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PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND TRADE UNIONISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY U.S.

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Labor unions have been the primary organizational vehicle available to represent the interests of working women in the twentieth century United States, and to struggle on their behalf against the twin inequalities of gender and class. Organized labor's record in relation to women is, to be sure, rather mixed. On the one hand, unions have frequently fought to improve the wages and working conditions of employed women and have often challenged sex discrimination as well. Unionized women have always earned more and had better protection against management abuses than their unorganized sisters. They have also enjoyed greater access to meaningful representation in the workplace (or "voice"[1]) than their nonunionized counterparts. On the other hand, women have always been underrepresented in the ranks of organized labor relative to their numbers in the workforce as a whole. Moreover, like other formal organizations, unions have frequently excluded women from positions of leadership and power, and in some historical settings, even from membership. And, all too often, unions have failed to represent the interests of women workers adequately or to do battle against gender inequality at work; in some cases they have even fought to maintain male privileges at the expense of women workers.

Studies illustrating both sides of this mixed record have proliferated in recent years, as feminist historians and social scientists have begun to explore the previously uncharted territory of women's labor history. This essay critically evaluates the emerging literature on the relationship between women and unions, and poses a question buried in that literature but rarely addressed explicitly within it, namely, <u>under what conditions</u> have unions been effective political vehicles for women workers? "Political" here is

meant not in the narrow sense of formal, electoral politics, but in the broader sense of collective action and potential empowerment. While the evidence available is still too fragmentary to attempt to address this question definitively, it can be addressed in a partial way, by examining the conditions which foster women's union membership, on the one hand, and women's participation and leadership in unions, on the other. The variations among individual labor organizations in regard to women's union membership, participation and leadership, I will argue, reflect the diverse historical conditions under which particular unions were first established and their varying degrees of "maturity" as organizations.

THE DEBATE ABOUT WOMEN AND UNIONS

Most of the research on women and unions is quite recent, a product of the new feminist scholarship in history and social science. The first wave of literature was largely descriptive and compensatory in nature, and its primary aim was to refute the conventional wisdom on the subject: that women workers were less militant, less easily unionized, and less active in unions than similarly situated men. Leonard Sayles and George Strauss exemplified this traditional view in their claim that, "Women present a major problem to the union. Not only are they hard to organize but, once organized, they are less likely to participate."[2] By reconstructing the historical record of women's efforts to unionize and their many struggles at the workplace to improve their lot, feminist scholars sought to falsify this view of women as

passive, "problem" workers, and demonstrated that throughout the long history of conflict between workers and employers, "We Were There," as the title of one popular survey of the subject put it.[3]

What emerged from this was an emphasis on the failure of unions to deliver their potential benefits to women workers. For example, historians documented the exclusionary practices of craft unions in the early part of the century, when many labor organizations barred women from membership or actively discouraged them from organizing, and argued that unions themselves were the "problem," not women--in effect transposing the terms of the traditional view. As Alice Kessler-Harris suggested, in one of the most sophisticated treatments of this issue, "When we stop asking why women have not organized themselves, we are led to ask how women were, and are, kept out of unions." Kessler-Harris acknowledged that there were genuine obstacles to organizing women, but argued that, even in the first years of the twentieth century, these "were clearly not insurmountable barriers. Given a chance, women were devoted and successful union members, convinced that unionism would serve them as it seemed to be serving their brothers."[4] Similarly, Meredith Tax concluded that one of the main reasons women were unorganized in this early period was that "no one would organize them. And when anyone tried, women often showed that, despite all these barriers, they were raring to go."[5]

In addition to the question of why women were less often unionized than men, feminist scholars reexamined the issue of women's participation and leadership within those unions which did <u>not</u> exclude them from membership. Here too they documented a pattern of hostility toward women's participation on the part of

male union officials, as well as a host of broader social and cultural factors discouraging women from becoming activists or leaders.[6] This new feminist perspective on unionism emerged simultaneously with and drew directly upon the critique of institutional labor history by social historians and the revisionist labor history and radical social science which constructed unions as essentially conservative institutions.

If unions have been, as the literature suggests, indifferent or even hostile to the plight of women workers, some explanation of this phenomenon is required. Although there have been few explicitly theoretical efforts to account for the apparent failure of labor unions to provide women workers with the agency to improve their lot, two dominant approaches to this problem can be distinguished, one emphasizing structural, and the other cultural, factors. The structural perspective explains male-dominated trade unionism in terms of gender inequality in the larger society, usually understood as structured by patriarchy. In this view, women's exclusion from and subordinate role within labor unions is critical for preserving the patriarchal order which restricts women to the home or to poorly paid jobs. Women's economic subordination, in turn, makes it difficult for them to organize or to participate actively in trade unions. Perhaps the most influential contribution here has been that of Heidi Hartmann, who argues that "Men's ability to organize in labor unions ... appears to be key in their ability to maintain job segregation and the domestic division of labor."[7] In this view, as Cynthia Cockburn states in her study of London printers, trade unions are "male power bases" that struggle "to

assure patriarchal advantage."[8]

The second approach focuses attention not on the material interests of male workers but rather on their cultural domination of trade union institutions. This perspective draws on the concept of "women's culture" in feminist historiography, and also on historical and ethnographic accounts of women's activity in the workplace. In this view, male and female workers define their relationship to work in distinct ways, due to their contrasting roles in society and their sex-segregated experience in the workplace.[9] Unions, the argument goes, have typically been part of male culture, and are not the proper place to look for expressions of women workers' interests and struggles. Thus Susan Porter Benson's analysis of women saleswork documents a rich female work culture which is sharply opposed to management--and yet has no relationship to unionism.[10] Even where women are union members, in this view, the union is often culturally alien to them. Not only are union meetings typically held in bars, and at night, so that women must compromise their respectability if they are to attend; but the entire discourse of unionism is built on images of masculinity. Thus Beatrix Campbell concludes that the labor movement is essentially a "men's movement," and Sallie Westwood's ethnography of a British garment shop observes that, "the union seemed as far away as management, locked into an alien world of meetings and men which somehow never seemed to relate to the world of women in the department."[11]

The structural and cultural explanations of women's subordinate position within the institutions of unionism are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, while most commentators emphasize one or the other, some (especially in the British literature) have

merged the two. Separately or in combination, what is most appealing about these theoretical perspectives is their apparent comprehensiveness: they explain not only women's underrepresentation in the ranks of union members and activists, but also their general exclusion from positions of power in labor organizations and the relatively scant attention paid to women's special concerns by most unions. Yet, despite their valuable insights into the global problem of male-dominated trade unionism, these theories are far less useful for explaining the wide range of historical variation in union behavior toward women that is so richly documented in recent historical and sociological research.

The concept of patriarchy, which is at the core of the structural perspective, is essentially ahistorical, as others have noted.[12] The argument that women's subordination within organized labor is an aspect of patriarchy makes it difficult to explain historical changes in the nature and extent of male domination of the labor movement. Moreover, while this perspective explains many specific cases where unions do operate as a vehicle for male workers' interests, it fails to take account of the conflicting nature of those interests in relation to women workers. As I have argued elsewhere, this view presumes that men's gender interest in maintaining male domination will inevitably take precedence over their class interest in gender equality, whereas historically there are instances of the opposite as well.[13]

Similarly, the conception of the asymmetric relationship of unions to gender-specific cultures, while usefully illuminating many specific instances of female marginality in labor unions, comes

dangerously close to reifying the historically specific differences between male and female workers. It mirrors the ideology which justifies women's subordination within the labor market by reference to the assumption that women are less committed, more family-oriented workers than their male counterparts. And, ironically, like the pre-feminist literature on women and trade unions, this perspective fails to acknowledge the many historical and contemporary examples of female labor militancy that rely upon conventional forms of union behavior.

Seemingly paradoxically, there is another stream of feminist scholarship which also draws upon the concept of women's culture, but focuses on female mobilization into and within unions rather than on male domination of organized labor. For example, Temma Kaplan and Ardis Cameron have shown how women's culture and "female consciousness," rooted in traditional domestic concerns, can propel women into broad, community-based labor struggles alongside their male neighbors and kin.[14] Other recent scholarship has linked women's work culture to a distinctively female form of leadership in union organizing and to the mobilization of women workers within established union structures, suggesting that women's culture and unionism may not be incompatible after all.[15]

This work is critically important, for it begins to address the central question which is obscured by the more deterministic structural and cultural accounts of male-dominated unionism: under what conditions have unions been effective vehicles for women workers' collective action? With the dramatic rise in women's labor force participation over the course of the twentieth century, and especially since World War II, the possibilities for female

members depend for their livelihood. The unions' structurally weaker position tends to generate a siege mentality among their leaders, which in turn encourages suspicion and hostility toward any group which is perceived as making "special" demands. Union hostility toward women is often rooted in this fundamentally gender-neutral organizational dynamic (which nevertheless can and frequently does have a gender-specific outcome), rather than simply in "patriarchy" or male culture.

Organizational analysis can provide insight not only into such general dynamics, which tend to marginalize women within all labor movement institutions, but also into the factors producing variations <u>among</u> unions in their degree of openness or hostility toward women. To begin with, consider the implications for this problem of Arthur L. Stinchcombe's classic discussion of social structure and organizations, which emphasizes the persistence of organizational forms, once established, over time. Following Stinchcombe's argument that "organizational forms and types have a history, and ... this history determines some aspects of the present structure of organizations of that type,"[18] we can hypothesize that unions that arose in different historical periods would vary systematically in their treatment of women in the present as well as the past.

In the U.S., at least, the growth of unionization has occurred in readily distinguishable waves, and in each period of growth over the past century, both the dominant form of unionism and the social position of women varied markedly. If, as Stinchcombe suggested, the basic goals, structures, values, and ideologies of individual

unions are shaped early in their institutional life, and tend to persist intact thereafter, it follows that the prevailing type of union structure (craft, industrial, etc.), the position of women in the industrial setting, and the state of gender relations more broadly in the historical period in which a particular union originates, will be significant in explaining that union's behavior. Although Stinchcombe himself was not particularly concerned with gender issues, his theory of organizational inertia provides a tool with which to historicize the structural and cultural theories of women's relationship to unionism. It can incorporate into a broader framework the historical shifts in the material interests of men and women and their respective cultures, which have not remained static, but have been significantly affected by such factors as the long-term rise in female labor force participation and the strength of feminist consciousness in particular periods.

While his overall argument stressed the persistence and stability of organizational structures, Stinchcombe also discussed what he called the "liabilities of newness," arguing that in the earliest period of their existence, organizations are relatively fragile and unstable entities.[19] Other commentators have developed a similar notion and applied it to union organizations in particular. Richard A. Lester, for example, has suggested that as unions "mature," their organizational behavior changes significantly. When a labor organization first comes into existence, it is by definition on the offensive (albeit in an uphill battle); later, once it has won nominal acceptance from the employer, management increasingly takes the initiative, while the union typically settles into a reactive and often defensive role.

In addition, openness to alternative ideologies and modes of organizing is generally greater in the early period of a labor union's life than in its more mature phases, when it has settled into a routine existence and has an officialdom with a stake in maintaining its established traditions.[20] This life-cycle view of organizations complicates Stinchcombe's theory and has a different emphasis, but is not necessarily inconsistent with the view that organizations, once established (or "mature"), tend toward structural inertia.

Extending this idea to the problem of women and trade unions, we can hypothesize that, in general, unions would be more open to demands from women and feminist approaches to organizing in their youth than in their maturity. Moreover, both bureaucratization and the development of a siege mentality among trade union leaders--which, as was already noted, tend to marginalize women within union organizations--are typically minimal in the early stages of a union's history, and both intensify as it matures. Once again, then, the gender-blind organizational logic described by theories of union maturity can help explain differences among unions which are at different life-stages at a given point in time.

FOUR COHORTS OF AMERICAN UNIONS

In American labor history, at least four major waves of unionization which have produced four distinct cohorts of labor organizations can be identified. The problem is simplified by the fact that each of these cohorts coincides with particular structural forms of union organization (craft, industrial, etc.), each of which

recruited in specific types of occupations or industries. Each of the four union cohorts had a different historical relationship to women workers, and to a large extent the differences have persisted into the present day. Thus a historical perpsective, informed by Stinchcombe's analysis of organizational inertia as well as union maturity theories, offers a potential basis for explaining the variations evident on the contemporary labor scene in women's position in unions.

The oldest group of unions, some of them with roots going back deep into the nineteenth century, are the old-line craft unions, such as the building trades "brotherhoods" or the printers. These unions today still tend to be the most hostile to women, not only because of their maturity but also because of the nature of the relationship they established to women when they were formed. Initially, their constituency of craftsmen saw women's labor as a threat to established skill and wage levels, and therefore typically excluded women from union membership (until as late as the 1940s in some cases) and generally viewed them with suspicion. Indeed, the entire logic of craft unionism was predicated on the importance of skill, and employers' reliance upon it, as the primary source of workers' power. This generated exclusionary practices directed not only against women, but against all unskilled workers. It is perhaps not accidental that craft unions have been the main focus of analysis for those scholars who argue that labor organizations serve as an instrument of patriarchy.[21] But these unions are hardly typical of the twentieth-century experience, and indeed they comprise a relatively small part of the labor movement today.

A second cohort of unions emerged in the 1910s, primarily in

the clothing industry. The "new unionism" of this period was at once an outgrowth of the craft union tradition and a departure from it, in some respects anticipating the industrial unionism of the 1930s. Craft exclusionism was effectively abandoned by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) in this period, even though originally it was the skilled male cutters alone who were organized. In the wake of the militancy of women workers, most notably in the New York garment workers' strike of 1909-10, vast numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled women were incorporated into these unions' ranks. The "new unionism" recognized women workers' need for organization and also broadened the definition of unionism to encompass not only economic but also social functions, pioneering in such areas as union-sponsored health care and educational programs. Yet the leaders of these unions still viewed women as an entirely different species of worker than men. For in this period, women were still typically employed for a relatively brief part of their lives, particularly in the clothing industry. Not only male union leaders, but also working women themselves viewed women's needs as different from those of men in the 1910s. Women's militant organizing efforts were centered not on economic demands for gender equality but rather on moral appeals for better protection against management abuses. These appeals implicitly or explicitly invoked their special vulnerability as women.[22] Under these conditions, it was hardly surprising that the leaders of the "new unions" viewed women paternalistically, and not as equal partners; or that these unions' officialdoms remained overwhelmingly male despite the

dramatic feminization of their memberships. Like the old-line craft unions, these unions today are still deeply marked by the legacy of their historical origins; their still predominantly male leaderships continue to view their majoritarian female (and now, third world immigrant female) memberships paternalistically, as weak workers in need of protection.

A third cohort of unions took shape in the massive industrial organizing drives of the 1930s. The mass production industries in which the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions emerged were overwhelmingly male--steel, auto, rubber, electrical manufacturing. But insofar as women were part of the production workforce in these industries, the CIO organized them alongside men from the outset. And the attitude of this generation of unionists toward women workers was quite different from that of either the old craft unionists or the "new unionists" of the 1910s. In the 1920s and 1930s, in the aftermath of the suffrage victory and with growing labor force participation among married women, the claim of women to equal treatment in the public sphere gained ground.[23] The CIO opposed discrimination on the basis of sex, color, or creed in a deliberate departure from craft union traditions and practices. While older views of "woman's place" still persisted within the CIO unions, the inclusionary logic of industrial unionism and its formal commitment to the ideal of equality opened up new possibilities for women in organized labor.[24] This became particularly explicit during World War II, when women poured into the basic industries that had been organized by the CIO immediately before the war, and women's issues (such as equal pay for equal work, nondiscriminatory seniority, and female representation in labor leadership) gained a

prominent position on union agendas.[25] After the war, while women once again became a minority within the workforce of the basic industries, this cohort of unions retained their formal commitment to equality and anti-discrimination efforts. The United Auto Workers' Union (UAW), for example, was an early advocate of national legislation against sex discrimination and later became the first labor union in the nation to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment.[26]

Finally, a fourth group of unions emerged in the post-World War II period in the expanding service and clerical occupations, predominently in the public sector but also in some private-sector institutions (e.g. hospitals). Initially, in the 1950s and 1960s, these unions organized mainly blue-collar male workers, such as garbage collectors and highway workers. More recently, however, the majority of their recruits have been pink- and white-collar workers (including many professionals) in occupations where women are highly concentrated. Women were not unionized "as women" but as teachers, as hospital workers, as government clerks, etc. However, their massive recruitment during this period of feminist resurgence and growing acceptance of the goal of gender equality ultimately led this cohort of unions to reformulate traditional labor issues in innovative ways which are especially relevant to women. For example, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the two largest unions in this cohort, have led the campaign for pay equity or comparable worth in the 1980s.[27] More generally, both because of their relative youth and because they emerged in a period of feminist resurgence, these unions have been especially

receptive to women's leadership and to efforts to mobilize around women's issues.

The striking differences among these four cohorts of labor organizations in regard to their relationship to women workers are traceable, at least in part, to the different historical periods in which each was ascendant. Each period was characterized by a different configuration of gender relations in the larger society, and each wave of unionism had different structural characteristics (craft, craft/industrial, industrial, service sector) and a different organizational logic. Of course, this is at best a first approximation: many other factors--among them, economic shifts and dislocations, political and legal influences--can affect the relationship of unions to women workers. Examining the problem through a comparison of cohorts, moreover, makes it difficult to distinguish clearly between the effects of what are in fact separate variables: the organization's age, the historical period in which it originated, the type of industry, and the type of union involved. The difficulty is that all of these tend to coincide historically within each of the four cohorts. More interesting analysis might come from detailed comparative case studies of individual unions within the same cohort, which would facilitate finer distinctions. This should be an important part of the agenda for future research in this area. But in the interim, a framework that is sensitive to cohort differences among unions and to the internal process of "maturation" within labor organizations may begin to explain some of the variations in women's involvement in trade unions and in unions' effectiveness for women which remain unaccounted for in most of the existing literature.

WOMEN'S UNION MEMBERSHIP

Consider the issue of women's union membership. Although non-members often benefit indirectly from the activities of unions, members gain far more. They also have direct access to political resources vis-a-vis their employers which non-members typically lack. The degree to which women are recruited into the ranks of organized labor, then, is one major determinant of the degree to which unions effectively represent their interests. The density of female unionization has fluctuated considerably over time, but at no point have a majority of U.S. working women been union members, and perhaps more significantly, the male unionization rate has always been greater than that for females. Why is this the case, and what explains the variations over time and across industries and sectors?

To address these questions, we must first note that, at least in the twentieth century U.S., becoming a union member was and is associated primarily with employment in a firm or industry which has been targeted by union organizers. Under the American legal and industrial relations system, whether or not an individual joins a labor union is rarely a matter of individual choice. Indeed, one can infer nothing about gender-specific preferences from the observation that a greater proportion of male (23 percent in 1984) than of female workers (14 percent) are union members.[28] Rather, the best predictor of union membership is one's industry or occupation, which in turn determines the likelihood that a union is present in a given workplace.

Since jobs are highly sex-segregated, women and men are not evenly distributed through industries or occupations, and in general, the gender distribution of unionism is an artifact of the sexual

division of labor. On the whole, throughout the century "men's jobs" have more often been unionized than women's. Yet there are also vast differences in unionization rates within both the male and female labor markets. Only 2.5 percent of the women (and 3.5 percent of the men) employed in finance, insurance, and real estate are union members, for example, while in the public sector 33 percent of the women (and 39 percent of the men) are unionized. Moreover, both survey data and analyses of union election results suggest that unorganized women today are more interested in becoming union members than their male counterparts, although this probably was not true in the early twentieth century.[29]

As theories of union maturation stress, unions (or their subdivisions) historically have tended to recruit new members for a period of time and then to stabilize in size, concentrating on serving their established members rather than on continuing to expand. For this reason, a union's gender composition at any given point in time reflects the past and present composition of the occupation, industry, or sector it targeted for unionization in earlier years. While efforts to preserve the organization over time frequently lead existing unions to undertake recruitment efforts (targeting workers employed in the same industries and occupations as their established membership), few have successfully expanded their jurisdictions to take in wholly new constituencies. (An important exception here is the Teamsters' union, which has the second largest number of female members of any union in the nation and which has diversified over a long period of time far beyond its traditional base in the trucking industry.) In recent years, some

industrial unions, facing severe membership losses because of reduced employment levels in their traditional jurisdictions, have launched efforts to recruit service sector workers, but so far have had limited effectiveness.

Each of the four union cohorts described above focused its original recruitment efforts on specific types of workers, and their membership composition remains broadly similar today. Each cohort of unions was guided by a distinctive and essentially gender-neutral organizational strategy, which, however, had highly gender-specific results. The early twentieth century craft unions took in primarily skilled workers. Their strategy of limiting access to skills with high market value functioned to exclude women from both craft employment and from union membership in many industries--not only because of their gender but also because of their unskilled status. Whereas from one perspective, this exclusionism reflected the interest of male workers in maintaining the system of patriarchy, an equally plausible account might simply stress that exclusionism--which was directed not only against women but also against immigrants, blacks, and other unskilled workers--was an organizational feature inherent in craft unionism.

Although craft unionism was the predominant form of unionism in the U.S. at the turn of the century, it soon gave way to new forms which lacked its structural bias toward exclusionism, first with the "new unionism" of the 1910s and later with the industrial unionism of the 1930s. Here the organizational strategy was simply to recruit everyone the employer hired within a given industrial jurisdiction. In the clothing industries that were the focus of the "new unionism," this meant organizing unprecedented numbers of

women. By 1920, nearly half (43 percent) of the nation's unionized women were clothing workers.[30] The CIO, too, while recruiting many more men than women, greatly increased women's unionization level. But because the CIO's strategy centered on organizing blue-collar workers in durable goods manufacturing where relatively few women were employed, the results for women were less dramatic than in the 1910s when organization centered on the heavily female clothing trade. In both cases, though, what determined the extent of female unionization was not the union's strategy but the pre-existing gender composition of the workforce in the targeted industry. Where women were numerous among production workers, as in clothing in the 1910s and electrical manufacturing in the 1930s, they were recruited into unions in large numbers; where they were few, as in auto and steel, the two largest industries organized by the CIO, their numbers in the union ranks were correspondingly small. And in the 1930s, there was little interest in organizing the already considerable numbers of women employed in clerical and service jobs in the tertiary sector.

While the organizational logic of craft unionism had excluded women not so much "as women" but rather because they were unskilled workers, now the inclusionary logic of industrial unionism reversed the situation--but still without any particular effort to recruit women as women. There is some fragmentary evidence that occupations and industries where women predominated in the workforce were slighted because of their gender composition by CIO unions, as Sharon Strom has suggested for the case of clerical workers.[31] But in general, the targets of CIO organizing drives were selected on

the basis of considerations which involved not gender, but rather the strategic importance of organizing mass-production industries to build the overall strength of the labor movement.

The same was true of the organizing drives which brought hospital workers, teachers, and a wide variety of clerical and service employees into the labor movement in the postwar period. The growth of this fourth cohort of unions (together with the decline of the third cohort due to deindustrialization) resulted in a substantial feminization of union membership in the 1970s and 1980s: by 1984, 34 percent of all unionized workers were women, a record high.[32] However, this came about not because union organizers sought to recruit women specifically, but as a byproduct of their recruitment of particular categories of workers who seemed ripe for unionization. Feminization was essentially an unintended consequence of this process.[33]

On the whole, then, although throughout the century women's overall unionization level has been lower than men's, much of the gender gap (and also its recent diminution) was the result of gender-neutral strategic and organizational factors and the preexisting segregation of women into jobs which are less likely to be unionized than those held by men. While it is reasonable to criticize the labor movement for its general failure to challenge job segregation by sex, or to target more "women's jobs" in its recruiting drives, a major part of the explanation for the general sex differential in unionization rates, and for the wide variations among unions' sex composition as well, lies in gender-neutral organizational factors operating in a sex-segregated system.

PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Another crucial dimension of unions' political effectiveness for women is the extent of female participation and leadership in labor organizations. There is considerable variation among unions in this area, and while obviously the extent of women's union membership is one relevant factor, by itself it is not a satisfactory predictor of women's participation or leadership. The ILGWU, for example, is notorious for the lack of significant female representation in its leadership, despite an 85 percent female membership.[34] More generally, even in industries or occupations where women are highly unionized, their participation in labor union activities is typically less extensive than men's, although the extent to which this is the case varies considerably. Positions of union leadership, to an even greater degree than voluntary participation, have been male-dominated historically and remain so today, especially at the upper levels, although again this is more true of some unions than of others. What accounts for women's underrepresentation among labor activists and leaders? Under what conditions can the "barriers to entry" for women be overcome? And what explains the variations among unions in the extent of women's representation among participants and leaders.

Research addressing these questions has focused primarily on identifying specific personal attributes which are associated with participation and leadership and those which function as obstacles to activism. Divorced and single women, for example, are more likely than married women to be union participants and leaders, and extensive domestic responsibilities are an obstacle to activism for many women.[35] These findings help account for gender differences in

union participation and leadership and also explain why some women are more likely to participate or lead than others. However, this approach provides, at best, a partial explanation. It is necessary to examine not only the attributes of women themselves, but also those of the labor organizations in which their participation and leadership is at issue.

In younger unions, which are involved primarily in recruitment of new members and organization-building, women's participation and leadership is often more extensive than in more mature unions. Most of the celebrated examples of women's militancy and leadership come from these early stages in union development, especially organization strikes, ranging from the garment workers' "Uprising" of 1909-10 to the recent strike of Yale clerical workers.[36] But the level of women's participation and leadership tends to decline as unions become more formally organized (and bureaucratized) institutions which concentrate on collective bargaining and other means to protect and win benefits for an already established membership. Male rank and file union participation also tends to decline as union organizations mature, but the shift between union democracy and bureaucracy that accompanies maturation is especially complex for women.

In mature unions, the problem of women's underrepresentation among activists and leaders is a specific case of the more general phenomenon of women's exclusion from leadership roles in virtually all mixed-sex formal organizations. Indeed, the record of unions in this respect is no worse than that of the corporations with which they negotiate. In both unions and corporations, married women and

those with heavy domestic responsibilities are less likely to become leaders than other women. And, as was already mentioned, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's organizational analysis of women's exclusion from top corporate positions is relevant to unions as well. In both cases, and perhaps even more so in the case of unions with their siege mentality, tremendous value is placed on trust and loyalty among officeholders, especially at the top levels of the organizational hierarchy. This premium on loyalty encourages the process of "homosexual reproduction," whereby males in top positions "reproduce themselves in their own image," that Kanter has described so well for corporate organizations.[37]

Conventional organizational analysis also helps to explain why, when special positions are created for women within the union's organizational structure, the (presumably unintended) effect is usually to marginalize female leaders and exclude them from the centers of union power. A good example is the UAW Women's Bureau, created during World War II to cope with the sudden influx of women workers into the union's ranks. The Bureau, while doing valuable work, was then and remains to this day organizationally isolated and marginal to the union. In contrast, those few (by definition "exceptional") women who rise through the union hierarchy on the same terms as men, and without being defined as specialists in women's concerns, seem to be taken more seriously.[38] But this route to power within the union is often blocked by the emphasis on loyalty and its attendant mechanism of "homosexual reproduction."

Another factor limiting women's access to leadership posts in mature unions is the lack of available positions. The number of vacancies narrows as membership, and with it the size of the

organization, stabilizes. This reduction in the number of opportunities for advancement in the leadership structure is even more severe in unions than in other "mature" organizations, because union officialdoms are one of the few avenues of upward mobility open to workers. In a corporate or governmental organization, officeholders' careers might carry them from one organization to another (although this is actually relatively rare in the corporate world). But in the case of unions, positions of leadership, once obtained, are rarely relinquished, especially at the upper levels. Despite the formally democratic electoral machinery within unions, in practice, paid officials seldom depart from their posts unless they win promotion to a higher one, retire, or die.[39] Thus in a mature labor organization, unless membership, and with it, leadership, is expanding rapidly, the possibilities (for both sexes) of gaining a leadership post are relatively restricted compared to those in a young union that is actively recruiting new members and thus expanding its leadership structure.

Other critical influences on the opportunities for women to become union leaders, and especially paid officials, include the position of women in the employment structure of the jurisdiction within which the union operates, and, more broadly, the state of gender relations in the larger society during the period when the organization first develops. The more extensive women's participation in the public sphere generally, and in positions of power or importance in particular, the better their prospects for movement into union leadership posts at a given point in time. Moreover, women's prospects will be corresponding brighter in

organizations which are relatively young or experiencing rapid growth at the time. Indeed, over the twentieth century, and particularly in the postwar period, as women's exclusion from the public sphere has diminished, female representation in the leadership of successive cohorts of unions has increased.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the craft unions first emerged as a powerful force, women were still largely excluded from positions of leadership in public life. They were barred from membership in most of the craft unions, and so the question of their participation and leadership in these unions seldom arose. And while all the craft unions were forced to remove their formal bans on women's membership by the mid-twentieth century, most continue to this day to view women as interlopers, and it remains almost unimaginable that women would ascend to positions of power within these unions. A recent study found that in 1985 such unions as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the International Association of Machinists (IAM), and even the giant Teamsters' union, had no female representation whatsoever among their officers or on their governing boards--despite the fact that more than one-fourth of the members of both the Teamsters' and the IBEW were female.[40]

The "new unions" created in the 1910s, despite their majoritarian female memberships, also developed as male-led organizations, and still retain overwhelmingly male leaderships, with only a token female presence. Early in their history, these unions established a pattern of paternalistic (and male) leadership over an unstable (and largely female) membership, a pattern that has been preserved intact ever since. It is reinforced by the peculiar

structure of the clothing industry, in which the two major unions are relatively large, impersonal institutions representing a workforce scattered among a multitude of small and often unstable firms. Today, the membership of these unions is not only mostly female but also composed largely of immigrants from the third world. The special vulnerability of these workers encourages paternalistic leadership, made up largely of men drawn from earlier immigrant generations who are now well assimilated in the larger society.

The third cohort, the CIO unions, emerged in a period when women's position in public life was quite different than in the 1910s. Not only had women won the vote, but by the 1930s a generation of middle-class professional women had become well entrenched in American society, especially in the public sector.[40] While the older notion of "woman's place" remained more resilient in the working class than in the middle class, the CIO unions embraced the ideology of formal equality between the sexes. The main difficulty was that in most cases the membership of these unions was overwhelmingly male. Thus the population of potential female leaders was quite limited in the crucial, formative years. The CIO unions today, as in the past, have limited, token female representation at the upper levels of leadership--far more than in the case of the craft unions but still below the (quite modest) level of female representation among their memberships.

In the case of the fourth cohort of unions, the service and public sector organizations which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, the pattern is quite different. These unions developed not only in a period of resurgent feminism, but also at a time when the concept

of "affirmative action" had legitimacy in the liberal political culture. In addition, unions like AFSCME, the SEIU, and the teachers' and nurses' unions and associations had a large pool of educated female members to draw from when recruiting their leadership. While even in these unions the extent of female leadership at the top levels remains far smaller than their majoritarian representation among the membership, as a group these unions have a much better record than their predecessors. They not only exhibit a growing female presence at the upper levels of leadership, but have also accumulated a large cadre of women leaders at the local, regional and district levels. In 1985, for example, 319 of the SEIU's 820 local officers were female, as were 9 of its 61 joint council officers. Similarly, 45 percent of AFSCME's local executive board members and 33 percent of its local presidents were women in 1985.[42] The growing representation of women in secondary leadership posts is not only significant in its own right, but also augurs well for the future, since the next generation of top union officers will be drawn from this level.

CONCLUSION

Far from being monolithic, then, the labor movement's relationship to women workers varies significantly, both among unions and over time. Historical perspectives on the organizational logic and the particular orientation toward women of the four cohorts of labor unions help explain some of these variations, which the prevailing structural and cultural perspectives on women and unions cannot account for. As a first approximation, the political effectiveness of unions for women workers can be

understood as a product of the historical conditions under which each wave of unions first developed, and of their age and maturity as organizations. In general, the older unions, both because of their advanced age and because of the specific historical circumstances in which they originated, seem to be less effective than their younger counterparts in regard to women's recruitment into leadership, even in cases where they have large numbers of women workers among their members. The youngest cohort of service and public sector unions have also been much more receptive to feminist concerns than the older unions. While the legacy of tradition seems to be a serious obstacle to women's advancement in many of the older unions, the experience of the newest cohort, with their large female memberships and growing representation of women in leadership, offers a basis for optimism.

In the 1980s, however, organized labor is seriously embattled, losing membership and influence in the face of extremely adverse economic and political conditions. Just as women workers are beginning to secure a foothold in its ranks, the labor movement as a whole is fighting for its very survival. Significantly, however, the public and service sector unions have been the least affected by this crisis, and are currently the only unions which are continuing to expand. Yet they too are affected by the embattled state of the labor movement as a whole. One can only hope that, as previous such crises have done, this one will ultimately give way to a revival of trade unionism. Should that occur, the prospects for continued improvement in women's relationship to unions look quite bright.

[1]Freeman and Medoff (1984).

[2]Sayles and Strauss (1967), p. 124.

[3]Wertheimer (1977).

[4]Kessler-Harris (1975), pp. 94, 93.

[5]Tax (1980), p. 32.

[6]Wertheimer and Nelson (1975); Fonow (1977).

[7]Hartmann (1976), p. 159.

[8]Cockburn (1983), pp. 33, 35.

[9]Tentler (1979).

[10]Benson (1986).

[11]Campbell (1984), p. 129, passim; Westwood (1984), pp. 69-70.

[12]Beechey (1979); Rowbotham (1982); Young (1980).

[13]Milkman (1987).

[14]Kaplan (1982); Cameron (1985).

[15]Sacks (1987); Costello (1985).

[16]Kanter (1977, chap. 3).

[17]See Michels (1959); Lipset (1960, chap. 12).

[18]Stinchcombe (1965), p. 153.

[19]Stinchcombe (1965), pp. 148-150.

[20]Lester (1958)

[21]For example, Hartmann (1976).

[22]Kessler-Harris (1985).

[23]See the discussion by Nancy Cott, this volume.

[24]Strom (1983).

[25]Milkman (1987, chap. 6).

[26]Gabin (1985).

[27]Bell (1985).

[28]Adams (1985).

[29]Adams (1985); Kochan (1979); Wall Street Journal (1986).

[30]Wolman (1924).

[31]Strom (1983), p. 372.

[32]Adams (1985)

[33]Bell (1985).

[34]Baden (1986).

[35]Wertheimer and Nelson (1975), pp. 91, 115.

[36]See Tax (1980); Ladd-Taylor (1985)

[37]Kanter (1977), p. 48.

[38]Milkman (1987, chap. 6).

[39]Lipset (1960, chap. 12) attributes this to the "one-party system" of union government.

[40]Baden (1986).

[41]Ware (1981)

[42]Baden (1986), p. 239. Unfortunately comparable data for earlier years are not available.

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