

# **GENDERING UNION RENEWAL: WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO LABOUR MOVEMENT REVITALIZATION**

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**Jan Kainer**

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Movements have two major weaknesses: they are inclined to forgetfulness because they have no way of handing down memory, and they are liable to revert to the reiteration of protest when the larger changes they desire appear impossible.

Sheila Rowbotham<sup>1</sup>

## Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
The Politic of Gendering	6
Themes in the Union Renewal Literature	8
I. Visioning Social Change	11
The New Social Movements and Women's Labour Organizing: Gender Identity and Political Vision	12
II. Coalition Building: Labour and the Women's Movement Alliance	14
The Labour-Feminist Alliance in the Struggle for Pay Equity	17
III. Organizing the Unorganized: Women Workers First	18
Labour Women Organize	19
IV. Internal Organizing: Women and Equity Representation in Unions	22
Equity Diversity: Expanding Membership Involvement	23
V. Labour Internationalism: Women's Contributions to Global Organizing	25
What does gendering do?	28
Conclusion	30
References	31
Notes	36

## **Abstract**

This paper summarizes key themes from the literature on union renewal and argues that the contributions of women's organizing, a subject of extensive discussion within feminist analyses of trade unions, is given scant consideration in debates on labour movement revitalization. In spite of many years of feminist dialogue on women's organizing as a model for transforming unions and labour movements, there is limited recognition of the history of women's organizing efforts that have contributed to developments such as coalition building, rank and file activism, or devising alternative labour agendas to reflect new identities and new work forms. Additionally, the organizing work of women today continues to play a vital role in labour internationalism. This paper considers how women's organizing initiatives that began a couple of decades ago have continued to shape labour revitalization efforts into the present. It is argued that, in general, the union renewal literature has not acknowledged the 'gendering of the labour movement', or the transformational dimension of women's organizing, and its influence on labour to reposition itself in the face of neo-liberal globalization.

## Introduction

Labour analysts worldwide are in agreement that trade unions are facing a new and uncertain future under neo-liberal globalization. The challenges facing organized labour are well documented and have received extensive discussion in the academic literature. International economic developments are affecting the ability and strength of labour to confront global capital. Trade liberalization, global finance, and the power of transnational corporations to control capital flows and restructure production, have altered and intensified the competitive pressures under which business and governments operate. In industrialized countries in Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere, the commitment of governments to the Keynesian welfare state has given way to market-based neo-liberal policy that significantly undermines the 'social floor' of rights and entitlements for workers, and further weakens the capacity of labour to oppose employers. Labour market restructuring, particularly in the North, has led to the loss of unionized manufacturing jobs as corporations move production to low wage regions of the world, typically in the South, where labour protections are weak. At the same time, the growth of the service sector has created new forms of employment relationships, such as contract and part-time work, not conducive to unionization under the traditional model of industrial unionism. In this economic and political environment union memberships are falling and labour is losing its ability to influence the operation of the capitalist market either through work place bargaining or through political mobilization in the policy arena at both the national and international levels. These developments have raised widespread concern about the appropriate strategic direction for organized labour in the global economy. Union renewal, the process of restoring union power, is seen as an essential strategy to rebuild unions and revitalize labour movements.<sup>2</sup>

This paper summarizes key themes in the literature on union renewal and argues that the contributions of women's organizing initiatives, a subject of extensive discussion within feminist analyses of trade unions, is given scant consideration in debates on labour movement revitalization.<sup>3</sup> Despite many years of feminist dialogue on women's labour organizing as a model for transforming unions and labour movements, there is limited recognition of the history of women's organizing efforts that have contributed to developments such as coalition building, rank and file activism, or devising alternative labour agendas to reflect new identities and new work forms. Central to women's labour activism is an equity strategy to achieve greater fairness for women and minority members within unions – a strategy that has evolved to bring about greater internal union democracy and one which supports a social movement model of unionism promoting social and economic justice. Today, the organizing work of women continues to influence international and national solidarity efforts and women play a vital role in reviving labour resistance under conditions of neo-liberal globalization.

Yet most of the literature on union renewal starts from the premise that alternative forms of organizing are a recent response to labour movement decline. The previous, and ongoing,<sup>3</sup> work of union women (and other equity constituencies) including: revamping representational labour structures to better

represent a diverse rank and file, promoting women and diverse members in positions of union leadership, broadening the constituency base of social justice activism and rethinking labour's political agenda in view of an equity framework, is generally not seen to have been influenced, or inspired by, the sustained efforts of feminist labour organizing. For instance, this comment from an analyst attempting to explain the failure of organizing in the contemporary American labour context, echoes the objectives long expressed by women and equity activists:

... to attract substantial numbers of unrepresented workers, there really needs to be a coherent vision about how our economy and society would be different with a vibrant labour movement... Any initiative to transform the movement [also] needs to embrace internal change... to design leadership development programs that target a diverse cross section of rank-and-file activists, and to mobilize members more effectively, not simply around narrow contract demands... unions need to build new cultures that attract key groups of workers to the labour movement. Low-wage, low-skill manufacturing and service workers (many of them immigrants, African Americans, and women) will be drawn to organizations that reflect their respective cultures, especially at the leadership level. (Hurd, 2004:23)

Similarly, these authors cite the following "facilitating factors" for union renewal:

... the building of solidarity, of power – that most analysts stressed [include] the importance of unions building a new organizational culture: one focused on a more inclusive and participatory democracy, on traditions of struggle – for change in the workplace and society as a whole. (Kumar and Schenk, 2006:47)

As we will see in the following discussion, women unionists began the process of challenging organized labour on many of the above issues over thirty years ago. A major assertion by women activists is that labour movements have to be more responsive to the needs and realities of women and other vulnerable groups to move forward, especially in the area of organizing and leadership. Concerns around inclusive representation of women and equity-seeking groups remains a central preoccupation of union revitalization, nonetheless, because much of the literature on union revival does not sufficiently acknowledge the long history of feminist attempts to change traditional union practices, the lessons to be learned from this history are missed. If we are to determine "what works and what does not work" in union renewal, then the past contributions of women unionists must be taken into account. Using gender as a category of analysis, this paper attempts to incorporate an analysis of women's organizing initiatives in the discussion of labour movement revitalization. The paper asks why women's labour organizing tends to be ignored in the union renewal literature and considers whether women's organizing efforts in Canada has been a factor in sustaining the labour movement in this country.

Two claims are put forward. First, I suggest that much of the Canadian literature on union renewal fails to acknowledge that key aspects of the contemporary revitalization strategy were originally initiated by women union activists.<sup>4</sup> The organizing initiatives by women that began a couple of decades

ago have continued into the present, however, these initiatives are now often presented as an outgrowth of the “new” social unionism, having emerged from the struggle to advance the labour agenda in an era of economic globalization. It is suggested here that elements of the renewal program predate contemporary revitalization efforts and that this has implications for the future of unions. Acknowledging women’s contributions is significant for understanding the historic link between women’s organizing and the development of an equality framework that has been instrumental in transforming union and workplace policy, an important factor in making unions relevant to the contemporary lives of marginalised workers. What is missing from many union renewal analyses is recognition of the continuities of feminist unionist organizing, especially concerning the development of new organizational forms, and alternative organizing strategies associated with the ‘new unionism’. Specifically, targeting women members and developing gender-sensitive models of organizing to expand trade union membership, or to support feminized strike actions, is not particularly “new” but has evolved over several decades. As discussed below, women’s activism has proven to be a key dimension of labour movement resistance. As new organizing approaches, or models, were devised by women and equity groups to promote an equity agenda, the labour movement gained strength and momentum. Understanding the origins and historical background of women’s organizing is essential to tracing significant moments in movement building, and is therefore relevant to ongoing debates on labour revitalization.

Second, this paper attempts to situate the ‘politic of gendering’ within the discussion of union renewal so as to emphasize that women’s organizing has played an integral part in shaping labour revitalization. The equity agenda<sup>5</sup> is an attempt to redefine the ‘labour movement politic’ by incorporating the discourse on gendering – a discourse that recognizes the significance of difference and the systemic sources of inequality for women and other disadvantaged minorities. This equity strategy is intended to advance substantive (in contrast to formal) equality gains for equity-seeking constituencies. At the start of women’s organizing, making inroads in the equity reform program typically involved challenging conventional union and workplace policy and practices that privileged the gender interests of men. Gradually, the gendering strategy broadened to include diverse equity groups, many of whom perform gendered (e.g. reproductive/undervalued) labour. As explained below, gendering the labour movement has been an ongoing undertaking of feminist unionists,<sup>6</sup> and the strategy has undergone continual refinement and modification as activists met resistance to achieve equity goals.

## **The Politic of Gendering**

A discussion of women’s organizing in the context of labour movement struggle cannot be divorced from analyses of the meaning of ‘gendering’ that emerged within the women’s movement (and within the feminist literature) over the past two to three decades. In the early years of the second wave of the women’s movement, the dialogue on gender relations was informed by the view that “gender” refers to relations between men and women. The basis of women’s inequality was understood in relation to

issues such as women's unequal wage earnings compared to those of men, to the under representation of women in organizational structures of decision-making, and to an unequal gender division of labour that held women primarily responsible for family and domestic work which reinforced their subordinate status at the workplace, in the union, and in the home. Although these structures of inequality persist, and are still regarded as important structural determinants of women's social and economic inequality, "a shift in focus from looking at genders (man and woman) to the *gendering* of all social relations" (Weston, 2002: 59) has altered the way in which women's organizing has been pursued and conceptualized within the women's movement.

Over time, the study and meaning of gender relations has broadened to encompass the social processes and cultural value systems that lie behind inequities experienced by women and other equity-seeking groups within society. In the context of the labour movement, gendering is sometimes referred to as promoting 'transformational equality', an approach that "questions the basis of union organization and processes by which some groups, such as men, build and renew power over others, such as women." (Parker, 2002:31). For example, as feminists explain, unionization privileged male manufacturing workers concentrated in mass industry. This industrial model of unionism which emerged in the post-WWII era in Canada (based on the US Wagner model of 1935), has been critiqued by feminists for operating to secure a male industrial wage that could support a family and thereby reinforced patriarchal values tied to the nuclear family form (Forrest, 1995; 2004; Warskett, 1996). Feminist unionists also point to the gender bias of the seniority principle in which the male norm of continuous service disadvantages women (e.g. Blum, 1991; Creese, 1999; Dulude, 1995; Guard, 1996). Additionally, feminist unionism challenged the dominant discourse on the meaning of work to include reproductive labour and social reproduction more generally; issues around child care, reproductive choice, and balancing the work day between home and work have become defined as important labour concerns (e.g. Briskin, 2002:33; Beccalli, 1996). Moreover, labour women as early as the post WWII era helped to gender employment and welfare policy that would be fairer to working women (Cobble, 2004).

From this perspective 'gendering' refers to identifying, and uprooting, the systemic causes of inequality deriving from the "deep structures" within organizations and institutions that perpetuate 'gender difference' (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:3). For instance, at the level of union policy a gendered analysis entails identifying the subtle and hidden forms of gender bias operating within traditional union and organizational work cultures that contribute to the unfair treatment of women. As many feminists point out, production relations at the workplace are gendered. Hegemonic masculinity assures men a dominant position while women are treated as secondary workers (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002:6; Williams, 2002: 292-8). Within this patriarchal dynamic, work rules are constructed in favour of men. Hence, in many Western industrialized economies a masculine construct of an *ideal* generic worker emerges who is presumed to be: White able-bodied, heterosexual, a sole breadwinner permanently employed full-time in a skilled/unionized manufacturing, construction, professional or managerial occupation. This construct serves as an implicit reference point for determining "regular" or "normal" work standards (Acker, 1990;

Briskin, 1994; Creese, 1999; Franzway, 2000; Sangster, 1995; Vosko, 2000). Consequently, women (and other minority groups) who do not approximate the male norm experience systemic disadvantage at the workplace (and in unions). Recognizing that gender, and other systemic inequities, are the result of long standing cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity which operate to privilege men and disadvantage women, engaged women's organizing in a variety of directions and encouraged political action at different levels of organization.

The 'politic of gendering' conveys contestation, the struggle for inclusion of women and equity groups in labour movement struggle, and more broadly, integrates their fight for social and economic equality within the political action of labour movements. This gender dimension of trade union activity, while ongoing for several decades within many industrialized economies, has not been fully acknowledged by labour renewal scholarship even though the gender and equity agenda was incorporated internally within unions, and in coalitions between labour and the new social movements, since the late twentieth century.

### **Themes in the Union Renewal Literature**

The literature on union renewal is very large and continues to grow, making generalizations difficult, however, a number of broad themes tend to appear throughout.<sup>7</sup> A wide range of subjects related to the problem of union decline and possible strategies for renewal are examined, often in a cross-national or comparative context (e.g. Boeri, Brugiavini and Calmfors, 2001; Fairbrother and Griffin, 2002; Fairbrother and Yates, 2003; Harrod and O'Brien, 2002; Frege and Kelly, 2004; Jose, 2002; Verma and Kohan, 2004). On the whole, recent reviews tend to focus on the reasons for decreasing union density, diminishing bargaining power and the weakening influence of labour in the global political economy as well as the response of unions to neo-liberal economic restructuring. Some of the themes investigated to bolster unionism include cross-border solidarity, reforming internal union structures, engaging in political and corporate campaigns, labour-management partnership, strengthening bargaining power, union mergers, and improving labour law to advance unionization. A particular focus is on internal organizing within unions, especially consideration of membership participation and democratization of labour organizations and innovative approaches to organizing workers, the 'organizing model' and other alternative strategies to increasing unionization (e.g. Behren, Hamann and Hurd, 2004:23, Schenk, 2003). Reference is made to assessing "best practices" (Kumar and Schenk, 2006:19) in relation to union structures, policies and other organizational features of labour organizations or developing a "bigger tool kit" (Turner, 2004:4), "both old and new", that challenges conventional ways of doing things, to revive labour movements. Many authors refer to the importance of drawing lessons from case studies and other research on a variety of renewal strategies (e.g. Verma and Kochan, 2004:3; Fairbrother and Griffin, 2002) and come to the conclusion that traditional approaches to unionism, related to the industrial



relations legal regimes devised in the post WWII era (e.g. Fairbrother and Yates, 2003) are lacking in terms of their capacity to confront the exigencies of neo-liberal globalization.

The important role of women in unions and the need for equity representation, especially in the area of organizing, as well as recognizing the need to change the (masculine) culture of unions to accommodate minority interests, is another theme in the renewal scholarship (e.g. Yates, 2003;2006). However, as mentioned, a consistent pattern that emerges from discussion is a general absence of the earlier contributions made by women's organizing efforts to the renewal project. As we will see below, women's labour organizing contributed significantly to building and sustaining rank and file participation, developing new democratic structures such as women's caucuses, organizing the unorganized, and forging political alliances with non-labour groups. That the past organizing work of women has been, and continues to be, important to the life of labour movements is evident in the many references made in the union renewal literature to strategies that actually originated from the organizing work of labour women over the past twenty to thirty years. For instance, in many discussions of renewal strategies the common themes identified include: "organizing the unorganized", "community-based organizing", "coalition building", "diversifying leadership", "democratizing unions" and "devising alternative visions for social change". In a recent text on union renewal in Canada a range of articles on such subjects as the sources of innovation in Canadian unions, the revitalization of unions in Quebec, and various union case studies on reinvigorating the labour movement refer to the foregoing themes (Kumar and Schenk, 2006). In these articles there are repeated references to successful approaches to union revival such as developing 'strategic capacity' based on vision, agenda and discourse, 'internal solidarity' or developing greater democracy in the union (greater opportunity for membership participation), and 'external solidarity' through various labour and broader community alliances and coalitions (Levesque and Murray, 2006:120-121). A common observation is that union growth depends upon formulating a broad worker agenda that will appeal to a diverse constituency or community "informed by a broader set of values incorporating the importance of membership involvement, equity and social justice" (Levesque and Murray, 2006:121). However, these initiatives are seldom attributed to women's labour activism, nor is there discussion of the lessons to be learned from union women's previous, and ongoing, efforts around gendering union policies and practices. As the following discussion points out a history of experience of women's organizing initiatives is available and necessary, to grounding an analysis of alternative paths to labour revitalization.

It is important to consider why women's activism is generally absent in the trade union renewal scholarship. One of the reasons for the absence of gendering is that much of the union renewal literature begins analysis of organizational and political strategic developments to rebuild unions starting in the late 1980s and the 1990s when union decline became particularly apparent, thereby overlooking the transition between women's union activism and the development of new organizing tactics in labour movements. A second reason for this gap is that the feminist literature on women and unions (e.g. Beccalli, 1996; Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Briskin, 1994; 2002; Cobble, 1993; 2004; Creese, 1999; Colgan and Ledwith, 2002; Franzway, 2000; Sugiman, 1993; White, 1993; Warskett, 1996) seems to exist independently of the

work of contemporary scholars interested in union revitalization. In some instances reference to women's labour activism is entirely absent (e.g. Fairbrother and Hammer, 2005 on labour internationalism); in other cases there is limited attention paid to women's past experience in the realm of union organizing (e.g. organizing the unorganized); but overall, there is a tendency to neglect the implications of 'gender' as a coherent force for political mobilization, what I refer to as the 'politic of gendering', that injects a transformative strategy within labour movements.

There are three major arguments that can be made about how overlooking women's labour organizing narrows the analysis of union revitalization. The first is that the union renewal literature tends to begin analysis in the late 1980s or the 1990s, therefore missing the earlier work of feminists challenging unions. The result is that the contemporary literature on renewing labour movements borrows heavily, albeit unconsciously, on the traditions and successes of women's labour organizing as possible strategies for renewal without according credit to their historic origins. Second, there is a focus on internal organizing at the expense of a "larger vision" for social change (i.e. a lack of regard of the equity agenda emerging from the feminist reform vision) And the third point, related to the second, is that there is little acknowledgement of the importance of equity in building a transformative labour agenda.

Below is a short thematic overview of women's labour movement organizing and its relationship to the union revitalization project. The discussion offers a brief sketch of key historical developments concerning women's organizing. Five dimensions of women's organizing are highlighted: 1) gender identity as a springboard for equity activism (from woman centred to equity-seeking diversity) and its role in framing an alternative vision for social change (transforming the labour movement agenda and union culture; 2) organizing the unorganized; 3) coalition-building (and the development of broader movement unionism); 4) challenging internal union democracy (alternative democratic structures of representation; new leadership; rank and file participation); 5) and labour internationalism. Analysis of the Canadian labour movement is emphasized with some comparative examples from other national contexts. It is argued that, in general, the union renewal literature has not acknowledged 'gendering', or the transformational dimension of women's organizing, and its influence on labour to reposition itself in the face of neo-liberal globalization.

## I. Visioning Social Change

A frequent argument made by union renewal scholars is the need for labour movements to develop a vision that will facilitate transformative social change.

As these renewal analysts understand a social vision is crucial for developing commitment to movement change (Herzenberg, 2002:133):

“The lack of a consensus social vision diminishes labour’s ability to attract and retain committed activists and staff ... a broader regeneration of labour’s social purpose requires a postindustrial solution to unions’ basic dilemma – the need to serve the interests of their members while simultaneously being seen to serve the interests of society as a whole. At the moment, institutional self-interest is too transparently the motivation for many labour actions, large and small. Paradoxically, only transcending the view that labour is just another special interest, and acting to make the world a better place, can restore labour’s power.”

In the Canadian context David Robertson comments:

The big questions remain about what unions are doing, how do unions see themselves, what is their role? And critically, what is their role in transforming the world which might sound high-minded, but if unions don’t have an agenda to transform the world, then what is it we are doing? (cited in Robertson and Murningham, 2006:177)

And in relation to the United States Bill Fletcher remarks:

While some people may say that a vision of working class power is utopian, I would counter by suggesting that it is essential and completely relevant to our current conditions.....This has become all the more clear in the [U.S.] current debate where there is no hint of a unionism linked to social transformation, but rather exists a unionism focused almost exclusively on collective bargaining power. (speech at Canadian Auto Workers Conference, July 13, 2005 cited in *Relay*, 2005:15-16)

As these observations indicate, in the current context critics argue there is not enough attention paid to framing a larger vision for social change while too much emphasis is placed on ensuring the immediate survival of trade unions through internal organizational change. This organizational reform approach, while necessary, is not sufficient to generate mass appeal for a diversity of workers, many of whom are facing extreme economic insecurity. Hence, there is growing acceptance by analysts that devising an alternative to the existing societal structure, particularly raising critical questions around neo-liberal policy and the global market, may be necessary to spark widespread activism to effect social change (e.g. Fairbrother and Yates, 2003:248; Kumar and Schenk, 2006:39; Schenk, 2003:248; Voss and Sherman, 2003:65-66).

Speaking about the problem of union decline in five countries (the U.K., U.S.A., Germany, Spain and Italy), Lowell Turner comments:

... there are at least two critical problems for a broadened labour participation in global, national and local reform efforts. One is when unions take a narrow perspective and fail to develop the linkages, alliances, and broad reform vision required to build the necessary political power. The other is the widespread contemporary problem of union decline.... a broadened perspective and more comprehensive strategic focus are necessary to reverse the decline of organized labour. (2004:2)

As the following narrative shows, building political power using alliances outside of labour circles describes the trajectory of labour women's organizing since the late 1960s. One of the past strengths of women's labour organizing was in articulating resistance to patriarchal capitalism, even though a detailed oppositional political program was never explicitly adopted. Still, as explained below, what emerged from women's activism was a willingness to join in coalitions with groups outside of labour in common cause of an equity or equality agenda. The struggle for equity lent coherency to a strategy for change - a strategy channelled at the level of labour organizations and more systemically incorporating challenges to (patriarchal) state policy and employer power. In women's activism there was, and remains, an explicit link between mobilization in unions around gender identity/gender relations and a broader vision to improve women's economic and social status within society. Out of this identity and alternative world view grew a broader trade union purpose to pursue gender equality. An alternative (feminist) unionism emerged based on challenges to an overtly sexist traditional union culture, to the masculine bias within the industrial relations model of unionism (e.g. Canada and USA) and to systemic sex (and other) discrimination entrenched in labour markets and within labour movement institutions. An equity agenda became a driving force for both motivating women in labour activism and it shaped strategies for strengthening and challenging unions; as such, it is an important dimension of labour activity experienced over many years that can be used to inform debates on union revitalization in the current conjuncture.

### **The New Social Movements and Women's Labour Organizing: Gender Identity and Political Vision**

The 1960s saw new social movements emerge around the world. As women, student and "new left" organizations came into view, an alternative politic emerged promoting widespread struggle for peace, greater democracy, economic equality, women's liberalization, civil rights and environmental sustainability. This new political environment created the groundswell for radical social change and established the conditions from which feminist unionists would first learn about direct action, advocacy, democratic process, strategic political alliances and grass roots organizing. At the same time, women activists expressed frustration about their unequal participation in 'the movement' and argued the need to create alternative approaches to organizing for change (Sargent, 1981). By the end of the sixties, many 'left' women activists in Canada (Rebick, 2005:18, 104) and the U.S (Milkman and Voss, 2004:10) shifted

their political involvement away from broad-based political struggles to become leaders in the women's movement and in trade unions.

Canadian women's union organizing first began in the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to a dominant male leadership and masculine union culture. As more women entered the labour market and joined unions, particularly in the newly organized public sector of the seventies, women struggled to define "women's issues", those that primarily advanced gender-specific equality for women within unions. Compared to the women's movement which competed over a variety of interpretive and strategic approaches to achieving women's emancipation and equality,<sup>8</sup> union women were largely focussed on a woman-centred strategy that sought to eradicate union and labour market barriers that prevented them from achieving representational and economic equality with men. In these early years of feminist unionism, women's mobilization revolved around promoting women as agents of political action within the labour movement. In Canada the decade of the seventies established fundamental issues for women, identifying them as a key constituent in labour struggles (Egan and Yanz, 1983:363).

Women's activity within unions has increased dramatically in the past decade. Women have been at the forefront of major union battles for the right to join a union, for the right to strike, against wage controls and concessions and for landmark gains on issues like maternity leave. Women have organized and fought for women's committees and caucuses, for equal pay and maternity leave to be negotiating priorities, and for unions to take up new and often controversial issues like child care, affirmative action, sexual orientation, sexual harassment and abortion.

This impressive list of demands, many of which remain firmly on the union agenda for women thirty years later (Briskin, 2006:26), appealed to female members based on their specific experience as a "woman" worker, caregiver, mother and trade unionist. In other words, women's particular group identity provided common cause to agitate for basic feminist labour demands.

It was through engagement in political action with women's movement organizations that many women labour activists developed a feminist ideology and feminist praxis. Participation in consciousness raising groups, which consisted of a small group of women who met as a collective in a non-hierarchical organizational arrangement to discuss women's experience of gender relations (sexism), radically altered their perception of women as an oppressed group in society and women's capacity to engage in collective struggle. According to American radical feminist Catherine MacKinnon, consciousness raising operated as both feminist method and political practice by transforming thought into action: (1989:95)<sup>9</sup>

The analysis that the personal is political came out of consciousness raising....Consciousness raising is a face-to-face social experience that strikes at the fabric of meaning of social relations between and among women and men by calling their givenness (sic) into question and reconstituting their meaning in a transformed and political way.

This new form of political practice legitimated women's subjective knowledge of their social experience and transformed their consciousness about the hegemony of male power in social relations. Identifying, and defining, sexual harassment at the workplace, for instance, was an outcome of consciousness raising.

A feminist viewpoint presented labour with an alternative politic that significantly challenged the subordinate position of women inside unions, and raised serious questions about women's inequality in the labour market and within society more generally. By taking into account "women's experience" traditional unionism was automatically challenged. Feminist demands steered unions away from a narrowly defined focus on bread and butter issues, the domain of conventional business unionism, to matters of "family" and sexuality and other issues within the sphere of women movement politics. This was the beginning of 'gendering' labour issues as the concerns of women defied masculine privilege and went far beyond the long-established labour/management industrial relations bargaining framework (e.g. for improved wages and benefits) to incorporate issues, such as sexual identity, child care or abortion.<sup>10</sup>

From the very beginning of women's organizing conventional conceptions of a union issue, and *unionism*, was being questioned and redefined by feminist unionists. It was largely because women union activists were involved in the women's movement that an alternative perspective of unionism took shape. Grassroots feminist organizations presented a whole different political ideology, offered alternative (feminist) organizational practices in contrast to the conventional bureaucratic approach of unions, and advanced a political program calling for fundamental, if not revolutionary, social change. The interaction and participation of union women with women's groups was to have lasting impact on the labour movement.

## II. Coalition Building: Labour and the Women's Movement Alliance

Many reviews of union renewal refer to the importance of building coalitions with the non-labour community including grass-roots or community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) involved in the environmental, women's and human rights movements (e.g. Milkman and Voss, 2004; Voss and Sherman, 2003) For instance, Kumar and Schenk, in their review of the union renewal literature, point out that "coalition-building is regarded as one of the most innovative strategies for union revitalization" and that links need to be drawn between "trade unions and other non-labour institutions in civil society" (2006:40). Frege and Kelly remark that, [i]n theory, unions might be able to increase their institutional power by accessing the power of social movements in civil society through building coalitions with these groups and therefore coalition building is our fifth union [revitalization] strategy (Frege and Kelly, 2004:35). Frege, Heery and Turner (2004) review trade union coalitions in the US, UK, Germany, Spain and Italy and argue that unions have been "pulled" toward coalition building when they are in need of resources or when they wish to pursue a broader social purpose to effect social change. Although these authors acknowledge an "integrative coalition" between women's movements and trade unions in

four countries (all but Spain), they do not allow that feminist union activism helped to broaden or transform the political objectives of labour movements in any significant way, nor do they imply that coalitions with the women's movement is a positive or desirable goal for labour. In general, within the renewal literature, political and community coalitions with non-labour groups is regarded as a fairly recent innovation of labour movements related to their need to mobilize support for unions and labour interests. The argument made here is that links with the women's movement by feminist trade unionists has influenced labour movements for many years; coalitions with women's movement groups, many of them grass-root organizations, built capacity for mobilization, expanded the constituency of labour organizing, reframed debates around union goals and unionism, and inspired visioning for social change.

For instance, in Canada in the seventies and eighties, the involvement of union women in women's movement organizations influenced how women labour activists thought about unions as organizations and the role of labour in movement building. There was a strong commitment by the women's movement to political coalitions and to an ideology of transformational social change. For instance, this feminist activist describes the 'radical' political agenda adopted by the International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) in the city of Toronto, a grass roots socialist feminist organization which established strong links to the labour community:

We agreed that capitalism must be fundamentally altered to achieve the liberation of women, that patriarchy and capitalism are interwoven, that mass action is necessary to win gains from the state, and that we need to make alliances with other progressive forces, particularly with the trade union movement, if we are to achieve our goals... .. we see building such a movement as a process of organizing coalitions of oppressed groups including women; immigrants, blacks and people of colour; lesbians and gays; and workers. (Egan, 1987:114-115)

Women unionists, motivated by this kind of 'feminist vision' for social change, encouraged unions to broaden the scope of labour politics. Madeleine Parent, a long-time trade union activist in Quebec<sup>11</sup>, emphasized the need for labour to challenge unequal power relations under capitalism, not only for women, but for all vulnerable members in society through forming political alliances outside labour circles:

... we cannot abstract ourselves from the whole of the community, we need the support of others and they need our support in the cause of social justice. I think it is important that women who are part of the trade union movement, also be part of the women's movement ... it is terribly important that we work in solidarity with men, with young people, with the elderly and with the disadvantaged minorities in our society who are suffering injustices which cry out for redress. In this kind of social solidarity we would be fighting for an alternative society, not one based on the market economy where the profit of a few large corporations is supposed to be of benefit to the whole of society. (Parent, 1989: 28-29)

Links with the women's movement demonstrated to unions that fighting for economic and social equality required more than engaging in struggle at the "point of production" (i.e. at the workplace), that it was necessary to broaden the base of labour activism, and that the political objectives of the labour movement

had to encompass much more than the usual economic demands commonly associated with collective bargaining, to incorporate issues related to the social needs of all citizens. In Canada there has been a long association between labour and community-based organizations. Writing in the early 1990s Linda Briskin explains some of this history:

In Canada the alliance of the last two decades between the movement of union women and the women's movement outside the unions provides a model for coalition-building. Many commentators date the anti-free trade movement [of the mid 1980s] as the turning point toward coalition politics in the union movement, but important groundwork prior to that time was laid by successful feminist coalitions among the New Democratic Party (NDP – Canada's social democratic party), trade union and community-based women's groups. (1994:103)

Since the early seventies various coalitions between labour and women's organizations were forged on issues such as child care, pay equity, abortion, immigrant and migrant (domestic) labour, employment standards legislation, and precarious employment. Additionally, as noted below, labour women expanded organizing efforts to incorporate waged and unwaged reproductive work such as work performed by housewives (wages for housework) and paid domestic workers.<sup>12</sup>

On a strategic level, too, the labour movement learned that alliances with the women's movement could be an important tactical move for building mass support for labour issues, as Judy Darcy, a high profile Canadian trade union leader points out:

It was the alliance with the women's movement that showed the first organizational commitment of the labour movement to social unionism. We were able to build recognition in the labour movement that women are a major ally. During the Eaton's [department store] strike, there was a rallying cry around women's issues. The Fleck [auto parts manufacturing] strike, too, was an important landmark, where people in the labour movement came to understand that there was another movement out there that could be an ally. (cited in Rebick, 2005:99)

The International Women's Day Committee, mentioned above, was a key supporter of the Fleck and Eaton strikes and many other work stoppages involving a majority of women (Egan and Yanz, 1983:366-369; Ritchie, 1987:76-78). In fact, a common sphere for mobilizing strategic alliances between unions and women's groups in Canada was around strike actions. A particularly poignant example was a nation wide strike for maternity leave led by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), a large federal union representing public sector workers across the country. The president of CUPW, Claude Parrot, wrote to 500 women's groups across Canada asking for their strike support, explaining the union's position that child bearing is a social responsibility, that it is unfair for women to be financially penalized for having children, and that men have a right to participate in family life. Women's movement organizations responded positively by holding rallies, press conferences and demonstrations, as well as picketing, in a show of support for the postal workers. The 42 day strike was one of the first to widely politicize the feminist union demand for seventeen weeks of paid leave, a demand that was won in the



final days of the strike in 1981.<sup>13</sup> The women's movement was pivotal in winning this precedent-setting battle:

.. .the attention focused on the issue [paid maternity leave] by women's organizations over the previous ten years was important in creating a climate in which such a struggle would be successful. The union leadership saw the opportunity that had been created and was prepared to take advantage of it, despite the fact that it might be controversial among their own members. (White, 1990:162)

Strikes and organizing campaigns that were supported by women's movement organizations educated the labour movement, and the wider public, about the plight of women's work lives, especially the problem of systemic sexism observable in such issues as maternity leave, sexual harassment and unequal pay for women.

### **The Labour-Feminist Alliance in the Struggle for Pay Equity**

The coalition between organized labour and feminist groups was especially significant in the struggle for pay equity. In the 70s, 80s and early 90s in large industrialized economies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe women's groups engaged in widespread political action demanding policy reforms to raise women's wages (e.g. Acker, 1989; Burton, 1991, Evans and Nelson, 1989; Fudge and McDermott, 1991; Lewis, 1988; Sales and Hegewisch, 1999; Strachan and Burgess, 2004).<sup>14</sup> In the fight for pay equity in the US, for example, trade unions joined with feminists in community-based coalitions in dozens of states across the country (e.g.; Blum, 1991; Johnson, 1994; McCann, 1994). Feminists took up leading roles in these campaigns, acting as union representatives, government officials, researchers, lawyers and women's rights advocates.<sup>15</sup> According to one commentator of pay equity "... without the active participation of feminist leadership "...women workers [would not have] develop[ed] a deeper gender consciousness and more independent posture toward their union brothers and officials [to press for pay equity] than otherwise would be the case" (McCann, 1994:120).

The labour-feminist alliance (Cuneo, 1990) demanding fair wages for women contributed enormously to the development of a "new gender politics" within labour movements (Hallock, 2001:152). Because the pay equity process required systematic and "scientific" analyses comparing the relative value of work performed by women in comparison to men, unions were sensitized to the gender power imbalance experienced by women on a daily basis at the workplace. Job comparison showed how women are "differently" situated in the labour market by making visible the countless forms of gender bias operating in the labour market. For instance, some of the causal factors associated with gender wage discrimination that were identified included: the pervasiveness of the male breadwinner norm; the over valuation of male-defined skills and knowledge in comparison with caring and interpersonal work performed by women; and the over representation of women and visible minorities in feminized part-time,

low-wage service occupations lacking union representation. Unions, particularly those in the public sector with large female memberships, were actively persuaded by pay equity activists to engage in the equal pay struggle. Labour responded by leading mass political mobilization campaigns, lobbying for legislative reforms, undertaking policy analysis, pursuing litigation strategies, and negotiating gender wage increases at the bargaining table. These activities had an enormous affect on the internal life and culture of labour organizations and labour movements. For instance, as labour began to seriously confront employers about their power to define the value of work performed by women (Acker, 1989:22), unions inevitably began to be challenged on their own gender labour practices. Pay equity provided a political opening for union women to push forward on equity demands both in the area of labour market policy<sup>16</sup> and in regard to internal union policy, especially concerning leadership and the gender-biased culture within labour movements. In this sense, the pay equity struggle of the eighties and nineties marked an important turning point in transforming the gender power dynamic within labour movements and it still remains a powerful strategic force for equity mobilization.<sup>17</sup>

### **III. Organizing the Unorganized: Women Workers First**

One of the first areas of innovation initiated by labour in the transforming global economy was in the sphere of union organizing. As decreasing union density compelled trade union movements, especially in the U.K., Australia and North America, to re-examine their approaches to organizing and to seek new members from sectors of the economy traditionally ignored by unions, it became more and more apparent that men in manufacturing and construction no longer represent the normative worker in the global workplace (e.g. Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Cobble, 1993; Colgan and Ledwith, 2002; Spalter-Roth et. al., 1994). Hence, union renewal scholars often ask questions about whether there has been a change in strategy and commitment to membership recruitment since the onslaught of neo-liberal globalization (e.g. Heery and Adler, 2004). As Fairbrother and Yates note (2003:17):

Unions paid little strategic attention to, and invested few resources in, actively organizing the unorganized. Even in the USA, where membership decline was evident in the 1960s, much earlier than in the other [Anglo-American] countries, organizing was not a priority.

It is often observed that a shift occurred, usually starting in the mid 80s and into the 90s , to recognizing that a more aggressive stance is needed by organized labour around organizing new constituencies of workers (e.g.,Behrens, Hamann and Hurd, 2004:21, Kumar and Schenk, 2006:37-39; Kumar and Murray, 2006: 207; Yates, 2006:230). Specifically, women, who are predominantly employed in flexible, low-wage, and insecure jobs, were increasingly seen to typify the 'model worker' in the service based economy and were singled out for recruitment. Moreover, over the past twenty years unions began to invest in new organizing initiatives by hiring organizers, targeting specific sectors for unionization, such as

the private service sector where women and youth predominate, (e.g. Milkman and Voss, 2004) and revised organizing approaches to meet the needs of a diverse workforce (e.g. Yates, 2003:231).

While it is true that greater emphasis and additional resources have been dedicated to organizing in recent years, it is also important to not lose sight of the historic continuities around *strategic* approaches to organizing the unorganized. Women have long been the target of unionization and new organizational methods, or models, were created by feminist unionists and other labour activists as early as the 1960s and 1970s to appeal to a feminized workforce (e.g. Colgan and Ledwith, 2002; Tait, 2005). As explained by these feminist authors, labour women influenced recent trade union strategy in Australia, Britain, Canada and Sweden: (Howell and Mahon, 1996).

Strategies for renewal have often been influenced by modes of action, forms of organization, mechanisms of representation and communication and types of discourse that were originally developed with women wage earners in mind.

Women's labour organizing pointed the way for re-examining conventional strategies of union organizing. Past organizing by feminist unionists sensitized labour to the problems faced by women, and other minority workers, differently situated in the global labour market. As discussed below, women's organizing starting in the 1960s, especially in Canada and the US, challenged the *form* of unionism adopted by labour movements by promoting woman-centred models of organizing. Further, feminist ideology, and interaction with the women's movement, helped redefine the goals of organizing, placing greater emphasis on activism and collective struggle as opposed to building union membership "numbers" (see: Heery and Adler, 2004:45). The activities of women unionists was essential and necessary background work for revising labour strategies and modes of representation to better address the concerns of diverse groups of workers within the neo-liberal global market. The union renewal scholarship often fails to sufficiently acknowledge these contributions by feminist organizing and incorporate into its analysis the insights, and contributions from, the history of women's labour campaigns in labour movements.

### **Labour Women Organize**

From the very beginnings of women's labour activism connections with women's groups influenced organizing objectives and how organizing was carried out. In general, campaigns were led by women and informed by feminist organizing principles. Unlike traditional unionization approaches, women's groups focussed on community identity, such as women's identity as service workers, to create solidarity and commitment to collective action. Women's organizing also recognized the social value of paid and unpaid reproductive labour, broadening the direction of labour campaigns. The women's movement struggle to make visible the significance of work performed by women in the household led to new conceptions about valuing family work and paid domestic labour including recognizing the intrinsic

worth of this work (the skill involved in child care, food preparation, tension-management, cleaning) and its role in social reproduction under capitalism. Numerous women's groups in Canada and the US devised creative strategies in the 1960s and 1970s to campaign for greater recognition of women's unpaid family work.<sup>18</sup> Acknowledging the social significance of unpaid household work led activists to take into account women's double day of labour (i.e. performing both paid and unpaid work), which resulted in revising strategies about how best to organize non-unionized women, as well as women members inside unions. Moreover, connections were made between the devaluation of women's work in the home and the social construction of low-wage 'feminine' or reproductive work, such as caring and personal service work, in the labour market. Women labour activists reached out to non-union women in sex-typed occupations that had not previously been unionized, forging alliances with grass root local communities to organize and build movement support. A few examples from Canada and the United States show how early efforts to unionize working women fostered innovative organizing models, a kind of forerunner to alternative organizing strategies that were to emerge later in labour movements.

Many new and independent women's organizational structures emerged in the seventies because of a lack of support for feminism within labour movements. In Canada, feminist women who supported labour struggle and wished to unionize women, formed their own women-centred structures to overcome the obstacles they experienced from organized labour. In 1972 the Service, Office and Retail Workers of Canada (SORWUC), a self-described "grass roots, feminist union" (Lowe, 1980:32) was formed by women labour activists to unionize workers in service sectors where women predominate. Despite a weak commitment by the Canadian labour movement to SORWUC, the union certified 26 units in the banking industry.<sup>19</sup> Eventually limited resources and an important legal decision restricting certification (i.e. unionized) units to bank branches in small, scattered locations, undermined the momentum of the campaign, and the union was unable to continue its organizing efforts. While SORWUC was relatively short-lived, its alliance with the women's movement sustained, and informed, other organizing achievements, as this activist explains: (Jean Rands cited in Rebick, 2005:91)

We got our confidence from the women's movement. We were intimidated, but we supported each other and kept reminding ourselves that organizing was our right...we believed that workers should be the ones negotiating, rather than trade union leaders. Collective agreements should be readable by workers too – short and well indexed and written in plain language.

Other autonomous feminist groups with strong ties to the Canadian women's movement included the Association of University and College Employees (AUCE) and Organized Working Women (OWW).<sup>20</sup> The AUCE successfully organized support staff at the University of British Columbia, bargaining a collective agreement in 1973 with "feminist stuff" such as a "personal clause about not having to run errands and make coffee" (Jean Rands cited in Rebick, 2005:89). The OWW was established to promote women's issues in the labour movement and was instrumental in supporting a Women's Committee in the

Ontario Federation of Labour, the first women-only committee to be formed in a labour central in Canada.<sup>21</sup>

In the United States one of the better known women-centred organizing models initiated in the seventies was the 9 to 5 Association. The organizing work of this Association was ground breaking in being one of the first to systematically direct its mobilizing efforts to the large feminized non-union clerical workforce. The original aim of the Association was not unionization per se, but creating group solidarity through community based actions that raised awareness of clericals unfair pay and working conditions. By the end of the seventies 9 to 5 formed National District 925, in alliance with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). District 925 functioned nation-wide as a union local “for women and by women”, tailoring its organizing strategies specifically to working women’s needs. The Association experimented with alternative organizing approaches such as opening a workers’ centre in the city of Cincinnati to: (Lipsig-Mumme, 1999:15):

...test out the possibilities of city-wide sectoral organising of clerical workers. From the union’s perspective, it was to be a new way to get into the workplace, not to target particular employers, but to aim to unionise 1% of all clerical workers in Cincinnati, then 10%, then 30%... [As] one activist said, “the 9 to 5 Association is more innovative than most unions allow”. And the “Dignity Dollars” which they distributed through out the financial district, or the “Rate Your Job” leaflets with which they papered downtown Cincinnati, attest to their creativity and ability to speak to non-union workers about their issues.

By seeing itself as an extension of the community and rethinking the role of the union (and union membership) as the sole mechanism for organizing, 925 successfully organized thousands of librarians, college and university support staff, day care, home health care and other government workers across the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Another innovative organizing model, also directed at service workers, developed in the United States in the university sector over the period of the seventies and eighties. Women support staff unionized numerous prestigious academic institutions, including Harvard University, which devised one of the more innovative organizing approaches referred to as the Harvard model. The 1987-88 union drive combined female feminist leadership with grassroots style organizing that radically challenged traditional union methods (Hurd, 1993). The organizers contacted workers one-on-one (as opposed to leafleting) where conversations about powerlessness and the devaluation of women’s work could be encouraged and freely discussed. Collective rank-and-file activism was promoted creating a feeling of community and personal connection, and allowed workers themselves to define organizing tactics and union issues sensitive to women’s needs. New and original union demands were devised including the demand for child care scholarships, extensive family leave, and the implementation of a non-adversarial model for resolving workplace disputes. The autonomy given by the parent union (AFSCME) allowed organizers to creatively fashion a new organizing strategy for a workplace where a majority of women “workers shared

a common identity” and “pro-feminist union organizers defined certain issues that [also] fostered gender consciousness among workers” (Hurd, 1993:323).

As these few case examples demonstrate, the post WWII model of unionism started to be redefined and challenged by women’s organizing beginning in the early seventies. The very fact that women led campaigns organizing feminized service occupations using their own unique organizing strategies involving feminist methods such as consciousness raising and non-hierarchical approaches to decision-making was a major, if not radical, shift from the traditional masculine approach of unionizing industrial male workers en mass in large factory settings. Feminist unionists were taking important steps toward gendering organizing strategy by altering the culture and objectives of labour struggle. Instead of a complete emphasis on expanding the membership base, women’s organizing concentrated on mobilizing women workers to undertake collective action, to reform their gender consciousness, and to bring them into a labour community focussed, not just on workplace issues but on social movement change.

#### **IV. Internal Organizing: Women and Equity Representation in Unions**

Another important theme threaded throughout the union renewal literature is the importance of rebuilding unions, and labour movements, by developing new strategies and organizational approaches to engage the participation of the general union membership, and thereby foster greater internal democracy and vitality within labour movements(e.g. Behren, Hamann and Hurd, 2004:22; Kumar and Murray, 2006:208; Schenk, 2003: 248-250). Attention is paid to promoting more rank and file involvement in union decision making, creating avenues for inclusive participation of minority or equity groups and advancing their leadership in the union hierarchy as well as in union organizing campaigns (Milkman and Voss, 2004; Sharpe, 2004; Weir, 2006). In the following discussion we see that women trade union activists made considerable inroads in challenging unions around internal democracy by creating innovative organizational modes of representation, such as Women’s Committees, inside unions and labour federations, which served to increase membership involvement and conditioned an environment conducive to building leadership within equity constituencies. These ‘new’ structures of representation went a long way toward transforming the culture of labour organizations, especially on issues of gender discrimination and leadership, and oriented labour movement goals toward social movement unionism. As discussed below, equity organizing, both historically and into the present, lies at the heart of women’s labour activism.

Labour support for women’s issues was sustained and reinforced by union women who organized themselves into separate representational structures inside labour bodies. Starting in the seventies labour women in Canada, the U.K., the U.S., Australia as well as some European nations, constituted women-only committees and reform caucuses where women could meet in a non-sexist culture to discuss concerns specific to women (e.g. Beccalli, 1996; Colgan & Ledwith, 2000; 2002; Briskin, 1994; 1999;

2000, Hunt, 2002; Parker & Gruelle, 1999; Franzway, 2000; Tait, 2005). Often referred to as separate organizing, these groups were structured in non-hierarchical, and less bureaucratic ways to encourage women's participation, and were a deliberate attempt to level power relations in unions so as to promote inclusive and collective decision making. In Canada Women's Committees, for example, were instrumental in creating anti-discrimination policy prohibiting sexist and other discriminatory behaviour in union meetings.<sup>23</sup> Separate organizing raised questions about union priorities that ignored women, resisted unequal power structures that disempowered women and facilitated women into leadership roles. As this former member of Saskatchewan Working Women (SWW), a women's labour organization (similar to Organizing Working Women in Ontario) formed in the 1970s in this Canadian province explains: (Sheila Roberts cited in Rebick, 2005:92)

Women got confidence from each other. As a result, the future president of the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour) came up through SWW. The head of the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union came from SWW. The chairperson of the Labour Relations Board too. Nearly all the women staff reps in unions came from SWW.

As a result of separate organizing in Canada union women demanded, and were successful in attaining, affirmative action positions on the executives of central labour bodies by the early 1980's (White, 1993). Separate organizing proved to have far ranging impact, not only in challenging the masculine culture of unions, but also in contesting the overall direction of labour movement goals. More than any other aspect of women's union activism, separate organizing provided the foundational bedrock for developing a gender and equity perspective of trade unionism (e.g. Briskin, 2002; Colgan and Ledwith, 2002; Sugiman, 1994).

### **Equity Diversity: Expanding Membership Involvement**

Women's union activism generated new approaches and perspectives on who to organize. Community coalitions, especially with women's organizations, led to growing awareness of the need to take into account *differing* experiences among women and other minority groups. Gender-specific labour demands that were first put forward based on a conception of a "universal women's identity" started to be re-evaluated in response to views of minority women whose experiences differed from the 'core' constituency of white, and typically, middle-class, women. The experience of racialised women in consciousness raising groups, for example, exposed 'different' forms of oppression among women.<sup>24</sup> While feminists had previously critiqued a 'universal male standard' as unfair to women, now minority women began to criticize essentialist notions of 'universal womanhood.'" As this feminist scholar puts it, "projecting the experience of some as though it were universal" ignores the multiplicity of oppression situated in differences of race, class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and other social experiences (Minow, 1993:340).<sup>25</sup>

Within labour movements recognition of diversity led to alternative equality strategies, not only for women, but for all minorities. New constituencies such as racialised minorities, gays/lesbians, the disabled and other marginalized union members, sought political recognition and structures of representation similar to those that women originally had pursued inside labour movements. In Canada by the end of the nineties, as Linda Briskin explains, women's organizing had firmly established the groundwork for building diverse union constituencies:

...past experience suggests that union women's separate organizing has been instrumental in raising issues of other marginalized groups. Highlighting differences between female and male workers and gender-specific patterns of discrimination has encouraged many unions to respond to the concerns of other groups of workers with specific needs: in the Canadian context, immigrant workers, gay and lesbian workers, workers from First Nations, and those with disabilities. (1999:551)

Sexual minorities in Canada especially benefit from the organizing work of women who paved the way for gay and lesbians to form caucuses, thereby opening space to debate and propose policy initiatives challenging unions on issues of sexual orientation discrimination (Hunt, 2002:272). Racialised constituencies, too, built upon the feminist challenge to rid labour movements and labour markets of systemic racism. Racial minority constituencies in Canadian unions have led anti-racism forums, expanded harassment policy to include race harassment; promoted the integration of anti-race training into labour education, and have advanced equity and employment policy to improve racialised minority worker representation in the labour market (Briskin, 2002: 38; Leah, 1999: 114) . As equity-seeking groups continued to organize, affirmative action designated seats were extended to racial minorities on central labour bodies by the early nineties, and later in the same decade, for the disabled, gay/lesbian persons and Aboriginals.

That women's organizing contributed to building and diversifying the constituency base of labour movements is not unique to Canada. As Hunt observes in regard to sexual diversity, "[t]he Canadian experience has some parallels in countries such as Australia, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent the United States... [in that] early union activity has tended to follow progress on women's issues..."(2002:273). In the U.K. as Colgan and Ledwith explain, "the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has moved from running a women's conference, since 1925, to organizing a black members' conference and a lesbian and gay workers' conference in the 1990s. In 2000 it established a conference for disabled members" (2002:16).

Recently, Aboriginal organizing in Canada has begun to flourish. In some unions collective agreement language to protect Aboriginal culture is being devised, alternative approaches to unionizing specific to Aboriginal communities developed, and employment equity plans formulated to better represent Aboriginals in the workforce (Moran, 2005; Page, 2005) . The provincial British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) has made entire Aboriginal communities the focus of organizing campaigns, while the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), a federal union



representing workers across Canada, has successfully organized a diamond mine in northern Canada with an explicit focus on Aboriginal issues.<sup>26</sup>

Before concluding this section, it is crucial to point out that in the United States the history of racial minority unionization began much earlier than in other national contexts, such as Canada. African American labour activism began in the early twentieth century and was revived in the 1960s and 1970s when rank and file caucuses were formed inside unions to resist racism experienced at the workplace and within the labour movement (see e.g. Parker and Gruelle, 1999:79-80). Inspired by the civil rights movement and influenced by radical black organizations such as the Black Panthers, these black caucuses espoused an ideology of racial equality and used direct action (e.g. plant shutdowns) to achieve their goals. Despite a “deep-seated sexism” within some caucuses, these autonomous black organizations were clearly a progressive force within American unions (Tait, 2005:58).<sup>27</sup>

Building equity constituencies created a vehicle for reaching out to communities outside labour to engage in collective struggle for social and economic justice. In recent years in the US and Canada unions have established coalitions with community-based groups, such as those allied with immigrant and migrant labour communities, to press for better and more inclusive labour protections. These coalitions have expanded the reach of organized labour to encompass groups difficult to organize (precarious workers) or the non-organizable (agricultural migrant workers) and encouraged labour organizations to engage in cross-border and international labour resistance strategies (e.g. Justicia 4 Migrant Workers; domestic workers).

## **V. Labour Internationalism: Women’s Contributions to Global Organizing**

A final subject in the trade union renewal scholarship concerns the issue of international unionism and global labour solidarity (e.g. Harrod and O’Brien, 2002; Munck, 2002; Turner, 2004). However, as Fairbrother and Hammer point out:

Surprisingly, there has been relatively little discussion of international unionism in the debates about trade union renewal or revitalization ... The prevailing focus has been on national unions...” (2005:406)

While there is little interest shown in labour internationalism within the broader union renewal literature, there is almost no discussion of the specific contributions of global women’s labour organizing. Below is a brief discussion of the organizing work of international trade union women, and other women labour activists, whose efforts have shaped discussion on matters of international trade and development policy, and on the complicated problem of setting international labour standards (i.e. the ‘social clause’). Remarkably, few references are made to international women trade unionist activism around the social clause debate, one of the most important and problematic debates within the international labour community in recent years.

Women's international labour organizing has been influenced by the global women's movement 'feminist politic' to "achieve gender equality and equity" worldwide (Antrobus, 2004:60; Munck, 2002:160). International women's groups began to systematically organize during the 1980s when structural adjustment policy implemented by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, severely altered the conditions of life for women, as Peggy Antrobus explains:

This [structural adjustment] policy framework demonstrated, as nothing else had done before, the gender and class biases inherent in an economic model that focused on economic growth while apparently ignoring social, cultural, and political factors. An understanding of the gendered nature of these policies and their impact on the poor, especially on women and on those for whom they cared – children, the elderly and disabled – served to radicalize large sections of women's movements worldwide. (2004:67)

Women's groups caucused, networked, organized coalitions and formed alliances with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to debate strategy and formulate gendered analyses of women's socio-economic position within the global economy. Such analyses highlighted how women are super-exploited in the sphere of production through export-led development in manufacturing that depends on low-wage, young female and flexible labour, particularly in the highly exploitative export-processing zones, but also in services where women are hired to perform exceedingly routinized (e.g. data and teleprocessing) and personal service (e.g. domestic, sex trade) work. Global women's groups also pointed to the impact of this development policy model in the sphere of reproduction, showing that reductions in the delivery of state funded social services such as education, health care, and general welfare programmes harmed the economic and social well-being of family/households. In the South capitalist expansion has contributed to environmental degradation, compromising food and water quality, reducing access to fertile land and undermining the health of the economically marginalized (Petchesky, 2003).

These patterns of development, begun in the eighties, only intensified over the nineties, and beyond. For instance, a large part of the struggle for women's equality has been to insist that governments recognize women's unpaid labour in the household. United Nations (UN) conferences on women devoted discussion to this issue resulting in member governments signing agreements in 1975 and 1985 to redress problems related to the devaluation of women's unpaid domestic work. However, as Meg Luxton explains, by 1995 at the Beijing NGO conference, women from all 185 participating countries reported a decline in the position of women in their countries and noted that women's unpaid contributions had increased while policies and services designed to support them had in almost all countries [had] been reduced or eliminated" (2005:8). The lack of commitment by countries to address the issue of women's unpaid domestic labour was attributed to the widespread adoption of neo-liberal policy.

The gendered analyses developed by women's organizations established the strategic groundwork for further global organizing. As international institutions, like the World Bank, played an ever expanding role in directing the world economy, women's groups had established the knowledge-base with

which to vigorously respond to their initiatives. When the World Trade Organization (WTO) was launched in 1995 it became a focal point for women's organizing, particularly feminist labour organizing.<sup>28</sup>

In 1996 the Informal Group on Gender and Trade (IWGTT), comprised of NGOs and trade unions, met at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Singapore where the proposal for a 'social clause' to enforce International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards in the WTO trade agreement was first debated.<sup>29</sup> More than any other aspect of global policy, the 'social clause' crystallized for trade unions the broad implications of trade liberalization on labour worldwide. It was also the first time international attention focussed on the specific gender impact of global free trade. For instance, the IWGTT asked: "what a social clause would mean for women and what its significance is in an overall campaign for workers rights" (Hale, 1998:28). The IWGTT was quick to point out that women working in the informal economy in agricultural, or as homeworkers at the end of the contract chain, would not benefit from a social clause; neither were resources provided to ensure enforcement of anti-discrimination measures; and women's right to 'reproductive freedom' through maternity leave, childcare, or provision to refuse overtime work were absent, as was any protections against sexual and physical abuse at the workplace (Hale, 1998:29-30). The IWGTT, and other women's groups such as the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) immediately recognized the shortcomings of trade-linked labour standards for women whose lives are often shaped by factors far removed from the formal economy, and whose participation in unwaged work (social reproduction) is not acknowledged by policy makers. Even in the formal economy expanded trade differentially impacts on the quality and work standards of working women as labour market growth depends on gender segmented markets where inequality of wages and poor work conditions including lack of safety standards, long hours and work intensification are pervasive.

The organizing work of feminists which clearly identified the gender-specific impact of globalization on women's labour, influenced the policy perspective of the international labour community especially of global unions, such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).<sup>30</sup> The work of the ICFTU Women's Committee has been extensive; it has repeatedly argued for the "inclusion of gender perspectives in all trade union policies and programmes". It devised an ICFTU Charter of Rights of Working Women, and has called for including women's workers rights in the policies of the WTO, World Bank and regional trade agreements, as well as demanding that the policies of international agencies and international financial institutions be assessed from a "gender dimension".

In addition, the ICFTU has asked affiliates to intensify efforts to target organizing women (who represent 80 percent of workers) in the Export Processing Zones, to organize women in precarious employment as well as youth, and to protect the rights of migrant workers. As stated in the ICFTU Final Resolution of the Eighteenth World Congress:

Gender discrimination is evident throughout the world in access to resources, educational and economic opportunities, political power and leadership positions. The rate of women's participation in the global workforce is now about 40% and growing, but they are paid between 30 and 60% less than men, concentrated in low skill, undervalued and insecure jobs, frequently experience sexual harassment in the workplace, and suffer

more and longer unemployment. Statements of increased political commitment and more extensive legislative provisions for equality, while important, have not proven adequate to uproot discrimination, particularly its hidden forms. In addition, women continue to bear the largest burden of family responsibilities. (December, 2004)

Inserting a gender analysis or perspective in discussions on global capital and international economic development redefined the contours of debates on important issues like trade liberalization and global labour regulation. International women trade unionists, in alliance with the global women's movement, identified women as central actors in the global economy, mostly as highly exploited workers in the formal and informal economies, who desperately need protection from trade unions as well as from global institutions whose policies directly impact on their work and day to day lives.

### **What does gendering do?**

As a result of women's organizing, the labour movement in Canada, and elsewhere, experienced decisive challenges to traditional unionism. As the above review attempts to point out, the greatest challenges occurred whenever a gender politic was brought to bear on the issues, structures, practices and culture of labour organizations. As the woman-centred strategy to eliminate sexism in unions evolved and expanded to a broader union-equity base, there emerged a stronger commitment to social justice, an agenda encompassing support for gender, racialised and other minority group equality, eventually extending to international labour and human rights, sustainable development and global solidarity. Various forms of women's activism from advancing new constituencies into the union fold, through encouraging greater rank and file participation, mobilizing both union and non-union workers in coalitions with grass roots community groups, and developing an equity approach to deliver substantive equality gains to the marginalised inside, and outside, the labour movement contributed to a coherent labour strategy to further economic and social justice. It is worth emphasizing that the history of women's labour organizing over the past thirty years can broadly be described as encompassing the following internal and external movement strategies: coalition building (alliances with women's movement organizations and grass root community groups); organizing the unorganized (e.g. non-union clerical and other service workers); political action campaigns (e.g. pay equity); inclusive democratic practices promoting greater membership participation (e.g. separate organizing of equity groups); diversifying labour leadership (women and minorities); labour internationalism and promoting an alternative vision of social change (feminist ideology and practice). All of these strategies contributed to a broader conception of unionism, altering how unions conceived of themselves and how they structured their organizations. An equality-driven framework, first begun by union women during second wave feminism, channelled labour struggle toward a transformative political program internally within the trade union movement, and externally as part of a larger social movement confronting globalization.

Women's organizing imparted to labour movement culture a feminist or 'gender politic' – a discourse that incorporates recognition of difference and that strives for substantive equality gains (i.e. equality of outcome) for women and other equity-seeking groups. This approach facilitated a transformative strategy along two dimensions. First, by internally challenging trade union organizations, largely, though not exclusively, in relation to equity representation, traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic structures were altered, expanding the basis for more inclusive and participatory involvement by women and other disadvantaged workers. This participatory involvement derived from union women's demands for a stronger democratic voice within labour organizations, and from new 'gender-sensitive' structures for organizing (non-union) women that were also relevant to workers of different racial, ethnic and sexual identities. Second, by opposing systemic gender inequality, and other systemic inequities, women's activism moved labour in a direction of social justice unionism through its alliance with the women's movement whose broad agenda for gender equality, and other social equity demands, enlarged and transformed the very basis of labour struggle. For instance, the struggle for recognition of women's unpaid work in the home is indicative of a decisive shift in thinking about "women's work" that altered perceptions about the social value of women's paid and unpaid employment in the economy and led to mobilization around specific policy demands (e.g. pay equity).

The struggle for women's equality gendered the labour movement in Canada, and elsewhere, by enlarging the goals of labour movement activism to encompass a diverse range of equity challenges. Some of these include: challenging masculine culture of unions and of labour markets (e.g. male breadwinner ideal); identifying the intersection between productive and reproductive labour (e.g. child care; work/life balance; parental/family leave); resisting low-wage feminized service work (precarious employment, gender wage equity; sex work); promoting human rights (e.g. international labour regulation; pay equity movements, same sex rights); and international solidarity (e.g. women and trade issues). In these equity struggles political engagement is motivated and understood in collective, as opposed to individual terms and thus requires group or solidaristic forms of action. Moreover, effective political action requires confronting fundamental (gender) power relations that point in the direction of transformative change. Flowing from women's organizing is a type of 'equity model' of unionism that often challenged the roots of traditional union objectives and culture, and thereby promotes a transformative politic within labour movements.

## Conclusion

How gender is incorporated into the union revitalization project was the central problematic of this paper. That women's union organizing initiatives promote labour organizing as a social movement through its wide ranging political program to further economic and social justice is not always recognized in the union renewal literature. For instance, as Christopher Schenk reminds us::

The need to support people's various identities as feminists, environmentalists, or members of a particular ethnic community and concomitantly to create the necessary unity to defend their needs and aspirations as workers is still before us. (2003:253)

I agree with Schenk that labour in Canada, and in other national contexts, must continue to represent and advocate for the needs and interests of feminists and other social movement activists, as well as equity groups. But I would also point out that this has been an ongoing struggle which needs to be taken into full consideration in evaluating tactics and practices of union renewal. Equity organizing is seldom addressed as a coherent strategy for labour movement change, but rather it is understood as one factor, among many, for revitalizing unions. Simply inserting women and equity-seeking groups into the existing union structures without understanding that the 'equity project' is part of a larger 'gender politic' to transform labour as a social movement will not alter the policies and practices of trade unions. In the current era of labour struggle in which unions are losing ground as a force of political opposition to capital, women's organizing continues to hold out possibilities for reinvigorating labour movements, and needs to be considered in debates on the future of unions.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 1996. "Introduction" in Monica Threfall (ed.) *Mapping the Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North*. London, Verso, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> For a few excellent reviews of this literature see, for example: Tito Boeri, Agar Brugiavini and Lars Calmfors (eds.) 2001. *The Role of Unions in the Twenty-First Century: A Study for the Fondazione Rodolfo De Benedetti*. New York: Oxford; Carola Frege and John Kelly (eds.) 2004. *Varieties of Unionism: Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy*. Toronto: Oxford University Press; Peter Fairbrother and Charlotte Yates (eds.) 2003. *Trade Unions in Renewal: A Comparative Study* London: Continuum. Jeffrey Harrod and Robert O'Brien (eds.) 2002. *Global Unions? Theory and strategies of organized labour in the global political economy*. London: Routledge; Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk (eds.). 2006. *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*. Toronto: Broadview and Garamond Press and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Anil Verma and Thomas Kochan (eds.) 2004. *Unions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An International Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Ronaldo Munck. 2002. *Globalisation and Labour*. London: Zed Books; V. Jose (ed.) 2002. *Organized Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper the organizing work of women labour activists refers to a wide range of activities by women in unions and women working in labour friendly organizations, which may or may not be officially affiliated with labour unions. The terms 'women's organizing', 'women's labour activism', 'feminist unionism', 'feminist trade unionism' and 'women's organizing initiatives', encompasses both internal organizing efforts such as equity representation and external organizing such as organizing non-union workers in feminized sectors and community-labour alliances. Also see note 4.

<sup>4</sup> In Canada, the topic of union revival or union renewal is fairly new. Until quite recently, union density remained relatively stable in Canada and therefore the issue of union decline was not seen as a major concern or a subject of academic debate, for instance, Joseph Rose and Gary Chaison (2001) argue the need for caution in regard to the notion of "revival" as there is limited evidence to support the notion of lasting or permanent change which constitutes "union renewal" in Canada, or the USA, see "Unionism in Canada and the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Prospects for Revival". *RI/Industrial Relations*, Vol. 56, No. 1:34-62. Other Canadian sources include, for example: Pradeep Kumar and Gregor Murray, "Canadian Union Strategies in the Context of Change". 2002 *Labor Studies Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter):1-28; Charlotte Yates. 2000. "Staying the Decline in Union Membership: Union Organizing in Ontario, 1985-1999". *RI/Industrial Relations*, Vol. 55, No.4:640-674; also see articles in Fairbrother and Yates (eds.) 2003. *Trade Unions in Renewal: A Comparative Study* London: Continuum and Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk (eds.). 2006. *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*. Toronto: Broadview and Garamond Press and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Labour Congress in its 1997 report *Women's Work*, refers to an 'equity and equality agenda'. Linda Briskin defines equity agenda and equity project in theoretical terms in two articles. 1994 "Equity and Restructuring in the Canadian Labour Movement" *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 15. No.1:89-112 and 2002. "The equity project in Canadian Unions: Confronting the challenge of restructuring and globalization" in Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith (eds.) *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions: International Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'feminist unionism' refers to actions that are informed by feminist principles and feminist politics. However, some women union activists may not self-identify as "feminist" per se yet support actions that improve the situation of women in unions and within the broader labour movement. Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith found in their research on women union activists in the U.K. that women differ in respect of their "gender consciousness and trade union activism" but that women who are active in unions generally support "other women and doing something positive for women". See Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith. 2000 "Diversity, Identities and Strategies of Women Trade Union Activists". *Gender, Work and*

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*Organization* Vol. 7, No. 4: pp. 243-244 and 1994. "Women's Trade Union Activism: A Creative Force for Change and Renewal within the Trade Union Movement? Presented at the Annual Conference of Work, Employment and Society p. 18 cited in Linda Briskin 1999 "Feminisms, Feminization, and Democratization in Canadian Unions" in Karen Blackford, Marie-Luce Garceau and Sandra Kirby (eds.) *Feminist Success Stories*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

<sup>7</sup> According to Anil Verma and Thomas Kochan there have been at least 25 books published on the subject of union renewal since 1998. See their Introduction to *Unions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An International Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the politics within the early period of the second wave of the women's movement in Canada and the particular position of trade union feminists to the autonomous women's movement see: Heather Jon Maroney, "Feminism at Work:" in Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton (eds.) *Feminism and Political Economy: Women's Work, Women's Struggles*. Toronto, Methuen, 1987, pp.85-107; Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing For Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988. Judy Rebick. *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Toronto, Penguin, 2005. On the broader feminist debates in the United States, the U.K. and Europe during the second wave of the women's movement see Linda Nicholson (ed.) *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> "According to MacKinnon, "[a]s Marxist method is dialectical materialism, feminist method is consciousness raising: the collective critical reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it." Consciousness raising was highly influential in feminist theorizing and in feminist action especially around questions of women's domestic labour and sexuality. See Catherine MacKinnon. 1989. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 84 (and chapter 5). Canadian union activist Pat Gallagher speaks about her shift in gender consciousness as a result of consciousness raising groups in Judy Rebick, 2005. *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*, Toronto: Penguin, p. 12; Bianca Beccalli. 1996. "The Modern Women's Movement in Italy" in Monica Threfall (ed.) *Mapping the Women's Movement*. London: Verso, pp. 152-183.

<sup>10</sup> On the issue of abortion in the Canadian labour movement see Judy Darcy cited in Judy Rebick (ed.) *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Toronto, Penguin, 2005, p. 160 and Nancy Knickerbocker, "Bread and Roses: An Interview with Judy Darcy" in *Our Times*, Vol. 23, No. 1:16-23 in which she explains that abortion "was a class issue, just like access to health care and education are health issues. At the time, having the right to reproductive choice depended on whether or not you had money", p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> For an in depth discussion of Madeleine Parent's feminist contributions to Canadian labour and the women's movement see: Andree Levesque (ed.) 2005. *Madeleine Parent Activist*. Toronto: Sumach Press.

<sup>12</sup> Some of the labour-feminist coalitions include: the Equal Pay Coalition which advocated legislated pay equity in the province of Ontario; the Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada which continues its struggle for a federally funded national child care program for regulated child care centres in Canada; the Ontario Coalition of Abortion Clinics, whose first initiative was to legalize abortion and then sustain the right to services at publicly funded therapeutic abortion clinics; Women Against the Budget that advocates for an alternative budget policy supporting a broad set of social programs beneficial to women and other vulnerable groups; Women Against Trade in the Pro-Canada Network which mobilized an anti-free trade campaign in the 1980s against greater trade liberalization with the United States; Toronto Organizing For Fair Employment (TOFFE) "a community-based workers' organization committed to improving wages and working conditions", especially for precarious workers the majority of whom are young, immigrants, people of colour and women, and Fair Wages and Working Conditions For Homeworkers Coalition, a coalition formed in 1991 to advocate on behalf of industrial homeworkers, many of whom are immigrant women, to better wages and other minimum employment standards. See, for example, Linda Briskin.

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1994. "Equity and Restructuring in the Canadian Labour Movement" *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 15. No.1, pp. 103-104; Wendy McKeen. 2004. *Money in their Own Name: The Feminist Voice in Poverty Debate in Canada, 1970-1995*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 68-69; Alice de Wolff. 2006. "Privatizing Public Employment Assistance and Precarious Employment in Toronto" in Leah Vosko (ed.) *Precarious Employment: Understanding Labour Market Insecurity in Canada*. Kingston: McGill-Queens, pp. 182-199. On struggles around reproductive labour including housework see: Meg Luxton, "Working Class Women and Struggles Around Unpaid Work" Paper presented at Labouring Feminism and Feminist Working-Class History in North America and Beyond Conference, University of Toronto, Centre for the Study of the United States, 29 September- 2 October 2005.

<sup>13</sup> The first union to successfully bargain paid maternity leave in Canada was the CSN, the Confederation des syndicats Nationaux, in Quebec. As Monique Simard explains, "In 1979 I was chief negotiator for the Common Front, and I negotiated full maternity leave, twenty weeks at full salary, for the first time in Canada", cited in Judy Rebick. *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Toronto, Penguin, 2005, p. 52. For a discussion of the 1981 CUPW strike see Julie White. 1990. *Mail and Female: Women and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing and Jean-Claude Parrot. 2005. *My Union, My Life: Jean-Claude Parrot and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers*. Halifax: Fernwood, pp. 143-147.

<sup>14</sup> This certainly was not the first time that unions took up the issue of gender wage inequality. Unions began the process much earlier starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century over struggles for equal pay for equal work, and later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during wartime when women entered masculine occupations in munitions and other manufacturing plants. However, the development of pay equity movements in the 1980s was far more widespread in leading labour to systematically analyse gender wage inequities at the workplace. On gender wage struggles during World War II see, for example, Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987 on the US and Pamela Sugiman. *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, McCann observes that many of the leading American feminists involved in pay equity campaigns "emphasized that their rights-oriented activities were interrelated with [previous] involvement in community organizing, the anti- [Viet Nam] war movement and "the sixties" in general", a point that was made above about the impact of political experience on women's activism in Canada. See: Michael McCann. 1994. *Rights at Work: Pay Equity Reform and the Politics of Legal Mobilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Since the eighties almost every dimension of labour market policy from occupational health and safety, to job training, apprenticeships, and employment standards, has been subject to a gender-sensitive analysis. On policy issues in Canada see, for example, Judy Fudge. 1991. *Labour Law's Little Sister: the Employment Standards Act and the feminization of labour*. Ottawa: Centre for Policy Alternatives on employment standards legislation; on employment insurance see Ann Porter. 2003. *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Rebecca Johnson. 2002. *Taxing Choices: the Intersection between Class, Gender, Parenthood and the Law*. Vancouver: UBC Press on child tax policy; and Margaret Hillyard Little. 2005. *If I Had a Hammer: Retraining That Works*, Vancouver, UBC Press; Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003 on training, and Jane Stinson. 2004. "Why Privatization is a Women's Issue" in *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 23, Nos.3,4:18- 22, on the implications of privatization for women.

<sup>17</sup> The continuities around pay equity struggle is evident in recent pay equity activism in Canada. For instance, in Quebec the right to equal pay for work of equal value was first enacted in 1976 and the fight for this right continued into the 1980s and 1990s when the women's movement and union movement in the province argued for, and eventually won, a proactive pay equity law in 1996. This was achieved, in

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part, by the Women's Bread and Roses march in 1995. See: Jennifer Beeman, "Pay Equity in Quebec: A Right Unknown to the Women Workers Who Need It Most" in *Canadian Woman Studies*. Vol. 23, Nos. 3, 4:96-104. Also see, for example, Marcy Cohen and Marjorie Griffin Cohen, "The Politics of Pay Equity in B.C.'s Health Care System: The Role of Government, Multinational Corporations and Unions" pp. 72-77 and Jan Kainer and Patricia McDermott, "Pay Equity in the Sky: The Case of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines" pp. 78-83; Joan Allen and Monica Mulvihill, "Still Chasing Pay Equity: Grievances by York University Faculty Women" pp. 84-88 in the same issue of *Canadian Woman Studies*.

<sup>18</sup> In the US, for example, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) "envisioned [as] a national union of welfare recipients" was formed in the mid 1960s to improve compensation for female majority welfare recipients whose unwaged labour in the home was seen by this organization to be seriously devalued. Domestic workers campaigns such as the National Domestic Workers Union (NDWU) also emerged about the same time; it successfully organized paid domestics using new tactics which substantially increased their wages in large cities of the US such as New York and Washington. See Vanessa Tait, 2005. *Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor From Below*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, pp. 40-42. In Canada, the history of organizing poor women, including welfare recipients, in the 1960s and 1970s was also largely focussed on improving welfare rates for single mothers. Some of these groups formed in the 1970s in Ontario include: The Family Benefits Work Group; the Mother Led Union, the Mother's Action Group, to name a few. Interestingly, "the radical left (Trotskyist) group, Wages for Housework" tried to influence welfare mothers to argue for wages for performing domestic work. See: Wendy McKeen. 2004. *Money in their Own Name: The Feminist Voice in Poverty Debate in Canada, 1970-1995*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp.40- 44.

<sup>19</sup> There is a fairly large literature that has developed around the issue of union organizing in the finance sector in Canada. See, for example: Patricia Baker, 1993. "Reflections on Life Stories: Women's Bank Union Activism" in Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (eds.) *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy and Militancy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Rosemary Warskett, 1991. "Bank Worker Unionization and the Law" in *Studies in Political Economy* 34 (Spring):219-33; The Bank Book Collective. 1979. *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)*. Vancouver: Press Gang; Elizabeth J. Shilton Lennon. 1980. "Organizing the Unorganized: Unionization in the Chartered Banks of Canada". *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 18, No.2: 177-237; Graham Lowe. 1980. *Bank Unionization in Canada: A Preliminary Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for Industrial Relations.

<sup>20</sup> For a fuller discussion of some of the women activists involved in SORWUC and AUCE see Pat Baker, *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) formed the first Women's Committee in a labour central in Canada in 1961, it later joined the Human Rights Committee in 1968 and then reconstituted itself as a Women's Committee in 1978. In 1983 the OFL amended its constitution to mandate five seats to women and in the following year, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Canada's national labour federation, changed its constitution to mandate six women vice-presidents on the Executive Board. On the formation of Women's Committees in Canada see: Julie White, 1993. *Sisters & Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., chapter. 5.

<sup>22</sup> In 2001 District 925 restructured, merging with various other locals within SEIU. However, 9 to 5 continues to exist and organize with a National Office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin focusing on campaigns such as family leave, sexual harassment and anti-discrimination, workfare and nonstandard work. see: <http://9to5/rights/change> Accessed 2/9/2006.

<sup>23</sup> In Canada the Women's Committee in the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union devised anti-discrimination language in 1988 that is still used today. Interview, Peggy Nash, CAW, October 31, 2003, Toronto, Ontario.

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<sup>24</sup> Vijay Agnew explains how consciousness raising in the 1970s served to alienate many racialised women living in Canada whose experience as immigrants and racialised minorities did not match those of white middle class women who tended to dominate these groups. “Thousands of women from the Caribbean and Asian countries have come to Canada to work as domestics in white households... In this situation it is rare for women from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean to identify with white women as ‘victims’ on the basis of gender.” See Vijay Agnew. 1996. *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 76-82.

<sup>25</sup> As Martha Minow comments, “... feminist analyses have often presumed that a white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian, and able-bodied person is the norm behind “women’s experience”. See Martha Minow. 1993. “Feminist Reason: Getting It and Losing It” in D. Kelly Weisberg (ed.) *Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p. 339. First published J. Legal Educ. 47 (1988).

<sup>26</sup> Public Service Alliance of Canada Press Release, February 1, 2005. “PSAC-UNW, Dene Nation join forces to protect Dene workers’ rights.

<sup>27</sup> Through their activism black caucuses accomplished significant gains such as garnering millions of dollars from unions, and the federal government, to support extensive community development projects in poor black neighbourhoods. Ultimately, however, their struggle for economic justice did not hold sway over the mainstream labour movement which clung to a more conservative liberal ideology favouring equality of opportunity. As Vanessa Tait explains, union sponsored projects devised for poor blacks in the late 1960s were not developed in respect of ‘difference (2005:62):

Poorer [majority black] residents who couldn’t afford to start or own business were trained as workers. The Saugus Job Center’s Orientation Manual aimed to instil “punctuality” and “discipline” along with good grooming since “employers have little regard for that person whose dress brands him as “different”. Creating an obedient working class was high on the agenda, as was linking success in employment to individual attributes rather than structural issues.

Additionally, even the more progressive currents within black organizing faltered because of top-down unionism and because organizers were disconnected to the communities they were attempting to mobilize (Tait:65-66). Black autonomous organizing during this era should therefore be distinguished from women’s organizing as it did not embrace a broad equity strategy built on strong alliances with grass root community groups. The limitations of black organizing in the US illustrate the enormous significance and potential women-led equity organizing had, and continues to have, for labour movements. See: Vanessa Tait. 2005. *Poor Workers’ Unions: Rebuilding Labor From Below*. Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.

<sup>28</sup> A number of feminist organizations and networks were developed to address the issue of gender and trade. DAWN, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era co-sponsored an International Women’s Strategic Planning Workshop on Gender and Trade which led to the formation of the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN). Women Working Worldwide (WWW) organized a conference on trade in 1996 out of which grew the Informal Working Group on Gender and Trade (IWGGT) that includes groups such as Women, Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), WWW, Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). See Peggy Antrobus, *The Global Women’s Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies*. London: Zed Books, 2004, p. 90 and Angela Hale (ed.). *Trade Myths and Gender Reality: Trade Liberalisation and Women’s Lives* Uppsala Sweden: Global Foundations Publication: International Coalition for Development Action, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> The debate around enforceable trade-labour standards first began in the nineteenth century, continued into the early twentieth century when the International Labour Organisation was constituted at the



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Versaille Peace Conference at the close of World War I, was proposed again in the 1950s when the ICFTU lobbied for a social clause in the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), was reintroduced again at GATT negotiations in the 1973 by the ICFTU and the International Metalworkers' Federation, and continues today. The term 'social clause' refers to a trade-linked mechanism that obliges signatory governments of multilateral (or other) trade agreements to respect fundamental worker rights, typically ILO core labour standards; non-compliance results in sanctions, such as levying tariffs on goods produced in conditions violating labour standards. The core labour standards are Conventions and Recommendations that have been adopted by the ILO and include: freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of exploitative forms of child labour; prohibition of forced labour and non-discrimination in employment. See: David Chin, "A Social Clause For Labour's Cause: Global Trade And Labour Standards – A Challenge For the New Millenium". London: Institute of Employment Rights, 1998 and Keith D. Ewing and Tom Sibley, "International Trade Union Rights For The New Millenium. London: Institute of Employment Rights, 2000; Peter Frairbrother and Nikolaus Hammer, "Global Unions: Past Efforts and Future Prospects", *RI/Industrial Relations* Vol. 60, No. 3:405-431.

<sup>30</sup> The International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) has a membership of 45 million workers representing 233 affiliated organizations; 40 percent are women. Peter Fairbrother and Nikolaus Hammer. 2005."Global Unions: Past Efforts and Future Prospects". *RI/Industrial Relations* Vol. 60, No. 3:405-431, p. 408.