

## **Thinking Through Labour’s Organizing Strategies: What the Data Reveal and What the Data Conceal**

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Canadian labour unions have done better than most other labour movements in maintaining a reasonable level of union density and union organizing. In the United States, Britain, Australia, Japan, and several European countries, union density has been declining over the last twenty years. Canada’s unions, in contrast, are still growing (Kumar 148). Nevertheless, for the last fifteen years, the Canadian labour movement has experienced a steady decline in union density as a percentage of those in the paid labour force, despite the fact that more women and racialized groups have been joining unions than ever before. With this decline, there has been a new emphasis on organizing the unorganized, with many unions adopting a strategic change from what is called the “servicing model” to the “organizing model.” Despite many creative organizing efforts to stem the decline in the overall percentage of union members, especially in the private sector, the number of unorganized workers continues to grow. This fact has inspired union researchers and academics to search for explanations that might inform union organizing strategies. This paper argues that any explanation for the decline needs to be set within the context of a historical approach examining the dynamic interaction between a multitude of factors, including those found not only in the central institutions of the labour market and the union movement itself, but in the relationship between social reproduction in the household and production in the workplace. In other words, explanations for the decline in

unionization, and consequent organizing strategies, need to be informed by the lessons of feminist political economy.

Although there have been profound changes in the Canadian labour movement with respect to women and racialized minorities, renewed organizing strategies, for the most part, are still based on the notion of the standard employment relation that had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. These strategies are constrained by the labour relations system that developed out of the industrial union conflicts of the 1940s. This paper argues that adopting the approach of feminist political economy—linking social reproduction with production, and, as a consequence, communities with workplaces—combined with an emphasis on democratic process, helps to shed light on Canadian unions’ organizing strategies.

### **Union Density, Gender- and Equity-Seeking Groups: What the Data Reveal**

Fewer than one in three Canadian workers were covered by a collective agreement in 2002. The union coverage rate was 32.2% of all workers in the paid labour force, compared to a high of 41.8% in 1984 (Jackson and Schetagne). It should be noted that this comparison is very approximate because Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey union data have been available only since 1997.<sup>1</sup> The one in three figure would be higher if one took into account the approximately one million workers who are not eligible for unionization. This includes not only certain kinds of professional employees, but those at the lower end of the labour market in self-account forms of work who are not considered to be in an employer/employee relationship. This means that current union coverage is, in reality, closer to 37% (Murnighan).

The Canadian labour movement has not lost members in absolute terms. Canadian union membership increased in absolute numbers between 1997 and 2002, while union coverage grew by 350,000 to 4.2 million (Jackson and Schetagne). This increase cannot, however, be seen as substantial. As Bill Murnighan points out, we have yet to succeed in bringing unions to many who desperately need them. In terms of overall advances, we are treading water. Contributors to a Forum in Studies in Political Economy about reorganizing unions echo this point repeatedly (125-190). Even though the Canadian labour movement has not made any real gains in membership compared to others, it still has enough union strength, for the moment, to ward off the very low union density found in the United States (Kumar).

In percentage terms, Canadian union density has declined mainly because of strong job growth in non-union workplaces. For example, job creation in the private business services sector (traditionally non-unionized) grew from 5.5% to 10.2% of all jobs between 1984-2002. There have been some job losses, however, in traditionally unionized sectors, and these have had an impact on the overall union coverage rate. The losses include a decline in the direct public sector, from 26.1% to 22.2% of all jobs since 1984, and a small loss of manufacturing jobs, from 16.9% to 15.1% (Jackson and Schetagne 2). It does seem, however, that the main reason for the overall decline is the growth of jobs in the non-unionized private sector.

What has this meant in terms of the unionized gender gap? The statistics reveal that it is men rather than women who are unionized less often than they were before: “The coverage rate for men has fallen from almost one-half in the mid-1980s, and has continued to slip since 1997. The rate for women has fallen much less, and has remained steady at 32% since 1997” (Jackson and Schetagne 2). There is no longer a substantial difference between the union coverage rates of women and men. This means that there has been a significant change since the early 1980s when

the union coverage rate for women was 10% less than that for men. While, at first glance, this appears to have a positive side in that women are now unionized as often as men, we should be careful about the conclusions we draw from this seeming equality. Indeed, there is a parallel to be drawn from the narrowing of the gendered wage gap during the 1990s in Canada: the narrowing of wage inequality was more about the stagnation of wages in male-predominant occupations than about the rise of wages in female-predominant jobs. A similar situation has occurred with union coverage: since 1997, the rate for men has declined while the rate for women has stagnated.

Although the size of the direct public sector has declined, there has been little change in the number of jobs in the broad public sector. Unionized women are found, for the most part, in both areas of the public sector. Overall in the private sector, where there have been substantial increases in the number of jobs (especially in business services as we saw), there has been a decline in union density for men (from 26.1% to 23.3%) and for women (16% to 14%) (Jackson and Schetagne). The problem of declining unionization seems to be caused, in large part, by the increase in private sector jobs, where traditionally there has been no union presence, and where employers have adopted a very aggressive anti-union approach (Kumar). Although there has been some recent successful organizing among women and equity-seeking groups in the private service sector, overall these groups are far less unionized than white men working in this sector.

Very significant changes have occurred in employment relationships since the 1980s. These include the substantial rise of the labour market participation of women, and also the significant increase in non-standard forms of work with various dimensions of precariousness. It is reported that 34% of men and 41% of women workers were in non-standard types of employment in 2002. This represents an increase since 1989, from 29% of men and 37% of

women (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford). The workers who are most likely to be found in precarious employment are women of all ages and ethnicities, and young men and men of colour (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford). These groups have the lowest rates of unionization in the private sector. It is these same groups that most want and need to be organized into unions (Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)). Unions are seen by members of these groups, many of whom are the most vulnerable workers, as a force that cannot only improve their terms and conditions of employment, but also help them gain satisfaction and respect in the workplace (Kumar 149).

There have been increased attempts to organize women and equity groups in the private service sector. For example, attempts to organize “the private service sector increased by more than 50% between the decade of the eighties and nineties. In the same periods, organising in traditional areas of union support, namely manufacturing and construction, declined” (Yates, “Expanding” 32). Yates presents evidence from Ontario and British Columbia demonstrating that employees in female-predominant workplaces were more likely to vote in favour of union certification. Despite increased organizing efforts and the willingness of marginalized and vulnerable workers to unionize, union density in the private sector continues to decline compared to the public sector. While the public sector continues to be a bastion of union strength, union density is slipping in the private sector as a result of job creation in traditional non-union sectors, and, to a lesser extent, because of economic restructuring in traditionally unionized industries (Jackson, “Solidarity Forever?” 134-140).

Given this data, there seems to be a crucial need to rethink union organizing strategy in light of changes in the political economy (Gindin and Stanford). This needs to be taken further,

bringing the insights of feminist political economy and democratic process to bear on the problem.

### **Organizing the Unorganized: A Historical and Feminist Political Economy Perspective**

If we take seriously the usefulness of an historical approach that is informed by the lessons of feminist political economy, then conceptions of the current feminization of the employment relation, and its effect on union coverage rates, need to be drawn out. This involves a bifocal emphasis on changes in the central institutions of the labour market and the heightening crisis of social reproduction (Fudge and Vosko); in other words it involves, at minimum, linking the world of employment with that of communities and the home in terms of the relations of social reproduction. This approach leads us to focus on the stark separation between production and reproduction that characterized labour relations for much of the nineteenth century, and, in particular, the way in which this separation was institutionalized in the labour relations system that developed after the 1950s.

The labour market of the post-war period was filled mainly by male workers hired into standard work arrangements with a relatively high degree of unionization, especially in primary and secondary industries. Social reproduction was privatized, hidden in the household, performed by the unpaid labour of women. In this period, the norm of a male breadwinner and the female caretaker fed into the dominance of the standard employment relation and labour relations system that had developed during the liberal state reform period of the 1930s in the United States. Legal regulation of union organizing drives and collective bargaining developed, and was institutionalized in a similar form in wartime Canada.

It is important to recall the elements of this labour relations system because they remain in place in all provinces and at the federal level in Canada, and have a profound effect on the relations between employers and unions. This system continues to channel the agency of unionists into confined and constrained ways of thinking and acting, and therefore reproduces the discourse of legal unionism on a daily basis in present-day labour relations (Fudge and Tucker).

The labour relations system that emerged from the conflicts between capital and labour in the immediate post-war period reflected both the strengths and weaknesses of the male-dominated Canadian labour movement of the time. By dint of their industrial clout and leverage in the goods-producing factories and primary industries of wartime Canada, industrial unions achieved a limited form of industrial citizenship. The strength of the corporations, founded in the ownership of private property and capital, was in being able to place limits on the system despite the compromise imposed by the Canadian State. This compromise forced unwilling employers to recognize and collectively bargain with unions. Furthermore, it continues to do this today despite the power of corporations, such as Wal-Mart or McDonald's, to resist and find ways of preventing this law from being applied in their bids to remain union-free.

The elements of industrial citizenship achieved by the end of the 1940s were inscribed in labour relations law that still remains in place in all jurisdictions in Canada. It is, however, a system of limited rights and extensive responsibilities as far as trade unionists are concerned. The right to free association and collective bargaining is severely tempered by restrictions on the right to strike, despite the fact that this right is a logical outcome of free association for unions. Grievances during the life of the collective agreement must be settled by resorting to a process of arbitration administered by state-regulated labour boards. In terms of organizing unorganized

workers into unions, these same labour boards play a dominant role in determining the outcome of the contest between employers and unions for the hearts and minds of workers.

An important outcome of the post-war labour relations institutions was the legitimization of trade union activity by the liberal democratic state. Trade unions became the junior partners in the labour relations system that required them to endorse and uphold the entire system. This meant distancing their activities and discourse from that of illegitimate unions. During the 1950s Cold War period, irresponsible unionists were defined as communists and fellow travellers (Fudge and Tucker Labour/Le Travail 298-301). Later in the 1970s, illegitimate actors were feminists, as well as socialists and even socially minded unions (Warskett, “Legitimate”).

The legalized system of labour relations that developed in Canada and the United States separated the private law of collective bargaining from the public law of politics. It conceived and constructed the economic world of work as a closed system that could be contained and managed by the rules and regulations of labour law. The system was framed to produce responsible trade unionists who would act within the parameters of the law and make sure that their members did likewise. Business unionists’ approach to organizing the unorganized and collective bargaining tends to reify the concept of responsible unionists in that the dominant discourse of unionism and union members is identified with legality and the legal certification of bargain units by state-appointed labour boards (Fudge and Tucker, Labour Before the Law 4-9).

By the late 1960s, the labour relations system had come under pressure from public sector workers wanting to share in the benefits of legal unionism. The introduction of a more limited, but similar, form of labour law resulted in large numbers of public employees and women becoming unionized and becoming members of the Canadian labour movement. The participation rate of women in the paid labour force rose steeply during the 1970s, and demands



for equal opportunities started to be heard within both workplaces and unions. The second wave of feminism had a resounding impact on the participation rate of women in the paid labour force, and, in turn, the trade union movement. Several important women's strikes in which the main demand was for equal pay took place near the end of the 1970s. These strikes set the tone for the newly developing movement of union feminists (Warskett, "Politics"). By the late 1980s, the union feminist agenda had started to place considerable pressure on traditionally male-dominated, private sector unions to change the limited discourse of business unionism. Through demands for equal pay for work of equal value, family leaves, paid maternity leave, freedom from sexual harassment etc., women expanded the issues being debated within the union movement. Indeed, the debate about women's right to abortion symbolized this change in that the labour movement now seemed prepared to take a stand on issues beyond the narrow confines of the workplace. Current union feminism remains centred in public sector unions where the vast majority of union women are found, although industrial unions such as the Autoworkers and Steelworkers adopted equity agendas by the 1990s. Indeed, these two unions have adopted a strategy of organizing workers in all sectors, which has increased the numbers of women and equity groups in their memberships.

Efforts to organize women in the Canadian private sector are not new. One of the most important campaigns took place in the mid-1970s and involved an attempt to organize chartered bank workers. The Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) made an important breakthrough in organizing predominantly female bank tellers in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. At the height of the organizing drive, more than one thousand workers were signed up. SORWUC was a small, avowedly feminist union dedicated to implementing a non-bureaucratic democratic process. It perceived itself to be a movement of women workers, but the

CLC and the Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) took a different view. SORWUC'S connections to the women's movement and the political Left were regarded with suspicion by both organizations. Marc Lapointe, head of the CLRB, expressed skepticism that a feminist group could be considered a legitimate trade union. Indeed the Banks, the Labour Board, and the CLC declared SORWUC to be irresponsible, not acting as a legitimate trade union, and unable to play by the rules of the game because its leaders were naive, incompetent, or linked to subversives.

Prior to SORWUC's efforts to organize bank workers, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) had established an organizing fund through a levy on its entire membership. In response to SORWUC's campaign the CLC, using this fund, established the Bank Workers Organising Committee (BWOC) with the purpose of enlisting all of its affiliates to contribute organizers and union support to the Committee. Several of the affiliates, however, refused to participate, arguing that bank workers were part of their jurisdiction so they should be the ones to organize the banks, not the CLC. To this day, this stance on the part of many affiliate unions blocks the possibility of a coordinate response to organizing the unorganized. It is a discourse of ownership. Unions in a particular jurisdiction perceive that they own the workers; if those workers join a union, it must be their union. The lack of solidarity among unions over who should organize bank workers and how it should be done contributed to the failure of the BWOC. There were other important reasons as well, including the very aggressive anti-union campaign conducted and coordinated from the headquarters of the chartered banks.<sup>2</sup>

As well as placing nails in the coffin of a coordinated, solidaristic approach to organizing the unorganized, the failure to organize chartered bank workers also enforced the discourse that women were difficult to unionize. This discourse reflected the dominant academic

approach to unionizing women at that time (White, Women in Unions 29-31). Turning to reflect on problems of organizing the unorganized, we see the pitfalls and problems in past explanations by academics and union organizers of why women were organized less often than men. Because of a perspective that completely separated the world of paid work from the household, and production from reproduction, women during the post-war period were constructed primarily as wives and mothers, their proper place confined to social reproduction in the household. Women's place was definitely not seen as being in a union, neither by unionists nor academics engaged in the sociology of work and industrial relations (White, Women in Unions).

The construction of women and racialized minorities as passive and apathetic to union organizing has undergone some change in the Canadian labour movement since the early 1980s, although there is still a need, in parts of the union movement, to debunk the myth that it is more difficult to organize women and racialized groups because of their passive approach to the workplace and unionization (Yates with Auton). Despite significant changes in the labour movement with respect to women and racialized groups, organizing strategies themselves remain, in large part, gendered and racialized, and the structure of the largely non-unionized, private service sector, together with the growing predominance of contingent work, feeds into the problem (Yates, "Rebuilding").

The decline of the male breadwinner model in Canada was well underway by the 1980s. Contingent work, performed primarily by women, stabilized the capital-labour accord of the post-war period, accommodated the declining male wage, encouraged women's increased labour-force participation, and maintained privatized social reproduction (Fudge and Vosko 202). As noted earlier, by the 1990s contingent and precarious forms of work had increased, substantially drawing in more women and other marginalized workers, and resulting in what is

referred to as the feminization of the employment norm. As a result, more and more workers are found in non-standard types of employment with varying dimensions of precariousness, expanding the ranks of women and other equity-seeking groups for whom this type of employment has long been the norm. Today, social reproduction remains gendered and privatized despite women's nearly equal participation rate in the paid labour market. The growing crisis in reproduction, however, is becoming more visibly fuelled by dire predictions of future labour shortages and declining birth rates.

One of the important corollaries of the labour relations system is that workers are conceived and treated primarily as wage labour. Their humanity ends at the office, factory, and store doors. The full dimensions of being a human being, living in a liberal democratic, capitalist society with rights as a citizen cannot be, and is not, sustained in the employment relationship. On entering the workplace, workers become a labour component that sells itself in return for a price. The principle role of the union in this system is to negotiate the best price for that labour. It is a narrow, confining role that does not question the undemocratic and dehumanizing basis of the wage labour system. But many unions in Canada, particularly those influenced by union feminism, have modified this narrow role and taken up issues that affect workers outside of the workplace (Warskett, Feminism's). In effect, union feminism has attempted to link the world of production with that of the home and social reproduction, not only for women but for other equity-seeking groups as well. Furthermore, these other groups have been fully asserting their own right to be in unions, and to bring their own issues of recognition to union bargaining tables and union forums since the 1990s. Despite all of these efforts to break out of the constraints of a legal and political system that reifies the separation between the undemocratic, private economic

world and the political and social world of citizens, the results within the Canadian labour movement have been uneven and variable.

Over the past thirty years, feminist political economy has attempted to theorize the relationships between patriarchy and capitalism, culture and economics or, in the terms of today's feminist debates, political struggles over redistributing and recognition.<sup>3</sup> Nancy Fraser reframed the debate. She points out that feminist theory has followed two trajectories: one emphasizing the politics of identity and the struggles of marginalized groups for recognition of their difference from the status quo, and a second theoretical strain emphasizing the politics of inequality in socioeconomic terms, translating these into struggles over redistribution and exploitation. She proposes a new vision in which the politics of recognition could support the politics of redistribution. In doing so, however, she maintains the separation between struggles over redistribution and recognition for heuristic and analytical purpose. Fraser's article sparked a passionate debate in the pages of New Left Review; in particular, interventions by Iris Marion Young and Judith Butler point to the return to the dualism of old debates over patriarchy and capitalism. Both theorists argued against the dualism of Fraser's approach. The dualism of struggles over redistribution and recognition recall the problems of the separation between economics and culture, and recall earlier feminist debates over capitalism and patriarchy and questions of causality. In part, the Fraser debate involves a difference over levels of analysis (Vosko 78). What follows looks at the integration of recognition and redistribution at the level of the Canadian labour movement's organizing practices.

Union feminists and other equity-seeking groups introduced the debate, at the level of practice, into the union movement during the 1980s and 1990s. Struggles over sexuality, homophobia, race, and a multitude of other differences emerged out of conflicts over

representation and the primacy of issues in collective bargaining (Warskett, "Politics"). Unions have subsequently played a crucial role in integrating struggles for recognition and redistribution by negotiating a wide range of clauses in collective agreements. These range from early collective bargaining gains on sexual and racial harassment, through to changes in the definition of "spouse" to include gay and lesbians and the extension of spousal benefits to these groups. Equity committees and affirmative action positions were also created in an attempt to deal with the lack of representation in leadership positions.

I have argued, however, that these struggles are not included in the main business of the union, which focuses primarily on socioeconomic concerns or questions of redistribution (Warskett, "Feminism's"). There is a constant danger in the union movement that the struggles for recognition will be treated as marginal to the trade unions' agenda. There has even been a tendency to marginalize pay equity, or equal pay for work of equal value, from collective bargaining. Pay equity is clearly a struggle both for recognition, in terms of giving respect and value to the work women traditionally perform, and, at the same time, redistribution in terms of increasing the monetary price of their labour. The argument here is that by separating struggles for recognition from struggles for redistribution, unions reflect and accept the very nature of commodification; that is, treating workers merely as wage labour whose price is negotiated.

### **Union Renewal through Organizing the Unorganized: What the Data Conceal**

During the 1990s, many Canadian unions, like parts of the American and European labour movements, adopted a more aggressive approach to organizing the unorganized. The recognition that unions need to organize or die is relatively widespread in the labour movement,

even among conservative unions, and significant amounts of resources have been spent on organizing drives (Gindin and Stanford 432). Some unions have expended more than 50% of their annual resources on organizing the unorganized, and have announced that they have changed their model of unionism from the servicing model to the organizing model. The new “Organizing Model” developed out of the AFL-CIO President Sweeney’s declared challenge to the American labour movement to build a “new labor movement.” As Katherine Sciacchitano points out, the revitalized AFL-CIO “has set its sights on nothing short of movement building. Inspired by the militancy and industry-wide drives of the 1930s, the federation and its affiliates are pouring millions of dollars into rebuilding organizing capacity in workplaces and communities” (“Unions” 75). The intention seemed revolutionary, coming as it did out of a labour movement that seemed to be hitting rock bottom, with organized labour at a low of 12%. For a number of reasons, in many cases movement-building developed into the not-so-new practice of rapid card-signing by organizers whose narrow concept of winning was getting as many applications for certification as possible. What happened was a reassertion of winning defined by how many cards are signed and how many applications are made for certification of bargaining units (Rooks 2003). In other words, the concept of winning in this case is a strictly quantitative one. The labour movement has won because its numbers have increased, or, as in the present situation in Canada, have not declined. As Sciacchitano points out, “organizers’ primary responsibility runs less to the people they are organizing than to the campaign” (“Unions”). In other words, the requirements of the campaign plan take over, with winning defined in narrow, quantitative card-signing terms.

Some argue that the servicing model produces passive members who are hierarchically and bureaucratically ordered in unions, and, furthermore, that this model does not build an active,

democratically inspired membership. As noted earlier, this is related, in part, to the legal labour relations system and the “need” of the union leadership to manage dissent. It is also linked to the insurance policy mentality where organizing new members involves appealing to workers’ self-interest. Organizers make promises about the advantage of unionism in terms of higher wages, benefits, and even the members’ stated needs. Little account is taken of the strength of the bargaining unit that is being organized, and whether advantages achieved by other unionized members can, in fact, be translated into a collective agreement for that particular unit. The history of the labour movement is replete with examples of first contracts that achieve few increases in wages and benefits, and resulted in decertification in the next round of bargaining (Warskett “Organizing Bankworkers”). Even more serious for the labour movement, this kind of organizing does not change its internal culture nor create a movement based on inclusion and social justice.

A similar kind of logic pervades the organizing model. Daisy Rooks argues that a “cowboy mentality” often characterizes the organizing campaigns of the new labour movement in the AFL\_CIO. She notes that with the new organizing strategy, groups of organizers descend “en masse” onto a workplace target. This means that the organizers must submit themselves to extensive travel, long hours, and emotionally demanding work. Women who also do caring in the home cannot take off on the road in this way. Research reveals that, more often than not, targetted workplaces are dominated by white males. This occurs because women and racialized groups are more likely to be found in small workplaces that unions are not interested in organizing. Also, union organizers were likely to be older white men (Yates, “Rebuilding” 173). Yates says that unions “need to shift their model of organizing such that they organize women and racialized groups, not just workplaces and workers” (174). This points to the false dichotomy



between the two models of servicing and organizing. Both models are predicated on a similar patriarchal approach to unorganized workers or union members. Both accept the present labour relations system uncritically. While there may be repeated calls to improve and add to its regulation, the system as a whole is not questioned.

Recent attempts at union renewal have raised crucial questions about what it means to win when organizing new members into the labour movement (Bronfenbrenner et al.1998). Does winning mean applying successfully for certification for a new bargaining unit, or does it mean something much broader and more complex? Does it mean certifying and building union locals and organizations that are capable of successfully taking on the employer and winning good collective agreements? Is that enough in terms of building a union movement that is inclusive of women and equity-seeking groups in general? It is argued here that “winning” should be equated with building a labour movement that is open to developing collective worker capacity, establishing a strong, progressive presence in the workplace, and broadening workplace problems by connecting them to social and political issues in the community. Included in this is organizing that allows for learning and development, and encourages the self-activism of all members. It involves creating a culture of inclusion: a movement that “embraces, attracts, and promotes women, people of color, immigrants, and lesbians and gays” (Fletcher and Hurd). But is this enough to break down the barriers that separate the economic sphere of production from the social reproductive activities in the community? Taking the approach further would mean, at the very least, a more reciprocal approach on the part of the unions: not only “finding the community in the union,” but also finding “the union in the community” (Sciacchitano, “Finding” 150). Some refer to this approach as “community unionism.”

Despite the continuing prevalence of the servicing model in many union locals, and the limitations of a gendered organizing model, there have been a wide variety of attempts in Canada to build community unionism. Many different kinds of community unionism have developed in Canada over the last twenty years. At one end of the spectrum, there is the simple, one-time attempt to involve community members in an organizing drive. At the other end, community unionism has acted to break down the divisions between communities and unions by linking issues of production in the workplace and reproduction in communities. Community unionism can integrate struggles over distribution with struggles of recognition in both the workplace and the community. In some cases, the struggles can subvert the discourse that unionism means only the legal certification of unions. There have been many innovative attempts over the last twenty years to build forms of community unionism. These efforts are contributing substantially to the revitalization of the union movement.

One of the earliest forms of community unionism was the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's (ILGWU) campaign to organize women home workers in Toronto. These women were mainly new immigrants working at home making clothes. In this case, the distance between the spaces of production and reproduction were non-existent, the home and community were one. It was the ILGWU that had to reconceptualize the space and devise new ways of acting and thinking about organizing the unorganized (Tuffs 240-244). This form of unionism used a number of different community initiatives to address the increasing numbers of unorganized working out of their homes. In Toronto in the early 1990s, the union began a research project designed to find out more about immigrant home workers. The contacts made during this project led to the formation of the Homeworkers' Association. This resulted in the important idea that workers can be members of a "union" without legal recognition, and, through their association,

together they can develop and build their collective capacity without entering the legal system. Other initiatives included seeking community support through a Clean Clothes campaign designed to make visible the low wages and poor conditions of women home workers, and a community coalition that lobbied the legislature for Fair Wages and Working Conditions for Home workers (Tuffs 242-243; Cranford and Ladd 48).

The unionization of these workers was the initial goal of the form of community unionism that developed around immigrant home workers. In other words, the ILGWU went out into the community both to contact the workers and to form support for their cause, even though these workers cannot be legally unionized. In doing this, the ILGWU provided a means for these workers to step into the public arena and begin a learning process of self activity. In turn, this opened the possibility of improving worker dignity and generating public recognition and respect for these workers who, in the past, were hidden in the household.

Another important example of unions “side stepping the law” was a recent campaign by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). CUPW was one of the earliest unions to think about the relationship between economic production and social reproduction. In 1980, it took strike action and became one of the first unions to achieve paid maternity leave outside of Quebec (White “Mail”). This victory set a trend in the Canadian public sector.

More than twenty years ago, CUPW started to realize that it needed the support of the community to prevent post offices in rural locations from being closed. In 1987, the community organization Rural Dignity organized “to fight the withdrawal of government support from rural areas.” The organization gained support from the postal unions and the CLC (Tuffs 233). The contacts and alliances built during that period developed into another campaign supporting the rural route drivers. Canada Post deemed these workers independent contractors rather than

employees. This meant they were not eligible for unionization, despite the fact that their working conditions were similar to those of the unionized parcel carriers. The main differences lay in the very poor remuneration received by the rural route drivers, 66% of whom were women. CUPW embarked on a ten-year campaign and funded the costs of building an association of these workers. The rural route drivers developed their own leadership and democratic structures. Attempts were made to change the law to permit them to unionize in their own right, without success. Finally the rural route drivers joined CUPW, and the union used the bargaining strength of its traditional membership to force Canada Post to recognize them as employees. The outcome, in January 2004, was a new collective agreement for both groups of workers (Bourque). This strategy was costly for CUPW, however: opposition developed within CUPW's traditional membership because certain benefits had to be given up to win a settlement for the rural route drivers. Nonetheless, this strategy is an important example of how the union movement does not always have to be constrained and limited by legal unionism. It is also an important example of altruism and solidarity between relatively better-off workers and those living marginally, and, in this sense, it was not just a struggle for redistribution narrowly conceived. Furthermore, the creation of an association of rural route workers allowed them to develop public speaking and representation skills, which cannot happen when individuals remain isolated in communities (Bourque).

Two more organizations provide final examples of community unionism: Toronto Organising for Fair Employment (TOFFE) and the Winnipeg Workers Organising and Resource Centre (WORC). Both organizations are committed to supporting non-unionized workers and helping them defend their rights. Both are engaged in mobilizing the non-unionized—TOFFE around the issues of fair employment and the WORC around issues of independent contractors

who are denied employment rights. The WORC is funded, at the moment, by the CUPW, but it is hoped that other unions will offer resources.

These examples of community unionism demonstrate current efforts to integrate community and union. The model of legal unionism that was constructed in the post-war period is losing its relevance for large numbers of workers in society, especially those in precarious forms of work such as women, racialized workers, and youth. It is clear that a number of unions are attempting to construct new approaches and to rethink the relationship between the world of work and the communities in which production is situated. These examples are encouraging not only for organizing the unorganized, but also in terms of rethinking the economic sphere and its relationship with communities. This relationship also has to be rethought in terms of the political and culture spheres. They are small beginnings, but indicate that the old models are beginning to lose their grip on the Canadian labour movement.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>. For a useful explanation of the data problems, see Andrew Jackson's recent article ("Solidarity Forever? Trends..." 145).

<sup>2</sup>. The chartered banks' aggressive anti-unionism was well reported and documented in the unfair labour practice decisions of the CLRB.

<sup>3</sup>. See Vosko (2002) for a useful and comprehensive review of the Canadian feminist political economy literature over the last three decades.

## Works Cited

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