WORKER MILITANCIES REVEALED: INTERROGATING THE STATISTICAL DATA[1]

Paper prepared for the Union Module of the Gender and Work Database

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Abstract

Undoubtedly both unionized and non-unionized Canadian workers have been militant. Between 1960-2004, there were 23,944 work stoppages recorded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). The state's major preoccupation with these strikes and lockouts relates to their economic impact. None of these data is constituted to examine worker militancies. However, it is possible to re-interpret the data by unpacking the aggregates used by the state, and the averages often reported in the industrial relations. This paper includes two examples -- on the duration and size of strikes -- of this statistical re-configuration which support new ways of looking at overall patterns of worker militancy. Part II teases out a trend not only toward public sector militancy but also toward the feminization of collective action: not only more women on strike, but women representing a higher proportion of those who go on strike. An extended example explores the militancy of Canadian nurses. Part III elaborates the distinction between the feminization of militancy, that is, shifting demographic profiles, and the gendering of militancy, that is, how gender shapes practices of militancy. Gendering is explored in relation to three forms of militancy: first, *union militancies* which focus on the politics of unions and the critical impact of the movement of union women on the politics, practices and culture of Canadian unions; second*, labour militancies*, that is, the organized and collective activism of unionized workers; and finally, *worker militancies*, the broadest and most open-ended frame. This discussion of gendering militancies is a critical reminder that strikes are only one form of worker militancy, although likely the one most accessible to study through statistical measures.

Given the generic limits of statistical data, this research on worker militancies draws on qualitative material as well as quantitative data, integrates statistical and theoretical approaches, and crosses methodological and disciplinary borders. This trans-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach informs the project of the Gender and Work Database.

Introduction

The most illuminating studies of worker militancy may be in-depth accounts of particular struggles. However, the current context of restructuring and globalization, in which Canadian workers face deteriorating conditions of work, competitive wage bargaining across national boundaries, dismantling of social programs, decreases in the social wage and a discursive shift to radical individualism, raises questions about *the overall patterns* of worker militancy. The deep restructuring of the labour market from the heavily unionized manufacturing sector toward private and difficult-to-organize services, and the transformation of work from relatively-secure full-time employment to part-time, casual, temporary and precarious employment has led to a decline in union density, a change in the demographics of union membership and a focus of worker struggle on resisting privatization, contracting out and employer demands for concessions, on the one hand, and protecting job security, on the other. These economic and political changes and the gender-specific impacts of the 'new economy' have politicized women workers in particular, especially those in the public sector.

Although there are theoretical and methodological difficulties associated with considering the 'big picture', the World Labor Research Working Group (WLG) at the Fernand Braudel Centre at Binghamton University in New York and Silver in particular (1995, 2003) argue that labour unrest is "an especially salient aspect of the world-system": "the decline of labor movements in most core countries in the 1980's was contributing to a sense that class and class conflict also were declining in significance. But once we widen the focus of the analysis beyond the core, the picture changes substantially. Labor militancy has been very much on the rise in the periphery and semi periphery" (Silver, Arrighi and Dubofsky, 1995: 1). Although this research focuses on a single northern country, there are some suggestive parallels with Canada if the shifting patterns of militancy in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors are considered. Although traditional measures (such as strike frequency and person-days lost) suggest a decline in militancy, other ways of examining the data and considering the issue suggest an increase in public sector militancy, the feminization and gendering of militancy, and the increase in worker militancy among the non-unionized. Like the WLG which challenges the portrayal of "workers primarily as passive victims of the transformations wrought by capital, rather than as active agents in a two sided struggle" (10), a goal of this research is to make visible the agency of women workers inside unions and workplaces.

At the same time, given the difficulties of examining the big picture, and the generic limits of statistical data as well as particular problems with the available data on worker militancy, this research draws on qualitative material as well as quantitative data, integrates statistical and theoretical approaches, and crosses methodological and disciplinary borders. This trans-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach informs the project of the Gender and Work Database.

The first part of this paper examines the work stoppages data recorded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). The state's major preoccupation with these strikes and lockouts relates to their economic impact. None of these data is constituted to examine worker militancies. However, it is possible to re-interpret the data by unpacking the aggregates used by the state, and the

averages often reported in the industrial relations. This paper includes two examples -- on the duration and size of strikes -- of this statistical re-configuration which support new ways of looking at overall patterns of worker militancy. Part II teases out a trend not only toward public sector militancy but also toward the feminization of collective action: not only more women on strike, but women representing a higher proportion of those who go on strike. An extended example explores the militancy of Canadian nurses. Part III elaborates the distinction between the feminization of militancy, that is, shifting demographic profiles, and the gendering of militancy, that is, how gender shapes practices of militancy. Gendering is explored in relation to three forms of militancy: first, *union militancies* which focus on the politics of unions and the critical impact of the movement of union women on the politics, practices and culture of Canadian unions; second*, labour militancies*, that is, the organized and collective activism of unionized workers; and finally, *worker militancies*, the broadest and most open-ended frame.

I. Mining the HRDSC Data[2]

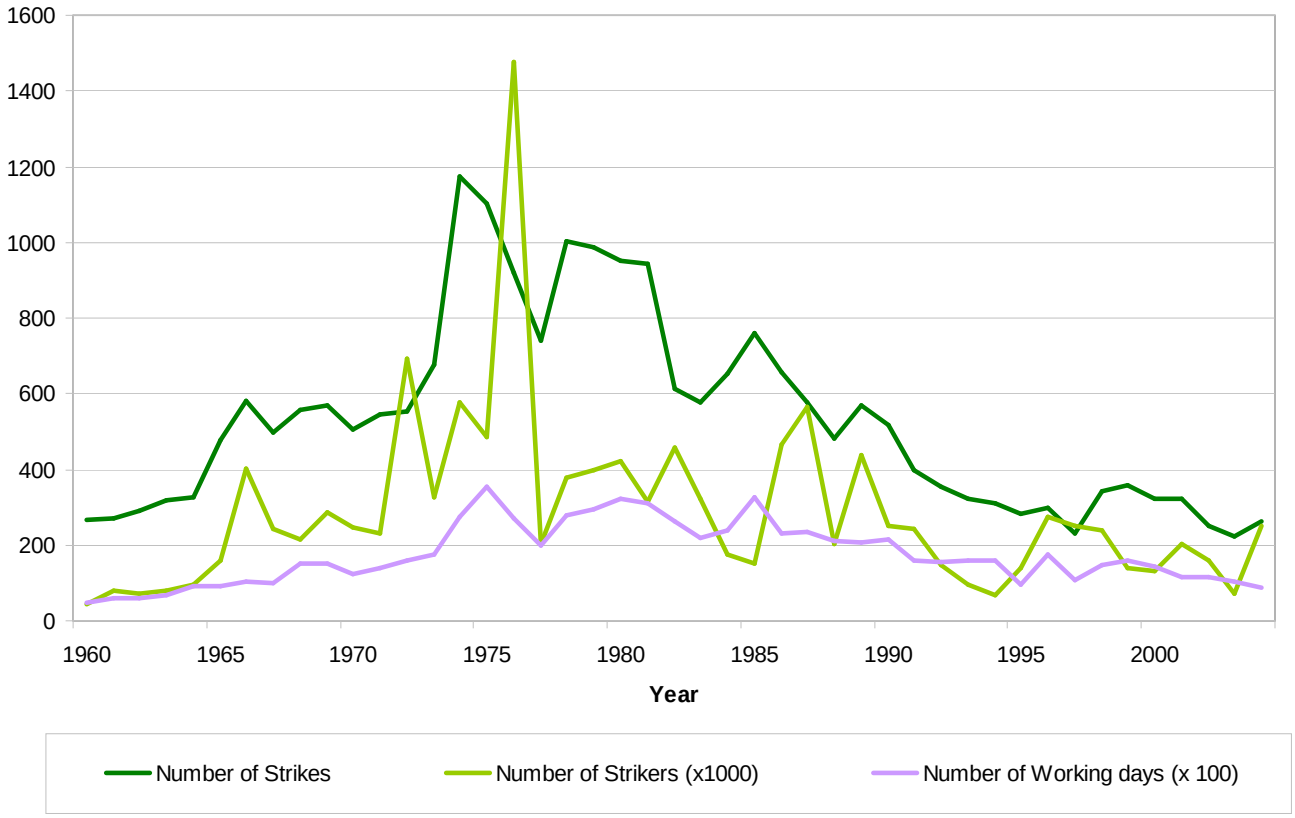
Undoubtedly, statistics can illuminate certain aspects of unions. For example, the discussion of unionization rates and union density offered in Warskett's paper maps emerging patterns which are re-shaping union organizing strategies (2004; see "Research Papers" in union module of GWD). Jackson's paper makes visible wage advantages which accrue to unionized workers (2004; see "Research Papers" in union module of GWD) Given the emphasis in this module on unions as a social movement, and unionists as social actors, a continuing research project is exploring available statistics to see what light they can shed on issues of worker militancies.

Relevant statistics are available from two sources: Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) and Statistics Canada (SC). In the HRSDC data, the indicator which proxies, or stand ins, for the complex notion of militancy is "work stoppage". Data on work stoppages cover strikes and lockouts which amount to 10 or more person-days lost (PDL) (although the variable for lockouts was included only in 1976). The record for each stoppage contains a wealth of information. In addition to person-days, length of stoppage and number of workers involved, the HRSDC data also include the following dimensions: contract status, result, company name, year, union, sector, province, metro/city, issues, NAICS (North American Industrial Classification System) code, and information on lockouts and rotating strikes. For an introduction to the HRSDC data, see "The Work Stoppage Data from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)" (Briskin 2005; see "Research Papers" in union module of GWD) which unpacks the definitions embedded in "work stoppage", considers how to group strikes by number of workers and duration, comments on the contract status and result variables, and discusses how strike issues are coded.

In the SC data, "labour dispute" is the relevant indicator. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID help make visible the demographic characteristics of strikers. The Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) differentiates work-to-rule, work slowdown, strikes, lockouts and other labour related actions and offers a profile of the striker in the worker questionnaire, and a profile of the firm in the employer questionnaire. Although the SC data are not yet posted to the GWD, the design of the surveys provides an interesting window into Statistics Canada's perceptions about unions and their relevance. In fact, the process of excavating these surveys reveals absences that are intensely ideological and ways of posing questions that prevent the significance of union activity from emerging. See the research note, "Excavating the Labour Dispute Data from Statistics Canada" (Briskin 2004; see "Research Papers" in union module of GWD) for a discussion of these issues.

Generally industrial relations specialists identify the following trends in Canadian strike activity: moderate until the mid-1960s, extremely high levels from 1970 to 1981, moderate and declining levels throughout the 1980s, and a sharp drop in the 1990s and into the 2000s (Gunderson et al, 2005: 348). The HRSDC data offers a variety of ways to measure strike activity, and all demonstrate a relative drop in the 1990s especially compared to the high point for strike frequency between 1974-1981. See Figure 1 and Table 1 (below).

Figure 1 Measures of Militancy by Decade, Canada, 1960-2004



Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Social Development Canada © Briskin, 2006

Table 1 Measures of Militancy, Canada

Year	Indicator	Year	Indicator
1974	1,173 strikes	2003	221 strikes
1975	35,239 working days lost	2004	8,862 working days lost
1976	17% of employees on strike	2001	1.5% of employees on strike

Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Social Development Canada

The decline in strike activity in the 1990s is related to a variety of complex economic, political and legal factors. In addition to the changing profile of the labour market, the growing intervention of the state into the management of labour relations, especially in the public sector has challenged "the very basis of free collective bargaining" (Panitch and Swartz 2003). The trend toward the adoption of various statutory incomes policies began with the implementation of compulsory wage and price controls in 1975 which led to a massive worker protest in 1976. In 1982, the Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act (Bill C-124) imposed a two year statutory wage restraint on public employees and suppressed the right to bargain and strike; most provinces followed suit. Significantly, 1982 marks the beginning of a drop in strike frequency. Statutory incomes policies were complemented by the increased designation of public sector workers as essential, thereby removing their right to strike; and the growing use of back-to-work legislation (5). Nevertheless, the disaggregated data indicate continuing militancy in the face of employer aggression and anti-worker government policy.

Undoubtedly both unionized and non-unionized Canadian workers have been militant. HRSDC records 23,944 work stoppages between 1960-2004.[3] Workers have gone on strike to improve the conditions of and remuneration for their work, and to defend their rights to union protection. They have used the strike weapon to resist not only employer aggression but also government policy.[4] The state's major preoccupation with strikes, however, relates to their economic impact. “Person-days lost” (PDL),[5] that is, the duration in working days multiplied by the number of workers is the framework for translating strike data into information about “time lost” to the economy. The data in person-days are used to provide a common denominator to facilitate comparisons across jurisdiction, industry, sector, and even across countries.

None of these data is constituted to examine worker militancy; however, it is possible to re-interpret them by unpacking the aggregate of PDL used by the state, and the averages often reported in the industrial relations (Briskin 2005; see “Research Papers” in union module of GWD). Such a shift makes visible the local and the particular, and supports new ways of looking at overall patterns of worker militancy, highlighting, for example, lengthy strikes, strikes in small workplaces and strikes involving many thousands of workers. Unlike the supposed irrelevance to the aggregate data of a first contract strike of fifteen women which lasts for many months, such a struggle would be very consequential to the women, their political consciousness and the communities in which they live and work. Interrogating the HRSDC data this way also underscores the political nature of data collection (what is seen to be germane and not), and data presentation (what is made visible and what is concealed). Here I offer two examples of what the data can show: about the duration of strikes and the size of strikes.

Number of Workers

To examine the number of workers involved in strikes, I first considered using the breakdown for workplace size used by Labour Force Survey of Statistics Canada: less than 20, 20-99, 100-500 and more than 500, a commonly used standardization. However, to make visible forms of worker militancy, the "more than 500" category was disaggregated.[6] As Table 2 (below) shows, although the "more than 500" category represents only 12.5 percent of strikes, 890 strikes involved 1000-2500 workers, 469 involved 2501-9999 workers, and 156 strikes involved more than 10,000 workers, many of them in the public sector.[7] In the aggregated data of "more than 500", these very large strikes would remain buried, for example, the Public Service Alliance of Canada strike in 2001 which involved more than 200,000 workers; the 1998 strike by the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement which involved more than 124,000 workers; the strike of more than 47,000 members of the Ontario Public Service Employees union in 1996; and the 1991 strike by more than 40,000 members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Table 2 Number of Workers involved in Work Stoppages, Canada, 1960-2004

Number of workers	Number of stoppages	Percent	Cumulative percent
1-19	4220	17.6	17.6
20-50	5318	22.2	39.8
51-99	3799	15.9	55.7
100-250	5139	21.5	77.2
251-500	2495	10.4	87.6
501-1000	1458	6.1	93.7
1001-2500	890	3.7	97.4
2501-9999	469	2.0	99.3
10000+	156	0.7	100.0
Total	23944	100.0	

Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Social Development Canada

At the same time, it is noteworthy that between 1960-2004, 17.6 percent of strikes involved 19 or fewer workers, 22.2 percent of strikes between 20-50 workers, and 15.9 percent involved 51-99 workers. This means that 55.7 percent of strikes involved less than 100 workers. In Canada, there is a proliferation of small and seemingly difficult-to-organize workplaces. Commonsense views which suggest that women are clustered in such workplaces and that strikes happen in large workplaces make expressions of militancy in such firms/workplaces all the more interesting. These data might be of strategic importance to unions in the context of new organizing campaigns to bolster dwindling membership.[8]

Strike Duration

Industrial relations experts emphasize the average length of strikes. Gunderson et al (2005: 352) report that over the full period 1901 to 1998, the average strike lasted 18.8 days, though it dropped to 16.6 days in the 1980s, and 13.8 days in the 1990s. In fact, they point out that with the exceptions of both World Wars, Canada has almost always had strikes of fairly long duration compared to many countries. The language of Gunderson et al is somewhat confusing (although widely quoted) since the length of average strike is calculated, not as one might expect, by dividing the number of strikes by the days lost but rather by calculating the average number of days a striking worker lost. They do acknowledge that "the macroeconomic measurement of strikes as lost work time necessitates a view of strikes from an employer perspective"(353).

A shift from these averages to the particulars tells a somewhat different story and highlights patterns of worker militancy not revealed by the aggregate figures. The HRSDC data show that 35.6 percent of strikes between 1960-2004 lasted between 1-5 days; in fact, 21.3 percent lasted only 1-2 days. These include political walkouts such as the 1976 Day of Protest around wage and price controls and 1996-7 Days of Protest in Ontario. Equally interesting is the fact that 8.6 percent of strikes lasted 17-52 weeks and 1.4 percent more than one year. See Table 3: *Strike Duration by Week, Canada, 1960-2004*. And furthermore, data on average strike duration (calculated by dividing the number of strikes by the days lost) show an increase in average strike duration. See Table 4: *Average Strike Duration, Canada, 1960-2004*.[9]

Table 3 Strike Duration by Week, Canada, 1960-2004

Strike duration	Total number	Percent	Cumulative percent
=1 week	8527	35.6	
1-2 days	5103	21.3	21.3
3-5 days	3424	14.3	35.6
>1 to =2 weeks (6-10 days)	2968	12.4	48.0
>2 to =4 weeks (11-20 days)	3475	14.5	62.5
>4 to =7 weeks (21-35 days)	2965	12.4	74.9
>7 to =16 weeks (36-80 days)	3651	15.2	90.2
>16 to = 52 weeks (81-260 days)	2020	8.4	98.6
>52 weeks (261+ days)	338	1.4	100.0
Total	23944	100.0	

Note 1. HRSDC data indicate both calendar days and working days. Calendar days refers to the number of calendar days in the month, while "The days counted as working day are those on which the establishment involved would normally be in operation (five days per week)" From the Work Stoppage Master File.
Note 2. Strike duration groups stoppage according to number of working days. '=1 week' includes stoppages which lasted less than or equal to one week, or 5 working days. '>1 to =2 weeks' includes stoppages which lasted longer than one week, but not longer than two weeks, or 6 to 10 working days.

Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Table 4 Average Strike Duration, Canada, 1960-2004

Year range	Average strike duration in workdays
1960-1964	22.3
1965-1969	22.1
1970-1974	25.3
1975-1979	29.4
1980-1984	36.3
1985-1989	39.7
1990-1994	44.4
1995-1999	45.3
2000-2004	41.1
Total	32.8

Note 1. The HRSDC data distinguishes between work days and calendar days. "The days counted as working days are those on which the establishment involved would normally be in operation (five days per week)" (from the Work Stoppage Master File). Average Strike Duration refers to the mean number of workdays each work stoppage lasted.

Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

II. Public Sector Militancy[10]

This section teases out a trend not only toward public sector militancy but also toward the feminization of collective action: not only more women on strike, but women representing a higher proportion of those who go on strike. An analysis of the strike data suggests a shift toward public sector militancy, what some have called the *tertiarisation of industrial conflict* (Bordogna and Cella, 2002). The roots of this change are complex but certainly include the shift in union membership demographics toward the public sector, and the militant response to sustained attacks on the public sector which have included wage freezes and rollbacks, downsizing, contracting out and privatization, and assaults on public sector bargaining rights (Panitch and Swartz, 2003). Despite the fact that many public sector workers are deemed *essential*, denied the right to strike, and possibly legislated back to work, between 1995-2004 27.3 percent of all stoppages were in the public sector (the highest percentage since public sector unionization).[11] Furthermore in this period, 44.1 percent of person-days lost were in public sector, and 71.7 percent of all workers on strike. This suggests the beginning of a dramatic reversal in the long-standing dominance of private sector militancy. See Table 5: *Sectoral Strike Activity, 1960-2004*.[12]

Table 5 Sectoral Strike Activity, 1960-2004

		Number		Person-days		Workers	
Year	**Sector**	#	%	#	%	#	%
1960-1994	Public	3751	17.8%	35,588,270	20.8%	5,177,586	47.0%
	Private	17310	82.2%	135,548,920	79.2%	5,831,247	53.0%
	Total	21061	100.0%	171,137,190	100.0%	11,008,833	100.0%
1995-2004	Public	787	27.3%	10,946,469	44.1%	1,334,162	71.7%
	Private	2096	72.7%	13,884,054	55.9%	526,343	28.3%
	Total	2883	100.0%	24,830,523	100.0%	1,860,505	100.0%
1960-2004	Public	4538	19.0%	46,534,739	23.7%	6,511,748	50.6%
	Private	19406	81.0%	149,432,974	76.3%	6,357,590	49.4%
	Total	23944	100.0%	195,967,713	100.0%	12,869,338	100.0%

Source: Work Stoppage Data, Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Social Development Canada

Disaggregating stoppages in two key public sector industries -- Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance is also revealing. From 1960-1994, strikes in these sectors represented 7.7 percent of all strikes representing 7.7 percent of person-days lost, and 14.5 percent of striking workers; however, in the period 1995-2004, 17 percent of strikes were in these sectors representing18.6 percent of person-days and 38.3 percent of workers. See Table 6: *Public Sector Militancy: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance, Canada, 1960-2004.* Many different measures, then, support the argument that public sector militancy is becoming more significant in the landscape of industrial conflict.

Table 6 Public Sector Militancy: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance, Canada, 1960-2004

Industry		1960-1994		1995-2004		1960-2004	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Educational services and healthcare and social assistance	Work stoppages	1,632	7.7	491	17.0	2,123	8.9
	Person-days	13,233,630	7.7	4,627,612	18.6	17,861,242	9.1
	Workdays	37,319	5.7	14,407	11.5	51,726	6.6
	Workers	1,600,782	14.5	713,346	38.3	2,314,129	18.0
All other industries	Work stoppages	19,429	92.3	2,392	83.0	21,821	91.1
	Person-days	157,903,560	92.3	20,202,911	81.4	178,106,471	90.9
	Workdays	623,021	94.3	110,361	88.5	733,382	93.4
	Workers	9,408,050	85.5	1,147,159	61.7	10,555,209	82.0

Union coverage figures source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey 2003. Custom tabulation, Gender and Work Database (http://www.genderwork.ca)

Work Stoppage Data source: Workplace Information Directorate, Human Resources and Social Development Canada

Not only are public sector strikes, especially in selected industries like health and education increasing, but they also have a different profile than private sector strikes. First, they tend to involve more workers. Between 1960-2004, about 20 percent of public sector strikes involved 500 or more workers compared to only 10.6 percent of private sector strikes. Not surprisingly, given the impact of such strikes on the public, they also tend to be shorter. For example, between 1960-2004, almost 30 percent of public sector strikes lasted between 1-2 days compared to 19.4 percent in the private sector. In fact, 38.6 percent of the very large public sector strikes involving 10,000 or more workers lasted only 1-2 days compared to 9.6 percent of similar size strikes in the private sector. And only 17.8 percent of public sector strikes lasted over seven weeks compared to 26.8 percent of private sector strikes. Disaggregating the pattern of long public sector strikes, and considering numbers rather than percentages, reveals that there

were 548 public sector strikes which lasted 7-16 weeks, 225 from 16+-52 weeks and 31 which lasted more than 52 weeks, 51 percent of involved less than 20 workers.

Bordogna and Cella speak of the distinct profile of public sector strikes in what they call “the geography of industrial conflict”, and point to the particular nature, logic, strategies, impact and pattern of such strikes which are not necessarily comparable to traditional strikes in the private sector, especially in manufacturing. However, they do not address the relevance of gender in the tertiarisation of conflict. Yet in many countries the public sector is dominated by women workers, as it is in Canada. I would argue that this new geography of industrial conflict is a landscape in which gender is of great consequence. The fact that women are an increasing percentage not only of the public sector workforce, but also of the unionized public sector highlight the growing feminisation of the public sector workforce, the enhanced significance of the public sector workers to union density, and the feminisation of militancy, as those on strike are more likely to be women. Undoubtedly, a significant number of major Canadian strikes have involved mainly women workers in the public sector: teachers' strikes and school support staff in Ontario, nurses' strikes in Quebec, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan, communications workers in Quebec and Ontario, and the cross country strike of federal public sector workers in 1991 which was legislated back to work. Statistics are not available that demonstrate the exact proportion of women and men involved in any particular strike; furthermore, given the complex way that gender intersects with sector, industry, occupation, region, age, firm size, and union coverage and the lack of multilayered data to represent this fully, caution is necessary in interpreting the data. However, the growth and feminization of the public sector, especially in health and education, and the significance of strikes in these industries do support the general claim for the feminization of militancy.

The Health Care Industry: An Example

What has been particularly striking is the involvement of nurses and other health care and social assistance workers, most of whom are women, in both legal and illegal strikes.[13] Studies that have examined the extent to which legislative prohibitions on union activity and the right to strike in the public sector have deterred strikes find that although public-sector strike activity does decrease, it is by no means eliminated; furthermore, restricting strikes may redirect conflict into other costly forms such as grievances and job actions (Gunderson et al, 2005: 363). Certainly the case of the health care and social assistance industry supports these studies. Between 1960-2004, there were 199 wildcats in this industry which represented about 18 percent of all strikes in this industry and 4.6 percent of all wildcats. However, between 2000-2004, a period of declining strike activity and increasing public sector militancy, the 16 wildcat strikes in health care represented 21.3 percent of all wildcats.

The situation of Canadian nurses, especially the move from full time to part time and contract work, has prompted considerable militancy. Recent research commissioned by the Canadian Nurses Association shows that 20 percent of new nurses walk away because of poor working conditions, low

wages and a shortage of full-time work caused by downsizing and cost-cutting. Only half the country's nurses work full-time, and two-thirds do so involuntarily and juggle multiple jobs. Casual nurses are cheaper because they receive no benefits and are called in only when needed. Québec nurses have worked 1.5 million hours of forced overtime (the equivalent of 800 full time jobs), 60 percent of jobs are now part time and the nurses, mostly women, continue to bear the brunt of health care cutbacks (reported in the *Globe and Mail* 18 June 1999). Furthermore, earnings for nursing graduates are actually declining (*Globe and Mail*, 13 July 1999 and 10 Feb 2000). In *Negotiations '99: Stand Up for Nursing*, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses [SUN] stressed that "the nursing shortage has meant many nurses have been forced to work overtime, are suffering extreme stress, work-related injuries and chronic illness. .. There has been an increasing 'casualization' of the nursing workforce so that instead of staffing properly with regular full and part-time nurses, management uses casual nurses to staff for heavy shifts and peak hours (like fast food outlets). For the remainder of the shift, patient care is put at risk and fewer nurses can earn a decent living."

Although there were 102 strikes involving nurses between 1966-2001, these recent attacks on health care have certainly politicized nurses. In 1988, more than 11,000 staff nurses in Alberta went on illegal shrike for 19 days “in the face of extremely punitive retaliatory measures by employers and the state” (Coulter, 1993: 44). And in 1999 Alberta nurses reached a settlement on the brink of what would have been another illegal strike. Also in 1999, there were three major nurses' strikes: in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. The first strike in 20 years by nurses in Newfoundland ended after nine days when the provincial government passed back-to-work legislation. Two days of wildcat strikes by 47,500 Québec nurses in June of 1999 (following a week-long strike in 1989) set the stage for a lengthy illegal strike which garnered massive support from the Québec public, 72 percent of whom thought the nurses' wage demands reasonable (*Globe and Mail* 28 June 1999), and brought out doctors, other unionized workers and members of the women's rights federation to their lines. The nurses faced two draconian pieces of legislation which Michele Biscay, vice-president of the Quebec Federation of Nurses thought the government was using to try to "kill the union" (*Globe and Mail* 6 July 1999). The nurses resisted the intimidation of both Bill 160 which levied fines (more than $10 million dollars by the end of the strike), withheld union dues and docked two days of pay for each day off the job (costing individual nurses around $7000); and Bill 72, back-to-work legislation which targeted the union leadership. Five days after the passage of Bill 72, 93 percent of nurses voted to continue the illegal strike. One week later, an agreement in principle was reached which the membership later turned down by 75 percent. The nurses continued to use "local guerrilla" tactics including working to rule, insistence on overtime pay and the filing grievances for all breaches of collective agreement (*Globe and Mail* 26 July 1999).

Following strikes in 1988 and 1991, Saskatchewan nurses defied back-to-work legislation for ten days in 1999. Saskatchewan nurse Nancy Styles spoke to convention of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC): "There were nurses on the picket line who told me, 'I've never even had a speeding ticket.' But you know they never flinched. They were willing to stay on that picket line and maybe even be sent to jail.. All

we want to do as nurses is to deliver safe, excellent nursing care.. We cannot do this in the working conditions we have now" (quoted in *Globe and Mail* 13 July 1999). Laurie Swift, a nurse in Regina, wrote in a letter to the Editor of *The Regina Leader-Post* (7 May 1999): "This issue is really about the nursing shortage which... has led to horrific and unsafe working conditions and compromised patient care... We are taking a stand for the people of Saskatchewan: you, me, our families, our communities, as the caregivers and patient advocates that we are."

These nurses' strikes were characterized by strong popular support, and by backing from other unions and the women's movements. Barb Byers, president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) said: "I've never seen a membership so solid and I've never seen this level of support from the public."[14]And undoubtedly the significance of gender is recognized. Byers told a demonstration in support of the nurses: "We've got to let them know that women workers in this province are not going to be discriminated against" (quoted in *The Star Phoenix* 12 April 1999). Byers thought the government had "underestimated the nurses in a sexist and patronizing way".[15] A May 1, 1999 opinion piece in the *Phoenix* was titled "Premier Faces Women's Fury."

Debra McPherson, the secretary-treasurer of the National Federation of Nurses' Unions was interviewed in *The Star Phoenix* (15 April 1999): “The government [has] failed to take into account that most nurses are middle-aged women who have plenty of life experience and aren't easily cowed... If Mr. Romano [premier of Saskatchewan's NDP government] thinks these 8,000 women are going to back down, he had just better take his testosterone hussy fit and stuff it. He's not giving women their due." She explained that the resentment stemmed from the fact that governments everywhere have shown no reluctance to cut or freeze the wages of public sector employees, most of whom are women. "The public sector is constantly the brunt of wage restraint. We have our federal government pushing back pay equity decisions from the courts. But if they think they can keep women working for less, they are going to have to think again. We're past that.”

Major health care cutbacks in Canada have definitely politicized nurses. One could hypothesize that when a publicly funded health care system is under attack, nurses act to defend it, and in the process recognize their own rights to decent working conditions and fair wages, or to put it another way, see the link between their working conditions and a well-functioning system. In such a context, their demands seem less “selfish”. In her study of 1988 illegal strike of Alberta nurses, Coulter concludes that women's caring occupations generate particular strategies of militancy. Undoubtedly those who serve client groups (most often women) find it harder to make demands around wages, yet as both public education and health provision are collapsing in Canada, public sector workers are organizing and striking to a much greater extent than private sector workers.[16] In reference to the 1988 illegal strike of Alberta nurses, the organization Edmonton Working Women drew this connection: “They defied the law to defend their own democratic rights, and to oppose the erosion of workers' rights on all fronts... [and to] fight for patients' rights to quality publicly funded health care” (quoted in Coulter, 1993: 56). Furthermore, nurses are starting to see themselves as part of the broader labour movement, and by extension as workers as well

as professionals. In April 1996, SUN joined the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress in 1997, the first nurses' union in the country to do either.

The contrast to earlier decades is noteworthy. Traditionally the fact that women did caring work was used to deter women from striking: "Women are trained to feel responsible for the people they care for, whether at home or on the job. Consequently, they can easily be made to feel guilty if they refuse to take care … And when they do strike, the media may depict them as "heartless and unfeeling" (Darcy and Lauzon, 1983: 175). In this new context, women are striking because of their commitment to their caring work. In both cases, gender is significant; in the latter, gendered work experience is a force that mobilizes. As Coulter argues about the Alberta nurses, “nurses have begin to develop some consciousness of themselves as women workers and have used some of the conceptual tools of feminism to understand and explain their lives” (57).

III. Feminization and Gendering[17]

The militancy of Canadian nurses and public sector workers in general supports an argument for both the feminization and gendering of militancy. Feminization speaks to demographic profiles: the feminization of work (more part-time, low paid and often precarious service jobs, work traditionally understood as women’s work), the feminization of the workforce (increasing numbers of women workers), and the feminization of union density and the concomitant feminization of unions (increasing numbers of women union members). These demographic transformations set the stage for the *feminization of worker militancies*. In contrast to these demographic shifts associated with feminization, *gendering* is considerably more complex since gender is not the property of a person but a social relation, and gendering is a historical and political process. Undoubtedly, gender shapes practices of militancy, that is, tactics and strategies emerge out of the workplace, household and community experiences of women (and of men).[18]

I suggest that gendering be explored in relation to three forms of militancy: first, *union militancies* which focus on the politics of unions and the critical impact of the movement of union women on the politics, practices and culture of Canadian unions; second*, labour militancies*, that is, the organized and collective activism of unionized workers; and finally, *worker militancies*, the broadest and most open-ended frame. This discussion of gendering militancies is also a critical reminder that strikes are only one form of worker militancy, although likely the one most accessible to study through statistical measures.

Gendering Union Militancy

Social unionism has long contested the narrow focus of business unionism on wages, benefits and job security, and has traditionally been expressed through the relationship between the unions and the Canadian social democratic party, the New Democratic party (NDP). In the last three decades, the movement of Canadian union women has been instrumental in permanently shifting the ground of business unionism inside unions themselves. Union women have organized around union representation,

redefining union issues, and separate organizing and constituency building. Demands by women activists for full participation have challenged the apathy produced by the service mentality of business unionism, and shifted union power structures. As a result, unions have moved toward greater inclusivity and more democratic practices (Briskin and McDermott 1993, Briskin 1999 and 2002). This deeply rooted transformation in the practices of Canadian unions could well be understood as a "gendering of union militancy". As Cobble and Michal (2002: 234) note: "Women are at the forefront of economic change, and they are at the forefront of devising new forms of unionism that will appeal to a new generation of workers".

It is also the case that union women's organizing has been instrumental in transforming the union movement's relationship with other progressive movements, and initiating the trend toward social movement unionism. Beginning in the 1970s, around issues such as and violence against women, childcare, reproductive rights, union women have organized alliances and coalitions across unions and with social movements, contesting the isolationist tendencies within the union movement and legitimizing coalition building with groups outside the union movement, what has come to be known as "social movement unionism". In recent years, such coalitions have organized a Quebec women's march against poverty in 1995, and a national march *For Bread and Roses, For Jobs and Justice* in 1996. Modeled on these events, they also initiated the World March of Women which culminated in 2000 and was endorsed by over 200 countries and 2200 organizations and whose goals were to eliminate poverty and violence in women's lives. Women's militancy crosses the public and the private, and bridges women's dual role in families/households and waged work. Such initiatives are concerned with "worker as citizen as well as wage earner" and this bridging might be characterized as a key to understanding women worker militancies in the union movement, and the gendering of union militancy. "Both social and social movement unionism embrace a much wider definition of solidarity, i.e., that unions should defend all workers and not just their members. Moreover, both seek to promote the interests of the worker as citizen as well as wage earner and, in so doing, emphasize the importance of unions' political activity" (Murray, 2005: 108). See Kainer (2006) for a detailed elaboration of this form of gendering. (link)

Gendering Labour Militancy

Unlike union militancy which focuses on the politics of unions themselves, labour militancy speaks to the organized and collective activism of unionized workers. The gendering of labour militancy takes many forms. This research considers two areas: the gendering of collective bargaining issues (see Briskin 2006a and the CB material in demo on union advantage how to reference? link) and the gendering of strikes and collective action. It is also worth noting the gendering of the union project of organizing the unorganized (See Warskett 2004 link?)

Two themes in the gendering of strikes are considered briefly: the importance of "associational bargaining power" and the use of distinctive picket line tactics.

Cultivating Associational Bargaining Power: Coalitions and Alliances

Many strikes of Canadian women workers have involved extensive coalition building not only with workers in other unions but with the community-based women's movement and sometimes other progressive social movements (Briskin 2002). For example, the six month Eaton's strike in 1984 "inspired" the creation of the Women's Strike Support Coalition "which brought together women from both the labour and the women's movement in a committee that organized numerous highly successful support rallies", a strike also supported publicly by the Canadian Catholic Bishops' Committee and the Anglican Church of Canada (McDermott, 1993: 23). For many of the strikers, this was their first experience of the organized women's movement. The strikers led the International Women's Day March in Toronto in 1985, which involved more than 6000 marchers. Maria Cavalli who addressed the crowd on behalf of the strikers described "how she was overwhelmed by seeing so many women together cheering for the strikers" (McDermott, 1993: 32). From Nov 1987 to Feb 1988, a small group of women workers went on strike to obtain a fifteen percent wage increase and "wage parity with tellers at other Nova Scotia Banks"; in this strike, community support was critical (Baker, 1993: 74). In fact, there is a long tradition of organizing support for women strikers by the Canadian women's movement. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Egan and Yanz (1983) report the involvement of the Toronto International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) in the following strikes: Radio Shack 1979 (Ontario), PSAC strikes, Bell Canada 1981 or 1982 (then Communication Workers of Canada-CWC, now CEP), Fotomat (United Steel Workers of Canada-USWA), Puretex workers (Confederation of Canadian Unions-CCU), Ontario Hospital workers (likely CUPE), postal workers 1981 (CUPW), Tel-Air Answering Services (CWC), Irwin Toys 1981 or 1982 (USWA), Blue Cross 1979 or 1980 (United Auto Workers-UAW, now CAW), and Mini-Skools 1983 (OPSEU).

Drawing on Olin Wright's distinction between structural power (both marketplace and workplace bargaining power) and associational power (trade unions, political parties, and cross class alliances with nationalist movements), Silver (2003) notes the increasing significance of the latter for workers in the current global context. In a revealing comparison of the militancy of textile workers in the nineteenth century and automobile workers in the twentieth century, Silver concludes that textile workers were consistently more militant than automobile workers.

> A crucial difference between workers in the two industries, however, was that textile workers' successes were far more dependent on a strong (compensatory) *associational* bargaining power (trade unions,, political parties, and cross class alliances with nationalist movements)….[19] Textile workers…had to develop a countervailing power based on citywide or region wide political and trade union organization. Likewise today, low-wage service workers … have followed a community-based organizing model rather than a model that relies on the positional power of workers at the point of production. The Living Wage Campaign and the Justice for Janitors campaigns in the United States have sought to base labor organization in the community, severing its dependence on stable employment in any given firm or group of firms. As for textile workers historically, victory could not be achieved by relying mainly on the workers' autonomous structural bargaining power but rather dependent on alliances with (and resources from) groups and strata in the community at large. If the significance of associational bargaining power is growing, then the future trajectory of labor movements will be strongly

conditioned by the broader political context of which they are a part (2003: 172-3).

Successful strategies to improve the conditions of the most marginalized workers and those in equity-seeking groups -- who are often one and the same -- may rely on associational bargaining power. As noted by Silver (2003), this is evident in the remarkable "Justice for Janitors" campaign (Erickson et al, 2002) and the Living Wage campaigns, both in the US (Reynolds, 2001; Luce 2002). The "Justice for Janitors" campaign in Los Angeles among low wage immigrant workers in an industry "where the employer is elusive and where layers of subcontracting diffuse responsibility across multiple actors (owners of the buildings, renters and contractors)" (Erickson et al, 2002: 544) is noteworthy for the development of unusual forms of pattern bargaining by Service Employees International Union [SEIU].[20] The 1994 "rebirth" (Luce, 2002) of a living wage movement began when Baltimore passed a pioneering law which ensured that all city contractors pay a living wage. By 2001, 63 municipalities had passed living wage laws and another 70 were involved in negotiations (Reynolds, 2001: 31). Unions have worked in coalition with social movements to support these campaigns which offer alternative mechanisms for bargaining equity and justice for low paid and often un-unionized workers. In Ontario, a broad-based coalition "Ontario Needs a Raise" under the umbrella of the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice is demanding that the minimum wage be raised to $10.[21]

In contrast to those in the heavily unionized manufacturing sector, for women workers and members of other vulnerable groups, many of whom are in marginalized low paid jobs, conventional bargaining strategies and the strike weapon may be weaker tools. Like those in public sector jobs where the community is heavily impacted by a strike, these groups may need to rely on the public for support. In both instances, the building of associational bargaining power is critical, an awareness of which is evident in some recent campaigns. In 2005 the Toronto and York Region District Labour Council launched the "Million Reasons" campaign which points to the more than a million workers in the Toronto region who earn less than $29,800 a year. The campaign calls for good jobs, bargaining to raise standards, mass union organizing and restoring the social wage.[22] In 2006, the focus is on "A Million Reasons to Support Hotel Workers," and is linked to a continent-wide UNITE HERE campaign to raise the wages, and health and safety standards of hotel workers.[23]

In "Promoting Gender Equality Through Collective Bargaining" Lim, Ameratunga and Whelton of the ILO stress that "the overall bargaining strategy [must include] alliance building with equality seeking groups" (2002: 19). Similarly, in her overview of the extensive research project on Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining in Europe, Dickens (2000: 204) argues that there needs "to be links to collectivities of women within the union and outside it." However, she also notes that "the relationship between external women's groups and trade unions in Europe is often tenuous or non-existent." In contrast, Canadian women's organizing has embraced alliances and coalitions across political current, sector and institution in order to bring women together from unions, political parties, and community-based groups to co-operate nationally, provincially and locally. This co-operation has meant that trade union women work with community-based feminist groups, to build coalitions around key issues such as

childcare and pay equity, to pressure the union movement to respond to the feminist challenge, and to support strikes. Trade union women, in turn, have had an important impact on the politics and practices of the Canadian women's movement, weakening the tendency towards individualistic solutions and introducing (and re-introducing) a class perspective (Briskin 1999a).

Distinctive Strike Tactics

Although the area of distinctive strike tactics is under-researched, I suggest two examples. McDermott's important study (1993) of the Eaton's strike in the private service sector which involved largely part-time low paid female workers concludes that women in retail strike differently than workers in manufacturing. This is likely both a gendered and sectoral phenomenon.

> Because this strike was in the service sector and conducted in settings through which many members of the public had to pass daily, new techniques had to be learned to deal with people who crossed the picket lines. It did not take long for the strikers to question industrial style picketing tactics they were expected to use (26).

McDermott details conflicts with workers from male-dominated unions who came to support the strikers but who expected the Eaton's strikers to stop cars entering the malls. One striker commented: "I remember the construction workers used to come and help us out on Saturday… They would stop the traffic to let people know we were there, but in essence that action of stopping the traffic ended up turning against us. People told us they were supporting us until they had to wait so long.. It also increased the abuse we took." The Eaton's lines decided against slowing people down and developed creative and less confrontational tactics to win support.

The issue of the *public* is central to strikes not only in the private service sector but also in the public sector. As noted above, by and large public sector strikes are becoming a larger proportion of strikes and overall, they tend to involve more workers than private sector strikes, and likely more women. What is also significant is that such strikes have a greater impact on the public, and more visibility in the public arena and in the media. In fact, Peirce (2003: 273) makes the point that "public sector unionism is inherently political, with efforts directed towards winning and maintaining public support both for public sector unions' specific rights and for the government spending that under girds the services public sector workers provide. During the 1990s the relative importance of political action and publicity campaigns increased dramatically, due mainly to government restrictions on public sector bargaining activity." These strikes of mostly women challenge the traditional image of labour militancy, once so connected to blue collar men, a form of gendering of the public imagination.

Gendering Worker Militancies

In addition to strike action, both legal and illegal, Canadian worker militancy has taken innovative forms especially among the most marginalized workers, many of whom are women and workers of colour Such organizing may be of increasing importance in defending workers' rights, given attacks by corporate capitalism, coercive state practices and the difficulties organizing precarious workers into unions. "Worker militancy", then, is the broadest and most open-ended frame and goes beyond a focus on unionized workers. It may be illuminating to understand these new forms of militancy under the rubric of "gendering worker militancy".

The 1990s have witnessed the growth of "community unionism" which focuses on the unemployed and precariously employed and is explicitly committed to promoting equity objectives and democratic process, in ways not dissimilar to constituency organizing among equity-seeking groups inside unions. Community unionism includes efforts of unions to connect with non-labour community groups to unionize workers, so community-union alliances; attempts by community groups to organize non-unionized workers in precarious employment; and organizations which build the power of non-unionized workers and the working class community, for example, Workers' Centres which create broad solidarities though education, networking and organising (Cranford and Ladd, 2003). Community unionism can include attention to location (constituency, site and issue based organizing) and process (levels of participation and styles of leadership) (Cranford et al, 2005). Undoubtedly, globalization and economic restructuring are making new forms of organizing, militancy and resistance, through unions and in communities, both necessary and possible.[24]

The concept of 'gendering' may be too narrow to understand worker militancies in their rich complexity. However, there is no doubt that gender invisibility has impacted both commonsense and scholarly understandings of militancy. This discussion has attempted to demonstrate the value of a frame of feminization and gendering to understanding new patterns of militancy and hopefully will provide a basis for challenging the lingering ideology inside unions that militancy is about men. Such a shift may, in turn, help unions address outdated gender stereotypes and mobilize their increasingly diverse membership more effectively. A nuanced analysis of gendered militancy might also challenge the simplistic renderings of gender which continue to dominate the industrial relations literature. Perhaps as well, this framework will offer a reference point for the necessary parallel process of theorizing the practice of the resistance and militancy among racialized, young and immigrant workers, especially as the proportion of such workers in the Canadian labour force continues to expand.

Despite the decline in the frequency of strikes in the 'new economy' the disaggregated data and qualitative sources indicate continuing militancy in the face of employer aggression and anti-worker government policy, the heightened involvement of women workers, and the increasing significance of gender to any analysis of militancy.

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Notes

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[2] I have negotiated full access to the records of each Canadian stoppage from 1946-2004. I wish to thank the Workplace Information Directorate of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, especially Manon Henry and Suzanne Payette for providing this microdata. All HRSDC data quoted in this paper is from the work stoppage data unless otherwise specified. HRSDC was previously Human Resources and Skills Development Canada[HRSDC] and previously Human Resources Development Canada [HRDC] and prior to that Labour Canada.

Short periodic reports on work stoppages were previously published in two HRSDC publications. The Workplace Gazette reported work stoppages by jurisdiction (mainly by province), by industry, and offers a chronological perspective on stoppages (the number, the number of workers involved, and lost work time) by year. The duration in person-days of all work stoppages in a year was also shown as a percentage of estimated working time based on estimates of the number of non-agricultural paid workers in Canada obtained from the Labour Force Survey (Statistics Canada). The Collective Bargaining Bulletin listed major work stoppages (those with 500 or more employees) on a monthly basis giving the employer, union, issues, and number of employees. In 2005, these publications were merged to form the Workplace Bulletin which also includes a list of current settlements, current stoppages and upcoming negotiations. Available from the main page of the Workplace Information Directorate. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/wid/info.shtml.

[3] For information on Canadian strikes prior to this time, see Huberman and Young (2002) and the government publication titled Strikes and Lockouts in Canada. Posted on the Statistics Canada website are also data on strikes and lockouts from 1901-1975 < http://80-www.statcan.ca.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectione/sectione.htm>. Scroll down to "Statistics Canada: Historical Statistics of Canada". Click on "Number of Strikes and Lockouts, Employers and Workers Involved and Time Loss, Canada, 1901-1975". For an account of probably the single most significant strike in Canada, the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike which lasted six weeks, see Penner (1973).

[4] Silver unpacks the varied acts of resistance to the proletarian condition which target the employer directly and the state. See 1995: 15.

[5] Person-days lost was previously referred to as mandays. The HRSDC shift from the terminology was no doubt a late recognition of the fact that women work and are involved in stoppages.

[6] The Workplace Bulletin of HRSDC lists major work stoppages (those with 500 or more employees) giving the employer, union, issues and number of employees. Although it is true that such strikes account for a disproportionate percentage of person-days lost given the number of workers involved - 69.3 percent, the fact that 87.4 percent of strikes are not reported in any detail in HRSDC publications underscores the state's narrow interest in economic impacts of strikes, in particular, person-days lost. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/wid/info.shtml.

[4]. In general, large strikes tend to be in the public sector: 12.1 percent of public sector strikes involved more than 1000 workers compared to only 4.9 percent of private sector strikes.

[8] In fact, James and Mackenize (2005: 8) point out that in Ontario most newly organized units tend to be comparatively small workplaces. In 2000-2001, 63.9 percent of the total certification applications involved units of less than 40 employees and 26.1 percent applied to units of less than 10 employees.

[9] See Gunderson, Hebdon, Hyatt and Ponak (2005). Although their discussion of average strike duration used calendar rather than work days, a similar profile of increasing duration is demonstrated here using work days.

The disaggregated data also reveal another way to look at the shifting patterns about duration: between 1960-2004 35.6 percent of strikes lasted less than one week; however, in the period 2000-2004, only 25.8 percent of strikes were solved in that short time. And whereas over the whole period, only 15.2 percent of strikes lasted between 7-16 weeks, between 2000-2004, the percentage had increased: to 19 percent.

[10] This discussion draws freely on Briskin (2006a).

[11] Gunderson et al (2005: 358) suggest that even these rates may be misleadingly low "because the public sector had a substantial proportion of contracts settled through direct legislative intervention (22.4 percent in the 1990-98 period). In some cases, legislation takes place after a strike occurred; in others, legislation suspended collective bargaining and imposed collective agreements. Furthermore, arbitrated settlements are much more common in the public sector. Combining arbitrated collective agreements with agreements achieved after strike or through legislation would show that between 1990 and 1998, public-sector collective agreements were achieved by the parties themselves (or through the assistance of a mediator or conciliator) only about 70 percent of the time. By comparison, private sector negotiations successfully produced collective agreements 88 percent of the time."

[12] Some caution is necessary in assessing this data. As Bordogna and Cella (2002) point out, "the growing relative weight of labour conflicts in services may simply be due to the decline in disputes in the traditional industrial sectors, without depending on increased worker militancy in services". To some extent, the Canadian data supports this point. So for example, in the period between 1995-2004, the 2096 private sector strikes represented only 10.8 percent of all private sector strikes between 1960-2004; however, the 787 public sector strikes represented 17 percent of all public sector strikes.

[13] By 2001, 82 percent of workers in the Health Care and Social Assistance industry were women; and 83 percent of those covered by a union were women. Data from Labour Force Survey (LFS). Documentation available from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Dli/Data/Ftp/lfs.htm>.

[14] Quoted by Judy Rebick on CBC On-Line, 16 April 1999.

[15] Ibid.

[16] In reference to the 1981 illegal strike of hospital workers (housekeepers, lab technicians, dietary workers, nursing assistants, and maintenance workers) in Ontario, over 75 percent of whom were women, White (1990) makes a similar argument: "The bond to care-giving work, loyalty to patients, and service orientation created a pressure *to strike.* The need to protect standards impelled women to strike. Women interviewees were asked if they were concerned about the level of care patients would receive during the strike. The most common response involved a defence of the strike *in maintaining health standards*. Typically the hospital worker commented: 'It's them thats wrecked it for people, not us. I can't take care of anyone the way it's set up. That's what I want-to get things back (RNA, General)'" (70). Furthermore, "labour process changes broke this care-giving bond for many women workers. The desire to reestablish this bond was one consideration in the decision to strike" (125). Equally interesting are the gender-specific reasons for striking that White's research revealed. "Increases in compensation, a reduction in workload, and protection of benefits, (such as the sick leave plan) were the male unionists' goals in the strike. The male unionists were concentrated in work areas with less patient contact and a much reduced care-giving component. This was a non-service, non-care giving milieu that reinforced the

reward system of the men. The search for compensatory, extrinsic rewards for changes in the workplace characterized the men of the hospital" (125).

[17] For a detailed development of this distinction between feminization and gendering in relation to militancies, see Briskin (2005a). In an earlier work, (Briskin 1999) I drew out both the distinction and the relationship between feminization and feminisms.

[18] Gendering is equally about men, just as the traditional association of men with militancy is about *gender.* The absence of a discussion of men's militancies is problematic for two reasons: first, it can reproduce "the long-standing habit of assuming that it is only women who have gender" (Sinclair 1998: 13) and that "men are gender-neutral" (Franzway 1997: 131), and second, it makes it difficult to understand the relational nature of gender as a social construction, and the way in which the shape of women worker militancies develop in and against the practices of men.

The flip side of the association of men with militancy is the assumption of women's passivity. Purcell (1981) explores and challenges these assumptions as does White (1990) in his study of the 1981 illegal hospital workers' strike which involved mostly women workers.

[19] An analysis of the famous 1912 Lawrence strike of mill workers concluded that women strikers drew on community supports as a strategic asset (Cameron 1985).

[20] Erikson et al reference Kochan and Katz's definition of 'pattern bargaining': "an informal means of spreading the terms and conditions of employment negotiated in one formal bargaining structure to another. It is an informal substitute for centralized bargaining aimed at taking wages out of competition"(2002: 560-61).

[21] To reach the poverty line, a person working 35 hours a week needs an hourly wage of at least $10. The minimum wage in Ontario is currently $7.45 an hour. For more information about campaign, see <http://www.ocsj.ca/campaigns/>.

[22] For more information, see <http://www.labourcouncil.ca/amillionreasons/>.

[23] For more information, see <http://www.hotelworkersrising.org/aboutcampaign.asp>.

[24] In the US where union density is considerably lower than in Canada, there has been a long history of creative initiatives to address the need for collective representation and organization. In the 1960s, civil rights organizations became de facto bargaining agents to ensure job access and equity through industry wide hiring agreements for communities of colour; in 1980s, independent unions such as the Detroit Fast Food Workers Union represented workers at McDonalds' and Burger King; and in 1997 Latino day laborers sponsored the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act to increase penalties against employers who violate hour and wage laws (Tait 2005: 1). These are just a few of the examples discussed in Valerie Tait's documentation and analysis of "poor workers' unions" whose membership is largely people of colour and women and which include low wage workers and no-wage workers (workfare workers, unpaid domestic workers and the unemployed (11). These unions, which she contrasts with 'trade unions', take many forms including economic justice organising, community-based unions and workers' centres, and workfare unions. They are committed to "racial and ethnic diversity, gender equality, participatory democracy, and community-based organizing strategies"; reject a productionist focus and thus take on multiple issues around affordable housing, health care, racial and gender discrimination and police brutality; often involve broad based coalitions; and "offer a different vision of what the labor movement can be" (Tait 2005:2). Parallel themes in vision, ideologies and characteristics emerge between poor workers unions and the processes of gendering union militancy.