

WORKING TOGETHER DISTRICT 3 CONFERENCE REPORTS

Women Of Steel:

How A Training Course Became A Movement

by CAROL LANDRY

The 1991 District 3 Summer School at Hecla Island, Manitoba, marked the introduction of Women Of Steel, a leadership course that has

since sparked a movement among Steelworker women throughout Western Canada.

First developed in Ontario, the course has done more than train activists. It has created and ensured a

place for women in the union. With more and more women joining Steelworker ranks (thanks to increased organizing in sectors that employ mainly women), Women of Steel now is part of the "culture" of the union.

From January, 1992, to August, 1993, 145 Steelworker women have been introduced to Women of Steel, in sessions taught by local union women, most of whom came out of the first session in 1991.

One of the objectives of Women of Steel is to build a network and support system within the district. Now established, that network has expanded to include District 6 (Ontario) and many states.

Expansion has also meant another course that includes Steelworker men. Brothers And Sisters, Working Together allows union members to jointly address the barriers women face on the job, in the union and in the home. Breaking down those barriers is more than a personal victory for the individuals who take the courses; it builds and strengthens the union.

Another planned spinoff of Women Of Steel has been the introduction to many collective agreements of contract language addressing such issues as parental leave, sexual harassment, on-site child care,

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Steelworkers Appointed To Help End Harassment

Four Steelworkers have been designated as racial and sexual harassment officers for the district.

They will be available to assist — in strictest confidence — union members who feel they have been the victims of harassment. They are also able to conduct one- or two-day courses for local unions or area councils, or joint labour/management courses in the workplace.

The officer named for B.C. is **Sandra Pinter**, c/o the Steelworkers' Burnaby office, 7820 Edmonds Street, Burnaby, B.C. V3N 1B8 (tel.604/525-7481).

In Alberta, contact **Dawn Crawshaw**, c/o the Edmonton office, 215 — 14925 111th Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5M 2P6 (tel.403/487-1141).

Saskatchewan Steelworkers should contact **Sharon Prentice**, c/o the Saskatoon office, 200 — 3311 Fairlight Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7M 3Y5 (306/382-2122).

Syed Ahemedullah is the officer in Manitoba, c/o the Thompson office, 19 Elizabeth Drive, Thompson, MB R8N 1S7 (tel.204/677-4511).



TWO WOMEN OF STEEL: Carol Landry (Local 7619) and Dawn Crawshaw (Local 5885). Crawshaw is also available to assist Steelworkers in Alberta on racial- and sexual-harassment issues.

Open And Inclusive

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required to cover all the developments in the field. It was a new course in 1992, and secondary manuals are already being developed to keep union members ahead of management.

Changes in work and society mean more member education is necessary, although the cost is often a burden to local unions. 1994 will

begin the search for new and innovative ways of delivering the necessary training.

The Education Department now has responsibility in District 3 for area councils and the Steelworkers' Organization Of Active Retirees (SOAR). Area councils across the West are in the process of rebuilding and are being encouraged to assist in the creation of SOAR chapters. Three chapters have been established in

B.C., thanks largely to the efforts of SOAR activist Jim Patterson (retired, Local 651).

As always, the education program owes its success to its instructors, drawn from the ranks of local unions in all the Western provinces and territories. Without them, Steelworker education would not enjoy the reputation it now has of producing some of the best labour leaders in North America.

The Humanity Fund And District 3:

Travelling On A Two-Way Street

by JUDITH MARSHALL

Solidarity is a two-way street, and the traffic includes Steelworkers travelling to agricultural cooperatives, women's groups and community kitchens supported by the Steelworkers' Humanity Fund.

The trips have served as eye-openers on both sides. Steelworkers come back with new ideas about how the union can link up with working people in South Africa or Bolivia to become strategic allies for fair trade and sustainable development. At the same time, workers in Central and South America now see behind the wealthy image of Canada, and have found instead the unemployment, impoverishment and devastating impact of free trade.

Nine local activists and staff rep-

resentatives now have travelled to Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, South Africa, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. The stories they bring back have common threads, including shock at the deep contrast in some countries between extreme poverty for the majority, and luxury for an elite few.

While Humanity Fund travellers are generally awakened to the struggle of workers in other parts of the world, the visits have meant profound personal changes for at least two Steelworkers who decided that two weeks was not long enough.

Cesar Cubillos, of L.5220, travelled to Bolivia for the Fund and subsequently resettled his family in Chile. He now works on two-way solidarity as part of a Chilean network on trade and economic integration, promoting sectoral links between

Canadian and Chilean trade unionists.

Gerry LeBlanc, of L.9113, visited labour housing and literacy projects in South Africa for the Fund, and decided to return to neighbouring Mozambique to work in a health and safety project for the fledgling trade union movement there.

Along with a Steelworker from District 6, Sandra Pinter, of L.2952, went to Bolivia in the fall of '93, where she participated in workshops, and compared notes with Bolivian women about approaches to training. Their experiences also contributed to a 'gender and development' statement now being formulated by the Humanity Fund for guidance in selecting projects for support.

Two other Humanity Fund trav-

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and the opening up of training programs that allow more women to work in 'non-traditional' jobs. Some locals are setting up financial assistance programs and child care, to give more women the opportunity to attend membership meetings and take part in Steelworker education programs. Women's committees are springing up everywhere, and more women are coming forward to run for positions on local union executives, Steelworker area councils, and labour councils.

With Women Of Steel as their base, and with the support of District 3 Education Coordinator Don Posnick, more women are also becoming instructors in the union's other courses.

Not all of the road to equality has been smooth. But it is clear now that the invisibility of women in a male-dominated union is being eliminated, with few voices in opposition. The goals of the United Steelworkers have evolved to include the special concerns of its women members, allowing all Steelworkers to feel part of a common cause — to create a union, a workplace, and a society where justice and dignity prevails.

— Carol Landry is treasurer of the Steelworkers' Local 7619 (Highland Valley Copper) and Co-chair of L.7619's Women's and Civil Rights Committee. Besides being an instructor, she has also worked on developing a teaching manual for Steelworker women in the U.S.

"The customs of centuries die very hard

But we still look in hope for the time

When equality's not just in charters and laws

But entrenched within everyone's mind

Still the internal struggle's the hardest of all

It's the fight to be all we can be

But when women and men join as allies and friends

We'll find truth can set all of us free..."

— Eileen McGann,
from the album
"Elements"