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# **SURVIVING**

**AND**

# **THRIVING**

**Women in Trades & Technology**  
**and**  
**Employment Equity**

Proceedings of a conference held  
October 1-4, 1988 at Naramata, British Columbia

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# Table of Contents

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Preface  
Introduction  
List of sponsors  
Acknowledgements

## *Women In Trades & Technology*

- 1** *Keynote address: A journey of women: Beyond the non-traditional* . . . . 1  
Kate Braid, journeywoman carpenter and writer

### *Our Experience*

- 2** *What happened once we got our tickets* . . . . 7  
Women, many of who were the first in their field, describe their experiences before and after qualification.

- 3** *Sharing our union experience* . . . . 27  
Janet Lane, avionics mechanic, and Jill Jones, an active labour historian, lead this discussion of women's union experience.

- 4** *Gender talk* . . . . 39  
Carol Brooks, Phd, of Quinta Consulting, explores the differences between male and female language styles.

- 5** *Overcoming isolation* . . . . 47  
Karen McMahan, a labourer at Ontario Hydro, leads this empowering discussion of meeting the challenges alone.

- 6** *Supervising Male Employees* . . . . 55  
A cross-Canada panel of trades and technical women analyze their experience and provide helpful suggestion for dealing with this new role.

### *Our Issues*

- 7** *Neither friendly nor familiar: Language styles, stress and macho* . . . . 61  
Kate Braid explores the gender difference in work and communication styles that can be so baffling on the job.

- 8** *Sexual and gender harassment* . . . . 69  
Debra Beauchamp, Manitoba Human Rights Commission, covers the various types of harassment, how to recognize them, and possible avenues of action.

**9 Women and unions** . . . . 77

Jill Jones, Typographical union, and Marion Pollack, President, Vancouver Local of the Canadian Postal Workers' Union, discuss some of what unions have done for women, what some of the struggles have been, and begin to identify what more can be done in the future.

**10 Enhancing the experience of women in the building trades** . . . . 83

Bill Darnell, Joint Board Coordinator, talks about some of the initiatives put forth by the Carpenters' Union; participants explore other actions and potential actions.

**11 Health and safety** . . . . 89

Susan Meurer discusses health and safety issues and actions of particular interest to women in operational, scientific and technical jobs.

*Our Education*

**12 Relational learning styles** . . . . 95

Carol Brooks and Susan Booth, Quinta Consulting, describe the elements and teaching strategies for female relational learners in science, trades and technology.

**13 What really happened to the WITT graduates?** . . . . 101

Marcia Braundy, Kootenay WITT, and Patti Schom-Moffatt, Karyo Communications, describe and analyze the data and experience of women surveyed in a 1988 national research project.

**14 How to keep your WITT alive** . . . . 111

Pat Fraser moderates this roundtable of analysis and suggestions for developing and maintaining WITT training programs.

**15 Community-based training: West End Machinery** . . . . 115

Susann Haw and Carolyn Hoevenaars share the story from inception to current practices, including the impact of recent changes to the funding criteria of the Canadian Job Strategy.

**16 Community-based training: Working at the Bain** . . . . 125

Joan Magill of the Bain and Jo Lee of George Brown College, present the what, how, and how's it going of their exciting joint renovation and training project.

***Employment Equity*** . . . . 135

**Foreword**

Marcia Braundy describes the programs.

**17** ***Keynote address: Employment Equity*** . . . . 137

Shelagh Day, former director of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and human rights activist, reflects on the issues.

***The Nuts and Bolts***

**18** **Court orders: What then?** . . . . 145

Marie Tellier, Assistant VP, Employment Equity, CNR, and Rob McConaghie, Consultant, Sheetmetal Workers Union, U.S.A., describe their respective approaches to evening up the score.

**19** **From Task Force to implementation** . . . . 155

Mary Ellen Magill, Employment Equity, Ontario Hydro, shares a nuts and bolts approach to Ontario Hydro's implementing women's entry into trades, technical, and operator positions.

**20** **Seniority and Employment Equity** . . . . 163

Bill Black, currently of UBC's Law faculty examines contract language and potential modifications to protect union seniority and implement employment equity.

**21** **Employment Equity: The nuts and bolts** . . . . 175

Debby Kobilansky, B.C. Telephone, and Donna Huminicki, Manitoba Hydro

**22** **A comprehensive affirmative action plan** . . . . 181

Kerry Kellough, Department of National Defense, gives an overview of Affirmative Action/Employment Equity planning and focuses on the target-setting exercise and accountability.

**23** **Employment Equity: Consultative process models in a unionized environment** . . . . 189

Anne Adams, Employment Equity Coordinator, Employment and Immigration Canada, Quebec region, presents material based on her recent thesis.

***As a Training Incentive***

**24** **Bridging programs for industry: Moving clerical women into entry-level trades and technical jobs** . . . . 199

Eleanor Ross, City of Toronto, discusses "Bridges," a program for moving clerical women into entry-level operational and technical jobs.

- 25** **Community-based training: Winnipeg Core Initiative & Women Working Inc.** . . . . 209  
 Revitalization of the downtown core is being used to train and employ target group members, i.e. women, natives, disabled and visible minorities. Jennie Styrchak describes this program. As well, Joyce Rankin talks about her work as founder and president of a private business involved in a 35-week WITT training program.
- 26** **Using the Canadian Job Strategy** . . . . 215  
 Lorraine Cameron, EIC, discusses some of the positive aspects and some of the problems of CJS.

## *Women and Technology*

- 27** **Keynote address: Women changing technology changing women** . . . . 225  
 Elaine Bernard is a labour historian and a consultant on technological change. She is the Director, Labour Programs at Simon Fraser University.
- 28** **Overcoming math anxiety** . . . . 233  
 Tasoula Berggren and Liz Szpitun, Mathematics department, Simon Fraser, describe the factors that contribute to math anxiety, strategies for eliminating the causes and techniques for controlling the symptoms.
- 29** **Gender stereotyping in maths and sciences** . . . . 237  
 Leslee Lee, mathematician, discusses historical and present-day “scientific” theories that have been used to “prove” gender differences in intelligence.
- 30** **Strategies for encouraging girls into science and technology** . . . . 243  
 Mary Vickers, Society of Canadian Women in Science and Technology, and Ann Holmes, Ontario Women’s Directorate, present programs from technical community organizations and government perspectives.
- 31** **Gender discrimination in new technologies** . . . . 249  
 Marcy Cohen, WomenSkills, and Maggie Benston, Simon Fraser University, explore where the jobs are in new technologies, what skills are necessary, where women are and why.
- 32** **Women Inventors Project** . . . . 255  
 Lisa Avedon and Shelly Beauchamp describe the activities of this extremely innovative project to identify and provide networking and support material for young and older women inventors.
- Appendix** . . . . 259  
**Recommendations**

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# Preface

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This book is the reflection of the knowledge and experience gained by Canadian women as they struggle to gain access to the world of trades and technical work. As well, it gathers the current efforts, initiatives and programs which have been developed to assist in that process. It is the first Canadian volume to address these issues in depth.

Kootenay WITT has been involved in furthering these aims since 1983, when we developed and produced the seminar *The Workplace In Transition: Integrating Women Effectively*, and the A/V presentation "What Happens To Women In Tradesland." Since 1983 we have presented the seminar at technical schools throughout B.C. and to employers, managers and apprenticeship and employment counsellors. We have written and presented briefs on access to training and apprenticeships, and have sat on numerous committees to further the goal of opening the doors and easing the way for more women in trades and technology.

In 1988, Kootenay WITT organized **Surviving and Thriving – A Canadian Conference On Women In Trades and Technology**. The conference had three main themes. The first was the experience of women who had been training, working and searching for employment in these fields. The second was Employment Equity – its capability and actual initiatives being undertaken to enhance the experience of women. And the third was Women In Technology – their potential for showing us better ways to use technology and strategies for increasing their numbers.

The four-day conference was attended by tradeswomen and technologists, many of whom had been the first in their fields. They were joined on the second two days by employers, educators, union and government personnel. It provided a well-used opportunity to dispel some myths on all sides, and to share firsthand stories and information. The result was to encourage and assist us all to meet the goal of increasing women's participation in operational, professional, scientific and technical occupations.

This volume presents, in edited form, many of the workshops, presentations and discussions that took place at the conference. Workshops have been edited for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the poor quality of some of the audiotapes. We regret any deletions, as most of the material was worthy of reproduction. Other deletions were made for reasons of brevity, duplication, and continuity. We have done our best to maintain the integrity of presenters' and participants' remarks and responses. We apologize for any oversights or errors in editing judgements.

Also available from Kootenay WITT is a 50-minute videotape, "*Let's Go To The Shop*". It was prepared by Joan Webb and Gillian Browning in conjunction with Shaw Cable 10, Nelson, and gives a useful overview of the issues addressed at the conference, with additional footage of women working in the field.

Hopefully, these resources will promote enlightenment in employment practices among employers and unions, encourage diligence on the part of government agencies and provide trades and technical women with a sense of support and a greater reflection of their own accomplishments.

Marcia Braundy  
Coordinator  
Kootenay WITT

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# Introduction

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Women have been entering trades and technology, and operational, professional and technical kinds of work since World War II when they successfully performed the necessary manufacturing, construction and production tasks. It has recently come to light that many of the patented inventions which, through the years, were attributed to men were actually invented by women. Sybilla Master invented the first machine to be patented in North America, a corn cleaning machine, but it was patented in her husband's name. Her name is in small print at the bottom as the inventor. Somehow, these important pieces of our history have been overlooked, and women's success in these matters has been, if not denied, then at least ignored.

With the resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s, women reviewed their occupational choices, and many women found them wanting. During the International Decade of Women, lobbying efforts succeeded in obtaining orientation courses in trades and technology (INTO, WITT, Pre-Trades Training, etc.) in several provinces to assist women to enter what had been identified as employment "non-traditional" for women. This was defined as those occupations where women's representation was less than 33 percent (approximately 80 percent of all occupations). These courses were to provide a knowledge and experience base to enable the women to train on a more equal foundation with men in regular technical training courses.

Many women did this, as evidenced by the representative group that gathered at the first National Women In Trades Conference in Winnipeg in 1980. Others had gone directly into technical training and university courses. At that time, it was clear we were encountering some difficulties. Some of us were not sure whether it was because we were apprentices and students, or because we were women.

It was said that not as many women entered those courses as had been expected, and those who entered didn't always experience success in training or in finding a job. Government agencies and educational institutions began to ask why. They were told over and over again in evaluations and briefs from women's advocacy groups across the country about the problems women were facing. About apprenticeship and employment counsellors who were not supportive and gave women inaccurate or incomplete information. About vocational and technical instructors who didn't know how to handle the difficulties that arose in their classrooms because they didn't think it was their responsibility to proscribe behaviour. About university professors who presented "scientific" evidence that we are the "weaker" gender. About employers who refused to hire women and gave irrational reasons. About sexual and gender harassment which was being ignored.

Despite all those difficulties, many of us persevered and became qualified, a large number at the top of our classes. Employment was often hard to find, and our daily struggles with employers and unions were sometimes heartening and often exhausting. And there were those of us that gave up, who are remembered by everyone for different reasons.

In the 1970s, the governments of the day put forth Equal Employment Opportunity legislation to address the inequities in the labour force. These programs were somewhat ineffective, as they saw their job as "opening the doors," and did not address the systemic barriers to the employment of women and minority groups, barriers inherent in the employment systems and practices that had evolved to that time.



Some provincial governments looked to the United States, for their initiatives in Affirmative Action. Some saw problems and balked at bringing them here; others saw potential, and modified versions of the American programs began to appear both federally and provincially here in Canada.

In 1980, pilot Affirmative Action programs were started in three federal government departments and in 1983 all federal government departments were required to analyze their workforces and develop an Affirmative Action Plan to create a workforce that more fairly represented the general population.

In 1984, Judge Rosalee Abella tabled her Royal Commission Report on Equality in Employment, in which she coined the phrase Employment Equity. She documented the discrimination in employment faced by women, aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, and people with disabilities, and she recommended legislation to address this problem. She also recommended enforcement mechanisms.

In 1986, legislation was enacted requiring crown corporations and federally regulated employers with 100 or more employees to report annually on the makeup of their workforce, starting in 1988. They must also develop and implement Employment Equity Plans to address their workforce inequities. It is hoped that public scrutiny of those reports will provide the pressure necessary to enforce implementation.

At the same time, Treasury Board decided upon a policy of contract compliance, whereby contractors who do business worth more than \$200,000 with the federal government and who have more than 100 employees must also implement an Employment Equity Plan.

Employment Equity hiring, training and promotion targets are currently being set based on workforce requirements and the available designated group members who are qualified or ready to be qualified with some training. Somewhat inaccurate availability data is being developed by Statistics Canada, based on census data (which never asks what you may have trained for, only what you are currently doing) and college and university graduation information.

Orientation programs in trades and technology for women which would be feeder courses to those college and university programs have been severely cut back in every province, and yet most provinces are struggling to increase the numbers of girls who go into science and math so they can keep up with the changing technological trends.

Some employers have been very innovative in their approach to program and plan development, hiring and training. For the most part, these are employers who have been involved starting with Equal Employment Opportunities, and they have understanding and expertise to share. Others have started more recently, and with as much dedication and innovation.

Since 1980, women have been told that demographics indicated imminent skilled trades shortages. We have an aging trades and technical workforce, and the baby boomers have not gone into these fields in large numbers. Technological change is reducing the numbers of traditional women's jobs, the vast majority of new entrants to the labour force are women, and many areas of our country are experiencing skilled worker shortages. Some employers understand this and are planning with an eye to the future, where a diversified workforce will be a necessity to get the best employees.

Many employers are saying they can't find any qualified women (disabled, natives, visible minorities). More than a few Employment and Immigration officials have said that women aren't

interested and they can't fill their courses, but they won't advertise because they might create a need in the minds of impressionable women.

And women who have been struggling to find productive, satisfying, tangible and financially viable training and work continue to knock on the doors of the established order, often with the highest marks in their class. Still they are refused entrance or acceptance. The world is slow to engage the quality of human potential available. Women are just not being hired in numbers that reflect their availability, and their skills are not being recognized.

It was into this fray that Kootenay WITT stepped in 1988. With the assistance and financial support of employers and federal and provincial government departments, and with the participation of resource people; tradeswomen, technologists and scientists; employers; educators, government and union personnel, we presented four full days of learning and sharing. More than 60 workshops and events described women's experience, government programs, innovative employers' initiatives, and fascinating community-based projects which address these issues. Our goal was to facilitate a better understanding of the subject areas and the development of networks and strategies to help us all resolve some of these complex employment-related social and economic issues.

The dialogue was fruitful. Those in attendance came away wiser and richer in experience, and with many new friends and ideas. Clearly the networking was an important part, and the participant lists, recommendations, and keynote speeches that went out after the conference proved useful. We continue to hear of new activities and programs generated from energy that emerged from the conference.

This book is for the Advisory Committee who worked so hard and for the resource people and participants at the conference so we may all continue to enrich the process that was begun there: that of working together to explore and invent, construct, maintain, preserve, renovate, and communicate with, the world we live in.

With thanks,  
Marcia Braundy  
Conference Coordinator  
Managing Editor  
Kootenay WITT

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Quebec Ministry of Intergovernmental Relations  
Nova Scotia Department of Vocational and Technical Training  
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# Recommendations

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## National Network

The participants of the 1988 Canadian Conference on Women in Trades and Technology recommend and resolve:

That women in trades and technology ensure their voice is heard on issues of national concern by establishing a national network, by lobbying and meeting with governments, educators, employers and unions to effect needed change and by seeking support and funding from governments, educators, employers and unions for this network.

That a steering committee be struck, with representatives from each province, one from trades and one from technology (at minimum), to meet on a continuing basis.

[The conference advisory committee is currently fulfilling this function, until reps can be chosen in a more democratic fashion by interested members in the regions. Currently included in this group are educators and advocates who have a strong commitment to ensuring the success of our greater numbers. Some consideration should be given to their ongoing inclusion in the National Network. - *Marcia Braundy*]

At the follow-up Steering Committee meeting, it was confirmed that the mandate of this committee is to develop strategies, funding sources and structures for:

- 1) a National Network of Women In Trades and Technology;
- 2) a National Data Bank Inventory of female trades and technology workers, the broadest definition to include women working in other blue-collar, scientific and technical employment;
- 3) a National Women's Trades and Technical Training Institution;
- 4) and to begin the work on a National Conference for 1990.

We recommend that all regions and/or provinces research funding sources for future conferences on a national and provincial level so that more tradeswomen and technologists are able to attend these conferences. We recommend that issues brought forward at the conference be again brought to all candidates' meeting with regard to the federal election.

## Training

At the 1988 National Women In Trades and Technology Conference, October 1-4th at Naramata, British Columbia, participant representatives from unions, governments, trades and technology, and industry recognized the need for ongoing skills development in trades and technology. The lack of active commitment to such development and long-term training will have devastating economic and social consequences.

It is clear that the federal government's reduction and capping of funds to long-term apprenticeship and vocational training programs minimize quality, availability and accessibility. This capping of funds is not acceptable, especially at a time when unemployment is high and yet many parts of the country are experiencing skill shortages.

## 260 *Surviving and Thriving*

We are particularly concerned with issues which inhibit target group members from becoming an active part of the skilled labour force. Recognizing that women are a majority of the population, additional funding must be allocated for exploratory trades and technology training for women, childcare assistance, educational upgrading and income support. This becomes more significant when it is noted that Employment Equity targets are being set based on the availability of "qualified" or "trainable" women and other designated groups. These measures will, in term, address some concerns we have about Employment Equity.

The solution to the skills shortage problem can be found among our own Canadian human resources.

### *From the Official Conference Committee:*

The official conference committee requests

That the Federal CEIC respond publicly to the results of the WITT Graduates Research Study, and tell the public what action they intend to take to reinstate the WITT-type programs across the country.

### *Recommendations from the WITT instructors meeting:*

Given the importance of exploratory and bridging programs for women's access to employment, Employment and Immigration Canada will be accountable for its mandate of Employment Equity by:

Modifying the Canadian Job Strategy eligibility criteria to insure accessibility and funding of bridging and exploratory programs to all interested women;

Making a commitment to provide funding on a continuous ongoing basis to ensure the success of these programs.

### *Recommendation from the Sexual Harassment Workshop:*

We recognize that bridging programs are of critical importance in preparing women to succeed in employment where sexual and gender harassment can be a day-to-day occurrence and recommend that the provincial and federal governments commit sufficient funding to support both existing programs and the reinstatement and expansion of bridging programs.

We recommend that CLOW, among others, be requested to lobby on our behalf for increased funding of exploratory trades and bridging programs for women.

### *Recommendations from the "What is our experience entering and working in trades and technology in education".*

#### Definition

There must be a very clear and consistent definition of the type and nature of programs offered across Canada, e.g. "Exploratory Training Course" to offer occupational options in trades and technologies (also known as Bridging, Pre-trades programs, Orientation to Trades and Technology, etc.)

It is imperative that the continued financial support be provided to exploratory training courses, so as to make them available to more women in all provinces and regions.

That there be an improvement in the quantity and quality of information pertaining to the trades and technical work being distributed by support staff, teachers, counsellors, etc. That this information be distributed to kindergarten through grade 12 students in the public school system.

*Recommendations from media/communications/government workshop are:*

That life skills courses that include shop and home skills be mandatory for all jr. and sr. secondary students across the country.

That clarification of the CEIC seat reservation policy be communicated to the public.

That criteria for entry into CEIC training programs are inappropriate and major changes need to be made in order for women who want orientation and trades and technology training to have access to it.

That CEIC be called upon to develop in consultation with the organized women's community a strategy to open trades and technology training and employment to more women.

### **Apprenticeship**

Privatization will not work for training excellence, therefore it is necessary to have a well-funded and consistent apprenticeship training program for all trades across Canada, available, promoted and outreached to all Canadians.

#### Whereas:

- Gender discrimination against women in trades and technology continues to be rampant;
- there is still a shortage of skilled labour in B.C., the Yukon and Alberta;
- There is still no comprehensive national apprenticeship program in place in Canada;
- We are still importing skilled labourers and technicians;

The B.C., Yukon and Alberta caucus of the 1988 National Women In Trades and Technology Conference makes the following recommendations on the implementation and delivery of apprenticeship programs.

1) Endorse the establishment of a levy grant system, where industries who do not provide training would be taxed. These funds, supplemented by government, would be used to subsidize companies providing training programs. Example: Sweden.

Redesign and tailor apprenticeship programs to address the identified obstacles to women's successful transition into fields of trade and technology.

Mobility - access to courses, and suitable employment opportunities, which will facilitate completion of apprenticeships.

Address the subtle but debilitating harassment evident in all levels of training.

Flexibility - e.g. daycare; training conforming to the needs of women ... not vice-versa.

Lobbying to ensure that women are represented on decision-making bodies, particularly at a local level

- Community futures boards
- Liaison groups for Canadian Job Strategy
- Policy boards of educational institutions
- Apprenticeship Boards

In summary, there is a strong need for creating apprenticeship training in industry and education for all types of trades. The present experience of importing tradespersons from other provinces and even other countries is a lamentable and dangerous practice. This raiding of resource talent results in the creation of huge skill shortages in all trades. Dramatically increased apprentice



## 262 *Surviving and Thriving*

training must become a priority to fill and perpetuate the growing demand for skilled tradeswomen and tradesmen.

Canada is experiencing a skilled trades shortage, and has indicated a commitment to Employment Equity. Treasury Board is requiring government departments to develop a 10 percent participation of women in all non-traditional occupations.

CEIC are expecting the provinces to develop a 20 percent participation of women in apprenticeship.

Therefore: Treasury Board should at least meet the 20 percent level of training women into non-traditional occupations.

### *Recommendation:*

That an extra 10 percent participation of women be required in federal government departments with designated trade jobs. There should be intake at first level (entry) and an opportunity for women to move through levels of apprenticeship and gain "journeyman" status then be integrated into the permanent positions without rebidding for their jobs.

This process will require staff/year allocations to double-bank the apprentice during the apprenticeship program.

### Employment Equity

We recommend that EIC immediately change the policy regarding contract compliance for federal contractors to include the same performance requirements as for federally regulated industries, and also that the wording be changed to include all contractors with over \$200,000 in contracts or over 100 employees.

### Data Bank Inventory

That CEIC be asked to fund a national organization for women in trades and technology to set up and maintain a National Data Bank Inventory of Tradeswomen, Technologists, and women in other blue-collar fields for purposes of networking and accessing employment opportunities.

### *From the Prairie/North Region:*

We recommend that people in regional meetings identify available information and resources on women in trades and technology and become a clearinghouse of these resources. We recommend that regional chapters identify tradeswomen and technologists for entry in a database.

### *Recommendation to be brought forward on the 26, 27, 28 of October to the Interprovincial Standards Program Coordinating Committee meeting:*

It is recommended that the apprenticeship branch of each and every provincial and territorial government establish and maintain a data base on women in training for or employed in trades and technology occupations, and make that data base available to all those facilitating women's employment in those occupations, including: EIC, Women in Trades and Technology Organizations, employers or employee organizations, etc. – that data base to include at minimum:

- the woman's name
- address
- phone number
- trade or technology occupation
- apprenticeship status
- on training – by year
- completion date

This recommendation to be sent to Danny O'Neill – chair of Interprovincial Standards Program Coordinating Committee – to put on agenda and present recommendation for consideration.

*Human rights*

We recommend that the Canadian Human Rights Commission be directed to actively initiate complaints against companies that are found, through their reports or audits, to be in violation of the EE legislation or Contract Compliance Program.

Evidence suggests that prior to legislation women were being trained, yet now in the face of EE and AA legislation, pre-trades and pre-technology programs are being cut and women are not being trained.

Education is guaranteed under provincial human rights.

We recommend the consideration of filing complaints of discrimination on the basis of sex, due to inconsistent and reduced funding of the exploratory trades and bridging programs which provide the educational opportunities needed for employment equity for women.

These complaints would be filed against provincial Ministries of Education (or other Ministries responsible for job-related training) and CEIC, through the Federal and Provincial Human Rights Commissions.

[the above recommendation passed by a very small majority]

**Sexual and gender harassment**

*Recommendations from "What happened to WITT grads" workshop.*

We recommend:

That women taking pre-trades, pre-technology, and other non-traditional training be advised during or after the program on how to make an individual complaint of discrimination to their provincial Human Rights Commission;

and

That individuals who experience discrimination or prejudice in seeking work after their training be actively encouraged and supported in making such complaints.

*Recommendations from the Sexual Harassment Workshop:*

We recommend that the governments of those provinces whose human rights legislation does not specifically define and prohibit sexual harassment amend their legislation to do so, in order to provide clear and certain human rights protection from this form of discrimination. In addition to employment, we recommend that this protection extend to all other areas and activities covered by the legislation and that domestic workers be included within these human rights protections.

We recommend that employers and unions include effective sexual harassment policies and complaint procedures in their employment policies and collective agreements and communicate these policies and complaint procedures to all persons who are working or are members of their organizations.

We recommend that all trades and technology programs include a teaching unit on sexual harassment as a required part of the curriculum.

## Unions

### *Women in Unions*

The 1988 National Women in Trades and Technology Conference recommends to the Canadian Labour Congress, Confederation of Canadian Unions and the Canadian Federation of Labour that unions facilitate the role of tradeswomen and women technologists by providing support in the areas of:

1. Training, i.e. counselling, networks, mentors and courses.
2. Contract provisions, i.e. parental leave, protection from sexual harassment, and non-sexist contract language.
3. Organizational structure, i.e. women's and apprenticeship committees, women delegates to convention and affiliated bodies, and encouragement of participation of women.
4. Policy, i.e. policies to welcome women, end harassment, provide parental and family leave, provide childcare, promote part-time jobs and job sharing, increase access to information, oppose pornography and support transition houses.

*From "Enhancing the Experience of Women In The Building Trades" to all Trade Unions, Federations of Labour and National Labour Organizations.*

That unions be encouraged to facilitate the entrance of women into their ranks by making changes in the area of their training, contract language, organizational structure and policies. Some of these changes include:

In the area of training:

The establishment of training committees or training boards which would provide:

- counselling
- outreach to colleges and high schools
- outreach to Women In Trades and Technology Assoc.
- seminars for new apprentices and new union members
- courses in such things as parliamentary procedures and assertiveness training

These committees would also provide assistance such as networking, a buddy system, mentoring, etc. to help people through the training period.

These committees would operate between locals and between provinces in terms of setting standards and exchanging information and ideas about programs.

In terms of contracts and contract language:

Clauses are required on maternity and parental leave, sexual harassment, mandatory education for all union members on sexual harassment; and contract language throughout that is non-sexist and gender neutral.

In terms of organizational structure:

The development of apprenticeship committees which are like bridging programs, a non-elected body where apprentices can come and learn how the union works in a non-threatening atmosphere.

The constitution of women's committees within the unions that would:

- provide networks and deal with women's issues
- provide women delegates to conventions and other bodies so they would be able to see how the organization works at a policy level
- relate to other parts of the labour movement
- encourage other women to participate

In the policy area:

Passing policies throughout the organization, usually through a convention by way of a resolution that provides a welcome to women in the trades and technologies:

- policies against sexual harassment
- providing leave for parental and family responsibility
- policies providing childcare for union meetings
- establish commitment to ideas such as part-time work with full benefits and job-sharing
- providing access to information so everyone knows how to get into and become a member of the union, and how to enter particular trades
- policies on issues of concern to women such as pornography, transition homes, etc.

*From the Prairie Region:*

We recommend that women in union locals support their sisters and encourage other locals to hire women.

*Health and safety issues*

From the Health and Safety workshop:

That health and safety seminars, designed by workers, that include information on hazards and potential changes to the working environment be provided on company time. That these sessions deal with the hazards at their source, and solutions focus not only on the individual's responsibility for personal safety, but also on modifications that can be made to the workplace to make it a safer place to work.

That employers and women's groups put pressure on manufacturers to produce clothing, tools and personal protective equipment in appropriate forms and sizes for women.

*Recommendations from "Women, the Workplace and AIDS"*

Whereas AIDS is caused by a virus that is not transmitted by casual contact with an infected person in the workplace, and whereas today AIDS is mainly transmitted by unsafe sex and by the sharing IV needles for drugs:

We recommend that unions and employers provide accurate information to their memberships and employees about AIDS/HIV infection and its transmission and adopt policies that inform and protect workers who have AIDS from discrimination in the workplace.

We recommend that the federal government significantly increase its funding commitment to accurate and effective AIDS education, drug research and health care.