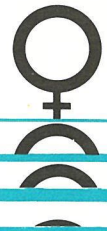


# Equal Partners for Change: Women and Unions



## Using Your Union

Unions have been instrumental in bringing about changes in wages, working conditions, fringe benefits, job security and human rights for workers. If women workers are to be equal partners in the workforce, they must work with and through their unions. The Canadian Labour Congress has supported the goals of equal pay and equal opportunity in its Policy Statement on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers. The CLC has requested Labour Councils to establish committees to ensure that women receive equal pay for work of equal value and that they have equal opportunities in the workplace and in the larger community. These committees, called Women's Committees or Equal Rights and Opportunities Committees can be effective forces for change in the workplace. Procedures for establishing and operating such a committee could be as follows:

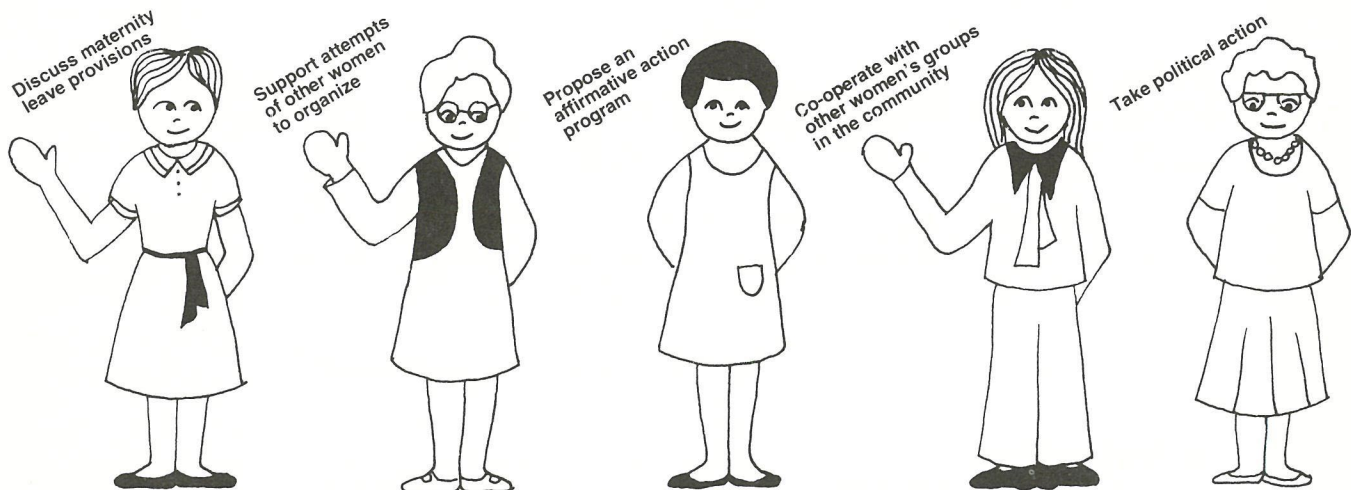
- 1) The labour council passes a motion to establish a committee on equality. A chairperson is named from among labour council officers or selected by committee members at the first meeting.
- 2) Members of the committee are chosen from affiliates, with as wide a representation as possible from both unions and occupational groups.
- 3) The council calls the first meeting of the committee to determine its terms of reference which might include:
  - developing policies and programs to bring about equality of treatment between men and women workers.

- involving women more actively in their local unions and in the labour council and its programs.
- developing programs to examine the status of women within their area, such as hiring policy of local employers; services of government to find out how they treat women clients; child-care services; educational opportunities for women and career choices offered to young girls still in school.
- co-operating with the CLC and affiliates in education programs to assist women in developing leadership skills.
- helping to organize the many unorganized women in the community.
- co-operating with other women's groups, for example NDP women, to take action on common issues such as learning opportunities for women in the community.
- recommending to the labour council possible policy positions and action proposals that would improve opportunities for women.

- 4) The newly-formed committee would take its proposals and terms of reference to the labour council for adoption.
- 5) The committee would report regularly to the labour council on progress in implementing the terms of reference.

### Union Locals

Union locals and groups of women within a local may also wish to take action to improve the status of women. Union locals can undertake many activities to work for equal pay and equal opportunity for women workers.





Participation in union activities is the first step towards influencing union decisions.

Union locals can establish women's committees or equal rights and opportunities committees to:

- Encourage more women to participate in union activities. Seek out and encourage women to run for elected positions in your local. Set up special sessions to listen to the problems faced by women in your workplace.
- Study the collective agreement to see if there are any clauses which have a discriminatory impact. Ask women workers what clauses they would like to see added to the next contract.
- Propose an affirmative action program to end discrimination in hiring and promotions, and open doors to non-traditional occupations to women.
- Examine your wage structure and/or classification system to see if it is based on equal pay for work of equal value. Discuss your findings with your committee and prepare recommendations to your executive or bargaining committee.
- Co-operate with the health and safety committee to study your workplace for health and safety hazards for women. Carry out research into the health problems of women employees to see if there is a pattern which could indicate a hidden health hazard.
- Encourage women workers to speak out about sexual harassment on the job. Through the local, request the employer to issue a memorandum to supervisory staff condemning sexual harassment. Work for protection against sexual coercion in the next contract.
- Examine the fringe benefits in your contract to see if they discriminate against women, and recommend to the local ways to equalize benefits in the next contract.

- Discuss maternity/parental leave provisions to see if they adequately protect the income, seniority and well-being of parents.
- Conduct a study into child-care arrangements made by the working parents in your workplace. Could these parents be better served if the union worked for on-site child-care, 24 hour child-care services for shift workers, or financial subsidies for child-care away from the workplace.
- Study the position of part-time women workers and their wages and fringe benefits.
- Support attempts of other women in other workplaces or occupations to organize, and support workers striking or picketing over issues of special concern to women.

A union is only as strong as the workers who join and participate in it. The more that women take an active role in the union, the greater their influence in improving the status of women workers and the greater the strength of the union in bargaining for women's rights.

