



Women's  
Leadership  
Development  
Forum



**October 19 to October 21, 2003**

**Report**

**December 2003**

## “Strengthen the movement One woman at a time”

**The National Union of Public and General Employees** has always believed in, promoted and fought for gender equality. Part of the struggle has been to ensure that we have women leadership in our federal and provincial governments and within the labour movement. To prepare women for these leadership positions within our unions the National Union created the Women’s Leadership Development Forum. Bringing together women from across NUPGE components into a forum to develop leadership skills and strategies to enhance women’s issues was the third stage in the Action Plan endorsed at the 2001 NUPGE Convention. The Forum was held in Wakefield, Quebec, October 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003.

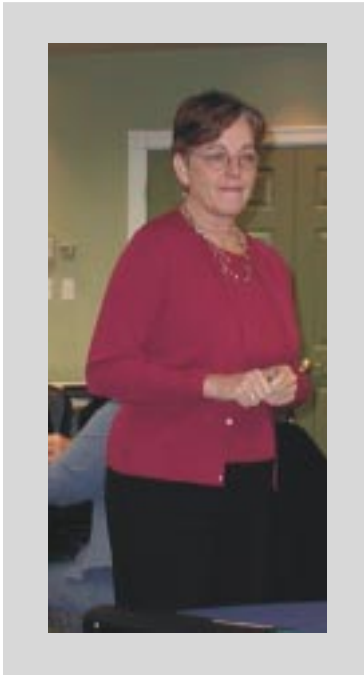
The National Union Women’s Leadership Development Forum commenced Sunday evening with greetings and welcome from National President James Clancy.

Sister Carol Meyer, Director of Research and Campaigns, opened the program on Monday morning with an overview of the formal agenda. Sister Meyer advised that the forum was set up with a series of presentations by guest speakers Dr. Isla Carmichael, Professor Dorothy Sue Cobble and Sister Gloria Mills as well as a session led by Sister Meyer herself. On the second day of the forum, participants would have the opportunity to brainstorm, with the assistance of the facilitators, to find strategies to address barriers and challenges. The participants would also work with participants from their own component to build action plans.

### Women and Their Unions

This presentation was given by Dorothy Sue Cobble who is a Professor of Labour Studies, History, and Women’s Studies at Rutgers University where she directs the Institute for Research on Women. Her books include: “Dishing it Out: Waitresses and their Unions in the Twentieth Century” (1991), “Women and Unions: Forging a Part-

nership” (1993), and “The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America” (2004).



Professor Cobble addressed the issue of women and union leadership and discussed barriers and strategies to increase representation of women in leadership positions. As an opening exercise, the participants were asked to identify a woman that they admire. The women identified included mothers, union leaders and women who have made historical advances.

During the session, participants were asked to identify leadership qualities. A lengthy list was compiled which included such qualities as: generosity, humor, tenacity, clarity of thinking, gentle quiet strength, passion for social justice, integrity, positive attitude, balance, formidable, and resourceful. A good leader must also have the ability to move into non-traditional areas, develop leadership in others, be able to sacrifice for the larger society, be able to break barriers and understand that they must leave a legacy for younger women.

Professor Cobble identified the four stages of gender equity:

1. access / equal rights
2. participation / equal voice
3. leadership / equal power
4. transformation / equal value (leadership for social change)

Professor Cobble concluded the session by stating that to obtain leadership, thereby power, women must have education (improve their skills), have self-confidence (be assertive), and have individual change (value who they are as women versus trying to change to conform to a man’s style). Women must also balance “Bread” and the “Roses”.

## Women's Committees Vehicles for Women's Voices or Instruments of Marginalization?



This session on best-practices for women's committees and the need to ensure that women's issues become union issues was facilitated by Sister Gloria Mills who has worked as a senior trade union officer for the past two decades and was appointed Director of Equal Opportunities of UNISON in 1993. She is responsible for promoting UNISON's strategic equality campaigns and programmes including work on proportional representation for women. Sister Mills has been instrumental in achieving ground-breaking constitutional changes on equality for women, ethnic minorities, and under-represented groups, as well as securing amendment to the European Union Treaty of Rome and Article 13 of the European Commission Directives on equality legislation.

Sister Mills began the session by stating that Women's Committees have been perceived as being only responsible for dealing with 'women's issues' - not "bread and butter" issues. In many unions women's issues - such as equal pay; sexual harassment; childcare; discrimination; and women's health matters - are "dumped" onto the Women's Committee rather than being addressed by the union in an integrated fashion. Women's Committees are further minimalized by being labeled as 'tea clubs', 'knitting clubs' or 'social' networks. Under traditional union structures, Women's Committees report to the Executive Board, who reports to the union Convention or Congress. Women's Committees can be either a vehicle for transformational change, thereby social justice, or a vehicle for marginalization.

The structure of Women's Committees needs to be analyzed: what is the purpose and strategies of the committee, what structure does it operate under (where is the power); what are the methods of working and where are the strategic alliances / partnerships /

networks. Sister Mills outlined a SWOT Analysis of Women's Committees: Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Sister Mills continued the session by stating that the union 'agenda' (mainstream) must be relevant to women, developed by women and owned by women and men who exercise power. Women need to build capacity by promoting women into leadership, building confidence, determining strategies and creating strategic alliances, obtaining training and developing new ideas and visions. Women must achieve POWER which equates to responsibility and accountability. Women need to be seen as 'adding value' with positive outcomes and they need to transform the agenda, the structure, and the culture.

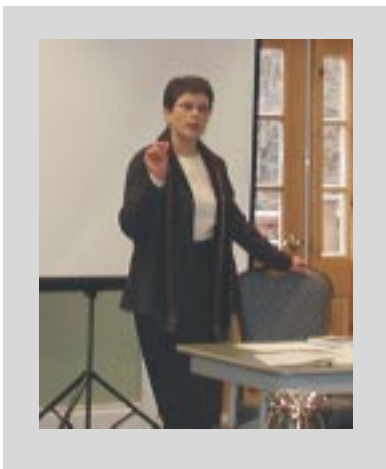
Sister Mills concluded the session by stating women need to learn how to 'get the Whole Loaf' - and 'not just the crumbs'.

## **Promoting Rights for Women through Collective Bargaining**

This presentation concerning issues for gender equality bargaining was led by Sister Carol Meyer, Director of Research and Campaigns for the National Union of Public and General Employees. Sister Meyer has both instructed and facilitated many courses in collective bargaining, and other leadership schools.

Sister Meyer began the session by stating that the traditional approach to gender equality bargaining was that unions relied on legislation to achieve and protect equality issues. Historically, with the exception of maternity leave, concerns and interests of women have been overlooked in the bargaining process. Where proposals that benefit women made it to the bargaining table, they were 'traded-off' early or viewed as subordinate issues. Today, most unions understand that women's issues are union issues and union issues are women's issues.

To achieve gender equality within collective agreements, Sister Meyer suggested that an analysis should be done of current collective agreements for areas where improvements are necessary. In first collective agreements, the same analysis should be used to set standards that can be built on in subsequent rounds of negotiations. Areas to focus on in the analysis would include: wages and benefits, leave provisions, hours of work, health and work environment, maternity and family responsibilities, rights of non-permanent and part-time workers and protection from discrimination provisions.



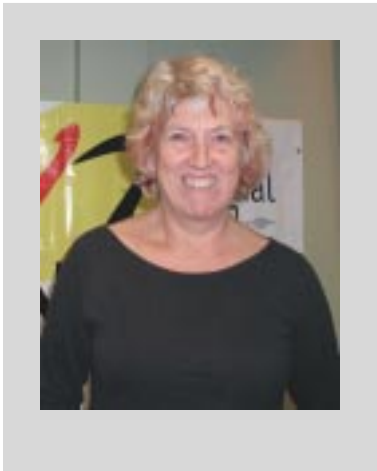
To prepare for gender equality bargaining, women must participate and encourage other union women to participate in the bargaining process by attending meetings where proposals are gathered, running for election to bargaining committees, submitting proposals and responding to bargaining surveys. Women must also work within their union women's committees to build a bridge between the work of the committee and the union's collective bargaining agenda. The needs of the workers must be identified and prioritized.

Once negotiations have concluded, Sister Meyer stressed that it is important to communicate the policies, rights and benefits obtained on a regular basis. Women's collective bargaining workshops offer a safe environment for women to learn about their collective agreement. Statistics must be continuously obtained. If possible, attempts should be made to have someone at the worksite monitor the number of women hired, promoted and trained. Careful monitoring of the implementation of the new collective agreement should be conducted, with an eye to where improvements can be made in the next set of negotiations. Equality issues should be promoted in educational and training programs. The work done by the union on behalf of women should be publicized - which is also an organizing strategy.

Sister Meyer concluded the session by stressing that success at gender equality collective bargaining hinges on mutual support and activism of both women and men.

Therefore, it is important that there be a strong educational component to accompany key gender equality proposals to help build support with the rank and file.

## Pensions and Women's Economic Well-Being



This session dealing with the importance of pensions and economic well-being and how these issues impact on women was led by Dr. Isla Carmichael who is the Senior Researcher and Educator at the Ontario Public Service Employees Union/NUPGE. She completed her doctoral studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. She is a trade unionist and feminist. For thirteen years, as Pay Equity Negotiator, Coordinator of Education and Campaigns, and Chief Executive Assistant to the President, she specialized in union administration, labour education, women's equity issues, union mobilization strategies, research on the social value of public sector work, rights at work, and pensions.

Sister Carmichael began the session by stating that older women are the poorest in our society. Statistics show that almost a quarter of women (24%) over 65 are below the low income cut-off, compared to fewer than 12% of men. This means that women spend more than 20% of their before-tax incomes on food, shelter and clothing. Over half of these women live alone, compared to one in three elderly men who live alone.

She advised that there are three pension pillars: (1) The Canada Pension Plan - CPP (in Quebec - the QPP), (2) Registered pensions plans or workplace plans – RPPs and (3) Registered retirement savings plans – RRSPs. Women depend on the CPP. In 1997, 64% of all income received by senior women came from government transfers -

60% of this was from the public pension system - Q/CPP and OAS. As Sister Carmichael pointed out, CPP doesn't work in the interests of women because CPP contributions are based on hours of work and wages and women have traditionally more interruptions in their working lives and lower wages.

Almost as many women as men are members of RPPs (registered pensions plans) because the proportion of men in the workplace has dropped sharply in the last twenty years and the proportion of women with pensions has risen because of increasing numbers of women in the paid workforce and the increased numbers of unionized women in the public sector. Since more women (58%) than men (36%) belong to public sector plans, women tend to contribute more and have more generous access to benefits. However, since women earn less than men and accumulate fewer years of service, their benefits are predicted to be lower.

RRSPs and private savings are based on the fact that the more income you have, the more able you are to contribute. Since women tend to earn less than men, fewer women contribute to these plans. Also, these are higher risk as returns mirror stock market returns and the individual bears 100% of the risk.

Sister Carmichael reiterated the fact that the wage gap brings down our future pension and CPP benefits. Job segregation is the main cause of the female wage. She suggested the following solutions: get a union; raise female wages; reduce female absences from the workforce through shared childcare, eldercare and parental leave arrangements; strengthen rights and benefits for part-timers; strengthen workplace pension plans and lobby for a stronger public pension system.

Sister Carmichael concluded by stressing that of utmost importance is to ensure that bargaining committees have female representation, that pension issues are on the bargaining agenda and that pension education is available at all union levels.



## Women as Union Leaders



Sister Gloria Mills began this session by stating that the undisputed reality is that women face more barriers than men do to become leaders. These barriers include children and eldercare responsibilities, discrimination, gender hostility, stereotypes, the culture and structure of organizations, and the lack of established support networks that have been easily accessible to men. As well there tends to be higher expectations from women leaders than for male leaders.

Another barrier faced by women in leadership is the cultural norms of organizations. The ‘written’ rules are there but it is the ‘unwritten’ rules that in reality are the way things are done. Unwritten rules, which men utilize, tend to exclude women and decisions are made in this ‘corridor of power’. Women must be included at all stages of decision making and to this end networking, building strategic alliances and partnerships are vital.

Women work longer and harder to fit in. As women we should not collude with status quo rather we need to change the status quo. A survey was conducted which concluded that women who are promoted tend to be single and childless, which is a pattern of discrimination. Women need a level playing field and therefore research should be done on the patterns of the advancement of women within the worksite and within the union.

There is the ‘Queen Bee Syndrome’ whereby elected women don’t support the issues they campaigned on and in fact support the male priorities. This is political suicide to their reputation, ethics and trust. Instead of opening up access to other women, they ‘pull the ladder up’. Sister Mills reminded participants that women must “lift as we rise”. We need progressive women in positions of power. Women’s committees should be a mechanism for support for those who have achieved elected status.

Women's issues tend to get marginalized and are not on the mainstream agenda. Women's committees need to be instruments of power, not just 'influencing' decisions but having the 'power' to make changes. Political networks are important - with other women, within the union, with other components, and the community.

We must try to distinguish between having influence and having power. Influence can determine what another person does or thinks. Power means having the potential, or capacity, to influence others. Such power includes the authority to deliver. If women take on impossible tasks which cannot be completed, they risk their reputation as they will be seen as incompetent. This is 'setting up for failure'. We need the tools to complete the task and that includes time and the funds/budget. Sister Mills concluded by stating women must get from the margins into the mainstream and in doing so achieve social change, create a critical mass and add value.

## Wrap Up

The participants broke into discussion groups and came back with the following solutions to women's barriers:

- Be involved in the political process at all levels;
- Run for leadership positions;
- Develop a mandate and priorities (don't forget who put you there);
- Develop a base of support (and also support the women you voted into elected positions)
- Get educated and make it personal (opens opportunities);
- Distribute positive media messages;
- Rules - know them but keep in mind there are 'games';
- Have meetings closer to home, and ensure the agenda is action oriented (not just reporting);
- Lobby - allies, network, family, and workplace;

- Recruit more women as stewards/activists;
- Know the demographics of locals/unions; and
- Develop ‘safe places’ for women (i.e. support at mikes during meetings or conventions) and transfer these skills gained into the mainstream.

The participants also identified what is **NOT** needed: lip-service, opportunities for ‘photo shots’, tokenism and being set up to fail.

Sister Mills summed up the session with the following key comments:

- Focus on solutions - not the obstacles of life.
- Publicize successes - use the media.
- Mentorship - cascade down to other women.
- Rule book - consolidate hard-won gains (within constitution).
- Make sure your vote counts - translate actions into votes.
- Women need courage, which equals confidence and experience.

## Participants

**National Union:** Carol Meyer, Marie Bean, Brenda Hildahl

**BCGEU:** Catherine Bell, Wendi Lawrence, Sandi McLean

**SGEU:** Linda Anweiler, Theresa Wilkinson

**MGEU:** Kelly-Ann Ivory

**OPSEU:** Helen Riehl, Elaine Bagnall

**BGPWU:** Marg Ducie, Elizabeth Blazejewski

**PEIUPSE:** Eileen LeClair, Ann Landry, Gertrude Beirsto

**NBPEA:** Lydia Jaillet, Lisa Watters

**NSGEU:** Martha Brown, Joanne MacAdam, Rocky Beals

**NAPE:** Sheila Beaton, Arlene Sedlickas

**Speakers:** Dorothy Sue Cobble, Gloria Mills, Isla Carmichael, Carol Meyer



Back row: Ann Landry (PEIUPSE); Rocky Beals (NSGEU); Joanne MacAdam (NSGEU); Elaine Bagnall (OPSEU); Sandi McLean (BCGEU); Theresa Wilkinson (SGEU); Wendi Lawrence (BCGEU); Kelly-Ann Ivory (MGEU); Lydia Jaillet (NBPEA); Eileen LeClair (PEIUPSE); Arlene Sedlickas (NAPE); Gertrude Beirsto (PEIUPSE); Lisa Watters (NBPEA); Marg Ducie (BGPWU); Elizabeth Blazejewski (BGPWU); Sheila Beaton (NAPE)

Front row: Martha Brown (NSGEU); Dorothy Sue Cobble (Presenter); Catherine Bell (BCGEU); Linda Anweiler (SGEU); Helen Riehl (OPSEU); Gloria Mills (Presenter); Isla Carmichael (Presenter)







