UNION LEADERSHIP AND EQUITY REPRESENTATION

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the scholarly literature on the subject of women and union leadership reflected the push towards increasing women's participation in top leadership positions, often through affirmative action seats. In the struggle to democratize unions and shift the demographics of trade union leadership, the latter half of the 1990s saw several important and coincident shifts: from a discussion of leadership to a discourse of representation, and from a focus on women to the inclusion of other equity-seeking groups. Simultaneously, unions in all Western countries faced globalization and restructuring which have led to declining union densities and the re-positioning of global, national and local strategies.

The paper provides a thematic and analytic framework within which to explore issues pertinent to cultivating inclusive union leadership in the twenty-first century. Hopefully such an overview will point to both a research and a strategic agenda.[1] Although the focus is largely on Canada, where relevant, scholarly research and union initiatives from other industrialized countries and the international arena are included. The paper begins by examining barriers to leadership such as family responsibilities, the impact of occupational stratification on access to union leadership, sexism and racism. It then explores the importance of desegregating representation and simultaneously revaluing the local and informal leadership of women. In Part III and IV, two key union strategies for shifting the demographic profile of union leadership to include members of equity-seeking groups are addressed: affirmative action and proportional representation. Part V considers the question of gendered leadership styles. It interrogates the assumption that women lead differently and considers the political implications of this claim. The next section of the paper analyses the contribution of constituency organizing to increasing access to leadership positions and improving the representation of equity concerns. In this context, the argument is made that constituency organizing is a form of leadership. Part VII suggests that equity leadership, new leadership practices and constituency organizing are reshaping understandings of union democracy. Part VIII cautions against the uninterrogated use of the language of feminism to understand struggles around leadership and representation and suggests problematizing the relationship between feminisms, and the organizing and leadership of union women. In Part IX, the discussion of union leadership and representation is situated in the larger context of union and workplace restructuring. In particular, the impact on equity initiatives of union amalgamations, on the one hand, and enterprise bargaining, on the other, is examined. Finally, the paper calls for more documentation of and research on union leadership demographics and union equity initiatives.

This paper assumes that the objective for unions is not simply a numerical increase in leadership

participation by equity-seeking groups but rather union transformation and renewal, goals made more salient by the growth in worker exploitation resulting from restructuring and globalization. Within this larger frame, it is clear that even progressive leadership will be no substitute for a multi-layered union program to deepen union democracy, bargain equity (Briskin 2006a), organize the unorganized and institutionalize equity in workplaces and unions for all marginalized workers. Thus for representational strategies to have an impact, they will need to be just one part of the larger project of democratizing organizational practices and union culture. Undoubtedly one aspect of this democratizing practice is and has been constituency organizing. In fact, this paper argues that constituency organizing may be more effective than representation as a vehicle for union transformation.

Although many of the issues facing women find parallels with other equity-seeking groups, there are also specific issues for unionists with disabilities, and for those from the First Nations, communities of colour and sexual minorities. However, most of the available union and scholarly literature focuses on women; thus the leadership and representational issues of other equity-seeking groups are addressed in this paper only to a limited extent. Despite this focus on women, the paper recognizes the complexity of intersectionality[2], that is, the category "women" homogenizes experience and obscures the differences among women based on identities other than gender. The demographic of union membership is now shifting to include a greater proportion of workers of colour, gay, lesbian and transgendered workers; workers with disabilities; young workers, and First Nations workers, constituencies who have traditionally been marginalized in unions, but whose claims to citizenship inside unions have been consolidating. Hopefully these shifts will prompt research about and inspire strategies to address the specific equity and leadership concerns of each group.

I. Barriers to Leadership

Despite some gains in numerical representation, a growing consciousness that members of equity-seeking groups are prepared and competent to take on leadership positions, and the development of creative strategies to encourage this participation, under-representation continues. This suggests that leadership demographics reflect deeply embedded patterns of sexism and racism, and continuing structural barriers. Increasing leadership participation from equity-seeking groups, then, will require complex and multifaceted strategies that go well beyond a focus on numbers.

Structural Barriers

Much of the writing on structural barriers to union participation and leadership have focussed on women. The comprehensive 1995 report on national union confederations from thirty-one countries "Women and Decision Making in Trade Unions" prepared by Braithwaite and Byrne for the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) identified four major barriers: family responsibilities; job segregation; masculine union cultures, and traditional stereotypes.[3] Masculine cultures and the invocation of stereotypes undoubtedly support each other in excluding women. When stereotypes are internalized by women, their confidence in their capacity to organize and lead is weakened, and when externalized by men, stereotypes provoke overt and covert prejudices against women who take up office. Williams (2002) argues that the dominant masculine culture inside unions works against women's inclusion and has sexual harassment at its heart. However, she also notes that these cultural practices work largely in the interests of heterosexual men which suggests the possibilities for alliances between women and marginalized men.

Family responsibilities is the barrier most often cited. An early Canadian study by Confederation des syndicats nationaux (CSN) in the 1980s (reported in Guberman 1983) showed that women with families find it more difficult to commit time to their unions. A decade later, in a study of stewards in the United States, women said that "their main conflict was how to keep union responsibilities from interfering with or subtracting from family time... [M]ale stewards.... usually gave priority to the union responsibility" (Roby and Uttal 1993: 367-70). This conflict is reflected in the demographics: "56 percent of the female stewards and 23 percent of the male stewards reported living without partners. Female stewards were also less likely than male stewards to be living with children of any age (49 percent as compared to 69 percent)..." (367). ETUC concluded that there is a "skewed age and fertility profile of women union leaders, who tend to be younger women without family commitments or older women whose children have grown up" (13). State restructuring, especially cutbacks in social services which are decommodifying women's waged work and increasing unpaid caring work, make union activism even more difficult for women.

Women's disproportionate responsibilities for childcare and domestic work may result in an interrupted pattern of waged work, and thereby less access to union leadership positions. For example, in a 1982 study, Koziara, Bradley and Pierson found that

> "most officers interviewed had progressed steadily to positions of increased responsibility in the unions... People who achieve the highest elected positions in union office begin their careers early in their union tenure at entry level positions... and usually have uninterrupted careers as they progress to more responsible positions... It is also consistent with the explanation for the paucity of women in union office, which suggests that interrupted work careers inhibit advancement to other positions" (45).

In her study of the career path of women union leaders, Gray (2001: 108) similarly found that the

> "career paths of women in union leadership differ from the typical patterns of male leaders who work their way up through the ranks by assuming increasing levels of responsibility at local and regional levels before achieving high office. Some successful union women follow this route; others obtain recognition by excelling as staff specialists hired from the outside for their expertise in a valued professional field. A surprising number move up from clerical positions."

Australian research found that "lower incomes, an interrupted career and shorter periods of union membership, which are in turn associated with parenting" (Pocock 1995a: 387) inhibit women's activism and involvement in leadership more than the presence of children. Pocock groups barriers under personal, union and job-related characteristics and finds that "unions most commonly take action that addresses the personal deficiencies of women rather than deficiencies in the way unions work" (1995a: 383). She concludes that

> "only sexism would allow the effects of domestic work to be defined as societal or job related while shift-work or geographical distance are accepted as day-to-day challenge of union organizing, to be overcome, not by the individual but by the union. A genuine transformation of the Australian union movement...depends upon a shift in perception and action away from 'fixing deficient women' towards a close examination of union methods, organizing habits, and support structures for activism" (399).

Some recent research has identified an important deficiency "in the way unions work". The "greedy"[4] nature of union work exacerbates the problems of combining leadership or union staff positions

with domestic responsibilities. Paavo points out that "those women who do reach elected or paid office in Canada's labour movements find themselves facing a brutal combination of heavy workload with high expectations of sacrifice, and their own home and family responsibilities". Paavo talks about "union workaholism" and argues that "overwork is institutionalized in the union movement" (2004: 11). She suggests an eleven-point program for re-inventing union leadership: challenge unions' unspoken assumptions that "leaders are men who are always available and have no outside (e.g., family) responsibilities" (11); encourage leadership sharing models; place term limits on union positions; encourage sabbaticals and leaves of absence; involve the membership; develop staff policies around hours of work and training; bargain better support for activists; bridge the divide between personal life and union life; provide positive role models; develop alliances with supportive men, and challenge the unequal division of household labour. On the last point Paavo notes: "Over the years, unions have launched campaigns to change members' behaviour, including campaigns to encourage members not to buy sweatshop-made goods, and campaigns challenging sexual or racial harassment. Now they need to launch a campaign for male unionists to take on an equal share of household and family work" (16).[5]

Job segregation also raises a barrier to women's participation. Women's segregation in low-paid work with unrecognized skills and little flexibility means that they are often not encouraged or chosen to be union leaders. "Union structures reflect the sex segregated character of the labour market and create barriers for women's advancement" (Braithwaite and Byrne 1995: 13). In their analysis of the scarcity of women union leaders, Koziara and Pierson (1981) argue that "women are also less likely than men to be in the high status, visible positions from which union officers are generally selected, and at least some men and women see women as inappropriate for union office" (30). Gannage's study of women garment workers found that the skilled crafts, dominated by men, controlled the union. She concluded that the view of women's work as marginal had consequences for women's trade-union participation (1986: 170). Thus patterns of occupational stratification, gender power and union leadership intersect. In a recent American study of custodians, clerks and cafeteria workers who were members of the Communications Workers of America or the United Auto Workers, Coventry and Morrissey (1998: 291) confirmed this pattern: "Both gender and status discrimination seem to block unskilled women from positions of power within their union and from participation in union activities."

It is also the case that the work that women do "sometimes limits their mobility in the workplace and their ability to communicate with other union members during the day, and thus have a high profile as activists. This is the case for many women whose work is closely supervised or monitored or who work in

isolated workplaces" (CLC 1990: 20). Another study showed that "male shop stewards tended to conduct their union business on work time... female stewards tended to conduct union business more frequently on their own time, resulting in greater conflict with family and personal time. Overall, men's jobs tended to support their union activity to a greater extent than women's jobs supported theirs" (Lawrence reported in Melcher, Eichstedt, Eriksen and Clawson (1992: 269-270). On a practical level, women's low pay makes participation in union activities expensive: an extra meal, a babysitter, a taxi home after a late night meeting are costs that women often cannot afford (Little 1989a: 22; CLC 1990: 21). All of these studies suggest that collective bargaining in support of affirmative action and pay equity will enable more equitable power-sharing inside unions.

Undoubtedly, workplace power translates into union leadership positions. The recognition that workplace and occupational segregation affect the structure of union representation has led some union federations, in Australia, for example, to add seats for sectors employing large numbers of women (Trebilcock 1991: 422). In the UK, UNISON has also taken this initiative (McBride 2001). Constituency organizing among marginalized groups also can help counteract this tendency, offering constituency-based union power as a substitute for workplace status. Given intersecting patterns of occupational stratification, gender power and union leadership, constituency building may, in fact, be imperative to increased representation. The significance of strong constituencies among marginalized workers to increased representation and union transformation is a theme that runs throughout this paper.

Sexism and Racism

Dorgan and Grieco (1993: 157) document the lack of respect faced by women union leaders, and the "social punishments" such as laughter and negative labelling they experience for raising women's issues. Rampant stereotyping of women leaders exacerbates these problems. As Needleman indicates:

> "Traits dealing with competence are considered male and those relating to emotions, female. Male traits are valued within the world of work and generally coincide with leadership qualities; female traits have been viewed as an impediment to being an effective leader.... For women to overcome these cultural stereotypes and general obstacles, they must usually meet higher standards of skill and knowledge, work twice as hard, and organize a broad base of support within the local. .. women leaders in token numbers in any organizational framework will

> experience extreme pressure either to act like one of the guys or to maintain a low profile and take a back seat" (1988: 7-8).

Women union leaders are often in a minority, and may be subjected "to a scrutiny that is absent when they occupy their 'natural' place in the gender hierarchy" (Wajcman, 1998: 49). Union leaders of colour also face race-specific harassment. Das Gupta (1998: 329) refers to the research of Winnie Ng that "highlights the pressures of co-optation on people of colour who gain leadership positions within unions. Isolation, threats of being excluded and general alienation from White members are subtle ways in which members of colour are made ineffective in leadership." Das Gupta also recounts, as an example, the dissatisfaction of Yvonne Bob, an activist in OPSEU, who "lost an election because she advocated employment equity. She was labelled as a 'racist' for advocating on behalf of people of colour" (329). And undoubtedly, women of colour in leadership positions face the complex intersection of racism and sexism.

In Canada, women who fill the affirmative action positions described below which were established to redress inequalities can also face resistance, find their credibility challenged and their ability to fill their mandate hampered by their association with affirmative action. Research shows that they may encounter systematic exclusion from information networks and from formal and informal decision-making processes; ghettoization in narrowly defined areas of "women's issues", and feminist and lesbian-baiting (Briskin 1990; Cuneo 1993). Likely, leaders from other equity-seeking groups who have been elected to affirmative action positions also confront attacks on their legitimacy and credibility, and face marginalization and isolation.

Paradoxically, those in affirmative action positions may be more accountable to their constituency, and simultaneously less credible. For example, women leaders are often caught between power and marginality: power relative to the rank and file, and absence of power relative to male leaders. Women leaders are, more often than not, excluded from the power that should accrue to them by virtue of their positions as leaders. At the same time, they have the often unacknowledged privileges that accrue, by definition, to union leaders: greater access to information, union educationals, time, resources, travel, release from work etc.

Research on barriers has focussed largely on women as a generic group. Obviously women who are also members of other equity-seeking groups experience gender barriers compounded by racism, homophobia and ableism. In-depth research from an intersectional perspective that identifies and explores

the particular barriers facing members of other equity-seeking groups is urgently required.

II. Desegregating Representation

In their study of European unions, Braithwaite and Byrne (1995: 52) found women concentrated "in certain committees and departments: women's, social policy, training, and health and safety. Conversely, women are rare as committee members and department officials in the significant areas of economic and wages policy, collective bargaining " (52). Without a doubt, women have always been better represented at both at the local level and in lower level leadership positions. "Compared to their male counterparts, women officers are more often secretaries, secretary-treasurers, or treasurers, and less often presidents. They serve in the smallest locals, derive less of their income from union work, and devote fewer hours per week to union activities" (Chaison and Andiappan 1987: 282). The QFL found that

> "at the local level women had reached or exceeded proportional representation in executive positions; on average, women accounted for thirty percent or more of them. While recording secretary or secretary-treasurer were the most common positions for women on the local union executive, women were found as president or vice-president in over one-third of the local unions who responded" (CLC 1990: 10-11).

NUPGE found similar results: slightly more than half the membership were female; at the local level, about 40 percent of executive positions held by women but most in position of secretary or steward (CLC 1990: 12). In an affirmative action survey designed to collect data on the demographic makeup of local leadership, the CAW, a union of 30 percent women, found that of the 150 locals that participated, 21 percent reported that the position of local president was held by a woman; women were better represented in the positions of recording secretary, trustee and financial secretary (2003).[6]

In the US, union women are clustered in administrative functions rather than policy making and collective bargaining (Gray 1988). In an American study of local union officers, Melcher et al (1992) found a similar profile: women were in relatively marginal positions rather than influential ones and they were under-represented as stewards, "an influential position that is a traditional pathway to higher

office" (278). They also found that "chairs of committees providing visibility, access to information, and contact with other union leaders were substantially less likely to be occupied by women" (274). In Australia, "women's share of positions falls in direct inverse relationship to the position's level of power" (Pocock 1995: 15). In another Australia study, Bertone and Griffin found that non-English-speaking-background (NESB) female staff were "well-represented in the lower levels of union officialdom…but grossly underrepresented at senior levels" (1995: 14).

Revaluing Local Leadership/Recognizing Informal Leadership

The increased likelihood that women unionists will participate at the local level is a widespread phenomenon and requires interventions to support de-segregation. However, it may be that this pattern of segregation is a result not only of discrimination and structural barriers but also of choice. In interviews with Swedish trade unionists (Briskin 1999b), the point was reiterated that "women have different life priorities than men" (Svensson, quoted in Briskin 1999b: 161). "When asked, women say they like to work at the local level where they are more directly involved with membership service; they also like their jobs and want to stay in them" (Englund, quoted in Briskin, 1999b: 161). Problematically, local work is routinely undervalued and seen primarily as a stepping stone to higher positions (see, for example, Elkiss 1994; Melcher et al 1992). In fact, focussing affirmative action on top leadership positions exacerbates the invisibility of the leadership contributions of women at the local level (Briskin 1999).

Furthermore, women unionists often provide 'informal leadership' which is likely unrecognized. In his study of women activists in Canadian unions, Cuneo (1993) found it useful to disaggregate 'leadership' from formal elected positions in order to highlight informal rank-and-file leadership activities. He found that "activist rank-and-file leaders.. are women; they are more likely than men to be unpaid for what they do, and engage in temporary, voluntary activities" (118). Similarly, in her research on a hospital organising drive at Duke University, Sacks (1988) found that men and women exercised leadership in different ways. She distinguished "centre people", mostly women, from "spokespeople", mostly men. "[W]omen created the organisation, made people feel part of it, and did the routine work upon which most things depended, whereas men made public pronouncements and confronted and negotiated with management... centre people were key actors in network formation and consciousness shaping" (79). She concluded that it was "the relationship of these two roles that constituted the structure

of movement leadership ... [T]o expand the term leadership to encompass [the work of centre women] is to make the invisible visible. It valorizes some of the important ways in which women have exerted leadership and moves beyond equating oratory with leadership"(80, 93).

In their analysis of the two-month strike of the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) in 1997, Briskin and Newson (1999) reported:

> "Even though [women] held few elected positions and did not have a pre-existing power base in the union, during the strike women played an energetic, inventive and critical role. They participated actively not only in routine strike activities but also assumed leadership in initiating special activities as the need for them emerged and in responding spontaneously to events as they unfolded. In this sense, like other marginalized groups, the women tended to practice leadership in a particular way" (107-8).

Briskin and Newson conclude that the participation of women helped to re-focus the union's priorities and to re-vision YUFA as a more inclusive and equity-conscious union.

In the current anti-labour context, strong local unions are critical. Certainly they are the key to organizing the organized and involving new members, strategies of increasing importance given declining union density. Furthermore, how local leadership is conceived and practiced will be crucial to the inclusion of women and members of other equity-seeking groups, the implementation of union equity policies, the bargaining of equity-supportive collective agreements, and the ability of unions to resist the encroachments of economic restructuring. In addition, then, to de-segregating representation, the informal and local leadership of women needs to be recognized and valued.

III. Leadership through Affirmative Action

Affirmative action programs are a major union initiative to address the under-representation of members of equity-seeking groups in top elected positions. This section describes existing programs for union women, for members of other equity-seeking groups and for union staff. It also examines the debates about whether additional affirmative action seats should be added to executive boards or existing seats designated to this end, how those who fill these seats should be selected, and whether appointments or elections are more successful in supporting re-distribution of representation and power. It is worth noting

that the institutionalization of affirmative action programs have also led to changes in union constitutions, innovations in educational programs to support leadership by marginalized unionists, and shifts in union discourse.

Programs for Union Women

Many unions and federations now have affirmative action policies that designate or add seats on leadership bodies for women and other marginalized groups. In Canada, this process began in 1983 when the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) broke new ground by amending its constitution to create five affirmative action positions on its executive board.[7] The leadership role played by the Women's Committee of the OFL was crucial to winning this first affirmative action policy. The Committee organized a grassroots campaign, and promoted an analysis linking employment equity in the workplace with affirmative action in the unions. In 1982, the OFL Women's Committee drafted a discussion paper on affirmative action, titled "Our Fair Share". The 1982 OFL Convention adopted a policy statement on affirmative action which provided "a clear mandate for the OFL to embark on a major campaign both for mandatory affirmative action legislation and the promotion of women within union ranks". In 1983, the OFL sponsored an Ontario-wide series of public forums on affirmative action "which raised awareness of the size of the problem of discrimination faced by women in the workforce". The forums resulted in over 170 submissions. At its 1983 convention, the OFL amended its constitution to create five affirmative action positions on its executive board. In 1984 the OFL published "Making Up the Difference," which summarized the findings of the public hearings. The brief made over 40 recommendations to the government for legislative and other action to create some measure of equality for women.[8]

As a result of this successful initiative, women unionists across the country promoted affirmative action seats. In 1984, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) adopted a constitutional change calling for a minimum of six female vice-presidents.[9] Many labour federations and unions across the country followed their lead. The adoption of the affirmative action strategy for increasing women's representation is now widespread. Recently the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)[10] reported that trade union centrals in Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Columbia, Dominican Republic, Fiji, France, Great Britain, Guyana, Israel, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the Philippines all set

aside special seats (sometimes called "reserved" seats) for women on their central leadership body (1991: 46-47; also 1994).

Despite these shifts, these seats continue to be controversial.[11] At the 2005 CUPE convention, a National Executive Board (NEB) recommendation to amend the constitution to create five additional regional vice-president positions on the NEB for women was defeated. The motion was presented in response to a dramatic decline in women's representation: from 43 percent between 1995 and 2001 to 22 percent in 2005. Jane Stinson, a long-time CUPE staffer, commented on the defeat:

> "It was quite a disappointment. The arguments against included that it was discriminatory to have special measures for women, and that women can achieve equality based on merit. Women got up to say they had been elected by men at the local level and if women were to run, they would be elected at the national level. Some used the fact that we used to have two female top officers to argue that special measures aren't needed for women in CUPE. There is a lot of work to do in our union to raise awareness about systemic barriers for women." [12]

Despite continuing struggles around affirmative action programs, affirmative action strategies have increased women's participation in top leadership. In 1993, White reported that "of the ninety-five executive seats held by women in these organizations, fully thirty-nine of them (41 percent) are affirmative action positions. Without them, the representation of women on these labour central executives would fall from 28 to 18 percent" (105).[13] Women elected into top positions also give visibility to women in leadership, challenge stereotypes and provide role models. Since some of these women are committed to addressing the specific concerns of women as workers and unionists, the profile of these issues has also increased. Penni Richmond of the Women's Bureau of the CLC reports that the presence of "outsiders" on the CLC Executive has "changed the issues raised, changed who gets to hear what we talk about, and changed rank and file perception of who has power; in fact, it has put the discussion of power itself on the agenda" (quoted in Briskin 1999b: 158).

Research suggests that social identity is seen to be relevant to the ability to effectively represent particular constituencies. For example, Melcher et al (1992) found that 63 percent of men but only 27 percent of women agree that "women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders" (277). Women clearly anticipate that women will represent them more effectively. The finding that male leaders think they can represent women adequately reveals their lack of understanding about privilege, power and

patterns of discrimination, and the importance of role models. These authors conclude that "it seems unlikely that [male] leaders who think they are adequately representing the needs of their female constituents will see a compelling need to encourage women's involvement in more influential leadership positions" (278).

Although the affirmative action strategy remains controversial in many jurisdictions, there are good reasons to support it. Increasing the numbers of women and members of other marginalized groups in leadership positions is important, and affirmative action positions have represented a significant turning point to this end.

Programs for Other Equity-Seeking Groups

> *"In order to broaden representation and inclusion at all levels of union leadership and work, unions must examine the culture of privileges, perks, hierarchies and euro-centricity which mirror aspects of corporate structures and have no place in organizations fighting for equality" (CLC 1997: 12).*

Since affirmative action policies have often benefited white able-bodied heterosexual women to the exclusion of others, it is encouraging that the representation of minority women and members of other equity-seeking groups is now on the agenda of unions. Undoubtedly, there is a tension between the continuing need to focus on "women" in a discussion on union leadership, and the equally urgent necessity to take account of the diverse constituencies of workers based on "race", ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability and First Nations status, who are also marginalized in unions.

Although there is limited research on the union leadership of other equity-seeking groups, members of these groups have pressured unions to be pro-active in ensuring their visible representation at all levels. For example, the PSAC submission to the CLC Anti-Racism Task Force insisted: "Unions **have** to be pro-active and start seeking out aboriginal and racially visible members, ensuring our visible representation in all union levels and at all union events, getting us involved in addressing our own issues and **listening** to us when we address issues from our perspective" (11 June 1996 quoted in CLC 1997: 8; bold in original).

Although not exhaustive, the following is an instructive summary of some union initiatives to increase representation of equity-seeking groups other than women. The CLC constitution was amended

in 1992 to include two seats for Visible Minorities on the CLC Executive Council, and in 1994 a Visible Minority Vice President. By 2002, the CLC Constitution indicated that the composition of the CLC Executive Council includes

> "six (6) gender-affirmative action Vice-Presidents designated by the six (6) largest affiliates; two (2) Vice-Presidents representing workers of colour; and one (1) Vice-President representing each of: Aboriginal workers; workers with disabilities; young workers; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers who receive the formal endorsement of his/her affiliate and are designated at the Convention by the appropriate caucus; and one (1) Vice-President representing retired workers who shall be elected at the Convention of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada".[14]

The change in language to "workers of colour" from "visible minority", a racist category employed by the Canadian state as a means of marking out racial visibilities (but not other minorities) reflects an enhanced level of organizing among communities of colour inside the unions.

Also in the early 1990s, PSAC added equity seats to its Human Rights Committee for racial minorities, aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, and lesbians and gays (Hunt 1997). The Alliance also ensures equity representation on its education courses.[15] Since union education is one of the stepping stones to union leadership, increasing inclusivity in union education may improve representation in the future.

At the OFL Convention in November 1997, a position on the Federation executive for an out lesbian or gay trade union vice-president was adopted — a Canadian first. In the same year, the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) amended its constitution so that the Chair of both the Workers of Colour caucus and the Aboriginal Workers caucus each sit as a Vice-President on the Executive Board.

As of 1999, an elected worker of colour sits on the Executive of the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) representing all workers of colour and Aboriginal Workers. This individual is elected at Convention by a Workers of Colour caucus. In 1999 the national convention of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) created a national executive board position for one worker of colour and one aboriginal worker. The 2004 constitution of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) has the following clauses:

> "When components are eligible for both a National Vice-President and a Board Member, the

Board Member shall be designated by the respective component. At least one(1) of the two (2) representatives must be a woman" (X-8).

"If after all National Vice-Presidents and Board Members are named, the National Executive Board does not include members of each of the four designated groups (Aboriginals; persons with disabilities; visible minorities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) then the National Executive Board shall have the authority to appoint a person from those designated groups which are not already represented on the National Executive Board" (X-9).

In the British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL),

"affiliates designate their appointments to both the Executive Officer and the Executive Council bodes. In order to ensure the participation of under-represented groups, the Federation requires affiliates to ensure equity in their appointment. For example, where an affiliated union is entitled to two seats on the Executive Council, at least one of those must be from an under-represented group, which includes women, visible minorities and Aboriginal Peoples. The number of affirmative action seats increases proportionally with the entitlement of the affiliated union" (CLC 1999: 9).

In response to the pressure of young workers, many unions are now including youth representation on leadership bodies and setting up youth committees. In 1996 the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, the umbrella organization of unions in that province, endorsed a resolution to set up a youth committee. And the British Columbia Federation of Labour hosts a youth page on its website.[16] Wayne Samuelson, President of the OFL, argues that "one of today's major challenges is ... to help provide rights to the young workers" (Report of the OFL Conference on Organizing Young Workers 1999). Whether "youth" can usefully be understood as an "equity-seeking group" continues to be a matter of discussion.

Programs for Union Staff

Generally very little public information is available on the demographic composition of union staff in Canada. The 2002 CLC Convention report on "Representation in the Canadian Labour

Movement: Our Successes and Struggles" does include some data. For example, it notes that for NUPGE, there are 62 people of colour, six aboriginal persons, seven persons with disabilities and three persons from the GLBT community on staff at the National Union and its 14 components. However, it is difficult to assess such numbers without information about the total numbers of staff. For the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP), four out of 128 national representatives are aboriginal or people of colour.[17] In the UK, this information, at least on women, is readily available. For example, "Labour Research" reports bi-annually on issues of union women's representation including the proportion of women in officer (staff) positions (see "Women's Rise in Unions.." 2004; also SERTUC 2004).

Many unions are developing affirmative action programs for their staff. In the 1994 CLC Policy statement on "Confronting the Mean Society," the CLC called on its affiliates and the provincial federations of labour to embark on employment-equity programs for staff, and to set goals and timetables to ensure effective implementation. The 1995 OFL Convention Document (#2), "Solidarity Against Racism," in support of its plan of action to "hire staff to reflect the diversity of the union's membership" asserted:

> "We must look beyond programs and policies and look at our hiring practices. When the staffs of unions do not reflect the membership they represent, visible minority members question the ability of the union to represent their interests. If we acknowledge that the absence of minorities in many workplaces is due to racism and discrimination, then we must also acknowledge that the same could be true for their absences in the staffs of unions" (12).

In February of that year, PSAC signed an employment equity plan with its staff unions to target recruitment and selection of equity group members (those designated in employment equity legislation: women, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities). In this innovative employment equity plan for union staff, for every staffing action longer than three months, a joint decision is made about whether the position will be posted as a preferential hiring.[18]

Designated or Added Seats? Elected or Appointed?

Three procedural issues about union affirmative action programs are worth examining. The first issue concerns added or designated seats. In contrast to added seats, designated seats may mean that seats

previously held by men are now designated for women or members of other equity-seeking groups. Added seats tend to be less politically explosive. In many instances, additional seats for women were established in order to prevent backlash from men in leadership. As Bail comments: "Not one member of the old boy's club relinquished their throne to a sister. Instead, with true ingenuity, they created additional executive positions 'for women only'. Thusly they maintained their power" (1985: 9).

The practice of adding seats rather than displacing incumbent men is a common practice in many countries that have adopted affirmative action strategies (Trebilcock 1991; Braithwaite and Byrne 1995). Practices across Canada vary. In the CLC, six positions were added; women in these positions come from the largest affiliate unions which are already represented by their Presidents. Five of the nine Canadian labour federations specify that women will be vice-presidents, a more influential position than having a general seat. Only in British Columbia and Manitoba do the federations of labour designate rather than add seats (White 1993: 102).

The second issue concerns how the candidate should be selected. Currently a variety of practices for identifying candidates for affirmative action seats exists across the country (White 1993: 104-5). In response to what was seen as a top-down and male-dominated mechanism for selecting women to fill the original CLC affirmative action positions, women in the AFL won the right for the women's caucus to elect the women who would stand for these positions (Cuneo 1993). It is noteworthy that the current CLC Constitution (2002) indicates that for affirmative action candidates, their caucuses will be involved in the selection of their candidate. In the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL), "an all-women caucus elects the women's affirmative action positions, which are then confirmed by a vote of all Convention delegates. The purpose of this election process is that the women elected to these positions should reflect the needs and concerns of the women members" (White 1993: 105). At the OFL, White (105) reports that "a conscious decision was made to have the affirmative action positions appointed by the affiliated unions in order to link the male leadership of those unions more closely with the women on the executive. The purpose was to reduce the isolation of the women and increase the chances of action on women's issues." White concludes that the differences in approach reflect "the on-going tension between women's separate interests and the relationship with the general union movement" (105). More research needs to be done on the impact of these various strategies on the ability to effectively represent constituencies.

The third procedural issue relates to appointment or elections as a means of selecting those who fill affirmative action leadership spots, seats on equality and women's committees, and staff positions. Are appointments or elections more successful in supporting re-distribution of representation and power?

Certainly, there are a wide variety of practices. For example, the 1995 ETUC study (Braithwaite and Byrne 1995: 32) reports that members of 17 women's and equality committees in national confederations were appointed and nine were elected. Unfortunately, no similar Canadian data exist.

The research is also sketchy about whether appointment or election to union staff positions is more effective in re-distributing representation and power. In an overview on union leadership questions, Trebilcock (1991: 422) argues that "appointment rather than election is more likely to result in women holding full-time posts involving collective bargaining". For the US, Gray (2001: 113) reports that "recognition for women is more likely to come through appointment than election…In most unions, the percentage of women in charge of headquarters' departments substantially exceeds their representation on executive boards." Pocock (1995: 15) found that the majority of women union staff were appointed. For example, in South Australia, fifty-two percent of women were appointed compared to only twenty-three percent of men.

A study by Melcher et al (1992) found that "male respondents believe women face greater barriers in gaining access to elected positions than they do in gaining appointed positions...These male respondents, who are themselves leaders in the union and responsible for appointing members to leadership positions, thus apparently believe that the membership is a greater source of difficulty than the leadership" (276). However, when the authors assessed these perceptions against available data, they found that "in their locals women are no better represented in appointed than elected positions. This apparent misperception is particularly disturbing since male respondents presumably have more influence over appointed than over elected positions" (277). These kinds of findings suggest that the subject of appointment versus election is a subject worthy of more study.

In fact, although an appointment process may increase the proportion of women in officer or staff positions, it may also marginalize such appointees. For example, a 1980 Australian study (Pocock 1995:7) showed that women were "concentrated in appointed rather than elected positions where they were vulnerable to dismissal and excluded from political power". In another Australian study on female immigrants in unions, Bertone and Griffin (1995) found that non-English speaking background (NESB) female officials (staff) of unions were marginalized by the fact that they were in appointed rather than elected positions and thus lacked a power base within the membership.

In the Canadian context, Foley (1995) reports that members of the women's committees in the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU) and British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) were appointed. However, in the BCTF, the women's committee played a role in choosing the

new members while in the BCGEU, the union president maintained control. Not surprisingly, the BCTF committee was more effective.

Field (1993) compares her experience in the development of the original women's committees in the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and Local 1005 of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA). In the latter, the original committee was appointed by the leadership of the local; in the former, rank and file activists facilitated the emergence and the agenda of the committee. Although this is not really a direct tension between election and appointment, there are some relevant parallels. Field concludes that committees appointed by the leadership, especially those whose emergence is not a response to membership pressure, will be considerably less effective. Given widespread concerns about enhancing union democracy, elections may be essential; further, the election process not only ensures a constituency base for those elected, it also provides an important vehicle for debate and consciousness-raising.

IV. Proportionality, Representation and Legitimacy

Discussions of representation in unions have increasingly been shaped by a discourse of proportionality, that is, the recognition that women (and other marginalized groups) should be represented in leadership in proportion to their numbers in the membership.[19] Originally developed in Denmark, proportionality has been described as the "next stage after reserved seats" (Mann, Ledwith and Colgan 1997: 198). And certainly the frame of proportionality has led to some important shifts. For example, in February 2005, the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), where 55 percent of the members are women, announced that it had reached a level of 50 percent female leadership representation on their National Executive Board, nearly four years ahead of the 2007 target date set for national affiliates of the Inter-Americas Region of the Public Services International (PSI) to reach 50 percent women's participation.[20] In the year 2000, the Australian Confederation of Trade Unions (ACTU) made world union history with a new executive of 50 percent women. In 1985 ACTU had only one woman on its executive; with the adoption of this policy, it now has 32 women. In 1998, the UK Transport and General Workers Union (T&G), 20 percent of whose membership is women, introduced a minimum proportionality rule. This means that all committees mandated in the union's constitution "must have women members at least in proportion to the women in that constituency". The union reports that the impact has been "quite dramatic". In 1997, only nine percent of the members on regional committees

were women compared to 24 percent in 2002 ("Women's Rise Patchy…" 2004: 11-12).

Perhaps the most striking use of proportionality has been in the British UNISON, Europe's largest public sector union which was born in 1993 of an amalgamation of three unions (Mann et al 1997: 194-5). UNISON has about 1.4 million members, 75 percent of whom are women. The project of proportionality is "at the heart of UNISON's constitution".

> "Its approach combined *proportionality* with *fair representation* of all groups in the union, in particular, low-paid women, black members, lesbian and gay members, and disabled members. *Proportionality* is solely based on gender, and is the representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant numbers of female and male members…. *Fair representation* is the broad representation of members … taking into account factors such as the balance according to different occupations, skills, qualifications, part-time and full-time workers, race, sexuality and disability" (Mann et al 1997: 194-5) (italics in original).

Although proportionality has been a successful strategy, the particular demographics of unions will influence its efficacy. In unions where women represent a small percentage of the membership, a small number of women in leadership will establish proportionality (BCFL 1987). Proportional representation may be harder to achieve in unions in which women constitute a majority of the membership, and thereby should constitute a majority of the leadership. Counter-intuitively, a numerical majority of women members in a union is no guarantee of proportional or, indeed, any representation in leadership. Studies do show, however, that in female-dominated unions, women are more likely to be in leadership positions, albeit at the local level (see, for example, Chaison and Andiappan 1987 and 1982). And even without proportional representation, the voices of women on leadership bodies of female-dominated unions may less likely be marginalized. As Peggy Nash from the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) pointed out, "If you are the only woman on the collective bargaining committee and you represent 60 percent of the membership who are women you are in a different position than if you are only representing 20 percent of membership."[21]

Although "at heart proportionality is about democracy within unions" (Mann et al 1997: 198), mechanisms to reach proportionality can raise the issue of quotas and be seen as anti-democratic. Although few Canadian unions have instituted quotas,[22] the mistaken notion that quotas jeopardize the merit principle by leading to the election of those with lesser qualification is widespread. Such a view has,

at its core, gender and race bias which is made visible when compared to the unquestioned acceptance of regional, industry or occupational forms of representation. As Ulla Lindqvist, Secretary of Metall, one of the main unions in Landsorganisationen i Sverige (LO), the large blue-collar central in Sweden, argued, "No one is against quotas when it is a question of ensuring that there are some from Skäne and Norrbotten or from different branches" (quoted in Briskin 1995: 33).

Despite the value of proportional strategies, proportionality cannot ensure voice or legitimacy. In unions with small numbers of women and thus proportionally just a few women leaders, tokenism may be a serious issue. In Australia, unions which achieved proportional representation generally had very low numbers of women in their membership. Although one woman on an executive board of ten members may constitute proportional representation, Pocock points out that she may be treated as a token and unable to adequately represent women's concerns (1995: 12). Winnie Ng comments on the problem of tokenism: "It is not acceptable to have the presence of one worker of colour... to be 'set up' as speaking for all workers of colour. We need numbers. We can no longer afford tokenism if we are going to commit ourselves seriously to rebuilding the movement" (CLC 1998: 18). In Sweden, there is certainly an awareness of this danger. For example, Irene Sundelin, Equality Officer at Svenska Industritjänstemannaförbundet (SIF), a member of Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (TCO), the white collar central, indicated that although SIF has not decided if they will move in the direction of quotas, "it may be necessary". She is not concerned that "quotas will mean that we will not get good women but rather that if women are appointed the thought will be that she is not so good and that she got the job because she is a woman. And she will be forced to represent her sex. This is true now and it is harder on women. A lot of men don't live up to standards but they don't stand in for all men"(quoted in Briskin 1999b: 173).

Research certainly demonstrates the problems of tokenism. Kanter proposes that "the presence of tokens leads to boundary heightening by the dominants, that is, to their exaggerating each of their perceived distinctive traits and of other differences between them and the tokens. Believing their commonality threatened, the dominants greatly magnify the importance of gender differences..."(in Izraeli 1984: 214). A study of the impact of gender mix of union committees on the attitudes and perceptions of committee members makes visible how the tokenizing process works. Izraeli (1984) found that in male-tilted groups where 65 percent of members were men, more of both sexes "confined women to the role of gender specialist" (220), that is, viewed representing women as women's main responsibility. Furthermore, "no matter which sex was in the majority, men were not perceived as gender specialists"

(220).

Even more troubling are Izraeli's conclusions on the issue of influence in situations where women constitute the majority, findings relevant for female-majority unions where some degree of proportionality has been achieved.[23] In her study, she found that even a few men on a women's committee can undermine part of its purpose noting that

> "women who were in the majority felt more influential than those in minority, but the opposite was true for men; that is, male minorities rated their influence higher than did male majorities. It seems that being in a group, the majority of whose members are women, enhanced a man's image of his own influence... When men constitute a minority, they are likely to be gender-typed and cast in the stereotypical role of leader. In other words, female majorities may provide males with societal mirrors and actually help them to feel more influential" (22).[24]

What are the implications, then, for the efficacy of proportionality as a strategy to enhance leadership representation? Izraeli concludes that "the election or appointment of women to union office is no assurance that they will have a reasonable opportunity to play a leadership role, particularly so long as they constitute only a small minority of union leaders" (221). In the first instance, then, regardless of the gender profile of unions, a critical mass will likely be necessary to exert influence. Writing about women staff in Australian unions, Pocock recognized the importance of a critical mass. Her comments are equally relevant to elected leadership:

> "[M]any unions remain far from reaching a have critical mass of women workers who can support each other's advances and survival, as well as foster preferred styles of work, organizing and public presentation. A minority presence generally forces some degree of conformity with established practices, and in unions these patterns of work are generally longstanding, and sometimes closely coupled with beliefs about solidarity. These traditions are reflected in practices – whether in meeting procedures, language, patterns of union organizing, styles of debate or decision-making methods – making change hard to achieve and alienation a common experience of women employed in unions" (Pocock 1995: 15).

How then to ensure critical mass? The use of affirmative action seats and a commitment to "fair

representation" may offer a important complement to proportionality strategies.[25] As importantly, a critical mass of equity activists in leadership positions will depend on successful organizing among and across equity-seeking groups. The argument that constituency organizing is central to effective representation and progressive leadership is one of the key conclusions emerging from this research.

Problematizing Numerical Strategies

Although critical mass is undoubtedly important, focussing on changing the demographic profile of leadership may invisibilize the limits of a strategy based on biological sex, "race" or sexuality. A focus on numbers — through affirmative action seats or proportionality — rather than on politics means that when women, by virtue of their sex, or people of colour, by virtue of their race, are elected to positions of leadership, there is no guarantee, nor could there be, that they will have progressive views on equity issues.

Further, highlighting the success of a few women, people of colour or Aboriginal people who attain top leadership positions can make it appear that leadership is a personality trait rather than a social construction, and promote individualism rather than union transformation. It can also suggest, mistakenly, that great strides towards equity integration have been made. To some union activists, the focus on affirmative action seats sidelined more substantive demands for equality: "[M]any female activists saw affirmative action for exactly what it was, an admission of defeat in their bid for equal treatment within the labour movement"(Bail 1985: 9). Penni Richmond from the CLC concurred with the substance of Bail's assessment: "The measures were not designed to actually change the arrangement of power".[26]

In much of the research on women in union leadership, there is an underlying, if not explicit, assumption that increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions is the key to inspiring changes in the practices and policies of unions. Although there is no doubt that progressive leadership can play a substantial role in promoting equity and union transformation, nevertheless, an exclusive focus on leadership strategies represents a narrow view of the mechanisms for organizational change, overestimates the impact of a few women or "others" in the "boardrooms" of unions, and conflates representation with union transformation.

If the goal is to transform unions, the reliance on numerical representation, especially in relation to leadership positions, has the potential to backfire. It can be manipulated by power brokers who, for example, find women with explicitly anti-feminist perspectives to fill informal or formal quotas. Such

manipulation and the limits of numerical strategies have raised the question of whether representational strategies should be linked to pro-equity perspectives rather than biological facts. Cockburn's distinction between sex proportional representation and the representation of organized interests in which women "are elected or appointed not as individuals and not simply as members of a gender category but specifically to speak for the members of a disadvantaged social group: women" is useful (1996: 20). It distinguishes two separate but not unrelated goals: changing the demographic profile of leadership, on the one hand, and, on the other, addressing the needs of those who are marginalized not only in leadership positions but also in workplaces and unions.

Numerous pressures conspire to focus union attention on leadership, not the least of which is the dominance of representative democracy in other political arenas. Most unions in North America and Western Europe would also prefer to deal with representational issues and thus have focused their equity efforts on increasing numbers in leadership positions. Undoubtedly, it is easier to appoint/elect a few women or people of colour to affirmative action seats than to challenge deeply-rooted and systemic sexism, racism and heterosexism, and the domination of union structures, strategies and ideologies by white men. Not surprisingly, calls for transformation of union policies, practices and priorities have faced considerable resistance. Likely effective constituency organizing will be necessary to effect such substantive changes.

V. Leadership, Process And Participation

In response to hierarchical union practices and supported by constituency organizing, a politic of leadership has emerged that supports the decentralization of power traditionally associated with leadership positions, moves towards greater democracy and accountability, and emphasizes a strong and active link between leadership and constituency.[27] This politic of leadership also emphasizes process, sharing work collectively, and consensus decision making. For example, Ann Marie Wierzbicki (Canada Employment and Immigration Union (CEIU-PSAC)) recalled sharing the duties of strike captain. "Officially there was just one strike captain, but unofficially we shared the responsibilities" (quoted in Little 1989: 12). In another example, Local 7 of the Canadian Union of Educational Workers (CUEW: now part of CUPE) experimented with rotating the position of chief negotiator: "This gave everyone a chance to face management head on. I would never have run for the position of chief negotiator but when it was shared I became familiar with important adversarial skills which then encouraged me to run for

chief steward" (Jacquie Buncel quoted in Little 1989: 13).[28] These leadership practices are often linked to women.

In fact, the belief in, indeed, the commitment to, the notion that women union leaders lead differently in what is often called a "transformational" style (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2003; Rosenor 1990) is a persistent theme in the scholarly and popular literature. For example, in her survey of 80 US union leaders, 85 percent women and 15 percent men, Eaton (1992: 8) found "there were significant differences between men and women union leaders in defining leadership. Women were more likely to use words like 'care', 'love', 'listen', and 'empower', as well as 'delegate, teach, involve' …. Both men and women talked about 'motivating' as a role of leaders, but only men used the words, 'give direction' and 'make decisions' in their definitions."

American researcher Gray (2001: 135) concluded: "The overwhelming consensus among union leaders interviewed … is that women bring a distinctively more open, participatory, and 'people centered' approach to their leadership roles. … Describing their own leadership styles, women union leaders use such words as 'good listener,' 'democratic,' 'willing to share,' 'open,' 'inclusive,' 'consultative,' 'flexible,' and 'aiming for consensus'." Harriford (1993: 403) found similar patterns in the New York City chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), a primarily black-led organization: "[W]omen did bring different leadership styles to the organization. The toughness, rigidity, and competitiveness usually associated with union activity were replaced by greater warmth, flexibility, and cooperation. A sense of community, of sisterly concern, was most important to the members of the organization and was transmitted and reinforced whenever possible." Sudano (1997: 155-6) noted:

> "The dominant themes to emerge from my interviews with Australian women union leaders… are democracy, participation and empowerment… In all of the various contexts in which they led, the women leaders emphasised sharing information, ensuring democracy and encouraging involvement… Women leaders repeatedly emphasised their role as leaders in facilitating collaborative decision-making from the bottom up. Such involvement and devolution of authority is likely to encourage and build activism, particularly amongst union members" (see also Needleman 1988 and Edelson 1987).

This view of leadership is reflected in the practices of female union staff. Based on their extensive experiences as union staff, Stinson and Richmond (1993) differentiate the work style of male and female

representatives. In the dominant male model, the staff act as authority figures, experts and "white knights" who charge in to rescue weak locals. In contrast, women staff tend to promote a participatory approach whose aim is to develop the confidence and skills of members. These ways of working draw on traditional expertise but also recognize that experience and everyday knowledge are forms of expertise (see also Heery and Kelly 1989). In an interesting parallel, Jeanette Olsson, on staff with LO, the large blue-collar central in Sweden, reported:

> "For the majority of women [who work as union representatives] it is important to maintain contact with club members and to try to mobilise them and to share their knowledge. They retain a lay role. Many men more easily take on the role of specialists and spend more time thinking about how to tackle their management counterparts than thinking about the members ... It is not obvious that what men consider to be 'competence' and 'ability' in union work is the same as the way women define these things. We need to change the union to [include] both masculine and feminine ways of being" (quoted in Briskin 1999b: 161).

In a recent article, I interrogate this view of women's leadership, assess the evidence and consider the political implications (Briskin 2006). The available research on the leadership of union women from the UK, US, Sweden, Canada and Australia does suggest a striking convergence of language, practice and vision among many women union leaders across vastly differing union movements, cultural and national contexts. Perhaps counter intuitively, respondents from countries with adversarial industrial relations systems (like Canada) and corporatist ones (like Sweden, and until recently Australia) offer similar perspectives. This article seeks to identify what may be common across these countries to produce this phenomenon without resorting to essentialist explanations.

Any discussion which invokes women's difference — in attitudes to power, in leadership practices — can resonate with conservative arguments, reinforce discrimination and exacerbate stereotyping. In order to resist this conservative approach, I do not talk about *female* or *feminine* styles of leadership, the language of which can unproblematically invoke biologistic and stereotypical thinking; rather my focus is on the leadership of *women*. Further, grounding discussions of women's approaches to leadership in a materialist framework helps avoid the essentialism that pervades many discussions of women's distinct styles or attributes. A materialist social construction approach supports a recognition of difference without reference to essentialist ideas that women are more nurturing, relational, emotional by

nature.[29] Phelan emphasizes the need to resist both "the temptations to cloak crucial differences with the cloak of universality and to deny generalities for fear of essentialism" (1993: 786). So it is possible, then, to reject both a gender-neutral frame, and an essentialist reading of women's leadership in favour of more strategic and contextual approaches, thereby illuminating the reasons that many women may lead differently.

Such an approach assumes that women's experiences are socially constituted, that is, grounded in and emerging from the material experiences of their lives rather than from any narrow biological imperatives. It recognizes that women enter unions differently than men because of their workplace locations and their household/family responsibilities; that women's work bridges the public and the private, and each impacts on the other;[30] and that the pervasive discrimination and violence women experience in both public and private spaces influence workplace, family and union experience, and also women's political strategies. It is not surprising, and need have nothing to do with biological natures, that women identify different issues as salient, and organize, resist and lead in distinct ways. In this regard, Alcoff says: "We can conceive of the subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience and yet retain our political ability to take gender as an important point of departure. Thus we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant as a position from which to act politically" (1988: 433). Gender is thus a social relation, and not the property of a person.

In some historical contexts, union women's leadership aspirations have been supported with reference to their sameness to men and, at other times, with reference to their difference; likely these ideological waves could be charted.[31] In the current period, there is heightened attention to and struggle over "difference", in part because of the powerful pro-family discourse emanating from the religious right in the US which actively and sometimes extravagantly invokes the "natural". This political reality makes it all the more important to ground a discussion of women's leadership in a materialist framework which recognizes embedded structural power imbalances and the socially constructed nature of experience.

Since leadership is practiced by individuals, much research on the leadership of union women has probed personal histories to try to understand leadership goals, styles and routes to activism. Research has examined family backgrounds (for example, Ledwith et al, 1990; Healy, Bradley and Mukherjee, 2004), relationship with mothers and fathers (for example, Sinclair, 1998), educational experience (for example, Heery and Kelly, 1988) and, of course, workplace experience (for example, Colgan and Ledwith, 1996). My focus, however, is not on what women bring to unions as a result of occupational and family

socialization but rather what happens to women *inside* unions that helps provide a foundation for transformational leadership practice. From a materialist perspective, I conclude that the fact that women face discrimination in unions, on the one hand, and organize as a constituency and have access to women-only education, on the other, supports the development of transformational leadership. Unpacking union women's leadership practices in this way reveals a dialectic of victimization and agency which is about power and gender, about powerlessness and resistance. Leadership is undeniably a social and political construction, not simply a personality trait.

Clearly, gender is not the only social identity which shapes leadership practice. In fact, assumptions of homogeneity among women leaders can shut down exploration of the significance of other social identities. For example, as Harriford (1993: 402) points out for the US, in contrast to white working class women, "Organizational participation can be seen as a part of a black woman's gender role expectations. She is expected to assume a public role in her community. Managing conflict between family and union leadership is a different event for her than for a woman whose gender expectation does not include organizational participation outside of the family." Unfortunately, there is limited research on women union leaders from other marginalized groups, the impact on leadership practices of power differentials *among* union women, and the complexity of entering leadership positions from marginalized social locations based on class,[32] race, [33] sexuality and ability.

This paper suggests that an historically-specific constellation of factors supports the development of transformational leadership among women unionists, even across diverse contexts and cultures: the fact that they face discrimination in unions, and also pro-actively organize and resist. Although understanding the link between gender and transformational leadership is important, at the same time, unhooking transformational leadership from gender supports the vital project of mainstreaming this form of leadership in the unions. Given the argument of Harding (1987) that oppressed peoples may adopt similar world views,[34] it may be that other equity-seeking groups will also embrace (and perhaps already do) alternative leadership practices.

Cobble and Michal (2002) link the relevance of new leadership and organizing practices of union women directly to the labour market restructuring which is changing not only the demographic profile of union members but also the occupational profile of men.

> "Labour would do well to listen to its women members. For it is the issues women are articulating and the new institutional practices they are pioneering that are salient for the twenty-first century

> workforce, male and female. The feminisation of work and the transformation of the family have meant that the experiences of many men are coming to resemble those once associated solely with women... 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" (234).

The shifting patterns of men's work and experience may promote new forms of masculinity, and thereby facilitate positive changes in men's leadership practices. In fact, Clark is optimistic about the possibility of teaching transformational leadership and cites research that shows that local union leaders can, with appropriate training, learn to practice transformational leadership (2000: 174-175). "In one such study some of the stewards in a local union of Canadian public employees were given a one-day training session on transformational leadership while others were not. …After several months, members in the units with stewards who were practicing transformational leadership showed significantly greater satisfaction with their local union." Some Canadian unions, for example, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) have developed specific programs to educate men not only about equity issues but also about sexual harassment and male privilege. As part of gender re-education, such programs could pro-actively teach transformational leadership using the popular education techniques widely used in women-only union education (rather than the more traditional and formal methods in much union education).[35]

Wajcman (1998: 75) argues that "performing a 'feminine' style has a completely different meaning for men than for women. For men this style is not naturalized as part of the self, and is therefore rewarded and can be mobilized as an occupational resource. Whereas men will be advantaged by adding new qualities to those they are already deemed to have, women will continue to be seen as offering feminine qualities only." Given the social significance of gender, Wajcman is correct that transformational leadership practiced by women and men will have different meanings and impacts; at the same time, I argue that women's transformational leadership should not be narrowly understood with reference to stereotypes such as "feminine styles". Rather, a materialist approach grounds women's leadership styles in a more complex analysis which incorporates both victimization and agency.

Despite their limitations, unions have taken far more equity initiatives than any other social institutions and they offer one of the few arenas to counter both the ideological onslaught supporting the market and the neo-liberal promotion of radical individualism which is weakening citizenship rights. As Lynch (1993: 420) points out for the US, organized labor needs "to prevail against a culture that

unconsciously undermines it by fostering individualism, cynicism, and apathy" (see also Healy, Bradley and Mukerjee, 2004). They also have explicitly democratic structures. "Measured against virtually every other major institution in our society, they are singularly open, flexible, and responsive" (Lynch, 1993: 416). Thus democratic and transformational styles of leadership may be more readily supported in unions than elsewhere; at the same time, such leadership practice may be critical to union survival. By extension, then, women's leadership may be central to both union survival and renewal.

VI. Representation, Constituency Organizing and Union Transformation

Equity-seeking groups have struggled to ensure greater equity representation in leadership; at the same time, they have strengthened their voices and pressured unions through constituency building. Often called separate/self organizing and expressed organizationally in constituency committees and caucuses, it has offered a key vehicle to politicize rank and file membership, to ensure voice for the marginalized and disadvantaged, and simultaneously to organize equity-seeking workers both to challenge and to defend unions (Briskin 1993, 1999a).[36]

Undoubtedly, constituency committees have helped improve women's self esteem and confidence, develop their assertiveness, and train them in union procedures. In so doing, women have found it easier to move into mainstream union work, often in male-dominated environments, and to take up leadership positions. "Women who have had an opportunity to develop expectations of their own competence to accomplish a particular task, within the context of a homogenous group, are later more active and influential in mixed sex groups than women who have not had such an opportunity" (Lockheed and Hall cited in Izraeli 1984: 221). [37]

In fact, the ETUC report on union federations in 31 countries found that constituency building facilitates building the pool of women leaders and increasing their representation in leadership positions. In particular, the existence of women's committees promotes increased participation of women in union leadership. "Those confederations with markedly low levels of female representation within the confederation structures have no such committee, suggesting that women's or equality committees are a necessary part of achieving better female representation" (Braithwaite and Byrne 1995: 2-3). In Austria and Germany, women's divisions were "regarded somewhat sceptically as women's ghettos in the 1970s, [but they] have . . . assisted substantially in . . . the development of a new cadre of women leaders" (Till-Retz quoted in Trebilcock 1991: 419). This conclusion is also confirmed by an Australian study which

found that resource-intensive initiatives such as women's committees and officers led to larger proportions of women representatives (Pocock 1995: 17). The fact that many from equity-seeking groups are also marginalized in the workplace means that constituency-based union power will likely be a critical alternative to workplace status which often leverages leadership positions for privileged groups.

Constituency committees also play a key role in politicizing women and producing them as an effective and organized constituency (which implies that women identify their gender status as significant, recognize their links with other women, and act, as part of a collectivity, on their own behalf) (for example, Colgan and Ledwith 2000; Healy and Kirton 2000; Briskin 1999a; Briskin 1993). Thus not only does constituency organizing offer an arena to train leaders from and for equity-seeking groups, activist constituencies can also pressure those in affirmative action leadership positions to defend equity interests. In fact, the presence of organized constituencies may prevent the manipulation of affirmative action seats by those who see them as a way to strengthen the voice of the unions from which these leaders come, rather than the constituencies which they represent. Paralleling Cockburn's paradigm, constituency organizing can support the representation of equity-seeking groups and the representation of equity concerns, both of which are central to the project of transforming unions.

Such committees also challenge not only pervasive patriarchal cultures and men's domination of unions but also bureaucratic, often undemocratic, organizational practices in unions. Men's power, privilege and leadership combine with traditional organizational forms to exclude and disadvantage women, and other marginalized groups including men from racial and sexual minorities.[38] In contrast, women's committees and educational programs model more flexible and responsive structures. For example, a study of UNISON in the UK showed that women who go through union educational programs designed for women "display a very different approach in meetings and their union activism from those coming from mainstream, mixed-sex education and union experiences: they tend to be more informal and inclusive; they listen more, and are less bureaucratic and hierarchical" (Mann et al 1997: 210).[39]

Women's committees have also developed more inclusive ways of working which have often led to demands that unions change. Parker's research on women's groups in two large UK unions found that "much WG [women's groups] activity is directed internally at union organization, not just at workplace concerns" (2002: 32). She concluded that women's groups "address internal union power arrangements by mobilizing women and encouraging their active engagement in the union through decentralized, participative forms of activism" (39). In a later piece, Parker (2003) found that women's groups

> "left their mark on 'softer' organisational features by slowly transferring so-called 'women-friendly' … ways of working to the mainstream, particularly via individual WG women's involvement in mainstream posts. Specific influences included working and interacting in more friendly, 'open', enthusiastic, relaxed and supportive ways; making greater use of informal links…. These were reported to have positively affected branch and Council productivity, participation, and communication between lay activists and officials" (179).

Tension between Representational Goals and Union Transformation

Successful constituency organizing often leads to the formalization of equity and constituency committees, and the inclusion in union constitutions with specified terms of reference. The members of such committees are usually then elected, likely to represent particular regions or sectors. In recent interviews (2003, 2004), Bev Johnson, the Human Rights Officer for OPSEU, reflected on the process of institutionalization in her union, which now has three mandated committees: the Women's Committee, the Provincial Human Rights Committee, and the Youth Committee.

> "Once a committee of the union becomes constituted or formalized, things have to happen in a certain way, [that is,] once you have people elected to positions, then the idea of being re-elected becomes the focus as opposed to the issues. [W]hen you have a constituted committee it has to follow the normal track: being elected in a particular way, keeping minutes, regional representation, all those kinds of things. In terms of the history of the committees, before the Human Rights committee, there was an advisory committee, and it did a lot work because people were focused on the issues. But then there was a big push to get the committee formally constituted at the 1992 provincial convention. In 1993, progress began to slacken. It took awhile for the momentum to build back. But I don't think we have ever gotten back to that moment.
>
> However, there are also deliberately-formed caucuses for a variety of other equity-seeking groups (aboriginal circle, LGBT, disability, workers of colour caucus). The reality is that they have chosen to remain this way in order to control their agenda. When we talk about constituted committees you have one representative from each region elected to be on the committee. So with the Provincial Women's Committee, there is no guarantee that you will have a committee of

> women. … If a male chose to run in a particular region and did so successfully, you could have a women's committee with male representation. That's one of the reasons the caucuses have chosen not to go down that path. In our Rainbow Alliance which is our GLBT caucus, we have quite a mix of individuals participating in that caucus. People of different orientations, people from different parts of the province, bringing to the discussion different perspectives. If they were to go through an elected committee, you could end up with a committee of just gay men. So, there would be no lesbian members or their views and issues." [40]

Johnson's comments help to explain why formal committees may narrow their focus to representation and election issues and reinforces my argument that both autonomy and integration measures are necessary to successful constituency organizing, that is, maintaining a strategic balance between autonomy from the structures and practices of the labour movement and integration (or mainstreaming) into those structures (Briskin 1993 and 1999). Autonomy structures prevent political marginalization and the dissipation of the radical claims for inclusivity and democratization. They offer a vehicle for equity-seeking groups to assert their specific concerns. Integration into union structures, on the other hand, prevents organizational marginalization, creates the conditions for resource allocation, and encourages the mainstreaming of equity into union policy and strategy. Increasing leadership representation is a necessary form of integration; at the same time, autonomous constituency organizing is necessary to ensure substantial and often unpopular challenges to union structures and policies. Autonomous positioning can support equity leaders in order to prevent their marginalization, and at the same time pressure such leaders to maintain a commitment to the concerns of equity-seeking groups.

Constituency Organizing as a Form of Leadership

If one considers impacts and outcomes rather than numbers, then it could be argued that constituency organizing is a form of leadership, and may be more effective than representation as a vehicle for union transformation. In an interesting, if somewhat dated, study of public sector unions in Quebec using statistical path analysis, Nichols-Heppner (1984: 294) concluded that establishing women's committees is a more effective strategy than seeking greater electoral representation, and that such committees "evoke more organizational responsiveness from unions" and are "the strongest determinant of the negotiation of collective agreement provisions favourable to women unionists". More research of

this sort would be helpful. Over the last 30 years, unions have certainly responded to constituency demands by allocating staff and union resources to equity concerns. Human rights, equity and women's departments and/or staff now exist now in many unions but they continue to rely on the pressure of equity constituencies to support their work. In fact, one of the major tasks of equal opportunity officers in many Canadian unions is to support and encourage the self-organization of marginalized groups.

The fact that calls for transformation in the gender order in Canadian unions originally came, not from those in leadership, but from rank and file organizing on the margins of unions offers further evidence of the significance of constituency organizing as a vehicle for union transformation (Briskin and Yanz 1983).[41] Similar arguments can be made about the organizing by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered workers, workers of colour and aboriginal workers (see for example, Das Gupta 1998; Hunt 1997; Lukas and Persad 2004). In particular, likely few, if any, demands for increased representation of equity-seeking groups in leadership positions have come from incumbent majorities. Evidence suggests that it is not the few in top leadership who promote systemic changes but rather the mobilization of a movement of equity-seeking groups whose vision includes changing union practices, policy, culture and structures.

Rather than a singular focus on representation and leadership, it seems imperative to support strategies such as constituency organizing which help transform the conditions and possibilities for workers in all equity-seeking groups; encourage equity activists into formal and informal leadership roles at all levels of the unions, and change the rules and practices of leadership. Although a nuanced view of the balance and relationship between representational and constituency strategies is necessary, the latter has been more invisible and taken less seriously both in union discourse and the scholarly literature (with some exceptions: see McBride 2001; Briskin 1999; Mann, Ledwith and Colgan 1997; Briskin 1993).

The vision and practices of constituency organizing inside the unions find a striking parallel in what is often referred to as "community unionism" which focuses on the unemployed and precariously employed and shares a commitment to promoting equity objectives and to democratic process. 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 2006). Similar to constituency organizing inside of unions, community unionism outside of unions offers often-unrecognized leadership in support of social justice. For the project of union transformation to succeed, coalitions and alliances among community groups, social movements and unions will be fundamental.

VII. Union Democracy: Representation and Accountability

Embedded in equity initiatives on representation, leadership practices, and constituency organizing is a vision of union democracy that emphasizes participation and inclusivity rather than simply representation. This focus on democracy is not surprising given the historic exclusion of equity-seeking groups from decision-making. Exploring union democracy from the point of view of equity-seeking groups means moving away from abstractions. For example, gendering union democracy means eliminating both overt and commonsense sexism, and making unions accessible to women by taking account of realities such as child care and domestic responsibilities. It means ensuring that the bargaining agenda reflects the needs of women workers (Briskin 2006a), and promoting organisational structures such as women's committees that encourage the participation of women (Briskin 1998). The specific visions about, and claims for, democracy that emerge from other marginalized groups in the unions — lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered workers, workers of colour, Aboriginal workers and workers with disabilities — also need elaborating. For instance, democratising unions for workers with disabilities will involve, at minimum, increasing accessibility.

Although notions of democracy in the West tend to be linked to representation, increasing women's participation in elected leadership positions is not sufficient to en/gender democracy in the unions, or offer inclusive unionism to any marginalized group. In fact, the causal relationship may be the reverse. For representational strategies to be successful, they may need to be deeply embedded in larger processes of democratizing organizational practices and union culture.

Furthermore, there is a strong connection between democratic, participatory processes within the labour movement and the militancy needed to face employer intransigence. For example, in her analysis of the roots of militancy of the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) Rebecca Coulter (1993) isolates the highly democratic and participatory collective bargaining process within the UNA as "the flashpoint for nurses' militancy" and a key element in explaining both the solidarity of the membership and their willingness to strike. Democracy is undoubtedly central to worker militancies and resistance, leadership

and equity.

VIII. Feminist Leadership Practices? Feminist Process?

The discussion about women's leadership styles and ways of working inside of constituency committees raises the question of whether it is appropriate to characterize these practices as "feminist". Although I have in the past so labelled them (Briskin 1990), I am increasingly uncertain about the relevance, accuracy or meaning of such naming, given a more fluid understanding of feminism, a recognition of the multiplicity of feminisms which each promote different leadership styles, practices and politics, and the fact that women unionists themselves do not, by and large, use this language. Such labelling, then, may limit a debate about the relationship of feminisms to new organizational and leadership practices.

At the same time, there is no doubt that many of these leadership practices and the strategies understood as "women's" ways of working would be familiar to any feminist activist. In a study of women union activists in two unions in Britain, Colgan and Ledwith (1996: 176) found that

> "only a quarter of the active women trade unionists considered themselves to be feminist. Yet consistently, substantially more women than self-identified feminists showed beliefs and attitudes which we would describe as feminist. There appeared to be a remarkable consensus among feminists and non-feminists about what needed to be done for women in their unions. Regardless of self-perception, trade union women's primary attitudes seemed to be in agreement with what can be labelled feminist principles and strategies".

This finding underscores the fact that a feminist analysis can co-exist with a rejection of a feminist self-identification. However, when feminism is ascribed to those who do not self-label in this way, the significance of the conscious and public adoption of a feminist identity is not interrogated. Caution, then, is needed in labeling the practices of union women organizing as "feminist", given that women militants might not understand their movement or their leadership in this way (Briskin 1999, Coulter 1993 and Sugiman 1993).

Certainly in Canadian unions, the self-identification as feminist, and the labeling of organizing practices, strategies or solutions as feminist remains quite contested. In her opening Speech to the CLC

Women's Conference (8 June 2003)) which brought over 500 women trade unionists together, Marie Clark-Walker, Executive Vice President of the Canadian Labour Congress said:

> "Over the last few years I have heard more and more women apologizing for being feminists or making comments like 'I am not a feminist, I don't hate men'. It became clear that we needed to re-start the discussion of what feminism was. It has nothing to do with hating men – because it's not about men! Feminism is about women. It's about our right to speak, our right to act and our right to live as women."[42]

Penni Richmond, from the CLC Women's and Human Rights Department Bureau, has a similar view: "It used to be that few women would identify themselves as feminists; now there is a very significant group but still there is an ambivalent relation to feminism and a discomfort labeling oneself a feminist. The problem is that when feminist women organize openly and militantly, other women sometimes feel they are being criticized and support men."[43] Nancy Riche, Clark-Walker's predecessor, reflected on this issue:

> "When I first ran for a national position in the trade union movement ... I said 'I'm a trade unionist and a feminist and I think the words are synonymous.' I was advised by a number of labour leaders not to say that — that I would be seen as only concerned about the women's side of the trade union movement. What concerned me was that I had to say it at all — that I had to say that trade unionists and feminists were synonymous. Because I had assumed in my trade union life that the principles of feminism and the principles of trade unionism and social democracy were all the same" (1991).[44]

Riche's position remains a minority one. Given this political terrain, it seems both more appropriate and accurate to study, in the first instance, women's organizing in unions rather than feminist organizing.[45] Such an approach allows the relationship between women's organizing and feminisms as ideologies, as strategies, as analyses, as organizing practices, as visionary alternatives, and as complex self-identifications and identities to be problematized. Feminisms emerge, then, not as abstract criteria or boundary markers against which union women's organizing is assessed but a fluid, contextually located set of meanings and practices. Feminisms are sites of struggle, moments of resistance, organizing tools; they can help produce communities of interest and also patterns of exclusion (Briskin 1999). Such an

approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the organizing of women who do not identify as feminists. It also opens up challenges to those feminisms which tend to homogenize women's experience, have a narrow understanding of "women's issues" in ways which exclude the concerns of women of colour, poor, immigrant and working class women, and take insufficient account of intersectionality.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it is undoubtedly the case that feminist organizing and analyses have been instrumental in facilitating women's organizing inside the unions. In her Speech to the CLC Women's Conference (2003), Clark Walker also said:

> "Feminism has been extremely important for union women. When the women's movement gained steam in Canada during the 1970s, it helped union women to begin talking about the injustice and sexism that we experienced in our workplaces and yes, in our unions. Union women demanded that issues – such as sexual harassment, unequal pay, discrimination, maternity leave, racism, child care, the glass ceiling, access to jobs – be dealt with by our movement as union issues. The power of women to organize within the labour movement on these issues became so strong that a number of feminist women have been elected to leadership positions over the past three decades."[46]

A 1990 CLC discussion paper, "Empowering Union Women," speaks directly to the issue of feminism: "We need to develop a more woman-centred union perspective, a feminist perspective; one which will become part of the dominant outlook of the trade union movement" (23). Stinson and Richmond (1993), both long-time union staffers, argue that the feminist project in unions is directly related to the future health of the labour movement, and that a feminist approach to unionism, based on more participatory and inclusive decision-making, is needed for unions to successfully grapple with the challenges ahead.

It is also the case that many organizational innovations in constituency committees — around democratic discussion, inclusivity, consensus decision-making and shared leadership — are informed by the strategies of the grassroots women's movement. "Feminist process" encourages more responsive, hospitable, democratic, participatory and inclusive practices.[47] For example, in reference to the UK, Parker's discussion of " 'role swapping' and rotation of posts to give all participants experience in different areas and flexible meeting formats to encourage debate and ideas" (2003: 179) resonates with feminist process (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail 1988).

It is worth noting that feminist process has been a source of both strength and problems (Ristock

1991; Briskin 1990; Adamson, Briskin and McPhail 1988). When assumptions about process do not take account of the diversity of cultural and class experiences, women's committees and "women's ways of working" can be made less accessible to some women likely who are not white or middle class. For example, what constitutes a safe environment for some women may be experienced as dangerous by others; interpersonal practices which emphasize sharing experiences may be more comfortable in some cultural contexts than in others. Further, the time commitment necessary to make "process" work can easily exclude women who work full time, face a double or triple day, and are single parents. In the women's movement, feminist process is often situated in a non-institutional setting where the focus on political goals is difficult to sustain, and the desire and potential to create a haven from the "world out there" is strong. The daily reality of the workplace and the union may minimize some of the problems. The unions provide an institutional structure and a resource base; the workplace a common reference point. The informal and formal skills encouraged through feminist process are directly and immediately applicable to work and union situations.

IX. Union Restructuring, Leadership and Representation

Discussions of leadership, representation and union transformation need to be situated in the context of economic and political restructuring and regional integration which have raised serious challenges for Canadian unions, for union equity practices, and for mobilization strategies both inside unions and in the workplace. Undoubtedly the risk that equity concerns will be marginalized has increased dramatically.

Privatization, deregulation, increasingly hostile neo-liberal states, "global" employers, wage competition across national boundaries and increasing corporate rule are challenging the very foundations of unions. In order to maintain union density,[48] unions need to organize the unorganized, especially young and younger workers.[49] At the same time, unions face the task of representing the interests of diverse constituencies of workers based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, ability and First Nations status who are rapidly becoming a larger proportion of the unionized workforce.[50]

In the current conjuncture two dynamics often occur simultaneously: on the one hand, economic restructuring in many countries is increasing enterprise bargaining and thereby the significance of the local and workplace context (Levesque and Murray 2002; Murray et al 1999).[51] On the other hand, under the pressure of attacks on union rights by many neoliberal governments, unions are amalgamating in the

hopes of creating stronger and more effective structures. In these centralizing contexts, the power at the local level may be undermined but remain critical to resisting the bureaucratizing tendencies of large organizations.

Data from the UK and Australia suggest that amalgamations have restricted women's access to leadership and staff positions.[52] Colgan and Ledwith (1996: 158) report that, by 1994, the number of Trades Union Congress (TUC) unions had dropped to sixty-eight from eighty-four. "Since mergers ultimately mean streamlined organisational hierarchies, they also tend to reduce the opportunities for women and other minority groups to increase their representation up the union structures. In particular the squeeze in the number of full-time, paid officer positions available seemed to come just when women were beginning to move on, up and through the barriers in their unions." Colling and Dickens (2001: 148) note that "union mergers have … been beneficial for some aspects of equality bargaining, for example by facilitating harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment for different workgroups. But the central rationale of reducing unit costs has had a disproportionate impact on women's employment within unions. It has retarded women's progress into senior management positions."

Elton (1997: 114) identifies a similar pattern in Australia where the number of federal unions has dropped from one hundred and forty-three in 1989 to forty-seven in July 1995.

> "Union amalgamations have also significantly reduced leadership opportunities for women. The amalgamation of two or more unions into a single structure has involved accommodating existing senior officials and staff…. Pre-amalgamation structures are more often than not male dominated, reflecting the history of the workforce and the union movement. This male domination is transferred into the new structures, with the creation of a queue of male officials for a lesser number of top positions. This represents an additional barrier to women."

Jennie George, the first woman President of the Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU) commented: "Women were starting to come through the ranks when the (union) amalgamations took place, and by the time all the important positions were sorted out, the young women were pushed further back" (quoted in Cooper 2000: 59). However it is also worth noting that union amalgamations have offered some innovative opportunities to promote equity representation as is evident in UNISON in the UK (McBride 2001) and the Australian Services Union and Australian Education Union (Curtin 1999:45), both of which built equity representation into their new constitutions.

Both union amalgamations and enterprise bargaining underscore the importance of the relation between different levels of union organization, what Waddington (1999: 3) terms “union articulation”. “An articulated union is established around cohesive and coherent interrelationships between workplace, regional and national levels of organization .... where articulated union organization does not exist, workplace activities may be isolated and relatively ineffective. Furthermore, conflict between different levels of labour organization is shown to weaken labour resistance.”

Undoubtedly articulation tensions are evident in the Canadian context. A Canadian study on unions and restructuring (Pupo, Wells and White 1998: 4) highlights the gap between “an increasing commitment, albeit sometimes merely rhetorical, to social movement unionism and social democratic politics at the top ... and a resurgence of what appears to be a micro corporatist variety of business unionism at the bottom”. What the authors call “neo-feudalism” emerging in response to workplace reorganization encourages “local leaders and members [to] strategically align themselves with their managements as their first line of defense within a precarious work arrangement” (49). In general, the distance between unions (and union leadership), and their membership is exacerbating this tension. For example, “Our Members, Our Strength: Organizing the Organized”, prepared for the CUPE Convention in Montreal in 1995, speaks to “the widening gap”: “The truth is that right-wing ideas are gaining ground in the minds of our members. Large numbers of our members don’t see themselves as working class people. They are not clear about where their interests really lie. Many are voting for politicians and parties that take action against the interests of workers and unions” (3).

Effective union articulation is also central to the success of equity and representational initiatives. For example, in heavily decentralized unions, where bargaining is more local and the local is fairly autonomous from the central, decisions made centrally in favour of designated seats on national executives or equity policies may have less impact than in situations where the national level is of greater significance. A second example concerns the operationalization of equity policies. Despite passing progressive equity policies at national conventions, many Canadian unions have faced considerable difficulty integrating such policy into local practice, a problem not uncommon in other countries. At the same time, equity-seeking groups are expecting more from unions in the workplace. The Human Rights Director of the OFL speaks bluntly to this dilemma: “The problem has shifted from the top to the bottom. How are these policies going to be implemented down on the shop floor? Local leadership are resisting it. Yet people of colour on the shop floor, perhaps even more than before are expecting change” (quoted in CLC 1997: 102). What is evident, even from this brief discussion, is that the relationship between local

and national levels of unions varies considerably, influenced significantly by the collective bargaining regime and the particular union movement. Further this relationship is a key frame within which to map, assess and strategize about representation and leadership.

From an equity perspective, discussions of union articulation and amalgamation also raise the question of whether the local or central level offers the most effective vehicle for the implementation of equity initiatives. Obviously context is critical. In Australia, bargaining was traditionally centralized but has increasingly shifted to the enterprise with accompanying changes in union structures. Pocock (1996: 59) identifies problems for equity initiatives with the greater focus on the workplace. She concludes that "a dis-aggregated union movement ... lacking the capacity for movement-wide dialogue and decision is a much more difficult prospect for women to affect. This is because the development and dissemination of policy is much more difficult in a diverse, disorganized, and divided set of organisations than where a single channel of discussion exists."[53]

Yet the highly centralized Swedish union movement created limited space for on-going rank and file membership involvement and initiative, and produced and reproduced the unions as "service" organizations for their members (Briskin 1999b). "The very centralization of union activity that was so vital to the consolidation of the working class as a national political collectivity ... resulted in a stagnation of the workshop clubs that had constituted the building block of Swedish unionism" (Mahon 1991: 303).[54] The process of decentralization occurring in that country is changing the relationship among elected leaders, staff and membership, and how leadership and accountability are understood. There is also a shift towards more emphasis on the local level and greater efforts to encourage more membership involvement. Sture Nordh, past president of SKTF/TCO, says, "Now we need to mobilize the membership like we've never done before" (quoted in Briskin 1999b: 160). Elton (1997: 117-118) captures both sides of this situation in her comments about Australia:

> "Significant benefits for women have undoubtedly arisen from … national union direction and standard setting, especially on national employment standards like parental leave…. [However] strong, national control holds a danger of disempowerment at the local level, encouraging the abdication of local responsibility and inhibiting local initiative and action. Women have greater access to local forums in which they are more likely to be present in the numbers necessary for mutual support, and critical appraisal and development of new proposals."

It may well be that decentralizing tendencies will improve the representation of women (and other equity-seeking groups) but not necessarily make it easier for equity interests to be represented. The impact of the shift to the local level on re-valuing the local work and informal leadership of women (given that women and possibly members of other equity-seeking groups are a greater proportion of local leadership) and, indeed, for re-visioning leadership itself is not yet clear. Perhaps the leadership practices of equity-seeking groups offer untapped potential to develop a strategy to bridge central and local union politics, and to resist the neo-feudalism prompted by restructuring.

X. Documentation and Research

It would be timely for Canadian unions to document the demographics of membership, local and central leadership, union staff and committee membership, following the lead of the UK. As the 2004 SERTUC report notes, "monitoring… is central to an equal opportunities policy" (iii). In 2001, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the parallel UK organization to the Canadian CLC, passed an historic motion to change its constitution. A commitment to equality is now a condition of TUC affiliation and each affiliate pledges to eliminating discrimination within its own structures and through all its activities, including its own employment practices.[55] The Equality Officer of UNISON, Gloria Mills described this change as a "groundbreaking achievement": "This rule change provides the basis for bringing women's issues from the periphery to the heart of union culture" (Trades Union Congress 2005: 50). This constitutional change was accompanied by a comprehensive TUC equality auditing process on a bi-annual basis to "help maximize the dissemination and adoption of best practice throughout the trade union movement" ("Women in Unions" 2002: 10). The second audit released in 2005 is now available[56] and includes breakdowns by gender of membership, local and central membership, trade union staff, workplace stewards, delegates to conventions, and committee membership.[57]

In Canada, until 1995 when the Act was repealed, data on union membership was collected under the auspices of the Corporations and Labour Unions Act (CALURA). This included gender breakdowns of membership. Since 1997, union status has been a variable in the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) requests membership information from the unions, including gender breakdown of membership. However, unlike requests under CALURA which had the force of law, the unions co-operate with HRSDC voluntarily. Given the amount of work for unions to collect accurate information, the HRSDC data might not be entirely reliable, and the gender data is not

readily available for research purposes.[58] Information on other equity demographics is largely unavailable.

More research is needed in several areas: first, to assess the efficacy of affirmative action leadership programs after more than two decades in existence, perhaps comparing those unions and federations which have used this approach with those which have not; second, to explore the impact of increased participation of those from equity-seeking groups in leadership positions on the advancement of a union equity agenda, and third, to document and analyse the current state of constituency organizing and its relationship to changing leadership demographic profiles.

Conclusion

Although the limits of current data, documentation and research make it difficult to come to definitive conclusions, the struggles around union leadership in the last twenty years do point to some key insights: first, affirmative action programs have altered the demographics of union leadership. Second, transforming the union leadership profile should not be conflated with transforming the policies, practices and organizational culture of unions. Rather, the relationship between the two needs to be problematized. Third, constituency organizing is central to effective representation and progressive leadership. Indeed, constituency organizing is a form of leadership. And finally, the political and economic context of unions, workplaces, and states is instrumental in shaping equity and representational possibilities.

Increasing competition among workers — inside workplaces, between the unionized and unionized, and from workers moving from the manufacturing to the service sector, and across national boundaries — is at the heart of restructuring and globalization; it is also a gendered and racialized phenomenon. Thus the negotiation of representation inside unions is a task made more salient by the deepening exploitation of racial and gender differences by corporate capital. Equity strategies must pro-actively address this threat, challenge the neo-liberal invocation of patriarchal and individualistic values for workplaces and households, and build solidarities across diversities, with the non-unionized, and across national boundaries. What is the role of leadership and representational strategies in this context? Although critical, even progressive leadership and equity representation will be no substitute for a multi-layered union program to deepen union democracy, bargain equity, organize the unorganized, and institutionalize equity for all marginalized workers.

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NOTES

1 Readers may find useful the union equity documents and related research papers posted on the union module of the Gender and Work Database <www.genderwork.ca>.

2 In her text titled "The Complexity of Intersectionality", McCall (2005: 1772) notes that *complex*, *complexity*, and *complexities* appear frequently in discussions of "intersectionality". This language highlights the struggle to find suitable methodologies to study this category of analysis.

3. The 1990 CLC discussion paper *Empowering Union Women* discusses the same four considerations.

4. Franzway (2001) applied Lewis Coser's idea of the "greedy" institution – social institutions that demand undivided loyalty – to unions and explored how women unionists negotiate two such institutions: unions and families.

5 See Women Organizing Women: How do We Rock the Boat Without Getting Thrown Overboard? (Berger-Marks Foundation, 2005) for the specific problems faced by women union organizers.

6. The size of locals intersects in a complicated way with the patterns and positioning of female leadership. For example, "most women in local executive positions were in small locals where a small portion of the members (less than 25 percent) were female. Women were less likely to be in executive positions in large locals, even if they had a large proportion of female members" (CLC 1990: 10-11). A recent CUPE document (2005: 12) further supports this view: in a union made up of about two-thirds women, about 50 percent of locals of up to 500 members have women presidents but for locals of a 1000 or more only 27 percent have women presidents. Additional data from other unions on this subject would be welcome.

7 Reserved seats have a long history. The Trades Union Congress first decided to reserve two seats on its general council for women more than eighty years ago (TUC 2005).

8. Summary and quotations from "Affirmative Action: How We got Started" (#1) in a pamphlet series on Organizing for Affirmative Action, produced by the Women's Committee of the Ontario Federation of Labour, nd. For more information, see Cuneo (1993).

9 The CLC is the largest central labour body in Canada and is composed of about 85 national and international unions representing about 2.5 million workers. The so-called international unions are America unions (affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO) which have branches in Canada.

10. ICFTU has 187 affiliates from around the world representing more than one hundred million workers.

11 Continued ambivalence among union women to affirmative action may reflect uneasiness about highlighting women's "differences" and resistance to what Cockburn (1998) has called "coerced identities". Women struggle to be integrated as equals into the structures of institutions, despite the recognition that women are discriminated against as women and may need special measures to make such integration possible. The resistance of union men more likely has to do with sexism.

12 Email correspondence, 12 Oct 2005. Permission to quote. Das Gupta (1998: 327-8) recounts an earlier struggle in the mid-1990s in CUPE for two designated positions for people of colour on the NEB. At the National

Convention where this resolution was debated, similar arguments were made: "[T]here were some, including members of colour, who felt that affirmative action was tokenism and they have to rely on 'merit'." The proposal was eventually successful after "a great deal of negotiation and behind-the-scenes work … to achieve the unity needed to present a proposal to the NEB".

13. White also reports that women constituted 18 percent of executive seats in 1980 and nine percent in 1970 (1993: 99).

14.The CLC Constitution is available at <http://www.clc-ctc.ca/web/menu/english/en_index.htm>.

15. Correspondence, Joanne Labine, PSAC, 1995.

16 <www.bcfed.com/youth/index.htm>

17. Some of the available data are outdated: for example, the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL) reported that, in 1989, 13 percent of its staff were female (CLC 1990: 11). In the US, a 1980 study showed that women were 16 percent of union non-clerical staff; a 1985 study showed that, for 15 large American unions, women represented 32 percent of non-clerical staff. In 1985, SEIU had 35 percent women professional staff and by 1993 the percentage had risen to almost 50 percent (Eaton 1993).

18. Telephone interview, 6 June 1995.

19 The discourse on proportional representation is now being taken up around organizing the unorganized. "Many unions are now starting to adopt mirror representation. This is where organizers who go out into the field reflect the composition of the workforce they are trying to organize" (CLC 1998: 28). There is an extensive literature on organizing the unorganized. For a recent Canadian paper, see Warskett, 2004.

20. Posted at <www.nupge.ca/news>.

21. Interview, 9 Sept 1994.

22. For example, the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees (NAPE) requires that each committee be composed of two women and two men. The staff serving these committees must also be made up of half women and half men (reported in White 1993: 111).

23 More research needs to be done on the differences in women's constituency organizing in male and female-dominated unions. One might assume erroneously than in a female-dominated unions such organizing is not necessary. In such cases, women may be a "constituency" by virtue of their numbers but women's committees may be necessary to produce them as a self-conscious constituency that recognizes both the significance of gender and the need to organize around it (Briskin, 1999a).

24. Her finding is consistent with a study by Craig and Sherif (1986). "The major finding was that men were more influential than women when there were 1 man and 3 women present..."(463). The study concluded that "men have been found to be more influential when in a minority of one that in other conditions. There is also some indication that when men are not influential it is their choice, and thus, they are still really in control of the situation. ... [I]t is clear that a man is more influential in a minority, which has strong implication for men moving into traditionally female occupations and businesses. They may, in fact, be given more than an equal say compared to the women in the group" (465).

25. The leaderships of some male-dominated unions have pro-actively encouraged the participation of women and other under-represented groups on local executives in the interests of "fair representation". For example, in 1991, Leo Gerard, then Director of District 6, the Ontario Region of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), in a letter to local presidents encouraged them to keep in mind that "the makeup of our Local Union Executives should reflect the membership of the local as well as the community in which the local exists. I, therefore, ask that ... you consider encouraging women, people of colour, the disabled, etc., to run for executive positions".

26. Telephone interview, 12 Oct 1994.

27. This discussion is excerpted from Briskin (1990) which deals with women, unions and leadership. This article was largely based on a transcript of a workshop on Women, Unions and Leadership held at the Workers and Communities Conference (York University, Ontario 1989) which brought together about 60 women militants and leaders.

28. In May 1988, CUEW formalized this collective process at the national leadership level in a structure which called for two co-chairs (one of whom must be a woman) and rotation of responsibilities.

29 Essentialism is, "that set of assertions . . . designed to demonstrate that there is a 'female nature' . . . . [Essentialism] assumes a psychology and emotional temper peculiar to women . . . a set of preoccupations (and, I might add, occupations] appropriate, by nature" (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985, p. 142). Wajcman speaks of essentialism as "the assertion of fixed, unified and opposed female and male natures" (1998: 15).

30 Drawing on Pateman's discussion of social contracts, Wajcman argues that "current gender arrangements in the family mean that, no matter how similar they are in background and qualifications, men and women enter the labour market as different sorts of workers. In this sense, men as men are much more favourably positioned in the managerial labour market (33)… Women enter the workplace defined as family-oriented persons, whereas when men enter the workplace, they are stripped of any domestic identity" (38). By extension, this is also true of the way women enter unions.

31 See Wajcman (1998) for such a discussion about the management context.

32 Elton (1997: 120) points out that what is commonly associated with male and patriarchal leadership practices also resonates with working class realities: defensiveness towards perceived white-collar "book-learning" and formal union education, the assumption that union leaders should learn on-the-job and sink-or-swim, and the experience in male-dominated but also working class occupations, industries and unions.

33 Although not about one of the countries considered here, Bolles' We Paid Our Dues: Women Trade Union Leaders of the Caribbean (1996) is worth noting. She interviewed widely, her questionnaire focusing on work history, trade union involvement, role of trade unions in Caribbean, other organizational involvement, family life and personal development.

34 Harding examines the dualities of masculine/feminine and African/European and finds what she calls a "curious coincidence" between feminine and afrocentric moralities: "[T]he African World View is suspiciously similar to what …has been identified as a distinctively feminine world view" (299). Although her arguments are not unproblematic, the parallels between the two world views arise, she suggests, because both are grounded in "projects of social domination".

35 Many trade union education programs can rightly be seen as part of the tradition of popular education, that is, "non-formal education practices which aim to challenge injustice and oppression" sometimes called emancipatory education, transformative education or education for empowerment. Feminist popular education is "oriented towards transforming gendered power relations and shares the basic methodological principle of valorizing, and building analytically and practically upon, the experiential knowledge of learners themselves. …Popular education involves an inherently self-reflective, reflexive and non-dogmatic approach. It works to make space for the collective, participatory production of knowledge and insight, and builds on what emerges from the experiences of those actively participating…Feminist popular education is embedded within social activism and democratic organizations of civil society working for material and substantive transformation of women's lives and conditions" (Walters and Manicom, 1996: 2-3).

36. Separate organizing is also filtering into collective bargaining structures. New units of postal cleaners had always been put into existing CUPW locals. But now CUPW is debating the value of combining cleaners' units from various locals into their own local in order to acknowledge "the differences between the members in terms of sector and working conditions". Such an initiative also "recognizes that many of the cleaners are workers of colour and new immigrants who have little voice in locals dominated by postal workers with a predominantly white leadership" (CLC 1998: 8). Deborah Bourque, then the National Vice-President of Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), recognized the need to "empower these workers by giving them the necessary structures and service that will ensure equality within the union" (CLC, 1998: 8).

37. In a 1996 interview, Cheryl Kryzaniwsky, the first woman president of the council of the CAW, said, "I could articulate the issues better after having had a women's activist training course. It taught me how to survive in male-dominated organizations" (cited in "CAW Council Pres Urges Women to Get Involved" Herizons Spring 1996: 12).

38. Interviews with Swedish unionists identified centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures as barriers to women's participation. Irene Sundelin from Svenska Industritjänstemannaförbundet (SIF/TCO) said: "Women don't like the way that the union is working: the formal meetings which just rubber stamp. The union is looking for ways of leading the organization differently to encourage involvement and to give members more power to influence". Annica Magnusson, from Svenska Hälso och Sjukuårdens Tjänstemannaförbundet (SHSTF/TCO), envisioned "a flatter structure" for the hospitals, and pointed out that "men's hierarchical thinking" had heretofore dominated the workplace. Sture Nordh attributes changes in Sveriges Kommunaltjänstemannaförbund (SKTF) towards "more open, flexible, less hierarchical" structures to women's influence (all quoted in Briskin 1999b: 160). These comments reflect many of the criticisms Swedish women unionists have made of union organization: that it validates central and top leadership work over local work; that it encourages leaders and staff to become 'experts' removed from the daily work experiences of the membership, thus producing hierarchical and undemocratic structures which, in turn, reproduce male domination; and that these patterns make invisible, indeed, devalue, women's ways of working and organizing, and exacerbate women's low status in unions (Briskin 1999b).

39. Trade union education designed specifically for women has been very successful. For example, "After [women's] courses on equal value (in the white-collar unit of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AEUW) in Britain], women in all regions succeeded in swinging the large male majority ... to give their demand high priority in local bargaining .... In Austria and Germany, women's courses have helped inform and mobilize unionists in campaigns for more vocational training opportunities, expanded maternity benefits, equality in pension rights, and marriage law reform.... Union women have been among the best informed and most influential lobbyists in the provincial and national legislatures" (Cook, Lorwin and Daniels 1992: 127).

40. Interview conducted by Joel Harden in August 2003. Followup interview by Donna Bernardo in June 2004.

41. In contrast, in Sweden, most major initiatives for women have come from union leaders or equality officers, often without active support of, or organized pressure from women members. Kristina Persson, previously the TCO Equality Officer, said, "Initiative came from TCO, not from outside pressure or from below. It is important for the equality officer to take the initiative and formulate directions" (quoted in Briskin 1999b:159).

42 For the full text of Clark's speech, go to <www.clc-ctc.ca>.

43. Telephone interview, 20 Oct 1994.

44. In a speech to the 1991 Annual General Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). Transcribed from the tape provided by NAC.

45. Representational struggles have frequently been linked to "feminization." However, the term is often used loosely. Differentiating between feminisms and feminizing is helpful. Feminization which transforms the gender profile in unions and workplaces focuses on equitable representation of women. Feminist analyses which takes account of deeply rooted patterns of discrimination, and challenges organizational practices of unions inevitably push the discussion beyond representation (Briskin 1999).

46 For the full text of Clark's speech, go to <www.clc-ctc.ca>.

47 Given the complexity of the discussion about "feminist process", the varying interpretations of what constitutes feminist process, and the differing assessments of its success, it would be more accurate to talk about feminist processes.

48. A recent CLC Research report concluded: "It is not appreciated that the relatively steady membership of some unions masks constant organizing to offset membership losses in other workplaces. The membership of large industrial unions such as USWA, UFCW, CAW and the CEP has shifted from larger industrial workplaces towards the service sector as a result of mergers and organizing, and public sector unions such as CUPE, NUPGE and the PSAC have been organizing workers in privatized public services and in social services delivered by the private sector. Much of this new organizing has involved women" (Jackson and Schellenberg 1998: 22). For example, in 1995, the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) in Canada merged with the USWA bringing 25,000 new members to the union, mainly women. Canadian unions and federations have also undertaken extensive initiatives around young workers, and innovative organizing campaigns of women workers.

49. A recent Statistics Canada Report (Morissette, Schellenberg and Johnson 2005: 3) indicates that "the unionization rate of men aged 25-34 fell by almost 20 percentage points, dropping from 43 percent in 1981 to 24 percent in 2004. … Roughly one third of the decline in young men's union coverage was due to their growing concentration in industries that typically have low union coverage."

50 Although disaggregated demographic data on unionized workers is limited, what is certainly the case is that "virtually all of the growth of the Canadian labour force now comes from immigration." and since the 1980s, 75 percent of new immigrants have belonged to a "visible minority" group (Jackson, 2005: 103).

51. This analysis of Sweden is instructive: "The decentralization of collective bargaining can be seen as one element in a broader design which has been described as a kind of enterprise corporatism ... The employers' new strategy aims to provide the institutional foundations for an identity alternative to that of 'wage-earner'. The latter, constituted at the level of the nation as a whole through solidaristic bargaining and the welfare state, is to be replaced by a new unity of white- and blue-collar workers at the level of the individual firm and its subunits. The

new identity of *medarbetare*, in turn, complements that of the atomized consumer individual" (Jenson and Mahon 1993: 94-5).

52. Studies on amalgamations between male and female-dominated unions offer an interesting case study in this regard. In these often-forced mergers, women have inevitably lost power (see, Littlewood 1989; Cobble 1990; Bergqvist 1991: 115-118; Dorgan and Grieco 1993: 151; Pocock 1996: 96 and 146). In 1990-1, as an expert witness for the Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario (FWTAO), a female-only union of elementary school teachers which was being legally pressured to join with the male-only union (the Ontario Public School Teachers Federation (OPSTF)), I researched these issues extensively in order to demonstrate that forcing the amalgamation of the two unions would disadvantage women. This case is not unlike the situation faced by the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT) in Britain in which the male and female London locals were forced, around 1985, to unite to comply with the Sex Discrimination Legislation.

53 Certainly research suggests that decentralized bargaining is less likely to address women's concerns as workers. Curtin (1999: 55) reports that "the more decentralised the wage system, the wider the gender gap between male and female earnings".

54. Correspondence (May 1994) on this issue from Kerstin Sandell, a union activist in SAC said, "It is very difficult to get workers to act in even small questions at a workplace. The action should be done by ombudsmen... The centralized organization is taking away from the agency of the workers/unionists. That is part of why militancy and direct action is unheard of in Sweden. And that is devastating for the women's movement who has, as a founding element, localized direct action. So the lack of women's agency is linked to the lack of agency on the local level for everyone." A major and quite successful initiative by Kommunal around work reorganization in the caring sector emphasized democratic, bottom-up and from-within strategies that drew on the "silent knowledge" of the mostly women workers. Ironically, it came up against a hierarchical union structure that marginalized women members (reported in Higgins 1996: 181-2, 187).

55 The text from the TUC constitution reads as follows: "It shall be a requirement of affiliation that an organisation has a clear commitment to promote equality for all and to eliminate all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination, both within its own structures and through all its activities, including its own employment practices." Available at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/congress/tuc-5103-f0.cfm>.

56 Available at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-10487-f0.cfm>.

57 It is also the case that the Women's Rights Committee of SERTUC (South and Eastern Region of the Trades Union Congress in the UK) has been producing periodic surveys of women and unions which include demographic breakdowns and detailed reports from individual unions which now include information on women and other equity-seeking groups. See, for example, SERTUC (2004).

58 See union membership data on the HRSDC website <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/wid/info.shtml>.