

FEMINISM'S CHALLENGE TO UNIONS IN THE NORTH: POSSIBILITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

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In most advanced capitalist societies, the feminist challenge to labour unions began well over twenty-five years ago. This essay examines the history of the ambivalent relationship between women and unions and assesses the difference feminism has made in terms of the structure, practices and overall vision of unions' role and goals. Has feminism helped to renew union movements across the capitalist world and moved them at all towards socialism? The answer to this is complex and involves assessing both the different strands of feminist influence and the way these were interwoven with the attack on unions and working people that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

From the perspective of the end of the twentieth century there have been three distinct influences on the formation of union feminism. Socialist-feminism that developed during the 1970s; working class feminism that emerged from the largely economic struggles of union women, starting in some countries as early as the 1960s and continuing through to the present; and mainstream gender politics, generally going under the rubric of 'equal opportunity', that sprung up in many liberal-democracies in the late 1970s and 1980s. All three influences remain in tension within labour movements today, interwoven together to produce important changes.

The overall argument of the essay is that feminism's contribution to legal and collective bargaining gains is real and substantial; that the ideological separation between home and work has been effectively challenged by feminist insights; that how democracy works in some unions has been changed under the influence of feminist democratic processes; and that women are more visible

at the leadership level. All of this, however, has not changed in any fundamental way labour unions' vision of what the work-place, community and society could be. Indeed it can be argued that union feminists, like their male counterparts, have pushed an agenda that is both economic and reformist and that the sources of this lie as much in mainstream feminism as in male-dominated business unionism. In this respect the vision of socialist-feminism has not succeeded in changing labour movements, despite the positive changes that have been wrought by the conjuncture of feminism and unionism. This essay mainly draws on examples from Canadian feminism. While it is difficult to say how representative these are, nevertheless, they are indicative of developments over the last fifty years.

THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIALIST-FEMINISM

Feminism re-emerged within capitalist liberal-democratic societies at a critical moment for socialist movements. In most of these societies, by the end of the 1960s, the state was experiencing challenges from progressive movements of workers and students demanding radical changes in politics, society and the work place. In this context feminism re-emerged as part of the widespread challenge to the political and social hegemony of the period. This manifested itself in a multitude of ways; in student unrest and defiance of traditional authority; in trade union militancy that in certain places joined forces with student radicals; in New Left community activism and politics that questioned the power of developers; in international solidarity struggles and 'in the assertion of the power of women and the demand for transformed personal and sexual politics'.¹ Until then the struggle for socialism had had very little to do with changing the subordination and oppression of women, either within society generally or within socialist organizations themselves. Within these movements women were active but generally not seen, relegated to backroom work, serving as secretaries, organizers, tea and coffee makers. Ideas about human liberation during the 1960s had not done much to change this. Women for the most part were condemned to a subordinate position within the Left. Patriarchy within socialist movements was just as strong as it was within conservative institutions. In this context socialist women began to organize to change themselves and their respective parties and groups.²

There were a number of possibilities open to women on the Left in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Some took up the challenge within the socialist groups they already belonged to. Some, tiring of the attempt to change the patriarchal relations and authoritarian processes of sectarian groups, decided to leave and join with other women in the small groups that constituted the women's liberation movement. Others kept a foot in both camps. Still others made the labour movement the locus of their political activity. In Britain *Beyond the Fragments* by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright defined the debate from the perspective of the late 1970s' disillusionment with the Labour Party and other Left parties and groups.³ Their view was that the experiences of the

women's liberation movement had much to contribute to overcoming the problems which had held back the creation of 'a more democratic, more truly popular and more effective socialist movement than was possible before'.⁴

For women who considered themselves socialist-feminist, working with other women—whether in Left groups, the union movement, or the women's movement in general—resulted in an experience which led them to demand democratic participation. Not only did this raise questions and criticism about vanguardism and the sectarian Left, but in later writings, when reflecting on this experience, socialist-feminists argued that the process of women working together developed collective capacities both to live their everyday experience democratically and also to struggle for radical change.⁵ One of the most important insights of 'second wave' feminism was the need for women to develop self-activity, to free themselves from subordination where they experienced it, to rid themselves of passivity, deference and lack of confidence. In this respect working-class men had much to gain by applying the lessons of the women's liberation movement. But of course at that time they were incapable of hearing the message.

Developing women's self-activity involved consciousness-raising through analysis and discussion; developing processes for communicating democratically and rejecting hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. In this respect Johanna Brenner's argument that feminism is 'a rich resource for the renewal of Marxism—for recapturing and developing its radically democratic liberatory vision',⁶ accurately captured the perspective of socialist-feminists who never claimed that the women's movement was a complete model on which the Left should base itself, but rather that, as Hilary Wainwright says, it 'has made an absolutely vital achievement—or at least the beginnings of it—which no socialist should ignore'.⁷

Socialist-feminists also thought that feminism had the potential to democratize unions by including and encouraging the education and participation of those who have been traditionally subordinated within unions; by changing authoritarian and bureaucratic structures and practices; and by reducing hierarchy and encouraging equalitarianism. Socialist-feminists carried these ideas into the union movement and met up with union women who were in the process of confronting the reality of low pay and low status in the work-place, and of subordination and invisibility in the unions that represented them.⁸

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF WORKING-CLASS FEMINISM

The issues for women of the dominant classes revolve around the possibilities of transforming the internal gender relations of class without transforming class itself. Clearly those for working-class women confront a more fundamental contradiction, particularly as the ambiguous local patriarchal forms of the family are eroded by changes in the bases of the family economy.⁹

The changing material conditions of working-class women's lives contributed to a growing militancy by union women in many capitalist economies. While in most countries women—especially married women—flooded into the paid labour force from the late 1960s to the 1980s, a significant number of working-class women had always been there.¹⁰ They did not leave the paid labour force once they had children, but remained in jobs which were segregated from men. This was particularly the case in France where from the early part of the century significant numbers of working-class women were employed in industrial production. It is not surprising, therefore, that in France militancy by union women predated the re-emergence of a women's movement.¹¹

In Britain, Canada and the United States the experience of working-class women was somewhat different. Between the 1960s and 1980s there was a rapid increase in labour force participation and, as a consequence, in the numbers of women organized into unions. This occurred mainly in the public sector. In these countries working-class feminism grew out of strikes and militant struggles waged by unionized women in the 1970s and 1980s.¹² At the time these were not characterized as women's strikes. It was only later as women within unions became more acquainted with the language of feminism that these strikes were seen as the beginnings of their struggle for equality. In nearly all the cases the main issue was low pay or the need for equal pay (later constructed in socialist-feminist terms as women as a source of cheap labour).¹³ Coupled with the demand for more pay, however, was a focus on women's low status in the work-place and the need for respect and dignity on the job.

For women with working-class experience the movement for women's liberation seemed a luxury they could ill afford. The much-publicized image of North American women burning their bras and demanding sexual liberation seemed indulgent to women who worried each week about stretching the family wages to cover basic needs. As Dorothy Smith points out, patriarchy was not as visible to working-class women as those in the intermediate classes because it is found '... in the same set of institutional processes which organize class hegemony' and for this reason '... its patriarchal practices are not easily distinguishable from its class rule'.¹⁴

Socialist-feminists made sense of the changed material reality of union women's lives through the analysis that they brought into the unions. In informal groups, and later in formal education courses and workshops, the material and ideological bases of women's oppression were debated. In a number of countries feminists from outside the union movement turned up on picket lines to support women during strike action and demonstrate their solidarity with their union sisters.¹⁵ In Italy as well as France 'collectivities' of women unionists were formed during the 1970s with initiatives taken by women from the New Left. They demanded and won autonomous sections of women inside unions.¹⁶ These networks placed their emphasis on political activism rather than employment demands. This was in contrast to the

informal women's committees that started to be formed in the mid-1970s in the US and Canada, which mainly emphasized changing male-dominated collective bargaining and politics within unions.¹⁷

One of the most contentious issues for labour unions concerns women separately organizing inside them. Informal women's committees started in Canada and the United States in the mid-1970s and were succeeded by formal women's committees, education courses, workshops and conferences. As noted earlier, one of the most significant insights of feminism is the necessity for women to confront their passivity and subordination and become active participants. Because of women's propensity to remain silent and invisible, either being unable to prevent men's dominance or allowing them to take over, union women pushed for separate forums where they could discuss, debate and analyse their subjection together, without the presence of men. Developing from the early ideas of consciousness-raising, this kind of separation allowed women to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to take their full place in their unions. Furthermore, within these forums attempts were made to develop democratic feminist process, rejecting the authoritarian and hierarchical processes found in traditional union meetings. Separate women's committees are also the forums where union women can strategize about getting their demands on to the bargaining table and the convention floor.¹⁸

While socialist-feminists have argued that in the final analysis separate organizations for women strengthen unions overall, there is the problem that marginalization of women can result, in terms of both process and their demands.¹⁹ In the case of France, Jane Jenson argues that the establishment of autonomous groups of women within unions resulted in their being seen as marginal workers who were not part of the unions' main business, so that they were not treated equally as regular workers either in the unions or the labour market.²⁰ Clearly there is a need for women to maintain a balance between autonomy and integration if they are to strengthen their power within unions. Women and other subordinated groups have been in many cases hived off into separate committees, set apart from the 'serious' business of unions and thus marginalized.

Furthermore, women have been marginalized as wives in their attempts to have input into union policy that directly affects them. In this sense committees of union wives have been constructed by unions as being separate and marginal to union decision-making. Two examples of this stand out: in Britain 'Women Against Pit Closures' in 1984 and, in Canada 'Wives Supporting the Inco Strike' in 1978. Both groups were formed to promote solidarity between the unions and the community. Both organized activities that resulted in the private realm of the home being merged with the realm of work, into a community of defence and action. Both groups attempted to ask crucial questions regarding the separation of the work-place from the community. Did not the community have as much of their lives tied up in the mines as the men that worked there? Should they not have a say, or even a vote, about the decisions

to be made? In this sense both groups raised fundamental questions concerning working-class democracy, and the rights of both those who produce and those who *reproduce* to debate and contribute to decisions that affect the entire working-class community.²¹

By the early 1980s union feminists debated and started to develop strategies and policies aimed at changing women's subordination in the work-place, in their unions and at home.²² This involved addressing women's 'triple day' (as workers, parents and union activists), and devising policies which relieved women of their duties in the home, such as the provision of paid child care during union events. This emphasis on the relationship between home, the work-place and the subordination of women in both spheres also had the effect of questioning the traditional goals of industrial unionism. Should unions be concerned only with work-place problems or also with social issues generally? In Canada, by the end of the 1980s union feminism effectively challenged the narrow vision of industrial unionism to include policies on abortion, child care, sexual and racial harassment and other equality issues.²³ It is now well established in Canada that collective bargaining demands should address the needs of women and other discriminated groups, and more generally that the union movement should move beyond work-place issues to deal with social concerns that reflect the relationship between work and the community as a whole.

Union-feminism has to this extent played a fundamental role in breaking down the ideological separation of paid and unpaid work, home and work, the economy and the community. Challenging the idea of work as a separate sphere from that of the community has raised fundamental questions concerning the private/public divide and increased the union movement's potential to broaden its vision of the relationship between work and society. For example issues such as reduced working time were reconceptualized by feminists, so as to broaden the demand, linking it with issues in the home and community and the need for more time for the reproduction of labour power and for developing a culture of community activity.²⁴

RESTRUCTURING ECONOMIES AND INSTITUTIONALIZING FEMINISM

After the heady days of the women's liberation movement, the development of socialist-feminism and the flourishing of working-class feminism, the women's movement settled down and became institutionalized in advanced capitalist societies by the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed its institutionalization is a mark of how successful the second wave of feminism really was. The formalizing of the movement started in most countries in the late 1970s with the introduction of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination programmes by governments. 'Status of Women' offices were established and staffed by women, the 'femocrats' who made a career out of equal opportunities initiatives.²⁵ Such initiatives followed from International Women's Year in 1975, the

United Nation's symbolic attempt to promote women's equality in its member countries. With the institutionalization of feminism within various states, mainstream feminism became more acceptable within unions. In Canada and the United States unions established equal opportunity committees along the lines found within state bureaucracies. Frequently positions on these committees were held by women who could be trusted by the unions' male-dominated executives 'not to rock the boat'.

The main emphasis in equal opportunity policies is the removal of barriers to women's advancement within work places and other economic and political institutions, with declarations of gender equality and guarantees that women and men will receive equal treatment. This was all well and good, but for working-class women, condemned to a narrow range of low-paying job ghettos, 'equal opportunity' had little impact on the everyday double burden of unpaid work in the home and low pay in the work place. The influence of equal opportunity policy on unions resulted in bringing more women into leadership positions, challenging sexist practices and supplementing labour's traditional agenda with women's issues. In other words, equal opportunity policies set out to modify union structures and practices so women can be accommodated; they do not, by themselves, question bureaucratic and hierarchical decision-making. The equal opportunity approach also fostered a dependence on legal processes rather than on collective, militant action.²⁶ Equal opportunity recognized women's subordinate status within the union movement and the work-place but could not by itself change it.

The concept of equal opportunity was extended and developed into notions of pay and employment equity. Women, especially in unions, demanded that their low pay and status be addressed, and equal opportunity programmes had little to say about this. Equity has been interpreted as being about members of subordinate groups, including women, gaining the benefits, the status, the positions that white males already have. This is in profound contradiction with a more radical conception of equity as meaning a reduction in inequality in pay and status generally, a goal not satisfied by distributing the places in an unequal hierarchy more evenly.²⁷

At the same time that equal opportunity policies were being put in place, economic restructuring and the move to the right were occurring. Eventually by the 1990s all liberal-democratic and social-democratic economies were deeply affected by the restructuring of capital, the work-place and social-welfare provisions. Economic restructuring in general produced a marked increase in non-standard and precarious forms of work—historically associated with women. In many labour movements the loss of male-dominated industrial jobs and the expansion of the service sector provided an opening for feminist initiatives because women workers became the 'paradigmatic trade unionists'.²⁸ Because unions were experiencing a dramatic loss of male members, the need became apparent to organize women in the service sector and to try to address their specific needs at the bargaining table.

The move to the right also occurred with respect to feminism and was reflected in the undermining of social welfare states and the marketing of state functions. Johanna Brenner points out that ‘the new right has been so successful a counter to feminism’, because ‘... without the capacity to construct personal dilemmas as political issues, feminism is necessarily on the defensive ...’.²⁹ Of course, mainstream feminism remains alive. In the United States it is institutionalized in a vast network of organizations which operate as pressure groups on politicians to bring about legislative and juridical change.³⁰ And in Europe as well as Canada there has also been an increasing tendency to take up equity issues through legislative and court processes.³¹ This has resulted in some outstanding successes in terms of wage settlements for women even in a neoliberal era. For instance, in Canada—after a long and costly process for the union in terms of legal representation—the largest sum (\$4.5 billion) in the entire history of equal value/comparative worth was awarded in 1999 to the members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the union that represents most federal government workers who occupied female-dominated positions.

Swedish women also have been demanding pay equity. In the 1930s Swedish unions accepted women’s right to be in the paid labour force and later in the post-war period took special measures to help them to be active members of unions. Also women in general benefitted from the labour movement’s wage solidarity strategy. With the erosion of collective bargaining in the 1990s, however, and the breakdown of wage solidarity, the wage gap between men and women began to widen. This provided an opening for feminists in unions to demand equal pay for work of equal value. In LO this resulted in the creation of a special women’s ‘pot’ of money, instead of special pots for the lower paid whether they are men or women. What this means is that women are separated out from the rest of the working-class, and the special ‘pot’ now also benefits higher-paid women. While agreeing to the women’s ‘pot’, LO has resisted juridification of equity issues, largely due to its tradition of centralized bargaining.³²

There are often good arguments for such resistance, above all that juridification of union struggles inevitably results in a loss of mobilization and a reliance instead on legal experts and legal arguments. Yet this is not always the case and was not entirely the case in the PSAC’s struggle for pay equity in Canada. The sixteen-year-long legal process was paralleled by strikes, sit ins, demonstrations and education sessions. The union spent considerable resources educating and mobilizing the membership in support of its conception of the equal value principle, so the struggle was far from being a mere legal battle controlled entirely by legal experts. Yet there are contradictory outcomes for unions in allowing the courts to be the main forum in which conflicts are decided. In the case of the PSAC, despite the mobilization of the membership around the issue of equal value, the fact that the main battle was fought in the courts means that the issue has not become embedded in the collective

bargaining experience and practice of the union. Future collective bargaining cannot build on the experience and learning that might have taken place if the whole union had been mobilized to strike over the issue. Will future negotiations revert to the past practice of demanding higher wages for men? Without the experience of struggling for equal pay on picket lines, has the issue really become an embedded part of the 'main business' of the union? It is important for union feminists to develop a clearer vision of law and what it is capable of achieving.³³ Often even successful outcomes have contradictory effects.

Another problem with the equal value approach is that it leads to the view that men's pay and position are the ultimate objective to be achieved. Men's overall higher pay and higher status in the work-place have become the objectives of women's struggle together with the desire to see women equally represented in the hierarchy of jobs and pay. This is in stark contrast to a vision of transforming the hierarchical nature of the work-place, with its authoritarian division of tasks and separation of intellectual and physical labour. The earlier socialist-feminists' vision of changing union organization so as to promote the value of all people's work in terms of self-activity and human liberation is removed from the agenda, and equity, in terms of what white men have, becomes the ultimate objective. Furthermore, in certain sectors during the recent period of restructuring, the wage gap between men and women has declined, not because women's wages have increased but because men's have fallen. The emphasis on equal value has led unionists in some cases away from considering the wage gap between the lowest- and highest-paid workers. Even wages below subsistence level are perceived to be justified if job evaluation plans 'show' them to be only worth that much.³⁴

Yet there are instances where these implications of pay equity have been rejected by unionists who have instead fostered a concept of wage justice which rejects bourgeois notions of the market value of skills and labour. In Ontario, which was said to have the 'best' pay equity legislation of any Canadian province, applying to both the private and the public sectors, union locals organized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees refused to allow management's conception of the value of skills to guide the outcome of the pay equity process. Operating with their own conception of justice, union presidents in many cases insisted that pay equity had to mean raising the wages of the lowest-paid workers even though the job evaluation plan did not justify the increase. But in general, because of the use of a range of factors in evaluating skill gradations, job evaluation methodology emphasizes and accentuates the skill differences between workers rather than gathering workers together on the basis of similarities and one common wage.³⁵ Pay equity and its application through job evaluation therefore is often in contradiction with the need to raise the pay of those in the lowest part of the job hierarchy. This contradiction is frequently not recognized by many union-feminists, who in general do advocate for dramatic increases for those workers, including the unemployed, who receive incomes below subsistence levels.

All this said, it is still the case that while equal opportunities and equity policies carry with them individualizing tendencies focused on achieving a higher place in the hierarchy of jobs and pay for individual women, women in unions have, nevertheless, collectively rallied to support pay equity and in doing so have revealed the systemic, collective nature of women's low pay. In this sense pay equity has been an important, though contradictory, banner behind which union women and men have mobilized and formed alliances with feminist groups.³⁶

CONCLUSION

The challenge of feminism to labour unions has varied from country to country, and from union to union, both in its strength and its impact. Some unions remain untouched by feminism's necessary and important influence, while in others men strongly resist sharing their power with women. In general, however, by the end of the twentieth century women are in unions in large numbers and have made themselves and their demands heard. Union women are representatives at all levels of the movement and increasingly they are found in staff positions. New forms of union and working-class solidarity have been forged as a result of feminism that now include, not only women, but also other subordinate groups, and to some extent those outside in other social movements. Feminism has had the effect of broadening the definition of the working-class and work-place struggles and undoubtedly there has been a sea change with regard to the representation by women and collective bargaining issues addressing women's needs.

Economic restructuring and the move to the right in the latter part of the twentieth century had contradictory effects on the feminist challenge. On the one hand, the changes in the economy provided openings for organizing women and responding to their demands, while on the other they emphasized the economic tendencies of working-class feminism and limited its potential. Improving the economic position of women, other low-paid groups and the working class overall is of utmost importance and helps to strengthen the labour movement in general. An emphasis on economic welfare, however, without examining the underlying labour-market causes of below-subsistence pay and without raising fundamental questions concerning the organization of work and its relationship to the political economy is bound to result in reformist tendencies. In this respect union feminism carries with it the same economic limitations as those of business unions. In general feminism has been formalized in unions but it tends to be the economic, reformist tendencies that have got the upper hand. Socialist-feminism in the seventies was limited by the absence of working class and non-white women. Joining with union women overcame that limitation but at the same time socialist-feminists' energy has been directed to day-to-day working-class struggles that have attenuated their vision of social transformation. Socialist-feminist tendencies remain present but the transformative vision of socialist-feminism is still struggling in the wings, off the main stage.

NOTES

1. Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female*, London: Virago Press, 1987, p. 206.
2. This is not to deny the gains made under Communist regimes. Frigga Haug points out that East German women prior to reunification were more independent than West German women because of the social support they received from the East German state. See her *Beyond Female Masochism: Memory—Work and Politics*, London: Verso 1992, pp. 185–217.
3. Sheila Rowbotham described her experience during the 1960s in the Young Socialist group of the Hackney Labour Party where she met young Trotskyists, then later in the 1960s she briefly joined the International Socialists (IS). Overwhelmed by the ‘energy which erupted in May 1968’ she found the subsequent defeat of the broad left movement hard to take. The radical movements of ’68 did, however, open her ‘political eyes and ears’. The emphasis these placed on human liberation and the rejection of the ‘inner hold’ of capitalism also made her aware of the limitations of democratic centralism and the ‘assumption that the manipulation of people was justified by the supposedly superior knowledge’ of the revolutionary leaders. By the early 1970s she had become an ‘old leftist’, only then did she become involved with the emerging Women’s Liberation Movement. See Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, London: The Merlin Press Ltd., 1979, pp. 26–39.
4. Rowbotham et al., *Beyond the Fragments*, p. 14; also see Hilary Wainwright’s arguments in *ibid.*, pp. 231, 252 and in *Arguments for a New Left*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
5. See Rowbotham et al., *Beyond the Fragments*, pp. 211–53; Carolyn Egan, ‘Toronto’s International Women’s Day Committee’; Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton (eds.), *Feminism and Political Economy: Women’s Work, Women’s Struggles*, Agincourt: Methuen Publications, 1987, pp. 109–18; and Johanna Brenner, ‘Feminism’s Revolutionary Promise: Finding Hope in Hard Times’, *Socialist Register*, 1989, pp. 245–63.
6. From the perspective of the US, Johanna Brenner argued that: ‘Feminist theory has helped to undermine the system that Marxist theory had become: its economic reductionism, its productivism and uncritical approach to technology; its narrow definitions of work, worker, and the working-class; its reification of the capitalist split between “public” and “private” and the privileging of the public as an arena for theoretical analysis and political organization; its impoverished understandings of consciousness, particularly its inattention to the way emotional needs shape political understandings, the relationship between gender identities and the construction of political and economic “interests”.’ Brenner ‘Feminism’s Revolutionary Promise’, pp. 245–6.
7. Rowbotham et al., *Beyond the Fragments*, p. 250. Some of these ideas form part of the Gramscian vision of educationing the working-class and changing the relationship between leaders and led. The importance of socialist-feminism, however, was the way in which the ideas of educating and activating the masses became part of the debate and practice within women’s groups. For a recent discussion of the development of the ‘productive forces within capitalism’ by building capacities to govern democratically everyday life, the economy, civil society and the state,

- including those articulated by socialist-feminists, see Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, 'Transcending Pessimism: Rekindling Socialist Imagination', *Socialist Register*, 2000, pp. 1–29.
8. See the important essay by Heather Jon Maroney, 'Feminism at Work', *New Left Review*, 141, Sept–Oct 1983.
 9. Dorothy Smith, 'Women, Class and Family', *Women, Class, Family and The State*, Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985, p. 40.
 10. The major exceptions were France and Germany. The female share of the labour force in 1950 was 35.9% for France and 35.1% for Germany, these percentages had increased only slightly by 1982. In Canada and the US in 1950 the female share was 21.3% and 28.9%, and by 1982 these had increased significantly to 40.9% and 42.8%. See Isabella Bakker 'Women's Employment in Comparative Perspective', *Feminization of the Labour Force*, Jane Jenson et al. (eds.), Oxford: Polity Press, 1988, pp. 17–44.
 11. Jane Jenson argues that during the mid-1960s 'many women, employed where de-skilling and intensification of production was most important, had emerged on the front line of militant struggle'. 'Legacies of the French Women's Movement: Mobilization of "Difference" in the Labour Movement', Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Winnipeg, June 1986, p. 15. See also Jane Jenson, 'Gender and Reproduction: Or Babies and the State', *Studies in Political Economy*, 20, Summer 1986, pp. 9–46, for a discussion of the difference between Britain and France with respect to women in the paid labour force and the two states' child-care policies.
 12. See Rosemary Warskett, 'The Politics of Difference and Inclusiveness within the Canadian Labour Movement', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 4 (November) 1996. By the 1990s, a catastrophic decline in the numbers of workers organized in the US had resulted in new openings for a different kind of unionism. In Canada the labour movement has not experienced the same kind of decline and women in unions have undertaken the task of changing the old-style business unionism of the 1950s and 1960s. See Julie White, *Sisters in Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada*, Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1993.
 13. Heather Jon Maroney in *Feminism at Work* argues that 'the rise of working-class feminism has not, however, been an unmixed blessing'. She goes on to point out that the militant struggles by working-class women has 'reinforced a general tendency in the left to economism'.
 14. Smith, 'Women, Class and Family', p. 40.
 15. See, for France, Jane Jenson, 'The Limits of "and the" Discourse: French women as marginal workers', *Feminization of the Labour Force*, Jane Jenson, et al. (eds.), Oxford: Polity Press, 1988, p. 17; for Canada, Carolyn Egan, 'Toronto's International Women's Day Committee', p. 114; for Britain, Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s*, London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989, pp. 225–226.
 16. For Italy, see Bianca Beccalli and Guglielmo Meardi, 'When Equal opportunities is not enough: The ambiguous and changing relations between women and unions in Italy', Prepared for the Twelfth International Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, March 30–April 1, 2000.
 17. In Ontario, Canada, socialist-feminists formed Organized Working Women (OWW). Organized across union lines and labour centrals, OWW did not win

- recognition from the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) but had a significant influence on the OFL around a broad range of issues including abortion. For a discussion of separate organizing see Linda Briskin, 'Union Women and Separate Organizing', *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy and Militancy*, Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, pp. 89–108. On feminism and union democracy see Miriam Edelson, 'Challenging Unions: Feminist Process and Democracy in the Labour Movement', Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1987.
18. See Debbie Field, 'The Dilemma Facing Women's Committees', *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz (eds.), Toronto: The Women's Press, 1983, pp. 293–303; Julie White, *Sisters in Solidarity*, pp. 123–24.
 19. It is interesting to note that in Sweden class solidarity within LO has prevented women from organizing separately. Separation would be seen as a break in class solidarity. See Rianne Mahon, 'Learning to Embrace the Differences Within: Toward the Renewal of Swedish Unions', Prepared for the Twelfth International Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, March 30–April 1, 2000.
 20. Jane Jenson, 'The Limits'.
 21. See Heather Jon Maroney, 'Feminism at Work'; Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female*, pp. 202, 233; Rosemary Warskett, 'The Politics of Difference and Inclusiveness'.
 22. See Julie White, *Sisters in Solidarity*; Janet Routledge 'Women and Social Unionism' Resources for *Feminist Research*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1981; Debbie Field 'The Dilemma Facing Women's Committees'.
 23. See Jane Stinson, 'Window on the North: Women's Issues and Labour in Canada', *Labour Research Review*, no. 11 (Spring, 1988).
 24. See Bianca Beccalli and Guglielmo Meardi 'When Equal opportunities is not enough'; for a discussion of Rivalta FIOM women's activity around working-time organization.
 25. For a discussion of the construction of women's programmes and anti-discrimination legislation see Suzanne Findlay, 'Facing the State: The Politics of the Women's Movement Reconsidered', Maroney and Luxton (eds.), *Feminism and Political Economy*, pp. 31–50.
 26. See Dorothy Sue Cobble (ed.), *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership*, Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1993.
 27. Jan Kainer, 'Pay Equity Strategy and Feminist Legal Theory: Challenging the Bounds of Liberalism', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1985, pp. 440–69. In Canada and Europe pay equity means equal pay for work of equal value. In the United States the term used is comparable worth.
 28. See Chris Howell, 'Women as the Paradigmatic Trade Unionists? New Work, New Workers and New Trade Unions in Conservative Britain', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 4 (November) 1996, pp. 511–43.
 29. Johanna Brenner, 'Feminism's Revolutionary Promise', p. 251.
 30. The Coalition of Labour Union Women are part of this network. Created in 1974, early on this coalition produced educational materials and had the potential to mobilize union women; see Diane Balser, *Sisterhood and Solidarity*, Boston: South End Press, 1987. The CLUW is now part of the institutionalized women's movement in the US, and does not exhibit the rank and file activism it formerly did.

31. Major exceptions to this are the French labour movements. See Jeanne Gregory, Rosemary Sales and Ariane Hegewisch (eds.), *Women, Work and Inequality: The Challenge of Equal Pay in a Deregulated Labour Market*, London: Macmillan Press, 1999.
32. Rianne's Mahon 'Learning to Embrace the Differences Within: Toward the Renewal of Swedish Unions'. Women secured reforms such as day care and parental leave, and also responding to the challenge of immigration, equality measures and right to Swedish instruction on working-time. But all of these measures were championed in the name of the working-class family rather than equality. Rianne Mahon, *Economic and Industrial democracy*, vol. 17, no. 4 (November) 1996, pp. 545–86.
33. See Carol Smart, *Feminism and the Power of Law*, London: Routledge, 1989. She argues against a totalizing theory of law and outlines a view of law that is refracted rather than unified and has contradictory outcomes: 'It is important to resist the temptation that law offers, namely the promise of a solution', p. 165.
34. See Gillian Cresse, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944–1994*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999. She relates the history of the Office and Technical Employees Union (OTEU) at British Columbia Hydro, revealing how male 'breadwinner wages' were embedded in job classification and evaluation systems, and the contradictions in pay equity strategies that do not deal with the entire work organization and hierarchy.
35. See Jane Stinson, 'Ontario Pay Equity Results For CUPE Service Workers in Ontario Hospitals: A Study of Uneven Benefits', Master's Thesis, Carleton University, Ontario, Canada, 1999, p. 84.
36. See Michael McCann, *Rights at Work: Pay Equity Reform and the Politics of Legal Mobilization*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.