

Developing an Agenda: Expanding the Role of Women in Unions

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Organizers and labor educators advocating the unionization of women workers today face a difficult dilemma. While understanding the economic and social benefits of unionization, the advocate is equally aware that female participation in the power structure of unions today is still inadequate. Despite the historically demonstrated benefits of unionization,¹ there appears to exist a certain distance and cynicism among millions of women workers in their attitudes about what unions can do for them. Many women workers believe that unions are male-dominated institutions like many of the institutions they contend with in daily life. They are far from convinced that unions will represent their interests effectively.

Certain statistics support this cynicism. Despite the fact that women now constitute one out of every three union members, they are only one in twelve union leaders.² In some areas of the unionized workforce,

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1. Unionized workers earn, on the average, 30 percent more than their non-union counterparts. More unionized workers are covered by health insurance than non-unionized workers. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment and Earnings* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), January, 1985, Tables A-2 and A-3, pp. 16-17; and Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, *1975 Handbook on Women Workers*, Bulletin 297 (Washington, D.C.), Table 2, p. 11.

2. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Directory of National Unions and Employee Associations* (Washington, D.C., 1979), pp. 62-67, 95-99.

women constitute over 70% of the membership but less than 10% of the national or regional leadership of their unions.

This dilemma is sharpened by the fact that women workers have accounted for a substantially large percentage of the growth in labor union membership since 1970. The pattern of union organization during the last decade and a half among teachers, hospital workers, and more recently public sector office and service workers—predominantly female occupations—has created the potential for an entirely different base of membership for unions than that traditionally defined. The AFL-CIO, in its recent pivotal report on *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions*,³ acknowledged this potential transformation of the base of its membership, noting that 90 percent of all new jobs added to the labor force are in the service sector.

Unionization among female workers is, in fact, concentrated in the service sector, now about 10 percent unionized. By 1980, almost half of the 6.5 million organized women workers were found in educational services, medical services, or public administration.⁴ Some unions have initiated organizing efforts among female service workers to help offset steadily declining membership figures.⁵

Starting with the premise that unions can be a vehicle for equity and power for women workers, we attempted to evaluate whether unions are keeping pace with changes in the workforce by addressing the concerns of women workers in a structural and programmatic way. Our research analyzes union *institutional* responses to female workers; that is, the extent to which a commitment to women has become institutionalized within the labor movement.

Our findings indicate that union leadership and membership need to be encouraged, particularly through the labor education process, to develop more systematic and comprehensive approaches to combatting sexual discrimination both in the workplace and within the union structure. If unions are to represent women and minority workers effectively, then the development of some objective guideposts will aid unions and women

3. American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations. *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions* (Washington, D.C., 1985), pp. 8-9.

4. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Special Labor Force Report 244, *Employment and Unemployment: A Report of 1980*, 1981, p. A29; Ruth Milkman, "Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement Since the 1960's," *Women, Work and Protest* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 5-8.

5. In 1980, the latest year for which figures are available, union membership was the lowest since World War II, 20.9% of the labor force, Courtney Gifford, ed., *Directory of U.S. Labor Organizations, 1982-1983 Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs), p. 1.

TABLE 1
Women Members of Labor Organizations, Selected Industry Groups, 1980

Industry Group	Number of Women Members (thousands)	Women Members as a Percentage of		Percentage of All Women Workers (Organized and Unorganized) Employed in This Industry
		Organized Women in All Industries	All Women Employed in This Industry	
All industries	6,056 ^a	100.0 ^a	15.9	100.0 ^a
Educational services	1,737	28.7	33.0	13.2
Manufacturing	1,478	24.4	22.2	17.5
Medical services	689	11.4	13.1	14.1
Retail trade	560	9.2	7.7	19.3
Public administration	452	7.5	23.4	4.9
Services, other than educational & medical	408	6.7	7.7	14.5
Communications	341	5.6	52.6	1.7
Finance, insurance and real estate	71	1.2	2.3	8.5

Compiled by Milkman, *Women, Work and Protest*, p. 304.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 2105, *Earnings and Other Characteristics of Organized Workers, May 1980* (1981), pp. 18-21.
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Special Labor Force Report 244, *Employment and Unemployment: A Report on 1980* (1981), pp. A25, A29.

^aTotals do not add to 100.0% because not all industry groups are included here.

in an appraisal of progress toward this goal. Our research considered the following guideposts:

1. Are women in leadership positions at all levels of the union's structure in numbers commensurate with their numbers in the membership? If not, are there any mechanisms in place to encourage an increase in the numbers of women in leadership?
2. Are institutional resources expended on behalf of women workers?
3. What is the extent of the integration of women's concerns into the institutional structure of the union? For example, how is the union's approach to collective bargaining reflective of a commitment to, or influenced by, women members?
4. What is the history of the union's commitment to women's programs? How long has it existed? Have the economic downturns of the last five years caused any retreat in the commitment?
5. What is the union like as an employer? Is the union hiring its own management and organizing staff in accord with affirmative action principles?
6. What is the current status of union organizing among female workers? Does there appear to be a philosophy of organizing compatible with the concerns of female service workers? What sort of financial, staff, and resource commitments are being made to organize women?

Searching for Data

Systematic consideration of the above list of criteria would certainly provide a motherlode of information and insight into the nature of the labor movement's commitment to women. Unfortunately, such disciplined study is now made extremely difficult because public data compiled by government sources has been virtually unavailable since the inception of the Reagan administration. In 1980, the Bureau of Labor Statistics stopped requesting the information from unions about female membership and officeholders which it had previously compiled into useful publications, including the *Directory of National Unions and Employee Associations*.⁶ It discontinued publication of the *Directory* after 1980. Moreover, there has never been any government-collected data on women at regional or local levels of unions, nor has there been any substantial public data available on women in appointive or staff positions in

6. *Directory of National Unions and Employee Associations*. 1979. pp. 64-67.

unions. Such data is difficult to compile since there are over 71,000 local unions in the United States today, representing over 25 million workers.

Given the paucity of government data, a logical research alternative would be direct inquiry and examination of union records, interviews with leaders and staff, review of convention resolutions, contracts, and training materials. This route, however, is beset by difficulties as well. Unions do not always compile this information; some that do are reluctant to reveal details about their membership statistics. They are also hesitant to share specifics of their financial arrangements, structural organization, employment policies, and affirmative action plans. No union maintains complete, updated records on local membership and leadership.

A Review of the Literature

While the union as a social and political institution has been the topic of research in sociology, political science, and industrial relations since the turn of the century, until recently, little research has been completed on the role of women within unions.⁷ Most of the research in the behavioral sciences before the 1970s examined membership participation in unions, but it focused mainly on male workers or based its hypotheses on sociological theories of organization behavior that tended to ignore gender differences in participation.⁸

7. Certain historical work on women in labor has been notable for its mention of women activists, particularly Barbara Wertheimer, *We Were There* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1977); Philip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement from WWI to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1980); Ruth Milkman, *op cit*; Alice Kessler Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The New Nightingales, Hospital Workers, Unions, New Women's Issues* (New York: Enquiry Press, 1982).

8. See, for example, George Strauss and Leonard R. Sayles, "Patterns of Participation," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, October, 1953; Strauss and Sayles, *The Local Union* rev. ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1967); Daisy L. Tagliacozzo and Joel Seidman, "A Typology of Rank and File Union Members," *American Journal of Sociology*, May, 1956, pp. 546-553; William Spinrad, "Correlates of Trade Union Participation: A Summary of the Literature," *American Sociological Review*, April, 1960, pp. 237-344; Arnold Tannenbaum and Robert Kahn, *Participation in Union Locals*, (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1958); Eugene Hapburg, "Correlates of Organizational Participation: An Examination of Factors Affecting Union Membership Activity," *Pacific Sociological Review*, Spring, 1966, pp. 15-21; Robert Rogow, "Membership Participation and Centralized Control," *Industrial Relations*, February, 1968, pps. 132-145; M. Perline and V. R. Lorenz, "Factors Influencing Participation in Trade Union Activities," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. XXIX, 1970, pp. 425-438; William Glick, Phillip Merves and Diane Harder, "Union Satisfaction and Participation," *Industrial Relations*, May, 1977, pp. 145-151; Thomas Kochan, "How American Workers View Labor Unions," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 102, No. 4, April 1979, pp. 23-31.

As the gender gap became an issue in the American political landscape,⁹ so too did it attract attention among industrial relations researchers, who have finally begun to explore more closely the question of female participation in unions. Pioneering in this area from the industrial relations perspective, Alice Cook published on the topic as early as 1968¹⁰ and has continued to study female participation in recent years from an international¹¹ and public policy perspective.¹² Cook's work was followed by Wertheimer and Nelson's 1975 study of the participation of women in New York City local unions,¹³ a richly detailed exploration of the barriers to participation encountered at the local level. More recent research efforts have involved surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with either small cross-section samples of a particular union's female membership, or with a cross-section sample of local female leaders (usually stewards) from different unions.¹⁴

The participation studies mentioned above tended to *describe* female participation; *differentiate* it from male participation; and *hypothesize* reasons for gender differences if such were discovered. The studies produced a fairly consistent set of conclusions indicating that there *are* differences in the way men and women participate in institutional life, and that there are barriers to female leadership development which include the existence of dual roles for women, sexist stereotyping of women, low self-image, disdain for conflict, and a sense of marginality among women who achieve political office. These studies have proven useful in characterizing the reality of the gender gap in participation.¹⁵ They have not,

9. Virginia Sapiro, *The Political Integration of Women*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1984; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984; Kristi Andersen, "Working Women and Political Participation, 1952-1972," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 19, No. 3, August 1975, pp. 439-454; Mariane Githens and Jewel Prestage, eds., *A Portrait of Marginality: the Political Behavior of American Women*, New York: Longman, 1977; there are many other articles and books on these topics, too numerous to mention.

10. Alice Cook, "Women and American Trade Unions," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 375, January, 1968, pp. 124-132.

11. Alice Cook, Val Lorwin and Arlene Kaplan Daniels, eds., *Women and Trade Unions in Eleven Industrialized Countries*, Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1984.

12. Ronnie Steinberg and Alice Cook, "Women, Unions and Equal Employment Opportunity," Working Paper #3, Center for Women in Government, Albany, NY, 1981.

13. Barbara Wertheimer and Anne Nelson, *Trade Union Women*, New York: Praeger Press, 1975.

14. Michelle Hoyman, "The Participation of Women in Labor Unions," unpublished paper, University of Missouri, St. Louis; Baden and Glassberg, *Empowerment of Union Women*, CLUW Center for Education and Research, Washington, D.C., 1982; Pamela Roby, "Women and Unions: The Experience of Rank and File Leadership," unpublished paper, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1985.

15. On the quantitative front, a few studies were produced during the 1970's which reviewed the scarce government data to create findings about the demography of female membership and na-

however, attempted to analyze the union's *institutional* response to female members. To delve more directly into the question of institutional responsiveness, we undertook a special study in 1978 as staff at the CLUW Center for Education and Research.¹⁶ This article is the result of a follow-up study done in 1985.¹⁷

Methodology

For our research, we looked at a subset of fifteen national unions and two national associations, each of which had more than 100,000 female members. In each case, females made up more than 10 percent of the total membership. This subset provided a sample of organizations that, combined, represented more than 4 million women in the unionized workforce.

We attempted to procure the following data:

1. The number of women members.
2. The number of elected women officials on national governing bodies.
3. The number of elected women officials at regional, state, and local level unions.
4. The number of national union female staff and the types of jobs they hold.
5. The types of programs, departments, budgets, or other resources committed to women's concerns.

tional leadership of unions. See, for example, Virginia Berquist, "Women's Participation in Labor Organizations," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 97, No. 10, October 1974, pps. 3-9; Linda H. LeGrande, "Women in Labor Organizations: Their Ranks are Increasing," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 101, No. 8, August 1978, pp. 8-14; Karen Koziara and David Pierson, "The Lack of Female Union Leaders: A Look at Some Reasons," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1981, pp. 30-32; Arthur Schwartz and Michelle Hoyman, "The Changing of the Guard: The New American Labor Leader," *The Annals*, Vol. 4783, May, 1984, pp. 64-75; Joseph Antos, Mark Chandler and Wesley Mellow, "Sex Difference in Union Membership," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2, January, 1980, pp. 162-171.

A number of labor education and industrial relations faculty continue to develop studies in this area, using quantitative approaches with Census Bureau data, or qualitative approaches through interviews and oral histories, notably Karen Koziara at Temple University, Michelle Hoyman at the University of Missouri, Joyce Kornbluh at the University of Michigan, Alice Cook and Anne Nelson at Cornell and Ruth Milkman at CCNY.

16. See Baden and Glassberg, "Absent from the Agenda: A Report on the Role of Women in American Unions," CLUW Center for Education and Research, New York, 1980.

17. Our research, in effect, picked up where the government data left off in 1979. However, due to the absence of any incentive for international or local unions to keep accurate quantitative measures, the availability of union information was uneven.

Most of our research in 1985 was conducted by contacting colleagues and personal acquaintances at each of the focus unions and associations, many of whom are national staff or officers of those unions.

TABLE 2
Focus Unions and Associations

Union	Membership		Female Members		Percentage Female	
	1980	1985	1980	1985	1980	1985
ACTWU	501,000	350,000	330,660	227,500	66%	65%
AFGE	266,000	200,000	130,000	61,400	49	31
AFSCME	1,020,000	1,000,000	408,000	450,000	40	45
AFT	500,000	610,000	300,000	366,000	60	60
CWA	508,063	650,000	259,112	338,000	51	52
HERE	430,000	400,000	180,600	200,000	42	50
IAM	920,735	760,000	118,775	114,000	13	15
IBEW	1,011,725	900,000	303,518	330,000	30	30
IBT	1,923,896	1,900,000	480,974	485,000	25	26
ILGWU	348,380	258,000	278,704		80	85
		(1983)				
IUE	255,427	200,000	102,171	80,000	40	40
SEIU	625,000	870,000	312,500	435,000	50	50
UAW	1,499,425	1,200,000	164,937	156,000	11	13
UFCW	1,235,500		480,105		39	
USWA	1,285,740	650,000	162,500	60,000	13	9
ANA	187,000	188,000	181,390	180,668	97	96
NEA	1,696,469	1,700,000	1,239,500	1,000,000	75	60

Sources:

1980: Unpublished data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

1985: Author's survey and questionnaires.

6. Support for women's concerns via convention resolutions, collective bargaining policies, conferences, etc.
7. Organizing efforts directed toward women workers.

Findings

Public sector unions appear to be setting the pace on women's concerns. The other sector of the labor movement that has historically had high visibility, participation and leadership by women has been the virtually all-female associations, represented by nursing and teaching in our study. These labor organizations continue to show the most consistent pattern of female participation and leadership.

Leadership

In general, while the number of women in national leadership in unions has increased since 1979, the change has been at a snail's pace. Excluding the two national associations in our study, female representation on the national governing boards of the fifteen focus unions is at

9.7% in 1985, up only 1.8 percent from 6.9 percent in 1979.¹⁸ This compares to an average female membership percentage in these unions of 45 percent in 1985, up from 41 percent in 1979.

There have been recent efforts by national unions and the AFL-CIO to improve representation of women in leadership positions at the national level, including the creation of the post of "Coordinator of Women's Affairs" in the AFL-CIO's Civil Rights Department and the appointment of the first female department head at the AFL-CIO (Education). More dramatically, two women were elected to the 35-member AFL-CIO Executive Council between 1980 and 1982. In doing so, the Council had to waive long-standing, informal rules requiring that a council member be a chief officer of a member union.

Among public sector unions, there has been a marked increase in female leadership at the local and regional levels, reflecting the increase in female membership. Although the increase in female leadership at the national level has been slower, it still outpaces the average growth among our focus unions. The private sector unions, particularly in manufacturing, have generally lagged behind their public sector counterparts in terms of female leadership at all levels of the union.

Regional, district and state level leadership positions are still predominantly male. Again, statistical data on women at these levels has never been collected by government surveys. However, our inquiry uncovered fragmentary information from studies conducted by some AFL-CIO affiliates and departments which indicated that women are becoming somewhat better represented at this level. A few unions—particularly public sector and predominantly female associations—report women directors at the regional and district levels, as well as female staffers and other appointees.¹⁹ Unions such as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), The International Union of Electronics Workers (IUE), and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) all report women directors at the regional or district levels. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), whose membership is over 60 percent female, reports women at almost every state level. This is also true of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Nurses Association (ANA), which uses the state as its basic bargaining unit.

18. 1979 figures are from The Bureau of Labor Statistics charts in *The Directory of National Unions*, *op cit*. 1985 figures are based on our gathering of information from interviews with staff or officers of each focus union.

19. AFL-CIO Research Department data, unpublished, confirms this conclusion.

TABLE 3
Female Officers and Governing Board Members

Union	Total No. Officers/Bd		No. of Women Officers/Bd		Percent Female of Officers/Bd		Percent Female of Total Union	
	1979	1985	1979	1985	1979	1985	1979	1985
ACTWU	41	34	6	3	15%	9%	66%	65%
AFGE	18	19	0	2	0	10	49	31
AFSCME	29	28	1	4	3	14	40	45
AFT	32	34	8	11	25	32	60	60
CWA	17	18	0	1	0	6	51	52
HERE	22	24	1	2	4	8	42	50
IAM	11	11	0	0	0	0	13	15
IBEW	24	23	0	0	0	0	30	30
IBT	21	21	0	0	0	0	25	26
ILGWU	26	24	2	3	7	13	80	85
IUE	25	26	1	2	4	8	40	40
SEIU	46	50	7	9	15	18	50	50
UAW	26	25	1	1	3	4	11	13
UFCW	55		2		3		39	
USWA	29	30	0	0	0		13	10
ANA	15		14		93		97	96
NEA	9/145	9/121*	5/75	3/61*	55/51*	33/50*	75	60

*First numbers for NEA are executive committee; second are board of directors.

Sources:

1979: *Directory of National Unions and Associations*. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

1985: Author's survey and questionnaires.

The AFL-CIO State Federations, longtime all-male preserves, show four women in the position of secretary-treasurer. The City Labor Councils as well show an increase in the number of women on their boards and as executive officers.

Although statistical data on women in local leadership is unavailable from official sources, we undertook to get information from those unions that do keep track of local officers. Their records indicate that the greatest participation of women in leadership positions takes place at this level.²⁰ This information lends support to the idea that as one goes down the organizational hierarchy, the number of women in leadership roles increases.

Commitment of Resources

The two associations studied have consistently developed programs for women and an awareness of women's issues for their female mem-

20. Personal interviews with representatives of the labor organizations in the focus group.

TABLE 4
Women at the Regional/District and Local Levels, 1985
No. of Female Officers or Percentage of Female Officers, Where Available

Union	No. of Regions/ Districts	No. of Female Officers	No. of Local Unions	No. of Female Officers or Percentage of Female Officers, Where Available
ACTWU	joint boards	?	?	?
AFGE	15 regions	?	1,500	?
AFSCME	75 dist. councils	?	3,500	33% local presidents 45% local E. Boards 50% of officers
AFT	?	?	2,000	
CWA	13 districts	3 area directors 1 asst. to dist. VP	900	15% local presidents 35% local E. Boards 78 officers 77 presidents
HERE	14 districts	2 officers	175	
IAM	32 districts	1 officer	1,503	
IBEW	12 districts	0 officers	1,500	
IBT	44 joint councils	3 out of 457 officers	683	218 out of 4,781 local officers
ILGWU	?	?	145	?
IUE	6 districts	?	400	12% local presidents
SEIU		9 officers of joint councils out of 61 officers	350	319 out of 820 local officers
UAW	17 regions	0 reg'l. directors	1,500	?
UFCW	?	?	650	?
USWA	24 districts	?	?	?
ANA		0 officers	?	?
NEA	6 regional offices		53	
			11,800	50%-60% local presidents

Source: Author's survey.

bership. Of the fifteen focus unions, one-third appear *affirmatively committed* to addressing women workers' concerns through convention actions, budget allocation, standing departments and committees, conferences, and training materials. Another one-third appear *somewhat committed* to providing resources for women members, but generally do not have functioning programs. These unions tend to respond to membership requests for assistance but do not offer special programs for women members. In some cases, the lack of formal programs may be misleading, since some unions may have integrated their commitment to women into most of the functions of the organization. Unfortunately, this is difficult to discern in cursory surveys conducted for this type of research.

The final third of our focus unions appear to be merely *reactive* to crises concerning women and, in some cases, completely unresponsive to women's issues. A few of the unions in this group appear uninterested in even presenting the semblance of a commitment to their 100,000 plus female members. These unions offer no specific programs, employ few female staff except as clerical workers and, frankly, avoid in-depth investigation. In two cases, unions had absolutely no mechanism for female members to address women's issues, even though their female membership was between 138,000 and 300,000, comprising upwards to 45 percent of their membership. When representatives of these unions were asked how the concerns of their female members were handled, they stated that problems were dealt with locally through the grievance procedure. Upon further inquiry, we discovered that there were few female stewards and no training programs for stewards that addressed such issues as pay equity, sexual harassment, child care or pregnancy discrimination.

Of the fifteen focus unions, only one had a woman's department or staff before 1970. By 1975, six unions began carving out some services for female members. By 1980, eleven had established some stated or programmatic commitment to women. By 1985, the total had increased to twelve.

The Women's Department Dilemma

Where women's departments or programs exist, they appear to be underfunded, understaffed and relatively uninfluential at the national union level. Ideally, a women's department functions as a two-way conduit: it focuses on the special and particular issues facing women members, while creating a critical mass of support for women's issues among

the membership. Women's departments also help train members to become more effective leaders. In their brief history, however, most women's departments have been able to focus only on the educational component.

The educational focus, while certainly valuable, may nonetheless reinforce an approach toward empowerment of union women that, our research indicates, appears less promising than it once did. This approach argues that women can eventually become leaders within their national organization, by learning the skills necessary to lead and by exercising their political rights within the institution. In our view, the institutional barriers documented after ten years of observation are far more pervasive and entrenched than the "upward mobility" model of empowerment would have us expect.

In theory, the facilities, programs, and services, resources, and technical assistance of the union are always at the disposal of each and every member, whether male or female. In practice, staffing, accessibility, focus, attitudes and hidden institutional obstacles often create an unspoken gender gap for women members. Sexist stereotypes within the union as an institution and among its membership, perceived socio-cultural roles for women, and many historical influences help perpetuate a variety of internal barriers to the integration of women into positions of power. While education and training can help to overcome some of these obstacles, they are far from sufficient.

This has led some unionists, women in particular, to question the effectiveness of women's departments, whether they are, in fact, the best vehicle for promoting women's interests or whether in some cases they might not divert the energy and influence of women members away from the main path to political power. Clearly women's departments provide important services but should not be viewed as the sole means of increasing the number of women in leadership.

Staffing Patterns

Women continue to remain underrepresented in critical union management, collective bargaining and organizing jobs, but there is no question that major inroads are being made in these areas, particularly, again, in the public sector unions. In 1979, we estimated that approximately 16 percent of all national professional staff positions were filled by women. Today, we double that estimate.²¹

21. *Ibid.*

TABLE 5
Departments and Programs

Union	Area Within National Union Focusing on Women's Issues	National Conference	Local/Regional Mechanisms	Sample of Issues Addressed	When Established
ACTWU	Social Services Department		Some regional programs Some local conferences	Childcare, ERA, CLUW, Safety and Health	1973
AFGE	Department of Women's Affairs		District conferences Local co-ordinators	Equal pay, Sexual harassment, Career development, Childcare	1975
AFSCME	Women's Rights Department		District conferences Some local programs	Sexual harassment, CLUW, Comparable worth, Pregnancy discrimination	1978
AFT	Human Rights and Women's Rights		Local committees	Title IX implementation, Career development, ERA, CLUW	1970
CWA	Women's Activities	Yes	District representatives District conferences	Comparable worth, ERA, Safety and health, CLUW	1972
HREU IAM	Civil Rights Department	(Civil Rights)	Grievance procedure Grievance procedure	Employment discrimination	1976
IBEW IBT	Staff Representative Research & Education		Grievance procedure Grievance procedure	Sexual harassment, Pregnancy disability	1976
ILGWU	Education & Politics		Some local leadership workshops	Legislation, Educational programs, Social security	1940
IUE	Women's Department (within Social Action)	(Social Action) (Some Women's Conferences)	District conferences Local committees	Comparable worth, Pregnancy discrimination, Title VII compliance, Equal employment	1972

TABLE 5 (cont.)

Union	Area Within National Union Focusing on Women's Issues	National Conference	Local/Regional Mechanisms	Sample of Issues Addressed	When Established
SEIU	Women's Advisory Committee (now in formation)	Yes	Some local committees	Training, Job upgrading, Childcare	1980
UAW	Women's Department		Regional conferences and representatives Local committees	Participation in bargaining process, Childcare, Sexual harassment	1944
UFCW	Civil Rights and Women's Affairs	(Civil Rights, Women's Affairs and Political Action)	Local committees	Social services, CLUW, Sexual harassment	1978
USWA	Civil Rights	(Civil Rights)	Some local committees and conferences	ERA, Employment discrimination	1965
Association					
ANA	Commission on Human Rights		State divisions Local committees	Childcare, ERA, Gay rights, job upgrading, legislation	1976
NEA	Leadership Development Program (division of Services Department) Human Rights Department	Yes	Regional programs State Women's Caucuses	Affirmative action, Title IX implementation, Leadership development	1976

Perhaps the best example of the change is at SEIU, where the office worker affiliate, District 925, employs 19 organizing and field staff, 17 of whom are women; six senior management staff, all of whom are women; a female executive director; and a female president. SEIU itself employs some 55 field organizers and field representatives, 17 of whom are women. But, among SEIU senior non-supervisory field staff, there is only one woman, and among its field management staff, only one woman holds a supervisory job. Recent appointments of department heads, however, bode well for women at SEIU, as there are now 6 women out of 16 department heads, one female assistant to the president out of two, and one female assistant to the secretary-treasurer.²² Similar patterns are emerging at many of the other large public sector unions.

Organizing

A study of the pattern of union spending on organizing over the last few decades shows that 75 percent of union organizing budgets went into unionization drives in the goods-producing sector, even though 90 percent of the new jobs were occurring in the service sector.²³ In contrast, over the last five years unions have been focusing substantial resources on campaigns among women workers. Additionally, the public sector and health care drives of the seventies, even when conducted without specific focus on female workers, produced example after example of successful organizing of female workers.

The keys to success in these campaigns were a willingness to focus on issues that affected the workers at their worksites—pink collar ghetto issues such as low pay, low recognition, high stress and responsibility—and the increased presence of female organizers among the staff of the unions doing the organizing. At the same time, there has been a gradual redefinition of organizing styles, led primarily by the office worker groups. New styles emphasized the *collective* nature of workplace leadership, the emotional and personal rewards of unionization, and the importance of non-workplace skills among rank and file leadership, like those acquired in church or community organizations.

The development of new approaches to organizing may be the result of the increasing influence of female staffers, but it also signals the in-

22. Personal interviews with staff union officers at SEIU.

23. Paula B. Voos, "Determinants of U.S. Unionism: Past Research and Future Needs," *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Fall 1983, pp. 445-450; and also see Paula B. Voos, "Labor Union Organizing Programs, 1954-1977," Ph.D. Dissertations, 1982 (Library of Congress #82-22712).

creasing need for unions to find more effective means of reaching female members. District 925, now affiliated to SEIU, has become the preeminent example of the new style of female organizing. Not only are the district's organizing materials and themes decidedly female, so are its staff. The results of the District's efforts indicate an unmistakable identification by working women with this new organization. In little over four years, the District has organized 6,000 workers, predominantly in university, public sector, government, and school white and pink collar jobs. The District has set a national example for organizing by focusing on issues of direct concern to working women—VDT hazards, pay equity, job undervaluation, child care—and by developing female-run campaigns and rank and file leadership.

If imitation is the highest form of flattery, the District is well appreciated. Many unions have begun to shape similar campaigns for female workers, with particular focus on the white and pink collar university sector, public schools and other public employees. Thus far, few inroads have been made into the private sector fields of banking, insurance, or high-tech manufacturing and servicing.

One of the appeals of the District 925 model for organizing has been its commitment to women workers *prior to* and *outside* of unionization efforts. 9 to 5, The National Association of Working Women, the sister organization of District 925, is a separate entity and is not union affiliated. It advocates the formation of pre-union organizations which focus on self-help and assertiveness training; it also undertakes public and community organizing around issues of concern to women workers in a particular locale. Such a multi-faceted approach to women's concerns lends credence to the organization when it does advocate unionization.

Are They Bargaining for Equality?

While some unions in our survey have worked hard to enhance equal employment opportunity through collective bargaining—most recently in a flurry of activity around comparable worth—the majority have not been as diligent. Collective bargaining and grievance handling are generally decentralized activities in most unions and are thus affected directly by the priorities of the locally elected leadership. As such, the extent and position of women in locals will determine their influence over the bargaining table and servicing priorities.

Pay equity has undoubtedly been the single most important women's issue to emerge onto the collective bargaining agenda in the last decade.

Once again, the preeminence of the public sector unions in taking the lead on this issue reinforces the hypothesis that unions which organize female and minority workers in large numbers will sooner or later begin addressing their concerns as those workers begin to take control of the organization. In the public sector unions, it is apparent that policy shifts on pay equity have occurred because of increased participation of women in union activities. In a recent survey of its local union officers, AFSCME found that 33 percent of local presidents in 1982 were female compared to 25 percent several years before that and that women hold 45% of all local union offices.²⁴ Not surprisingly, AFSCME has been very committed to pursuing pay equity through collective bargaining. Wage adjustments, job evaluation studies and other equity language achieved through collective bargaining, legislative efforts and litigation have paid off for the unions that have acted on member priorities. Not only have pay equity victories benefitted current members, they have provided an effective organizing tool among women workers who understand that their wages are depressed due to sex segregation in the workforce.

Thus far, the successes in the comparable worth field have been generally limited to the public sector, in part because it is easier to procure comparative wage information for public employees, in part because public law provides for non-discriminatory wages for employees, and in part because there is a strong political component to the issues which appeals to legislators as employers. Whether such success will be possible in the private sector is yet to be seen. Whether it will be initiated by the private sector unions to any great degree will be dependent on the extent of female participation in private sector unions in the coming years.

Even without the staggering commitment of resources required to launch a major pay equity drive, there are many other ways unions are bargaining for women members. Aggressive servicing of members' contract rights, for example, means: filing unfair labor practice charges to get information on race and sex wage data from employers; pursuing EEOC complaints on behalf of women members; grieving sexual harassment under expedited contact procedures; filing requests for OSHA inspections; and bargaining for parental leave and child care. Collective bargaining also includes the enforcement of state and federal laws which affect workplace relations. One question to ask is whether the union has aggressively sought to establish a Title VII compliance program to uncover discriminatory provisions in the collective bargaining agreement, dis-

24. AFSCME internal survey conducted by its Women's Affairs Department, 1982.

criminatorary practices not covered by the agreement, and discriminatory patterns of employer selection for promotion, transfer and training that vary by race or sex.²⁵

Policy Implications

Our findings point to several types of policy implications.

A New Consciousness Raising

Women's voices must be heard as the labor movement struggles to catch up and adjust to changes in the workforce and the workplace. Although stereotypes held by members and leaders will not disappear overnight, unions can counter traditional views and prejudices by popularizing images of women as leaders in the union institution. Toward the same end, they should incorporate women's concerns visibly into educational, organizing, and collective bargaining activities.

Unions and labor educators should strive to improve the equality of information about women leaders at all levels of the labor movement. Rosters could be maintained showing the names and positions of elected and appointed women leaders at all levels. From an institutional point of view, such rosters would enable the union to identify its leadership ranks and to locate women leaders for training, appointments to new positions, and networking.

There should be a stronger focus on issues of concern to women unionists in labor education programs produced by unions and universities. Emphasis on leadership and bargaining skills, as well as on political skills and assertiveness training should be increased. New organizing techniques and successful treatment of women's concerns (bargaining strategies for pay equity, contract language on child care, parental leave, sexual harassment) must be documented and disseminated more widely among thousands of local unions who use labor education programs. Special efforts should also be made to recruit women into these programs. The summer schools now jointly sponsored by UCLEA, AFL-CIO and CLUW should be replicated year-round and provided with more financial and institutional support.

25. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Nonreferral Unions and Equal Employment Opportunity*, Washington, D.C., 1982.

As studies have indicated, women are most likely to participate when they feel that their involvement will make a difference. As female membership begins to influence decisionmaking at the local and regional levels, particularly in collective bargaining and organizing, such impact should be documented by labor educators and unions.

Affirmative Action Within

Institutionally, the labor movement must formalize its commitment by establishing equal employment opportunity goals and timetables for the promotion of women and minorities to leadership at all levels within unions and labor organizations. Such goals and timetables should be a part of each convention proceedings, and organizations should report to the membership annually on their progress toward these goals. Such rigorous standards of accountability will motivate institutional behavior that will help move women and minority workers into leadership positions.

Constitutionally mandated representation of women on all union executive boards might be an important step toward insuring adequate representation of female members. Unions might also consider altering customary rules of hierarchy (as the AFL-CIO recently did to allow the seating of two women vice presidents) to insure more female representation at the local, regional or national level.

Unions and associations should analyze their internal patterns of staff hiring, promotion, job classifications and wages and take the necessary steps to make corrections in discriminatory practices. Affirmative action committees could be established to monitor the staffing patterns of the union on a regular basis. Such a process would set an example for employers and could remove unions from the precarious position as defendants in internal sex discrimination suits.

Providing the Substance of Commitment

Structural and institutional goals for placement of women into leadership positions will fall short of achieving true success if there are not concomitant efforts to refocus union resources on women workers and their issues. Whether in the form of women's departments or in the form of an integrated theme for collective bargaining, unions must be prepared to take on the costs and consequences of fighting for women workers. Specifically, this will entail making commitments on issues which are not

necessarily popular in the current political atmosphere, child care, for instance, or VDT safety, and fighting for these issues with all the resources unions have to offer. The presence of female leaders will make the articulation of women's issues more likely, but only the institutional commitment of resources will insure change.