up dominating it.

They decided to take a number of measures to attack barriers to equality:

- They made presentations in the public schools about non-traditional work.
- Where there was hiring, they tried to apply pressure to get members of the target groups hired.
- They conducted child care surveys to determine the need.
- They organized apprenticeship ready courses for people to be prepared to write the test to gain entry to apprenticeship programmes.
- They tried outreach and recruitment measures to network in the community with women's organizations, native groups and other groups to inform them about the kinds of jobs available in auto.

Initially, we targeted women, but soon addressed all the key groups who faced injustice. All these and other measures had some impact on hiring, but it was very small.

Child Care Programme — 1987

One key area identified again and again as a real barrier for women was the lack of high quality, accessible child care, especially for those parents working shifts. We had first bargained child care fund in 1983, in an auto trim plant in Stratford, Ontario.

In 1987, at the Chrysler Corporation, we felt strongly that we had to make improvements in the area of child care. The company still wanted to do more surveys. They also offered to set up a child care referral service for the workers. We were fed up with surveys, and we knew that a referral service would not solve the problem of lack of child care spaces. We didn't have a clear plan in mind for future child care programmes, but we knew that we needed funding. So we bargained funding of one cent per worker per hour worked to go into a child care fund. The fund at all the Big Three would generate $1-1/2 million over the three years of the agreement.

We then secured funding from the provincial government to bring on board a child care expert to help us develop our plan. We decided as a pilot programme to set up a child care facility in the city of Windsor. The CAW Child Care Centre opened

about to begin a pilot in-home programme where an average of three children would be looked after by trained staff in a private home.

In 1990, we doubled the funding for child care that we negotiated with the Big Three. This will create quite a large pool of funds for future child care projects.

It is clear to us that as a union, we cannot build child care centres in every community where our members work. Our efforts to date just make a small dent in the overall need for affordable high quality child care.

What we need are social programmes and a social commitment from our governments at all levels to address this pressing social need.

But at the same time, we could not let the companies off the hook. We have to keep pushing for child care programmes and other kinds of social programmes at the bargaining table even though we know that the solutions are not to be found in collective bargaining but in the political forum through legislation.

Human Rights

Harassment and the dehumanizing nature of the industrial workplace were highlighted by the union as significant barriers to equality.

In 1987, we negotiated with GM a provision for human rights training. This agreement required the company to allow every CAW member at GM time off the job to attend a three-hour human rights training programme.

We have spent the last three years in locked battle with GM over the content of that programme, but it is now close to getting under way.

This kind of training will go a long way towards humanizing the workplace and to changing attitudes in the broader community.

But it was apparent to us as a union though we could not just wait to change attitudes in order to ensure that workers would not be subjected to harassment at work. In 1988, as a union, we implemented an anti-harassment programme throughout the union, in all workplaces.

The programme is aimed at fighting all forms of co-worker harassment, but especially sexual and racial harassment. It is designed to put the onus on the local union leadership to take an active part to investigate and resolve harassment cases.

The anti-harassment programme is working pretty well to resolve complaints. Because we have

III. Hiring Quotas

In spite of all our affirmative action efforts, the picture of the workforce was not changing very much. There was a big boom in auto in the late eighties, when lots of hiring took place. But there was not much progress made in hiring the target groups.

One thing was clear: all the good intentions in the world were no replacement for hiring quotas. We needed quotas as a complement to other affirmative action measures.

This year in Big Three auto bargaining, we put hiring quotas, with targets and timetables, squarely on the bargaining agenda with Ford of Canada. We argued strongly that voluntary efforts were not enough.

Our goal is to make the workforce representative of the community as a whole with respect to the target groups.

We demanded access to company hiring figures on a regular basis to ensure that the quotas were being met.

The company saw the quota issue as a challenge to their right to manage, a challenge to who they could hire. They were very strongly opposed to hiring quotas. This issue stayed on the table even after we were out on strike at Ford, but the company would not budge. We were not successful in getting quotas in 1990.

The company did agree that the joint committees would get regular updates on the numbers so that they could review and investigate the numbers being hired. So we were able to chip a little more away from their exclusive right to hire. We'll go at it again in 1993.

Conclusion

As we look from the past to the future, we feel that we have come a long way and should be proud. But as we look to the future the task ahead is still daunting.

Within our union, we have reached out to women and visible minorities for training and leadership promotion, but a look at our overall local leadership representation tells us that we still have a ways to go. While time will change this representation to some extent, time alone will not solve the problem. We will have to address it as a union.

Of course, we don't operate a social vacuum.

dollar and high interest policies have thrown our economy into a tailspin.

Women have been hardest hit — in all sectors, in all regions of this country. They are losing decently paid jobs and ending up in the unorganized thin wage sectors of the economy.

There are some rays of hope though. In Ontario now like the Yukon, we look to the NDP government for some help to achieve equality. Hopefully other provinces will follow with NDP governments. On the federal scene, we may very well find that our guest speaker this morning will be the next Prime Minister.

But if we are serious about our commitment to equality in the workplace, then we have an obligation to meet at the bargaining table.

In the CAW we must keep pushing to make progress in setting patterns at the Big Three and in broadening these gains to the rest of our membership.

It is an easy cop out for trade union leaders to say "we can do nothing at the bargaining table for affirmative action or child care, we have to press for legislation." It makes union leaders sound progressive without ever having to prove that commitment.

As a labour movement we can in good conscience only say that legislation is the answer if we have over the years kept equality on our own agenda and been serious about achieving it.

Judy Rebick

President

National Action Committee on the Status of Women

Thank you. It's always a little intimidating to get a standing ovation before you speak because then you feel that you have to give a really good speech. I do not really like to give the wrap-up speech at a women's conference because the same thing always happens, and that is the collective wisdom of women always makes the speech redundant. The discussion you had this morning, I think better than anything I could say, tells us what women, protest and power really mean. Part of that is being able to express our anger. That is something we are never given permission as women to do. To express it in a creative way, not in a destructive way, but in a way that we can feel our justified anger and fight to change the situations that made us angry and help our brothers and others to understand why it needs to change. To do that, we have to express our feelings, our anger when we are moved, our tears, our fears, and that's something I think we, as women, can teach the rest of the world about very well. I hope we continue to do that.

I want to talk about the last CLC Women's Conference because I was not here, but I felt like I was. I was, as Nancy points out, freezing in front of Morgentaler's clinic in Toronto. We had arranged that I would phone Nancy, or I would phone the office here when we heard the decision. I heard the decision like this. I should say what we expected because it is important to remember these things. We expected maybe the Supreme Court would strike down the decision, the conviction of the Court of Appeals. Maybe they would. We figured they would do it on the basis of unequal access across the country, if they did it, very limited grounds. As I am standing outside, the reporter came up to me and said: "Have you heard?" I said: thing here, but I'm not sure." I didn't believe it so I kept it to myself. Then we got the call and indeed the majority decision of the Supreme Court said women have the right to control their own bodies. That is why I was screaming and yelling with my little stupid tuque on. I remember calling the CLC Women's Conference. I cannot remember if it was Nancy or if it was Linda or somebody telling me about the scene of women hugging and kissing, and crying, and cheering. I thought at that time I felt sisterhood is powerful and we felt our power that day in a way we have never felt it before.

I think of another time more recently we felt powerful. That is when women in Newfoundland went into the Secretary of State's office and occupied it 24 hours a day for 7 days. Women who had never done anything like that before, and with them, the women from the women's movement were union sisters who showed them how to do it right, because they had done something like that before and, together, those women started a movement that spread like wildfire across the country. Women everywhere said: "The hell with it. We are going to stand up for our rights and we are going to occupy, even if they tell us it is a throwback to the Sixties, and we are going to fight like hell to get this money back to women's programmes." And we did it.

The last time I felt it was not among all women. I went to a rally in Manitoba. It was a rally of Aboriginal people the day before the death of the Meech Lake Accord. What I felt there was also power because there were the Aboriginal people of Manitoba standing with Elijah Harper and saying: "No. We will not let you step on us one more time. We do not care what the consequences are. For our

power, I see four elements of power: risk, leadership, organization, and solidarity. I think of the words of Solidarity Forever: "When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run, there can be no greater power anywhere beneath the sun, yet what force on Earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one, the union makes us strong." I would suggest to you that it is from that line in Solidarity Forever that we have to draw our understanding of power.

But recently I have had another experience of power. Two weeks ago I met with Michael Wilson. I want to tell you I did not think it was possible, but these guys look worse close up than they do from far away. I saw a form of power that was individualistic, aggressive, oppressive, arrogant, and anti-democratic.

I mean that we refuse that kind of power. We refuse that kind of power. We do not want that kind of power. There is an attempt today to appeal to the women's movement to convince us to agree to that kind of power, a so-called patriarchal power. I use the word patriarchal. It's rather theoretical. What does it mean? It means the power of a father in a traditional family. It's the power to say: "Do what I want you to do or else face the consequence."

The power to say: "Do what I want you to do or face the consequence." The power of the boss to fire us. The power of the violent men to beat us up. The power of the Tory government to take away everything we fought for — patriarchal power. We do not want any part of it. The power of gaining your power on the backs of others, instead of in solidarity with others. This is a crucial point in the women's movement and, I believe, in the labour movement as well. Some of us now have access to that patriarchal power — educated, White women, upper middle class — because the women's movement has been successful enough to force those in power to understand they have to include a few women or they will not have any credibility — they will not be able to keep their power. I do not know if some of you saw the Report on Business where they had a picture of women: "How do we get more women into the boardroom?" they asked. What they are trying to do is get women who will replicate their power and therefore maintain their kind of oppressive power. They are somewhat

Mary Collin's speech — I do not know if any of you saw it — about how we have to change our tactics, not be confrontational, be polite. Having to deal with the Minister, you know, that will do it. Then the question: "What do you women want? Haven't you got enough already? What do you want?" When I get that question on talk shows and so on, the way I answer is: "We want equality. We want to make the same amount of money as men. We only make 65%. We want the same opportunities. We want 51% of women. We want child care. We want violence against women to end." They say: "Oh, that is quite a lot left to be done, eh." I say "Yes." But, do you know what we really want? We want to change the world. That is what we want. We want to transform the notions of power because the only way for women, minorities, disabled people, Aboriginal people, gays and lesbians, and I would submit, the only way for workers to have real power in the society is not to buy into the patriarchal notions of power, but to transform the notions of power and fight for collective power that empowers all of us.

The labour movement teaches us solidarity and teaches us notions that not everybody is on our side, that we have to know which side we are on, that we learn from the labour movement, the class distinctions in the society, which in the women's movement we do not understand very well. What the women's movement has to teach the labour movement is these notions of the transformation of power. A different kind of power. A sharing of power. It is not easy as sisters pointed out earlier. I want to talk about the risks because I think we have to. One of the ways we get power is to speak the truth about things. There is a risk in fighting for equality and fighting for power because it means some people have to share their power and some people have to give up their power, in this case White men. A lot of men do not want to do that. They do not feel comfortable with it. They feel comfortable the way things were. It is much more comfortable and a lot of women do not feel comfortable with it either. The status quo is much more comfortable. It is what we are used to. Even though, as Nancy said, I did not worry about my make-up when I yelled and screamed, when I saw myself on TV I felt like shit that I was on national

Globe and Mail saying the Tories hate most of all, of all the groups they have to deal with, they hate the CLC and NAC the most.

I want to read you a quote from Martin Luther King. In 1963, he wrote to a group of clergymen who declared their support for his goals but called the violation of law and support of them unwise and untimely. His reply is worth keeping in mind and I quote: "The Negroes' great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens' Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the White moderate who is more devoted to order than justice, who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of attention to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

We are facing very powerful ideological weapons and often when I give a speech, I think three quarters of what I have to do, especially not to an audience like this but let's say to students, is to fight those mystifications that keep us oppressed. But also ourselves, we have to deal with it. When our sisters of colour get up and say: "We know you can fight for what you want as White women. Why are you not fighting as hard for what we want?" We have to look at that. As White women, in the women's movement, we have power which is very hard to accept. I find it hard. I hate it when they call NAC a mainstream women's group. But we do have power. I can get access to the media. The president of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada cannot. We have power, and we have to learn how to share that power by listening to our sisters of colour.

When our native sister Lois stands up and says: "We better settle down here because if I get angry I'm going to tell you what I really think." We have to say: "We are willing to listen to your anger because we know it is righteous anger." We are willing to hear it. That is not easy for us to do. It is painful. But we have to commit ourselves to that change. That is how we build collective power. By listening to those who have less power than us and committing ourselves to fight against racism and to fight for their demands — the same as ours — that is how we get unity. That is what real unity is about.

But at the same time we face another enemy. In

get up and say: "I am for equality. We are committed to equality." We have Mary Collins saying, getting up at conferences and talking about women's equality and the fight against violence. It is really easy to get confused because if we are all for equality, if the people in power are for equality, how come we do not have it? We have to deal with that double speak and say: "No, they are not for equality. Every policy that this Tory government has in place is anti-women, anti-visible minority, anti-native, anti-worker. They are doing everything they can to get the power of the elite to keep it strong, to keep it powerful, and to stop anybody who is out of power from getting power to destroy our collective power." That is what they are about. They are our enemies.

There is something else that makes us feel powerless, that confusion makes us feel powerless, but something else. I think to understand power, we have to understand powerlessness. There is nothing that makes women feel more powerless than violence against women. If you talk to women who have been victims of violence — and I would suggest to you that the majority of women in this room, if not all women in this room have been in one way or another victims of violence against women — it makes us feel frightened, alone and powerless. The only way that changes is by talking about it, and organizing against it together; to speak its name — whether it is in the workplace, on the campus, or in society; to understand that it is not an individual problem. It is not an aberration if some lunatic guy is beating up or murdering his spouse. But it is all of our problem. Whether it is a sexist prank at a university, sexist posters on the wall of a plant, whistles on the street, sexual harassment, intimidation in a relationship, date rape, wife battering, murder or a massacre, it all comes from the same source. That is individual men trying to exercise their power over individual women. Not to say all men are bad, or all men are violent, or all men hate women. It is not about that. It is to recognize the way in which the unequal power relations between men and women, impact on women through violence, harassment and sexism, and how we have to all take responsibility as women, and as men, to stop it and to speak out against it. That is what is important.

cannot talk about it. It is still too emotional for me. But I never worked on the issue of violence against women. Partly I stayed away from it because it was too personal. But on that day, December 6, 1989, I understood something in a profound way I never understood before. That was the level of misogyny in the society, the level of sexism, and the way in which that stops us from getting power and equality, and how it is every one of our responsibilities, whatever our issue, whatever our location, to stand up against violence against women, and to speak out against it, and to call it by name. That is why December 6th is so important to mark, and to fight for it to be recognized officially. We have asked the Prime Minister to make it an official day of commemoration. A remembrance day not only for the 14 women who were massacred, but for all victims, women victims and children victims of male violence. To say that this country and this society and families suffer as much, or more, from violence against women as we do from war dead and from violence in wars. To recognize that as a society it is important. If they will not recognize it on the level of the government, we as women will recognize it and claim December 6th as a Women's Remembrance Day, and we will be organizing. We will be organizing with our sisters in the unions, our sisters on the campuses, right across the country — vigils, discussions, conferences, art exhibits, performance art. It is happening. It is incredible what is happening all across the country for women to say "no" to violence against women and men also to say "no" to violence against women.

I want to talk about risk. The other risk, of course, is the backlash. You have talked about that a lot. I do not need to go into it more but I just want to say one thing about the backlash. One, there has always been a backlash to feminism from the suffragettes on. There has always been a backlash and that is men resisting change. It has always been there. It is nothing new. Do not let them tell you it is anything new. Secondly, any successful social movement — whether it is the labour movement, the women's movement, the ANC in South Africa — any movement that is successful in fighting for change produces a backlash. It is called polarization. That is how change happens. It would be nice if change happened another way. It would be nice if somebody said, "Hey, this is happens but it is not. As union women, anybody that has been on a picket line knows. Anybody that has been on a demonstration knows. Anybody who has fought for anything in their personal life or collectively knows that it is struggle that makes change and struggle means polarization. That is a fact of life, unfortunately. Someday, we hope, when we transform power, we can change that. When we are in power, collectively in power, we hope we will get to the point where we can listen to an injustice and correct it. But that is not where we are at in the society today. The risk is polarization and it is scary. Like the anti-choice, they are scary people. We get intimidated by them. We often get intimidated. We start to believe they have more power than they have because they are organized, and they are loud, and they are vicious, and they will stop at nothing. But we have to stand up to that backlash, and again, where we get our power to stand up to that backlash is together.

I remember the OFL Conference in 1982, where a lot of women were afraid to stand up and fight for legalization of free standing clinics. They were sure there would be a backlash. They were sure their brothers would laugh them out of the hall because at that time there were very few women delegates. We stood up and we fought at that convention.

We had a sister who was an older sister, who was known as a very hard bitten trade unionist, stand up and tell us the story of having a son who is haemophiliac and how she did not want to have any more children. Her son had just died. He was also a union activist. She was in her fifties, late fifties, and she told the convention how she had to go through three back-street abortions in order to save her future children from suffering what her son had suffered. You could have heard a pin drop in that room. There were no titters. There was nobody walking out. It was 4:30 in the afternoon. Suddenly the morality of the abortion issue, the real morality, the real meaning of a woman's right to choose became clear to all the brothers in the room and the vote was massively in favour of a woman's right to choose because we spoke the truth, and we organized collectively, and that gave us power.

The last thing I want to talk about is solidarity. The power of that convention came out of a coalition we have been building between women in the women's movement, and the women's community

bureaucrats inside the women's movement. They never wanted to go back again to those horrible meetings where there was not any order and everything was completely disorganized and "touchy feely" and all this. It was awful. We persevered. There were some of us in the women's community and some of us in the labour movement who understood the importance of that alliance. We persevered. That is how we got the Eaton's strike, the solidarity in the Eaton's strike that you saw in your books, and that solidarity of the labour movement speaking out for choice. That is where it came from. That is where all the coalition politics we have now, in my view anyway, started. It was by women in solidarity, accepting our differences, but understanding that what we have in common is greater than any difference, and understanding our common goals because I believe that the alliance between the women's movement and the labour movement — and we have a lot of other allies but I'm not going to talk about that — I think it is the most powerful force for social change we have ever seen in history. That is my view.

We have in that alliance the potential to transform power. We see that today in Ontario because I want to tell you the 11 women who are in Cabinet did not get there just because the male leadership of the NDP believe in equality. They believe in equality for a reason and that is because women fought for ten years. In the Party we fought for affirmative action. In the OFL we fought for affirmative action. Together, women in the NDP and the OFL fought for two years in the Party to take a strong line on choice, and it transformed the Party and the leadership of the Party to understand the importance of equality for women. We have not only 11 women out of 26, but we have feminists there who are there not just to further their own career, but to transform the power relations to bring other women into power and they understand that. We have never ever had that situation before, and that is why I find what is happening in Ontario so exciting. The other thing is there is still some of us out here that are going to keep fighting out here and make sure they keep remembering (because it is overwhelming to be in the government) why they are there.

We are facing very tough times now across this to destroy everything we have fought for in the sphere of social programmes, economics, women's programmes and Aboriginal rights. They are even willing to resort to military force to keep their power. It's frightening and it's hard. It's even harder for women. Last month, there was a job reduction in Quebec and 27 jobs out of 28 were women's jobs. It's awful.

We have a choice. We can retrench and fight each of our individual struggles, and heaven knows we have enough, or we can unite and together fight in coalition against the regressive policies of this government. For our collective rights, each of us fighting for our individual struggles and us fighting collectively for those things that we have in common and supporting each other on our individual struggles. That is going to be harder and harder to do. They are going to try and divide us more and more as things get tough. But I believe that the experience we have had over the last ten years and the solidarity of women within that is going to make us strong, and keep us strong, and get us to a point where we can transform the patriarchal notions of power and begin to really change the society as women, as workers, as minorities, as Aboriginal people, together united in sisterhood, in solidarity.

Nancy Riche

Executive Vice-President

Canadian Labour Congress

We have some guests I want to introduce right at the beginning. There was a room on the 18th floor. It had marvellous artwork all around the walls. In each bedroom there were at least four beds and cots and some of the people in there slept in the afternoon. Today they are off to the Santa Claus parade. But before they go, they thought they would like to come and say hello. These are the children from the daycare. The daycare was organized by Gayle O'Connor. Let me give you the names of the workers. Maureen Mericle, Ann Loy, Angelo Coin, Margaret O'Connor and Gayle O'Connor, all members of CUPE 2204.

Come up and stand here so all the participants can see you. There were 16 in the daycare; the highest number we have ever had. The little ones didn't come down because we thought there might be some difficulty getting them back out again. And we would like to welcome our daycare. We wish we were going to the Santa Claus parade but we have to change the world, so what can I say! Thank you for coming.

We are going to move very quickly to the reading of the report from the workshops. This is an overview, a little more than an overview, of the workshops that was put together from the facilitators meetings held on Thursday and Friday, and then worked on by the sub-committee and by three writers that we specifically asked to help us, and I would like to thank them even before you hear the report and ask them if they are here, to stand up and be introduced. (We have a small gift for you.) Donna Balkan from NUPGE, Pat Van Horne from Steelworkers, and Michelle Walsh from the Communications Department of the CLC.

This is not to dampen discussion in any way, shape, or form, but the women's conference is not a policy setting conference. It doesn't mean that the kinds of things that come out of workshops find their ways to the decision-making bodies of all levels of the labour movement because you will bring them to the locals, to your provincial federations, to your national unions, and we will bring them to the CLC Committee and Council. But we don't have the authority (no committee does in the Congress) to actually take a resolution and move it into convention. However, it's not unusual to see recommendations from a CLC women's conference on the convention floor in the form of resolutions.

This is a different conference. This was a conference not based on specific tangible issues: pay equity - how do you get it, what does it take, what is a job evaluation plan? - affirmative action, employment equity. It was not that kind of conference. In fact, if it had been it would have been exactly the same issues as the 1988 Conference. Nothing has basically changed in terms of the issues that we are fighting.

This conference was designed to have women look at power, empowerment and how we achieve it. Not an easy concept. We all have some notion of power that usually had nothing to do with us. We have all heard it said, and it's a cliche, but power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. So part of your head would say, what the hell would I want anything to do with that. We are, however, witnessing new styles of leadership. We have watched Audrey McLaughlin changing the power structures within the NDP caucus. For the first time in any political party, there are teams of critics. The team concept is a concept familiar to women, and sometimes we should analyze why we are more comfortable expressing power as part of a team than we are as individuals. Women talk about getting power, so they can share it. It's a different kind of thing to struggle with. Not an easy thing to struggle with with 600 people at a conference. How do you take a concept and work with it and stretch it and deal with it and go back and say now I want it.

The first women's conference I attended in the CLC we talked about paid maternity leave, so I could go back and say let's talk about paid maternity