

# **Who Makes the Decisions? Women's Participation in Canadian Unions**

**Marina C. Boehm**

ISBN: 0-88886-292-X

© 1991 Queen's University Industrial Relations Centre  
Printed and bound in Canada.

Industrial Relations Centre  
Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario  
Canada K7L 3N6

### **Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Boehm, Marina Christine, 1965-

Who makes the decisions? : Women's participation in  
Canadian unions

(School of Industrial Relations research essay series;  
no. 35)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-88886-292-X

1. Women in trade-unions - Ontario - Decision making. 2.  
Trade-unions - Government employees Ontario. I. Queen's  
University (Kingston, Ont.). Industrial Relations Centre. **II.**  
**Title. III.** Series.

HD6079.2.C32053 1991 331.478'09713 C91-094050-9

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
ABSTRACT .....	4
I. INTRODUCTION .....	5
II. BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF CANADIAN UNIONS .....	7
III. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN AND UNIONS .....	17
IV. MEASURES TAKEN BY LABOUR ORGANIZATIONS TO INCREASE WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING .....	28
V. CONCLUSIONS .....	38
REFERENCES .....	41

## FOREWORD

The Industrial Relations Centre is pleased to include this study, Who Makes the Decisions? Women's Participation in Canadian Unions completed in September, 1990, in its publication series School of Industrial Relations Research Essay Series. The series is intended to give wider circulation to selected student research essays, chosen for both academic merit and their interest to industrial relations practitioners and policy makers.

The research essay is a central requirement of the Master's Program in Industrial Relations (MIR) at Queen's, providing students with an opportunity to undertake independent research. The essay may be an evaluation of a policy oriented issue; a limited empirical project; or a critical analysis of theory, policy, or the related literature in a particular area of industrial relations.

The author, Marina Boehm, received her MIR degree in October, 1990.

I would like to express my appreciation to the author for granting permission to publish this excellent study and to Professor Ronnie Leah, who was in the Queen's Department of Sociology, for her important contribution as faculty supervisor.

P. Kumar, Acting Director  
Industrial Relations Centre and  
School of Industrial Relations  
Queen's University

April 1991

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Ronnie Leah, for her invaluable assistance and many helpful suggestions. Additional thanks goes to the representatives of the labour organizations I contacted - without the information they provided, this paper would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Bernice Gallagher, Mary Lou Coates and the staff of the Industrial Relations Library. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my family and Bob for their unfailing support during the past year.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to determine whether women are increasingly being involved in the decision-making process of Canadian unions. The scope of review of this report is restricted to public sector unions and one private sector union in the province of Ontario. A combination of methods were utilized in completing this study, including an overview of existing research, a review of statistical data, and an analysis of policy statements, convention resolutions and general union literature.

The results of this review indicate that labour organizations have paid significant and increasing attention to women's issues over the past 15 to 20 years; union policies have encompassed aspects of women's inequality within the union, in the workplace and in society. Many unions, particularly the central labour organizations, have adopted policies of internal affirmative action, they have increased the amount of education available to staff and union members on women's issues, they have implemented policies providing child care services during union functions such as conventions and workshops, and they have provided regular coverage of women's issues in membership publications.

While these progressive policies are a positive indication of the unions' commitment to attaining women's equality, they are not a guarantee of prolonged or significant increases in women's participation in union decision-making activities. Labour organizations must be careful not to overestimate the effectiveness of their policies, and they must redouble their efforts to win the battle against discrimination within their hierarchies and structures. To this end, unions must ensure that their policies are fully implemented in practice. They must also continue to educate their staff and union members about the benefits of providing women with equal opportunities. The labour movement can only grow stronger through greater solidarity between its union sisters and brothers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to determine whether there have been improvements in women's status in Canadian public sector unions. In recent years, women have become much more active in organizing for the representation of their concerns at the bargaining table as well as at the strategic decision-making level of their unions. Union leaders have recognized the importance of women's improved representation, due to their heightened awareness of women's issues as well as their concern over the stagnation in membership growth.

This report focuses specifically on unions within the Ontario and Federal public sectors. These unions contain a significant number and proportion of women members and have been among the most proactive in responding to their members' demands. This paper identifies the measures taken by these progressive labour organizations in their efforts to involve women more fully in decision-making activities. The Canadian Autoworkers' Union has also been included in the analysis, as an example of a private sector union that has initiated progressive policies to address its women members' needs. Although the proportion of women in the CAW is relatively small, in absolute terms the number of women members is quite significant. In 1985, there were 24,314 women in the CAW, which represented only 18.2 percent of the union's total membership (CALURA, 1985).

It is difficult to obtain adequate information on the initiatives being taken by unions to encourage women's participation. The fostering of women's increased participation in unions' decision-making process is quite a recent phenomenon and it is also one which is rarely documented. Many of the unions themselves have not yet begun to keep statistics on women in executive and staff positions. General literature prepared by the unions concerning women's committees, affirmative action initiatives within the union, convention resolutions and related issues are available in varying degrees of detail. Current independent research in Canada has concentrated on the barriers to women's involvement in union decision-making rather than on recent initiatives taken by unions to increase women's participation.

It is important to note that the increased attention being paid by unions to their women members does not necessarily address or resolve the concerns faced by all women. For instance, minority women face double discrimination in the workplace and the union, and must therefore deal with the additional burden of racism, a problem not encountered by the 'mainstream' women who are fighting sexism. These special problems are all too often ignored or forgotten, although this area too is receiving increasing attention.

The information contained in this report is drawn from various sources. The public sector unions, the CAW, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress were contacted directly (by telephone and letter) to obtain statistical information, policy statements, convention resolutions and general literature published by these labour groups. Further data are taken from previously completed research in this area. Statistical information is derived largely from Statistics Canada data gathered under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act.

This report is divided into several sections. It commences with a review of the available research in this area. This research addresses why women are less likely to be members of labour unions and focuses on the barriers women unionists face in attaining leadership roles.

The next section of the report contains an analysis of statistics on women's current position in their unions, compared with the past 15 to 20 years. The third section, based on information obtained directly from the unions, provides a discussion of initiatives taken by these labour organizations to foster women's increased participation in union decision-making. Analysis centres on policy statements and convention resolutions, as well as more concrete indicators such as the establishment of women's departments, implementation of affirmative action programs and many other related initiatives.

The report concludes with a summary of findings. It includes suggestions for further improving women's representation and accelerating women's participation in the decision-making processes of their labour organizations. It is hoped that this paper will serve as a starting point for further research on this topic.

## II. BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF CANADIAN UNIONS

In examining women's status in Canadian unions, it is informative to review existing independent research on this subject. This chapter provides an overview of research on women's increased entry into the workforce and women's continuing under-representation in union membership. The chapter focuses on reports that have analyzed the barriers to women's participation in leadership roles and looks at the measures taken by unions in their efforts to eliminate these barriers. Although certain studies cited in this section of the paper are outdated, it is interesting to note how ideas and criticisms have changed over the past 15 to 20 years. Where such concerns are no longer valid, a brief update is provided.

Over the past few years, women have entered the workforce in increasing numbers. Numerous factors have been cited as being the cause of this influx: the diminishing stigma toward women's working, the increasing cost of living, higher general wage levels, increasing education levels, and improved household technology which allows women more time to pursue other activities (Berquist, 1974). Other reasons, such as better possibilities for family planning, the declining birth rate, the greater incidence of single-parent families and longer life expectancy for women, have also been given as factors influencing women's decision to join (or rejoin) the labour force. A growth of white-collar jobs (traditionally filled by women), initiatives such as affirmative action and more accommodating work schedules, and legislative intervention (i.e. human rights acts) have all served to make the workplace a more enticing alternative (LeGrande, 1978).

This increase in the number of women in the labour force prompted a closer look at the circumstances surrounding their employment. There is an interesting anomaly: women's rate of unionization is far below that of men's. In 1986, women comprised 42.9 percent of the labour force, while constituting only 36.4 percent of total union membership (Kumar and Cowan, 1989).

There has been much discussion and research about why women are generally less unionized than men. Some rather complex explanations for this phenomenon have been proposed. For instance, some researchers argue that young women work only until they get married, and married women work to supplement the family income or to generally raise the family's standard of living by providing money for luxuries and savings for children's education. Because these women are not "committed" to the workforce and their jobs, they are not interested in the benefits that unions provide, such as greater job security and pension benefits, and they are not interested in the potential negative effects of unionization, such as strikes (Dewey, 1971; Fiorito and Greer, 1986). However, it has been shown that while some women work because of their desire to do so, many are forced to seek employment because of compelling financial need - helping to keep their families above the poverty line (Townson, 1975).

More commonly, other researchers explain women's low rate of unionization by pointing out that the types of occupations in which they are concentrated and the sectors of the economy in which they work are generally much less unionized and much more difficult for labour unions to organize than those areas where men predominate. For instance, women hold a significant proportion of the white-collar clerical jobs, which have traditionally been non-union, while men hold the vast majority of the blue-collar jobs - those which are among the most densely unionized (Dewey, 1971; Berquist, 1974; LeGrande, 1978).

Two recent studies have confirmed the observations regarding women's concentration in historically unorganized industries and occupations. Fiorito and Greer (1986) found that general differences in United States union membership were attributable to factors other than gender per se; they concluded that "differences in unionism measures will disappear as occupational and industrial distributions become more gender-neutral" (Fiorito and Greer 1986:162).

Kumar and Cowan (1989) came to similar conclusions in Canada. Building a model using human capital, industry and occupational variables, they accounted for more than four-fifths of the male-female differential in unionization rates by combining industry and occupational variables while controlling for variations in age, marital status, education, nature of employment (part-time or full-time), job tenure and province of residence. These results, concurring with the findings of the 1986 American study, confirm that industry and occupation - and not gender per se - are important determinants in women's rate of unionization (Kumar and Cowan, 1989).

With so many more women working outside the home and becoming union members, attention has begun to focus on the issues that concern women. While quite a spectrum of issues may potentially affect women at work, concerns seem to be concentrated on a small number of critical issues. Some problems cited include the lack of equal opportunity for entering occupations, seniority rights, pay, promotional opportunities, and the need for available daycare (Dewey, 1971). Improvements in many of these areas of concern require unions to provide equal treatment for their men and women members. However, Townson (1975) reported that some unions were at that time still negotiating separate pay scales for men and women, and those unions that negotiated percentage wage increases were in fact widening the wage gap between male and female salaries. Since that article was written, the Canadian Labour Congress (and other labour organizations) have directed their negotiators to cease bargaining separate pay scales for men and women, and have recommended that wage increases be negotiated in dollar rather than percentage terms (CLC, 1984a:42). The CLC has also adopted the principle of equal pay for work of equal value (CLC, 1978b; 1986; 1988; 1990).

One study summarizing responses to a survey questionnaire asked women union officers to prioritize six issues thought to be of concern to women workers, according to the emphasis given to them within their respective unions. The responses indicated that priorities varied depending on the nature of the union (i.e. technical, clerical or professional). For instance, equal employment in training programs was less important for officers in professional unions than for those in clerical and technical unions. This study also observed that maternity leave and upgrading of salaries in traditional "women's jobs" were two issues of primary concern. The study also found that many of these union officers were strong advocates of getting more "women's issues" converted into bargaining issues (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983).

In March 1976, the Canadian Labour Congress held its first national conference for female trade unionists. Resolutions passed at this convention included demands for government and employer-paid daycare, paid maternity leave, an end to discriminatory provisions in collective agreements, legislation allowing class action against cases of systemic discrimination, and the founding of a women's division within the CLC. One participant of the conference noted how difficult it was to get male union officers to take notice of and to support issues of concern to women members (Bannon, 1976:204).

What has become painfully obvious to women union members, is the lack of attention paid to issues of importance to them. In order for unions and employers to take note, it would appear that women trade unionists must take a more active role in pursuing their own interests.

Baker and Robeson (1981) have postulated four possible explanations why unions have historically discouraged women's efforts to work and to get equal treatment in the workplace.

- 1. Unions are vehicles of sexism.** While unions have not shaped social values, they have perpetrated them. For many years, unions supported the view that women belonged in the home. If women were able to enter the workforce, they faced a second hurdle - many male workers and union members felt that women had different abilities and rights than men, and therefore women should be segregated into certain jobs, usually with lower pay scales. Also, the prevailing view was that women's right to work was secondary to that of men's.
- 2. Women were a threat because they provided a source of cheap labour.** Because women were hired to do work for lower rates of pay, men were fearful that women would increasingly be substituted for male workers and union members. However, rather than attempting to fight with women against this discrimination, the unions excluded women from their ranks and did all they could to protect the more lucrative jobs for male members (presumably they were influenced by the social values described under the first explanation). In other words, unions perpetuated the discriminatory treatment of women in the workforce.
- 3. Women are difficult to organize into unions.** Essentially the argument here centres on the perceived lack of commitment women had to their jobs. Women were unskilled workers with low commitment, performing dead-end jobs because they worked only until they married. Also, women's concentration in white-collar jobs was initially an area in which unions did not wish to organize; later, when unions began to attempt organizing white-collar workers, they found it to be relatively difficult.
- 4. The collective bargaining process is based on majority rule and women are rarely the majority.** Unions bargain on issues which are supported by the majority of members, and many male members are not interested in striking over "women's" issues. Union membership is predominantly male, and female union members are often already so preoccupied with their work and their families that they cannot form a cohesive and united minority to demand that their issues be heard.

The authors conclude that, while all four theories are interconnected and interdependent, the majority rule theory is the most valid. The implication is that something must be done by unions or by women themselves to change their position within unions, i.e. increasing their participation in union governance and administration (Baker and Robeson, 1981:28). However, as discussed in Chapter III, it may be more beneficial to discuss women's influence on union policies where they make up a significant minority of the membership rather than an absolute majority. And as Chapter IV shows, unions have undergone fundamental change in their treatment of women workers and union members, as witnessed by many progressive policies and practices.

Andiappan and Chaison (1983) list several reasons why it is important for women to achieve a larger number of officer positions within unions.

- The appeal of unions would be greatly enhanced if unorganized women saw that these unions had female officers that women had participation in decision-making, and that issues directly affecting women would be addressed at the bargaining table.
- The increase in the number of female union leaders could bring a new and higher profile to issues of concern to women, such as equal pay for work of equal value, paid maternity leave, flextime and others. By forming a unified front, female union leaders could lobby for needed legislative changes and thereby potentially improve working conditions for both unionized and non-unionized women.
- Finally, a large corps of female union leaders could make union leaders and members more aware of and sensitive to women's concerns. This might pressure unions into an awareness that they can be instrumental in resolving rather than ignoring these issues (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983:25).

Despite all the benefits of having more women serve as union officers and leaders, women's participation in union activities has remained significantly under-representative of their numbers. For instance, in 1985 (the most recent figures available), women accounted for 36.2 percent of Canada's union members, but only 19.3 percent of union executive board members were women (CALURA, 1985).

Despite data acquisition problems, several American researchers were able to examine women's representation in union executive positions during the 1970s. They found that women officials were more prevalent at the local than national level, employee associations had a significantly higher proportion of women officials compared to unions, and the AFL-CIO had to that point (1978) not had a single female representative on its Executive Council. Other observations made by these researchers were: more women officers were elected (as opposed to appointed) in employee associations (50 percent) than in unions (16 percent); women more commonly held the office of secretary-treasurer, although rarely in unions with more than 50,000 members; and even in unions with over 50,000 female members, women were poorly represented at the executive level. Paradoxically, it was found that certain unions with few female members had appointed women to union office, while other unions with sizable female contingents had no women vice-presidents (Dewey, 1971; Berquist, 1974; LeGrande, 1978).

Some might argue that women's role in unions has improved since the above reports were published. A 1987 study by Chaison and Andiappan, which looked at the recent situation in Canada, confirms the observations made in the United States during the 1970s. The Canadian study found that in comparison to their male counterparts, women officers were more often secretaries, treasurers or secretary-treasurers and less often presidents. Women officers were often from locals with a majority of women officers and members, and they had a greatly enhanced chance of reaching office in locals with large proportions of female members. The study also found that almost three-quarters of the women reached office through appointments, uncontested elections or elections in which there was no male opposition. Women officers, compared to male officers, spent fewer hours per week on union business, derived a smaller proportion of their income from union work, and generally worked in smaller locals (Chaison and Andiappari, 1987:282).

As discussed in Chapter IV, many labour organizations have recently taken measures to increase women's representation in executive positions. In 1983, the Ontario Federation of Labour amended its constitution to designate five new executive vice-president positions specifically for women. In 1984,

the CLC expanded its Executive Council to include six positions of vice-president for women only (CLC, 1984a).

Why do women seem to have difficulty getting adequate representation on union executives? It has been theorized that women are less likely to become union officers for a number of reasons: 1) women have two jobs — one in the workplace and one at home — leaving them with less time than men to pursue other activities; 2) women are more likely than men to have interrupted careers — interrupted at a time when most union officers are getting a start in their union careers; and 3) women are often in the less prestigious and visible positions in the workplace, which makes it more difficult for them to develop a "profile" before running for union office. The same theory goes on to make a distinction between perceptions of reality and the reality itself, and the role that self-perceptions and perceptions of others play in selecting union officers. Often perceptions are influenced by stereotypes — which may be either correct or incorrect. Looking at the three requirements for union office — perceived negotiation and interpersonal skills, perceived knowledge of industrial relations, and perceived access of members to officers once elected — women as a group lose out on all three, regardless of how inaccurate or false these perceptions are. Women are stereotypically seen as being less assertive, having less expertise (due to absences from the workforce for family reasons) and being less available due to family responsibilities. These are compounded by many women's self-perceptions that they are indeed less assertive and less skilled, thus holding them back from running for union office in the first place (Koziara and Pierson, 1980).

A study by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University grouped barriers to women's participation in unions into three areas:

1. personal-cultural - including extensive home responsibilities and lack of personal confidence;
2. job related - including discrimination by employers against union employees; and
3. union-related - including unfamiliarity with union procedures and a need for encouragement to participate (Berquist, 1974:5; Townson, 1975:351).

Chaison and Andiappan (1982) have done extensive research on the barriers to female members' participation in the decision-making process of Canadian unions during the 1980s. They reviewed the common assumptions made about female union leaders - concerning their marital status, age and children - and compared these assumptions to questionnaire responses from a sample of female union activists. Regarding marital status, it has commonly been assumed that female officers are either single or formerly married, because women with families have little time for union activities after work. The results of the questionnaire responses indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between marital status and position or union characteristics (i.e., size of union, proportion of women members). The study also disproved the commonly held belief that older incumbents (male and female alike) are found in leadership positions of larger, geographically dispersed unions with generally unskilled or semi-skilled workers and few female officers and members. It has been theorized that it takes time to acquire political skills, forge alliances and establish a reputation for competence before being successful at winning office in a large union. No significant relationships were found between age and such factors as paid/unpaid positions, method of election, election opposition, size of the union and proportion of female members. The only significant relationship found was the one between age and union size - that is, smaller unions tended to have younger officers. Finally, it was assumed that raising

children acts as a deterrent to becoming involved in union activities, presumably due to a lack of time. The only relationship found - and a moderate one at that - was between children and the nature of election opposition (i.e. male, female or male and female opposition or no opposition at all): this is not really the result that was expected.

In the same study, Chaison and Andiappan (1982) also examined the relationship between female union officers and the proportion of women members in the unions they represented. A very strong relationship was found to exist between the number of female officers and the proportion of female union members. It was also found that many of these female officers reached office through acclamation or through elections with female opposition only.

A 1983 report by Andiappan and Chaison, based on the same questionnaire responses, analyzed additional aspects of women's participation in the decision-making process of unions. Regarding perceptions of sex discrimination in unions, only 9 percent of the respondents felt that sex discrimination occurred often or very often in attaining union office, while 79 percent felt that it never or rarely occurred. Similar perceptions were found among respondents concerning sex discrimination and the exercise of their union officer duties: very few (7 percent) felt that they experienced difficulties in performing their duties as a result of sex discrimination, while over 75 percent of the respondents felt there was no effect. Paradoxically, only 41 percent of the respondents felt that it would not be more difficult for a woman to reach union officer positions, and over 50 percent felt that it would be more difficult for a woman than a man to reach the highest levels of office, such as president or vice-president of a national union. Two other observations of interest were: 1) that 85 percent of the respondents had attended labour education courses on topics such as grievance handling and collective bargaining, disproving the theory that women have fewer opportunities to participate in such courses; and 2) that while most respondents felt that no sex discrimination existed within their own unions, half of them felt that other unions discriminated in electing or appointing union officials. An interesting follow-up study would be to test if the respondents' perceptions are actually matched by reality (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983:55).

This same report (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983) also discusses the careers of women union officials, looking at whether they differ from the careers of their male counterparts. These researchers found that the general career patterns of female union activists did not vary substantially from the careers typical of male union officers. Most women leaders moved up within the structure of a particular union, and they held a variety of positions before reaching the national level of their union. Prior to reaching national office, many respondents participated in local committees, held local office and local stewardships — allowing them to develop the necessary political skills and profile and generally providing them with knowledge about union governance, structure and administration. The researchers felt that this period of gaining necessary experience is particularly crucial to women. Finally, it was noted that many professional, technical and clerical unions — smaller in size and with larger proportions of women members — are instrumental in giving women officers their first "break," because of the existence of many part-time union positions; this allows women to get involved with unions despite having to cope with the dual burden of career and family (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983:32-34).

In both the 1983 publication and a much more recent study (Chaison and Andiappan, 1989), the authors discuss the results of questionnaire responses to a number of explicitly stated hypotheses about barriers

to women's participation in the decision-making process of unions. The methodology used in both studies was similar: the only notable difference was that the latter study also solicited responses from male union officers, and a comparison was made between the men's and women's responses to determine if they were significantly different statistically. The following hypotheses were tested by Chaison and Andiappan.

- 1. Many women hold two jobs (at home and at work) and have no time for union activities.** This has often been cited as one of the major reasons why women do not participate more in union decision-making. The results of both surveys confirmed that this is perceived by men and women to be a significant barrier for female union members. The 1989 report indicated that women gave this barrier a higher rating than did men, and that the differences in their perceptions were statistically significant.
- 2. Women lack knowledge about their union's administrative and governing procedures.** It has generally been assumed that women union members are poorly informed on procedural matters. The survey results, however, indicated that there was no consensus among respondents to either questionnaire. It was noted that women tended to rate this barrier higher than men, and this difference was statistically significant.
- 3. Women stop work for a few years to raise their families and miss out on attaining the lower level union positions at a young age. This lack of early experience handicaps them in reaching top union positions.** It has been remarked that women have difficulty in establishing careers in union government, perhaps as a result of child-raising responsibilities and having to absent themselves from the workforce. Both groups of survey respondents agreed that this is not a significant barrier, and there was no notable difference between male and female respondents' replies. Chaison and Andiappan suggested that this barrier may previously have been overstated for local positions, because attaining office at the local level is much easier than attaining it at the national level.
- 4. Women employees feel that supervisors can make work difficult for union activists.** According to the 1983 report, there was no consensus on this statement. The 1989 report states, however, that many female respondents ranked this factor as a significant barrier for women, while male respondents had no consensus. The difference in responses for men and women was statistically significant.
- 5. Women underestimate their abilities and feel that male employees are better suited to union officer positions.** Due to the socialization process of girls and the endurance of stereotypes concerning women, it has been postulated that women underestimate their own abilities. Both groups of survey respondents agreed that this is the case, and in the more recent study the responses from men and women were not found to be significantly different (Andiappan and Chaison, 1983; Chaison and Andiappan, 1989).

Chaison and Andiappan tested some other related hypotheses; however, those discussed above are the five common to both studies and they are representative of the researchers' overall findings.

Having determined that there are some significant barriers to women's participation in the decision-making process of unions, what actions have unions and women themselves taken to overcome these barriers?

A number of the studies documenting barriers faced by women unionists have also suggested or described strategies for women to increase their participation in and impact on decision-making processes within unions. Till-Retz (1986), in describing the situation in Europe, makes a distinction between top-down and local (or bottom-up) approaches, those at the top usually being initiated by the union and those at the local level being initiated by women themselves. Certain strategies may not fit definitely into either category because they come about through the joint action (or action-reaction) of unions and their women members. A number of initiatives have been suggested (or, in some cases, already implemented) for unions and for female members of unions to increase women's participation in the decision-making process.

### **1. Women unionists' organizations and conferences.**

In 1974, the Coalition of Labour Union Women was formed in the United States (without support from the AFL-CIO). This group defined several goals, including: (1) to encourage unorganized women to gain union benefits by becoming union members; (2) to increase women's participation within unions; (3) to seek "affirmative action" on the part of unions against employers' discriminatory practices; and (4) to press for legislative action which would further women's interests, such as child care assistance and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Each year CLUW holds a convention to discuss women unionists' issues, and this group has often spoken out on issues in direct contradiction to the AFL-CIO's stand (Berquist, 1974; LeGrande, 1978).

In 1976, the Canadian Labour Congress sponsored its first women's conference, making demands concerning initiatives such as daycare and the establishment of a women's division within the CLC (Bannon, 1976). Organizations of trade union women allow women to reassure each other that their concerns are valid and they give women a place for political socialization. Women's conferences and organizations allow participants to form a women's network within their unions, they enable women to learn how to work within union structures, and they generally assist women in organizing support for their issues. These organizations also may help to convince union men that women have historically been used as a source of cheap labour and that unions can be instrumental in improving women's position in the workforce (Baker and Robeson, 1981).

### **2. Women's departments and committees within unions.**

Extensive discussion has ensued over the establishment of women's departments or committees within unions, as well as over the pros and cons of establishing such bodies. Baker and Robeson (1981) state that separate women's departments may segregate "women's issues," but they are also instrumental in uniting women.

Women's committees often start by informal caucusing at the local, provincial and national level; this was the case with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). These caucuses perform quite a number of functions, including drafting convention and contract proposals, encouraging women's participation in unions' political affairs and processes, providing training and education to women on matters relating to trade unions, and preparing and publishing materials on women's issues for their unions (Field, 1981). Formal women's departments/ divisions within unions perform similar functions; they collect information and develop ideas and programs, and they give issues of concern to women a

higher profile, so that these issues will be dealt with by the leadership during negotiations and at conventions (Till- Retz, 1986).

Despite these seemingly positive aspects of women's committees and departments, there are skeptics who question the effectiveness of structures for "women only"; they ask whether there are not more effective ways of bringing women's issues to the forefront (Baden, 1986; Till-Retz, 1986). Baden points out that many women's departments are underfunded, understaffed and relatively uninfluential. This, then, may limit the effectiveness of these departments and may relegate them to providing little more than educational support for women members. Nonetheless, women union members are likely better off when these special structures are established; just by their existence, these departments and committees can monitor union policies and practices and increase union leaders' awareness of women's concerns. Where underfunding and understaffing cause problems, women must be prepared to find effective and innovative ways of using the resources available.

### **3. Other initiatives.**

A number of other initiatives to further women's participation have also been suggested. Quota systems could be implemented to create internal affirmative action programs for women within unions. However, in the past, such an approach was rarely taken, out of fear of a male backlash or a backlash from women who wished to "make it" on their own merits (Till-Retz, 1986). More recently, labour organizations have dealt head on with the affirmative action issue. For example, the OFL approved its policy document "Statement on Women and Affirmative Action" at its 25th Annual Convention (OFL, 1982). The "Policy Paper on Women and Affirmative Action" received delegates' approval at the CLC's 1984 Convention (CLC, 1984a). And as already mentioned, both of these organizations took the major step of designating a specific number of executive positions to be held by women only.

Another approach taken has been to make union meetings more accessible to women; this then leads to greater participation from women at the local level. The following three initiatives have contributed to accessibility: 1) moving meetings to the workplace, which is an easily accessible place; 2) providing child care during union schools, special conventions and sometimes at rank and file meetings; and 3) "demystifying" the rules and procedures used during meetings by providing opportunities to study these regulations (Till-Retz, 1986: 256-57). In fact, many labour organizations now regularly provide child care services at union events (i.e., see CLC, 1980: no. 426).

Unions may also increase women's participation and visibility in unions by committing more resources to women workers' concerns, through increases in convention actions, budget allocation, conferences and training materials. The establishment of women's committees and departments may also be classified in this category (Baden, 1986:247-49).

Unions' commitment to women can also be measured by examining the number of women who are staff members (e.g., employed in union management, collective bargaining and organizing jobs). Baden (1986) found that there was improvement in this area, especially among public sector unions such as the American Service Employees International Union (SEIU) (Baden, 1986:241-44).

Unions can also encourage greater participation by women by recruiting more women; this means organizing the industries in which women work. To be successful during such organizing drives, unions will have to place greater emphasis on issues of concern to these potential members and they will have to get more female organizers on their staff. A union's perceived instrumentality may also be enhanced if it commits itself to women's issues outside of organizing activities. By supporting such issues as pay equity or by bargaining for non-discrimination clauses, unions can make themselves much more attractive to potential new members (Baden, 1986; LeGrande, 1978). Many labour organizations, including the CLC, have actually resolved to assist and support community-based coalitions fighting for social improvements such as universal child care and equal pay for work of equal value (CLC, 1986).

Having found that women are no less predisposed to becoming union members than men, unions must do two things to improve their organizing success among women: 1) focus on the issues important to these potential members; and 2) focus on the organizing procedure itself. The former requires that unions become more committed to issues that concern women (equal pay, daycare, improved benefits and so on) both at the bargaining table and as general union policy, thereby increasing their perceived instrumentality. The latter principle requires unions to focus on the largely unorganized and largely female industries and occupations, and to use new "tactics" such as employing women organizing staff to do this work.

Once they have successfully organized new members, unions must then combat the barriers that stand in the way of women members' active participation in their decision-making process. Unions can address this problem with a range of responses: giving women's issues higher priority at conventions and at the bargaining table; making union meetings more accessible to female members; committing more resources toward their women members in a variety of ways; providing labour education programs to develop women's leadership potential. Using several approaches concomitantly can more effectively knock down these barriers quickly.

While barriers to women's full participation continue to exist, the evidence indicates that some progress is being made. With increasing pressure being exerted on the Canadian labour movement, it can only be hoped that unions will come to realize the full value of their women members.

### III. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN AND UNIONS

Gathering statistical information concerning women's position within labour unions is no easy task. While general data on membership are relatively easy to obtain, the more important statistics concerning the number and percentage of women holding executive and staff positions are difficult to access. Very few unions keep comprehensive or formal records of more than basic membership statistics, despite the fact that many of these same unions have affirmative action policies which seek to increase the number of women in leadership and policy-making roles.

In recent years, Statistics Canada, in its annual report of statistics gathered under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act. Part II — Labour Unions, has regularly devoted a section to women in unions. Much of the statistical information cited in this section of the paper is derived from this source. Some additional data have been received from the public sector unions being evaluated.

It should be noted that women's membership and their proportion of total union membership are both discussed in this section. This distinction is made because there are unions, such as the Canadian Autoworkers' Union, where women form a small proportion of the membership, but still represent a significant number of members. Where women comprise a large number of a union's membership, it becomes possible for them to form a women's network within that union, despite the small proportion of total membership that they represent. It is also interesting to compare women's membership and proportion over successive years because it is possible for numbers to rise while the proportion falls, or vice versa. Such an inverse relationship between numbers and proportion signals that women are joining or leaving a union's membership at a different rate than are men. Even where changes in numbers and proportion occur in the same direction, these too have implications for women's rate of unionization.

It should also be noted that women do not necessarily require an absolute majority of membership to enable them to organize support around their concerns. It suffices that women comprise a "significant minority" of a union's total membership to improve their status within the union. Specifically, Chaison and Andiappan (1987) found that women have a much better chance of attaining union office in locals with large proportions of women members.

Despite the dearth of information, it is nevertheless possible to get a general view of the situation facing women within unions. Table 1 indicates that women's membership in Canadian unions has more than doubled from 16.4 percent in 1962 to 36.4 percent in 1986. This rapid expansion of female membership is due to a number of factors, including women's increased labour force participation rate and the increasing unionization of sectors in which women comprise a significant proportion of the workforce.

To get a more precise picture, it is useful to view the changes in membership over time for the particular unions being studied in this report. While most of these unions have always had a significant number and percentage of women members, these figures have grown over the past 20 years. The data for the Canadian Union of Public Employees are shown in Table 2. The rate of increase in the number of women members has been significantly higher than the rate of increase in women's proportion of total membership, especially in recent years. Women make up a significant group in this union, comprising approximately half of the membership.

Membership information for the National Union of Government Employees and one of its component unions, the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, is given in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. NUPGE was formed by six provincial public service unions in 1976. Since that time other unions have joined, including OPSEU in 1979, bringing the number of component unions up to 13 in 1989. Therefore, in examining NUPGE's membership figures, it must be recognized that the growth of women's numbers and proportion of membership in this union is partly due to the incorporation of new component associations.

OPSEU has had and continues to display a somewhat higher proportion of women members than the central union. It is also apparent that OPSEU did not suffer the relative stagnation in growth, in percentage terms, of women members during the 1981 to 1984 recession, as did NUPGE. In fact, NUPGE's total membership fell from 226,597 members in 1981 to 225,038 members in 1984, while OPSEU actually experienced a growth in membership, from 73,802 to 76,873 members during the same period. OPSEU is the only union being examined in which women presently form the majority of members.

Turning to the Public Service Alliance of Canada, membership data for this union are given in Table 5. In the case of PSAC, stagnation in the growth of women members as a percentage of total membership occurred in the 1974 to 1977 period, even though women's membership in real terms continued to grow from 48,309 to 55,618 members. Although in 1977 PSAC had a relatively small percentage of women members compared to CUPE and OPSEU, by 1986 this union's female membership had increased to 45.5 percent.

The Canadian Autoworkers' Union, a private sector industrial union, shows a much lower number and percentage of women members compared with the public sector unions, as depicted in Table 6. For instance, in 1985 there were 24,314 women in the CAW, representing 18.2 percent of total membership. This union also shows a much less steady growth pattern, being more directly impacted by economic conditions than the government unions. Interestingly enough, of all the unions discussed here, the CAW is the only union in which a decline in total membership also has led to a decrease in the percentage of female members. With industry cutbacks, women have lost their union membership more often than their male counterparts; presumably this is a result of women's relatively recent entrance into workplaces and positions represented by the CAW as well as their relatively low seniority on the job.

While unions with a significant number and proportion of women members are likely to have more women involved in the running of the union, the number and percentage of women holding union executive or staff positions provides a more accurate indication of women's participation in the unions' decision-making process. Table 7 indicates the percentage of executive positions held by women in international, national and government employees' unions. It is apparent that women have not been very successful in attaining executive positions in international unions, holding only 1.7 percent of these positions in 1985.

**Table 1**

Percentage of Women Members in Canadian Unions, 1962-1986

Year	Women as a Percentage of All Union Members
1986	36.4
1985	36.2
1984	35.4
1983	34.8
1982	32.3
1981	31.0
1980	30.2
1979	29.3
1978	28.7
1977	27.7
1976	27.0
1975	26.0
1974	25.2
1973	24.6
1972	24.2
1971	23.5
1970	22.6
1969	21.2
1968	20.4
1967	19.8
1966	17.0
1965	16.6
1964	16.7
1963	16.6
1962	16.4

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II – Labour Unions

**Table 2**

Number and Percentage of Women Members in the Canadian Union of Public Employees

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	Women as a Percentage of Total Membership
1989	356,000 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1988	342,000 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1987	330,000 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1986	304,269 <sup>1</sup>	***	50.0
1985	309,526	148,188	47.9
1984	299,463	140,597	46.9
1983	290,052	136,355	47.0
1982	287,133	135,114	47.1
1981	284,134	128,798	45.3
1980	271,652	118,869	43.8
1979	252,040	109,847	43.6
1978	252,496	107,762	42.5
1977	242,622	101,615	41.9
1976	218,606	89,183	40.8
1975	217,246	86,521	39.8
1974	185,546	66,142	35.6
1973	183,685	65,046	36.4
1972	171,038	59,009	34.5
1971	165,838	55,859	33.7
1962	---	---	---

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II - Labour Unions

1 These figures from Labour Canada, Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada

\*\*\* Cannot be calculated from figures given

n.a. Not available

**Table 3**

Number and Percentage of Women Members in the National Union of Provincial Government Employees

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	Women as a Percentage of Total Membership
1989	297,205 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1988	292,359 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1987	278,522 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1986	254,278 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1985	234,295 <sup>2</sup>	121,859	52.0
1984	225,038	114,984	51.1
1983	230,614	114,962	49.9
1982	235,094	115,030	48.9
1981	226,597	111,107	49.0
1980	222,389	106,774	48.0
1979	205,808	95,987	46.6
1978	130,643 <sup>3</sup>	58,868	45.1
1977	101,310	44,935	44.4

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II – Labour Unions

- 1 These figures from Labour Canada, Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada
  - 2 Figures for the Brewery, Malt and Soft Drink Workers, Local 304, and Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers, Local 325, are unavailable and therefore not included.
  - 3 Figures for the Ontario Liquor Boards ‘Employees’ Union are unavailable for 1978 and therefore not included.
- n.a. Not available.

**Table 4**

Number and Percentage of Women Members in the Ontario Public Services Employees' Union<sup>1</sup>

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	Women as a Percentage of Total Membership
1989	98,459 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1988	97,172 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1987	95,000 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1986	80,019 <sup>2</sup>	***	53.6
1985	83,221	43,901	52.8
1984	76,873	40,820	53.1
1983	75,697	39,430	52.1
1982	74,349	38,410	51.7
1981	73,802	37,649	51.0
1980	73,377	36,919	50.3
1979	67,290	33,719	50.1
1978	66,060	32,484	49.2
1977	53,858	25,265	46.9
1976	57,346	27,504	48.0
1975	56,132	26,658	47.5
1974	55,970	26,259	46.9
1973	45,148	19,566	43.3
1972	41,433	16,940	40.9
1971	38,416	15,355	40.0
1962	31,897	9,174	28.8

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II - Labour Unions

1 Formerly called Civil Service Association of Ontario

2 These figures from Labour Canada, Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada

\*\*\* Cannot be calculated from figures given

**Table 5**

Number and Percentage of Women Members in the Public Service Alliance of Canada

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	Women as a Percentage of Total Membership
1989	171,966 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1988	175,759 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1987	179,888 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1986	182,000 <sup>1</sup>	***	45.5
1985	159,871	72,325	45.2
1984	181,247	80,886	44.6
1983	160,211	71,636	44.7
1982	158,446	68,659	43.3
1981	156,579	66,061	42.2
1980	154,546	61,204	39.6
1979	152,725	58,763	38.5
1978	157,256	57,517	36.6
1977	154,814	55,618	35.9
1976	145,141	51,761	35.7
1975	143,068	51,217	35.8
1974	135,957	48,309	35.5
1973	127,363	36,668	28.8
1972	118,913	31,929	26.9
1971	129,626	31,355	24.2
1962	---	---	---

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II - Labour Unions

1 These figures from Labour Canada, Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada

\*\*\* Cannot be calculated from figures given

n.a. Not available

**Table 6**

Number and Percentage of Women Members in the National Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers Union of Canada<sup>1</sup>

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	Women as a Percentage of Total Membership
1989	160,410 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1988	143,000 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1987	140,000 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1986	140,000 <sup>2</sup>	***	17.7
1985	133,610	24,314	18.2
1984	118,440	19,495	16.5
1983	119,211	18,178	15.2
1982	105,549	15,058	14.3
1981	112,301	14,700	13.1
1980	121,829	16,457	13.5
1979	131,163	16,522	12.6
1978	131,330	15,874	12.1
1977	127,680	15,099	11.8
1976	118,850	14,770	12.4
1975	117,215	12,774	10.9
1974	118,263	13,153	11.1
1973	122,744	14,526	11.8
1972	107,266	13,426	12.3
1971	102,933	12,260	11.9
1962	61,284	5,975	9.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II - Labour Unions

1 Formerly called United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America

2 These figures from Labour Canada, Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada

\*\*\* Cannot be calculated from figures given

n.a. Not available

**Table 7**

Percentage of Women on Executives of Canadian Unions

Year	International Unions <sup>1</sup>	National Unions	Government Employees' Unions	Total
1985	1.7	21.6	12.4	19.3
1984	6.9	19.0	14.4	18.1
1983	1.8	22.7	9.3	18.4
1982	1.9	25.7	11.5	18.4
1981	2.9	20.5	11.5	16.1
1980	3.8	21.8	11.5	17.0
1979	1.9	30.4	9.0	21.1
1978	3.3	23.4	9.2	19.3
1977	4.5	24.4	8.8	16.7
1976	5.1	16.8	7.2	11.8
1975	4.2	13.7	7.5	9.9
1970	2.8	13.1	6.5	9.8

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, Part II - Labour Unions

1 Percentages shown for international unions are for Canadian executive board members only

Interestingly enough, women as union executives have not fared as well in government employees' unions as in national unions, in terms of executive positions. In 1985, women held 21.6 percent of executive positions in national unions, but only 12.4 percent in government employees' unions. In the case of national and government employees' unions, there has been an overall trend of relatively slow and uneven growth. The international unions show no particular pattern of growth, decline or stabilization. In fact, all three types of unions show very large fluctuations in the proportion of women executives on a year-to-year basis. In order to determine the cause of this instability, one would have to examine the underlying data for the separate unions in each classification.

The major point to be taken from the information contained in Table 7 is that women have consistently been under-represented in executive positions relative to their union membership. In comparing the data in Table 1 and the "Total" column of Table 7, it becomes quite obvious that there is a significant gap between the percentage of women executives and the percentage of women union members. In 1985, when women comprised 36.2 percent of total union membership, they held only 19.2 percent of executive positions. This is an improvement over 1970, when women represented 9.8 percent of union executive members but 22.6 percent of total union membership. In fact, there are years, such as 1975 and 1976, where the percentage of membership is more than double the percentage of executive representation.

Two unions, the National Union of Provincial Government Employees and the Canadian Autoworkers' Union, provided some more detailed information on the status of their women members. NUPGE completed fairly comprehensive surveys of its female membership in 1986 and 1989; however, Evelyn Gigantes, National Representative (Women's Issues) for NUPGE, has expressed concerns about the accuracy of the data contained in the 1986 survey and parts of the 1989 survey (Gigantes, 1990).

The survey itself is quite comprehensive. It commences with membership data and surveys women as leaders (i.e. women on the executive committee and on boards or councils) and women as chairs and members of committees. Information was specifically sought on women participating in bargaining committees, as well as the number of female delegates to union conventions. Ms Gigantes herself stated that questions concerning women in staff positions were accidentally omitted (Gigantes, 1990).

From the data on the 1989 survey which may be cited, it is estimated that 56 percent of NUPGE's members that year were women. Two of 12 members on the National Executive Board were women — only 17 percent compared with the 56 percent membership figure. Figures on women delegates to conventions were somewhat more positive: 41 percent of delegates attending component unions' conventions were women; 34 percent of women attending the national union's convention were women; 33 percent of delegates attending the Canadian Labour Congress' convention were women; and 39 percent of total participants at provincial federation of labour conventions were women (NUPGE, 1989).

The NUPGE survey data includes information pertaining to the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, one of its component unions. 1989 female membership in OPSEU was reported as 54 percent. One of OPSEU's seven-member executive committee members was a woman (in a Vice-President's position). Finally, data on women delegates to conventions was similar to NUPGE's results: women comprised 38 percent and 36 percent of delegates attending the component union's and national

union's conventions, respectively; women comprised 38 percent of delegates to the CLC's convention; and, women comprised 40 percent of OPSEU's delegates to the Ontario Federation of Labour convention (NUPGE, 1989).

The Canadian Autoworkers' Union also provided some up-to-date statistics, reflecting the current status of women in that union. The CAW's Executive Board consists of 12 members and two of these members are presently women. This 16.7 percent executive representation compares favourably with women's 17.7 percent representation of total membership in 1986. Of 85 staff representatives (83 permanent, 2 temporary positions), thirteen - or 15.3 percent - are women (all permanent). These women are found in all departments, including organizing, servicing, legal, education, communications, research and the President's Office (Phillips, 1990).

While the statistical information discussed above is very interesting, it is also inadequate. These data provide little insight into women's present status in Canadian public sector unions. The union leadership and women union members are undoubtedly aware of women's under-representation in decision-making activities, but they do not have detailed statistical information on women's participation at conventions and conferences, on committees and councils, or in staff positions. Without these critical data, how can labour organizations effectively identify the barriers that prevent women's increased union involvement? And how can they enact effective policies to fight these barriers?

It is apparent that certain proactive unions, such as NUPGE, are making the acquisition of more accurate and detailed information a priority. At the same time, other sources of information are disappearing: since 1986, the Statistics Canada Annual Report ... Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act has condensed the section on women in unions. The supplement, published in conjunction with the Report, was last available in 1985. Without this comprehensive source of information, it will become much more difficult to find consistent data on such basic topics as women's membership in unions.

Although there is serious concern about the quantity and availability of statistical information, there are further problems with the quality of such data. Many of the statistics cited in this report do not distinguish between paid and unpaid or full-time and part-time executive positions. Neither is there information on the specific positions actually held by women, the method of attaining the positions (election versus appointment), or whether the positions held are designated as being for women only. Further data would help us assess whether women are increasing their representation in leadership positions, such as: general demographic information, length of membership in the union prior to becoming an elected executive representative, length of time spent in a position, and previous positions held. Admittedly, some of this in-depth information might be difficult to obtain, but it would assist us in determining how women attain executive positions; it would also highlight the continuing barriers to women's representation. Comprehensive information relating to unions' staff members should also be collected.

If unions are genuinely interested in increasing women's participation in their internal decision-making processes, they must be prepared to obtain vital information on the situation of their women members. Despite the administrative difficulties and expenses involved, this information will allow unions to implement more effective policies and it will also permit effective monitoring of these policies once they are implemented.

## **IV. MEASURES TAKEN BY LABOUR ORGANIZATIONS TO INCREASE WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING**

As already discussed, the availability of statistics depicting the position of women within the Canadian trade union movement is less than adequate. Nevertheless, labour organizations have not remained insensitive to women's under-representation in executive positions or to their segregation into less powerful and lower status positions. As Evelyn Gigantes stated in discussing her reservations about the 1986 NUPGE survey, "[The figures] were strong enough, nevertheless, that they seemed to accord with the intuitive understanding of the Union's leaders about the status of women within the National Union at that time, and they were accepted as documentation of the need to adopt the 1986 Affirmative Action Policy" (Gigantes, 1990).

From their early days, unions have been involved in a wide range of issues, ranging from social and legislative changes, to workplace concerns, to internal union issues. The area of women's rights and equality has been no exception. Many labour organizations have addressed a myriad of issues including pornography, reproductive choice, violence against women, minimum wage laws, legislatively mandated affirmative action and pay equity programs, child care, and women's departments and conferences, to name just a few.

Women's rights and equality began to receive increasing attention in the early to mid-1970s, with the advent of the feminist movement and the realization that a significant proportion of the public service unions' membership was comprised of women. In 1971, CUPE formally addressed women's issues by presenting the "Status of Women in CUPE" report at its Annual Convention. Two of the initiatives contained in that report included making efforts, at all levels of the union, to proportionately increase the representation of women in elected positions, and establishing women's committees to work toward ensuring equality of opportunity for working women (CUPE, 1983a:217-18). At around this time, the CLC was also passing resolutions on women concerning such subjects as night transportation for women workers (1970), reproductive choice (1972), and requesting legislation to ensure women received a fair share of assets upon marriage dissolution (1974). The CLC also resolved at its 1974 Biennial Convention that a study be carried out on the feasibility of hiring a coordinator for women's rights (CLC, 1970; 1972; 1974).

Women everywhere, not just those in unions, received a tremendous boost in their fight for equality when the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year and designated the period from 1975 to 1985 as the International Women's Decade. In 1976, the "Declaration of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers" was presented to and adopted by delegates to the CLC's 11th Biennial Convention. This policy statement was a direct result of the first women's conference held by the CLC, and it called for the increased participation of women at all levels of union organizations (Carr, 1976). At the same convention, the Women's Sub-Committee of the Human Rights Committee was replaced by the Committee on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers, renamed in 1983 as the CLC Women's Committee (CLC, 1978a:70-71). In October 1976, the National Board of Directors of PSAC founded that union's Equal Opportunities Committee, its role being to develop affirmative action plans, review collective agreements for discriminatory language, make legislative proposals, establish Equal

Opportunities Committees at all levels of the union, and prepare a major policy paper on equal opportunities (Mitchell, 1980:3). This policy paper recognized women's relative lack of participation in union activities and consequently recommended that standing Equal Opportunity Committees be established at all levels of PSAC and its components, as well as implementing special education programs to inform PSAC membership about the subject of equal opportunity (PSAC, 1979:31-32; PSAC, 1983).

The year 1977 was a landmark year for a number of labour organizations. The OFL organized its Women's Committee to coordinate and support campaigns to fight for women's equality (OFL, nda., Pamphlet No. 1). OPSEU delegates resolved at their 1977 Convention to create the position of Equal Opportunities Coordinator (OPSEU, 1990:327). And on December 1st, the CLC established its Women's Bureau. The Bureau's mandate was quite broad and included increasing the emphasis on women's issues in training courses and general union education, acting as a coordinating body on women's issues for affiliate unions, and conducting research on subjects affecting women in unions (CLC, 1978a: 70-71).

A document entitled "A Woman's Place Is in Her Union" was presented to the delegates of the OFL's 22nd Annual Convention, held in 1978. The paper, which espoused a variety of measures to establish economic equality for women, was overwhelmingly endorsed by the delegates (OFL, 1979a:9). The first women's forum at an OFL convention was held at this time: its purpose was to discuss the resolutions on women's issues and familiarize delegates with convention procedure (OFL, 1978a:7).

The second women's conference of the CLC was held in 1978. Throughout this conference, the emphasis was on women seeking greater involvement in union activities and leadership roles (Kehoe, 1978). During the CLC's 1978 Biennial Convention, delegates approved a resolution providing for a study on the feasibility of child care facilities being operated by labour councils (CLC, 1978b).

The year 1979 saw the establishment of CUPE's National Women's Task Force — as had been mandated by a convention resolution (CUPE, 1989). During the same year, the CLC launched its "Equal Partners for Change: Women and Unions" kit. It contained information on a wide range of topics, including policy of the CLC, history of women in unions, how to work through the union for equality and a book/film resource list. This kit was designated to be used during union weekend schools, week-long summer and winter schools, conferences and for discussions at local union meetings (CLC, 1979:3).

Another event held in 1979 was the OFL's first women's conference. Topics of discussion included bargaining for equality, organizing women workers and combatting sexual harassment. The conference delegates proposed that the OFL undertake further study on the subject of child care, and throughout the following year, this became the first major issue on which the Women's Committee prepared a policy statement. This conference was noteworthy in that it represented the first OFL function where child care services were provided for delegates (OFL, 1979b:13; see also Leah, 1989).

It was in 1980 that the OFL recognized the disproportionately negative effect that the lack of child care had on working women and resolved to bargain child care provisions into their collective agreements (OFL, 1981:8).

Under the theme "Policies for Power, Strategies for Strength," OPSEU held its first workshop on women's issues in 1980. Delegates discussed how they might more effectively advance their interests in the workplace and within the union movement (OFL, 1980:7). And at the CLC's 13th Biennial Convention, a far-reaching resolution on child care was passed - the resolution called for the CLC and its affiliates to provide quality child care at no extra cost during all union events, including conventions, schools, courses and conferences. This policy went one step further by mandating that affiliated unions reimburse parents for out-of-pocket child care expenses if it was not financially feasible for the children to travel to the union events (CLC, 1980).

Whereas the declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year had raised labour's conscience on women's issues in general, it did not have a significant impact on unions' internal policies on women. The recession of the early 1980s achieved the latter. The recent gains women had made in entering nontraditional and more highly unionized occupations were reversed with shocking suddenness due to mass layoffs: women, the last to be hired, were the first to lose their jobs. With the realization of how tenuous women's gains in the workplace had been, labour organizations also turned their attention to their own policies. The result was a renewed sensitivity to women's precarious fight for equality, and a flurry of activity leading to convention resolutions and policy statements on increasing women's participation within the workplace and the union ensued.

Articles in the unions' publications during the 1980 to 1984 period contain a significant amount of discussion about the impact of the recession on all union members, and particularly on women members. There is, however, no sense of where such concerns came from - whether they were voiced by union leaders or by women themselves. Such information might be gained by conducting interviews with union members and leaders active at that time. Such information may also be gathered from existing studies. For instance, Leah's study of the OFL Women's Committee was based on interviews with women union activists. Her work indicates how women organized around their concerns in the OFL from 1975 to 1980 (Leah, 1989).

Prior to its Annual Convention of November 1982, the OFL held a special conference to deal with the issue of affirmative action. This conference culminated in the presentation to the 25th Annual Convention of a document entitled "Statement on Women and Affirmative Action." This all-encompassing policy paper discussed legislative and workplace initiatives to be worked toward, as well as internal union measures to be taken to promote women's greater participation. Specifically, the OFL and its affiliates resolved to hire adequate staff to focus on equal opportunities issues, establish women's/equal opportunities committees at all organizational levels, develop affirmative action programs to eliminate the barriers to women's employment in the labour movement, integrate women's issues into all education programs, pay for the out-of-pocket child care expenses of members attending union activities, and provide training on affirmative action to staff and union members (OFL, 1982). During the same year, the OFL published its booklet "Parental Rights and Daycare: A Bargaining Guide for Unions," which included discussion of unions providing child care services and/or reimbursement for out-of-pocket child care expenses to members attending union functions, as well as increasing union education on this subject (Acheson and Macleod, 1982).

At its 1982 Biennial Convention, the CLC also passed a resolution on affirmative action, wherein it called for a special conference to determine strategies for achieving greater equality for women (CLC,

1982). By this time, the CLC had sponsored three biennial women's conferences and the continuation of this event was enshrined in a policy resolution passed at the 1982 Convention (CLC, 1982).

It was also during 1982 that NUPGE published its booklet entitled "Bargaining for Equality." This publication provided an explanation for issues important to women and gave union negotiators some model collective agreement clauses to bargain toward. The nature of this booklet meant that its emphasis was on improvements in workplace equality, not equality within the union per se.

During 1983, the Women's Committee of the OFL held nine public forums throughout Ontario on the subject of affirmative action. The information gathered during these hearings, along with the OFL's recommendations, were then summarized into a report and presented to the Government of Ontario (OFL, 1983:4; OFL, ndb.). Also in 1983, the OFL took the unprecedented step of approving a constitutional amendment which provided for five new Executive Vice-President positions specifically designated for women (OFL, 1983:8).

UPE also grappled with the concept of affirmative action. In the document "CUPE Women: Survival in the Crisis" prepared for the 1983 Convention, suggestions were made on how to increase women's equality within the union. These suggestions included implementing existing CUPE policy relating to the creation of women's committees, developing a comprehensive and in-depth staff training program on affirmative action, studying means of increasing women's representation in non-traditional staff positions within the union, and encouraging locals to negotiate clauses which would permit union meetings to be held during working hours (CUPE, 1983b:5-6).

In 1984, delegates to OPSEU's Annual Convention were presented with the "Equality Before the Year 2000" document, which discussed internal union strategies for women's equality. It was resolved at this convention that OPSEU would hold a regular biennial women's conference. The first such conference was held the following year (OPSEU, 1985).

At NUPGE's National Convention in 1984, delegates passed a resolution that established its Women's Committee. The National Executive Board was also directed to examine options for increasing women's representation within leadership positions and to report its findings to the 1986 Convention. The first meeting of the Women's Committee occurred shortly after the Convention created this body (NUPGE, 1984; 1985:1).

Finally, in 1984 the CLC followed the OFL's example of the previous year in dealing head on with the issue of affirmative action. After much preparation, including an Equality Conference held in 1983, convention delegates were presented with the CLC's "Policy Paper on Women and Affirmative Action." This comprehensive document discussed legislation, bargaining strategies and union action. Recommendations regarding union education included integrating women's issues into all education programs, publishing a newsletter from the Women's Bureau to update women's progress nationally, and having the Women's Bureau prepare a booklet entitled "Bargaining for Affirmative Action." Union action recommendations included having the CLC review a variety of methods for improving the proportion of women on its Executive Council, analyzing CLC structure and process to determine the status of women, and identifying ways to overcome existing barrier to women's participation. Further recommendations on union action urged affiliates to hire staff whose responsibility it would be to work

on women's issues, and to establish women's committees at all levels of the union organization (CLC, 1984a). It was also at this Convention that delegates supported the resolution to create additional Vice-President positions on the CLC Executive Council and designate six of them to be exclusively for women (CLC, 1984). Another resolution gave the CLC Women's Conference the power to develop recommendations for consideration by the CLC Executive Council (CLC, 1984b).

In 1984, PSAC held a "Skills Building Conference" which provided participants with information and skills on public speaking and parliamentary procedure (PSAC 1984:4). CUPE's first Women's Conference was also held during this year: delegates were given the message that women should get more involved in the union's activities (CUPE, 1984:4).

The OR created an unusual and innovative sub-organization when it established its Speaker's Bureau on Women's Equality in August of 1985:30 women who had faced obstacles in their fight for equality provided their services to speak at public meetings and conferences (OFL, 1985a:14). Earlier that same year, the OFL Women's Committee had sponsored a skills-building conference on the subject of affirmative action (OFL, 1985b).

In 1985, OPSEU held its first biennial Women's Conference - an initiative that was part of the union's affirmative action program (OPSEU, 1985). PSAC, too, held its first National Women's Conference during this year: under the theme "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," delegates discussed women's changing role in society. The participants of the Conference passed resolutions on various initiatives such as getting union locals to set up convenient union meeting times, setting up Equal Opportunities Committees to deal with affirmative action matters, having union locals adopt the PSAC child care policy so more members could participate in union activities, and providing more education on issues affecting women (PSAC, 1985:5).

The first Regional CUPE Women's Conference was organized in Atlantic Canada, and other Regional Conferences were held across the country throughout the following months (CUPE, 1985a; 1985b:3). The CLC's Women's Conference took place under the theme "Making Affirmative Action. Work"; much of the discussion at this conference focused on legislative and workplace initiatives rather than on internal union measures (CLC, 1985:5).

NUPGE adopted a policy of internal affirmative action in 1986. The purpose of this policy was to expand the decision-making role and participation of its women members (NUPGE, nd). During the same year, PSAC held a series of Regional Women's Conferences throughout Canada, where initiatives for increasing women's participation in union activities were discussed (PSAC, 1986). And of course it was in 1986 that the CLC elected Shirley Carr as its first woman President.

The OFL published its "Statement on Equal Action in Employment" in 1987 - a paper which contained a brief paragraph on internal union initiatives in this area (OFL, 1987). NUPGE had its first all-female group of table officers elected by one of its component unions during this same year: although the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia's membership was 87 percent women, it had never before elected only women to the positions of president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer (NUPGE, 1987:1).

The National Executive Board of CUPE established its Department of Equal Opportunity in 1987. This Department's purpose was, in conjunction with the National Women's Task Force, to work towards social and economic equality for women and minority members of the union, The Department continues to pursue this goal by organizing conferences, establishing women's and equal opportunities committees, and by developing and conducting education courses on equality issues (CUPE, 1989).

Under the theme "Equality for a Change!" PSAC held its Second National Women's Conference in 1987. Five major topics were discussed - Affirmative Action/Equal Pay, Child Care/Parental. Rights, Sexual Harassment, Technological Change, Women and Aging - and many interesting and progressive resolutions were passed as a result (PSAC, 1987). These resolutions were then forwarded directly to PSAC's Eighth Triennial Convention for consideration. The delegates to this convention, held in 1988, resolved to fully fund future national and regional women's conferences, thereby accepting a policy recommendation made by the Women's Conference (PSAC, 1988:20; 1989:8-9).

During the CLC's 1988 Convention, it was resolved that equal pay for work of equal value would be included as a topic for training courses. Delegates also demanded that the Labour College of Canada establish a child care policy (CLC, 1988).

Throughout the past 18 months, the labour organizations have continued their fight for women's equality. For instance, the OFL Women's Committee has recently prepared a draft of a booklet which will guide negotiators when they bargain for equality in the workplace. The paper "Taking Stock and Moving Forward: Union Women in the 1990's" was presented to the OFL Women's Conference, held in March of this year. It contains interesting discussion of a broad range of topics, including a section on preventing burn-out among women activists (OFL, 1990). And at its May 1990 Convention, the CLC passed resolutions on such women's issues as equal pay for work of equal value, violence against women, and equal treatment for women workers (CLC, 1990).

Turning to the CAW, this union has been unusually attentive to women's issues, considering its relatively low percentage of women members. It is also surprising that some of the CAW's initiatives on women have so significantly predated those of the public sector unions. Precisely why this occurred is unclear — were these initiatives a result of progressive leadership, active rank-and-file members, or proactive women staff members? In recent years, it has also become apparent that the CAW is very aware of its shrinking membership base in the traditional manufacturing sector and therefore has sought ways to attract new members from non-traditional industries.

Since the 1960s, the CAW's Constitution has provided that each union local must have a standing Women's Committee. The union held its first annual Women's Conference in 1975, and this was followed in 1976 by the establishment of the CAW National Women's Department. Child care services are provided for CAW members attending conferences, conventions, councils and educational events. For the Paid Education Leave program, consisting of four one-week sessions, parents are paid a child care subsidy if they must leave their children at home (Phillips, 1990).

The CAW has been particularly proactive in two areas during the 1980s. The first area relates to affirmative action, specifically the Affirmative Action Program the union negotiated with the Big Three auto companies in 1984. The collective agreement provides for special joint labour-management

affirmative action committees to be established, with the purpose of speeding up the hiring and advancement process for women, people of colour, native people and people with a disability (CAW, 1987:14).

The other area in which the CAW has been particularly active is sexual harassment. The union's policy deals not only with superior-subordinate harassment, but also with co-worker harassment. This is an issue that has direct repercussions for the union, in that it owes both the victim and the harasser the duty of fair representation. Many other unions have recently expanded their sexual harassment policies to include this issue (CAW, nd).

As can be seen, all of the unions being assessed here have given significant attention to the concerns of their women members. The foregoing list of achievements contains only the highlights and major initiatives undertaken by these unions, and it cannot capture all of the subtle and less noteworthy changes that have also occurred throughout the past 15 to 20 years. The chronology of significant events focuses on initiatives that were directed at getting women more actively involved in union activities and elected into leadership positions. Therefore, many important achievements in the workplace and at the bargaining table have intentionally been excluded.

Based on the information contained in the preceding pages, it becomes apparent that the central labour organizations have been the leaders in addressing women's issues, presumably because of their larger and more diverse membership base, and their greater access to financial and political resources. Of course, it must be realized that these central organizations are limited in their influence because they cannot impose their policies on any of their affiliated unions. Nevertheless, most, if not all, of the public sector unions and the CAW have established Women's and/or Equal Opportunities Committees, have held numerous conferences and workshops dealing with women's concerns, and have incorporated women's issues into their training courses for staff and union members. Additionally, these unions have developed policies dealing with sexual harassment, internal affirmative action initiatives and provision of child care services at union events. All of the unions have published varying amounts of literature relating to women's issues and have given extensive coverage in their regular publications to women's progress in their fight for equality.

Although this paper has separated out internal union initiatives from the broader workplace and social measures being pursued by unions to achieve equality for their women members, this is admittedly a rather superficial division. Even when an issue is purely workplace or socially oriented, the heightened awareness and sensitivity to such an issue may create beneficial side effects within the union. For instance, in providing training courses on subjects such as affirmative action, sexual harassment or child care, the staff and union members are introduced to the concepts and terminology surrounding the issue and are forced to re-examine their own values and beliefs on the subject. This new knowledge and awareness of problems facing women then allows the trained union members and staff to detect the barriers to women's equality within the union, for example, the under-representation of women in leadership positions or the problems created by the lack of adequate child care for women. After all, it is well known that the first step in finding the solution to a problem is to recognize that the problem exists.

In the same way, women's conferences serve a dual function. While the topics of discussion are ostensibly organizational or social in nature, the conferences provide opportunities for women unionists to form alliances, renew their sense of purpose, and experience a feeling of solidarity. Again, knowledge of workplace issues may allow these activists to better recognize and discuss problems that exist within the union itself.

Remedies addressing workplace and social issues may also have more direct results in breaking down the barriers faced by women in unions. The workplace affirmative action program negotiated between the CAW and the Big Three auto companies requires that at least one union member of each affirmative action committee must be a woman. This contractual requirement means that the selected woman, whether she is a long-time union activist or a new participant in the labour movement, would gain experience, self-confidence and visibility within the workplace and the union. This involvement could in turn increase the woman's desire and ability to further participate in other union activities, including the pursuit of a leadership position. In fact, such an effect has been found to exist in the labour movement. For example, the organizing of women around the issue of daycare had a positive impact on the developing women's movement within the OFL (Leah, 1989).

The unions, particularly their women's committees and departments, must be commended for their innovative approaches to drawing attention to women's issues. Aside from using the usual forums such as panel discussions and workshops, specially-composed songs and innovatively-written plays have been utilized to incorporate serious issues and messages into more light-hearted and interesting media. The unions have also organized women's conferences around catchy and timely themes, and have developed special information kits which serve the dual function of being used in training courses while also acting as valuable public relations tools. The annual approach of International Women's Day has also been used opportunely to highlight women's concerns in society, in the workplace and in the union. This innovative use of various media to discuss women's issues is both reflective of and beneficial to the women's movement within unions: it fosters women's increased participation in unions in a non-threatening manner while also conveying important messages in an interesting and informative style.

The unions must also be praised for their coverage of women's activities and achievements in their regular publications. While all labour organizations have reported on women's issues to a greater or lesser extent, two unions particularly stand out: PSAC for its consistent and repeated message for women to become more involved in their union, and OPSEU for its regular attention to issues concerning minority members. Nonetheless, some doubts remain as to the type of coverage women's achievements do receive in union publications. For example, the article "The affirmatives have it: history," contained in the OFL's Fall/Winter 1983 edition of Ontario Labour, reported on the monumental step the OFL took at its 1983 Annual Convention in designating five Executive Vice-President positions exclusively for women. The opening paragraph of this article read, "A 27-year-old tradition died on the Ontario Federation of Labour convention floor in November." Not only was it a misnomer to call the exclusion of women from the OFL's executive board a "tradition," but the use of the word "died" might have had a strong negative connotation to certain readers. While the rest of the article was very positive in tone, it is this subtle bias that unions must work to exclude from their publications.

It is interesting to review the early literature on women's issues which was published by the labour organizations being studied. When the topic of women's equality was first discussed, the issue was promoted in terms of how discrimination against women (and other minority groups) weakens the labour movement. What the unions sought was solidarity between their member brothers and sisters. In many cases, the unions saw the need to justify women's increased protection by and involvement in labour organizations — partly because at this time there was some resistance to addressing women's issues. This led to reports taking on a somewhat defensive tone. For example, the document entitled "A Woman's Place Is in Her Union," prepared for the OFL's 22nd Annual Convention held in 1978, stated the following:

Over the past five years, the general attack on labour and the living standards of all working people have shown that we never needed our unions more than now and women need them most of all. They have learned that economic equality and the most basic rights of dignity on the job will not be conceded by government and employers without a fight. Women cannot even enter into the battle without working together and for working women that means being in a union. ...

Some people have been reluctant to see the women's movement infiltrate the ranks of labour, believing it to be a diversion from the common interests of all working people. Perhaps they have failed to see that the spirit of equality for women is transformed when it is taken up by women in our own ranks. It can become a new source of vitality and growth at a time when we will need all the strength we can muster. The interests of all our members will be served if our ranks are opened at all levels to the full participation of women (OFL, 1978b).

It is also worth noting that the various women's organizations within unions have published many brochures and pamphlets on their history and function, and on how they can assist women union members. These publications often go into great detail discussing women's status within their union and explaining why there was a need to establish such a special body to promote women's issues. Other departments and committees in the union rarely prepare and distribute information of this nature; they simply report on the results of their activities. This difference has had positive results for women — some outstanding publications have resulted from this unique approach to discussing women's issues. For example, the OFL has prepared a very useful series of six pamphlets on the topic "Organizing for Affirmative Action."

The brochures and pamphlets produced by women's committees, as well as the articles published in union magazines and newsletters, provide good documentation of the developments in women's fight for equality. These sources do not, however, indicate where the impetus for these policy changes originated. Knowing whether a convention resolution was submitted by union leaders, by the women's committee or by rank-and-file women members provides important insight into women's status within that labour organization. Further research and analysis should be undertaken on this aspect of women's participation in union decision-making activities. Certain researchers have already completed work in this area (i.e., see Leah, 1989).

The progress being made on women's fight for equality in labour organizations must be tempered with a note of caution, however. There is a danger that the value and progress these achievements represent

will be overestimated, and that union leaders and members will become complacent in their future struggles for women's equality. Moreover, formal changes in policies and structures do not necessarily signal a change in union members' attitudes. In a recent article, Linda Briskin (1990) warns that the existence of designated affirmative action positions does not guarantee that women's interests will be furthered: in electing their representatives, women must ensure that these union activists practice progressive (i.e. feminist) politics. Also, it is easier for unions to establish these designated affirmative action positions and label this action "progressive," than it is for unions to genuinely attempt to identify and change the attitudes that form the barriers to women's increased participation in decision-making activities (Briskin, 1990:38-39).

Briskin also identifies other problems facing women's struggle for equality in unions. Women who are elected into affirmative action positions are often still perceived as being token executive members; as a result, they may face difficulties being accepted as equal partners, being consulted on a wide range of union issues, and gaining access to information. As a response to these problems, feminist unionists are now utilizing a new politic of leadership which places a greater emphasis on accountability and process. Using this leadership style entails soliciting input from the elected representatives' constituents (i.e. women's caucuses) and makes for more democratic decision-making. Briskin cautions, however, that this new leadership style may have its pitfalls as well: this participatory style may mean that women who are not in the caucus — often minority women — may be excluded from decision-making. Moreover, the fact that elected representatives are reluctant to make decisions without consulting their constituents may antagonize other union executive members (Briskin, 1990:39-41).

Despite these words of warning, the overall impression is that women's issues have received significant attention from unions and central labour organizations, which are genuinely interested in increasing women's participation in their internal decision-making processes. While further research needs to be done on how these unions are translating their written policies into reality, these unions do provide an example to smaller and less progressive organizations. Public sector unions and progressive industrial unions like the CAW can also play a more direct role in furthering women's equality. These unions hold a significant proportion of delegates' votes at central labour organizations, and they should use these votes to support progressive resolutions on women's issues.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the area of women's participation in the decision-making processes of Canadian unions, it is a strange irony to discover that women in unions and women in corporations share a similar problem of under-representation at top organizational levels. However, the shortage of women in management's ranks has received much more attention during recent years than has the plight of women in unions. It is obvious that these two types of organizations are established with different structures in order to meet diverse purposes. Unions are democratic and representative in nature, and women in unions must usually be elected to executive positions. On the other hand, women in corporations must be appointed to management jobs. The pervasiveness of women's under-representation in the top levels of corporate management and union leadership is overwhelming evidence of men's dominance in our society's organizations and structures.

Over the past 15 to 20 years, union leadership and membership alike have recognized that barriers exist to women's full participation in union decision-making activities. To this end, public sector unions have actively sought means of promoting women's issues within their internal structures - realizing that they will not be in a position to effectively pressure governments and employers for action on women's concerns until they remedy their internal situation. Additionally, the recent stagnation in membership growth has caused the unions to seek new sources of organizing potential, leading to the discovery that many of the unorganized sectors of the economy contain a high proportion of women.

The labour organizations studied in this paper have responded to these pressures with a myriad of initiatives. Most of these unions have increased the coverage of women's issues in their periodicals and general literature, have established women's committees and departments, and have held regular women's conferences and workshops. They have also adopted internal affirmative action policies, have included women's issues as topics for study in union training courses, and have provided child care services for various union functions. Many other progressive policies have been adopted and implemented.

Despite all of these positive measures, however, union members and leaders must not become complacent in their fight for women's equality, mistakenly believing that the battle has been won. Much more work lies ahead. Unions need to ensure that policies are being implemented into practice and they must continue the steady but slow assault on the prevailing attitudes that hinder women in their attempts to gain increased access to the positions of power.

As a start, unions should make an effort to keep better records and statistics on women's participation in union activities and their holding of union office. While it is true that most unions do have a general idea of women's under-representation, future improvements in women's representation and participation may tend to be quite subtle and will require more accurate record-keeping. After all, unions must be prepared to monitor the effects of their policies to evaluate their effectiveness. These labour organizations should be encouraged to follow NUPGE's example in sending out periodic survey questionnaires to affiliates and union locals. Such surveys have a dual function in that they facilitate the gathering of accurate statistics while also calling regular attention to women's subordinate position in the union. Both the labour movement and women would likely benefit if various unions were to work together and pool their resources in establishing a comprehensive record-keeping system — cooperation

and solidarity often having been a successful strategy in the past. The role that progressive independent researchers can play here should not be overlooked, either.

Women's committees will and must keep up their tireless work in promoting women's concerns within the union structure. In addition to organizing conferences, developing educational materials and preparing general literature on women's issues, these committees must continue to seek innovative ways to draw more women into union activities. These committees also serve to foster women's networks within the union, allowing women activists to feel united with and supported by other women union members. Labour leaders should ensure that these vital committees receive adequate staff and funding to function effectively.

Another front on which unions can continue to push for women's equality is at the bargaining table. By negotiating clauses such as those that allow union meetings to be held at the workplace, preferably during working hours, women will find it much easier to participate in their locals' affairs. And the unions should realize that negotiating such a clause will bolster all members' attendance at meetings — not just women's — thereby making it an initiative that unites the whole membership to turn out at such meetings. Other issues to be negotiated with employers include the provision of child care in the workplace and increased time off with pay for union activities.

Perhaps the most important initiative in waging the war for women's equality is in the area of education. Education is essential to changing people's attitudes — attitudes which have often been the most significant barrier to women's equality. Education as defined here involves not only including special topics in training courses, but also involves broader measures, such as continuing coverage of women's issues in union periodicals and publishing special pamphlets and booklets devoted to women's concerns. Unions can educate their members about measures that will enable women to participate more fully in union decision-making activities and to successfully attain leadership positions. Education enables union members to confront and examine their own values and beliefs, equips them to discuss these issues within the union context, and then permits them to carry the message into the workplace and into the wider society. Without a fundamental change in attitudes, women will never truly win their fight for equality. The CAW, by establishing its family education centre in Port Elgin, Ontario, has taken an innovative approach to providing education to its members and their families. This emphasis on educating union families has had a progressive effect on increasing support for women's concerns.

This paper has focused on large public sector unions in Ontario; for this reason it is somewhat limited in scope. Much more work remains to be completed on this topic. Future research in this area may be pursued in a number of directions. Unions in other economic sectors and other areas of the country should be studied, in order to determine how progressive they have been in pursuing women's equality. One or more of the unions evaluated here could be studied in greater detail to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their policies and practices, and to determine whether, in fact, there exist any contradictions in their pursuit of women's equality. Finally, research should be completed on how the public sector unions are attempting to put their policies into practice, and what barriers continue to stand in the way of successfully implementing these policies.

The fight for women's equality in society, in the workplace and within the labour movement has already led to a number of significant achievements for women in the past 15 to 20 years. Much more remains to

be done, however. No true or fundamental improvements can occur until there is a change in our society's attitudes towards women. Nor can the inequality reflected in our economic, social and political structures be eradicated without this change in attitudes. Labour organizations can lead the way by educating their membership and by providing an example for other organizations in our society. Perhaps one day, the need for special policies will no longer exist. Then, women's committees can be abolished with their goal realized — having women's equality recognized as being in everyone's best interest.

## REFERENCES

- Acheson, Shelley and C. Macleod. 1982. Parental Rights and Daycare: A Bargaining Guide for Unions. Toronto: Ontario Federation of Labour.
- Andiappan, P. and Gary N. Chaison. 1983. "The Emerging Role of Women in National Union Governance: The Results of a Canadian Study." In Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of the International Industrial Relations Association, Kyoto, Japan, vol. 4, 23-44.
- Baden, Naomi. 1986. "Developing an Agenda: Expanding the Role of Women in Unions." Labour Studies Journal 10 (Winter): 229-49..
- Baker, Maureen and Mary-Anne Robeson. 1981. "Trade Union Reaction to Women Workers and Their Concerns." Canadian Journal of Sociology 6: 19-31.
- Bannon, Sharleen. 1976. "CLC Conference: Women Unionists Demand Their Share." Labour Gazette 76 (April): 201-204..
- Berquist, Virginia A. 1974. "Women's Participation in Labour Organizations." Monthly Labor Review 97 (October): 8-14.
- Briskin, Linda. 1990. "Women, Unions and Leadership." Canadian Dimension (January/February): 38-41.
- CALURA. [Statistics Canada.] 1985. Annual Report Under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act. Part II — Labour Unions. Catalogue No. 71-202. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- CAW. [Canadian Autoworkers' Union.] nd. Communications Department. Confronting Harassment in the Workplace. Folder.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. National Union Magazine (Summer).
- CLC. [Canadian Labour Congress.] 1970. Eighth Constitutional Convention, Edmonton, May. Resolutions
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1972. Ninth Constitutional Convention, Ottawa, May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1974. Tenth Constitutional Convention, Vancouver, May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978a. Twelfth Constitutional Convention, Quebec, April. Report of the Executive Council
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978b. Twelfth Constitutional Convention, Quebec, April. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979. Canadian Labour 24 (October 12).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. Thirteenth Constitutional Convention, Winnipeg, May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. Fourteenth Constitutional Convention, Winnipeg, May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984a. "Policy Paper on Women and Affirmative Action." In United Towards a Working Recovery. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Constitutional Convention, Montreal, May/June, 39-48.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984b. Fifteenth Constitutional Convention, Montreal, May/June. Resolutions.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. Canadian Labour 30 (July/August).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. Sixteenth Constitutional Convention, Toronto, April/May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. Seventeenth Constitutional Convention, Vancouver, May. Resolutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. Eighteenth Constitutional Convention. Resolutions.
- CUPE. [Canadian Union of Public Employees.] 1983a. Compendium of Policies:1963-1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983b. CUPE Women: Survival in the Crisis. A document prepared for the Annual Convention.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984. The Public Employee (Summer).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985a. National Task Force on Women. CUPE Task Force Women Respond to the Challenge – CUPE Women: Survival in the Crisis.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985b. The Public Employee (Summer).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. Equal Opportunities Department. Working Together to Achieve Equality.
- Carr, Shirley. 1976. "Union Role in Equality of Opportunity." Canadian Labour 21, (September): 1.
- Chaison, Gary N. and P. Andiappan. 1982. "Characteristics of Female Union Officers in Canada." Relations Industrielles 37: 765-77.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. "Profiles of Local Officers: Females v. Males." Industrial Relations 26: 281-83.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. "An Analysis of the Barriers to Women Becoming Local Union Officers." Journal of Labor Research 10:149-62.
- Dewey, Lucretia M. 1971. "Women in Labor Unions." Monthly Labor Review 94 (February): 42-48.
- Field, Debbie. 1981. "Women's Committees in Unions." Women and Trade Unions 10 (July): 8-11.
- Fiorito, Jack and Charles R. Greer. 1986. "Gender Differences in Union Membership, Preferences and Beliefs." Journal of Labor Research 7: 145-64.
- Gigantes, Evelyn. 1990. Personal Correspondence with Marina Boehm, May 6.
- Kehoe, Mary. 1978. "CLC Conference on Equal Opportunity." Canadian Labour 23 (March): 30-33.
- Koziara, Karen S. and David A. Pierson. 1980. "Barriers to Women Becoming Union Leaders." In Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Annual Meeting of the Industrial Relations Research Association, Madison, Wisconsin, 48-54.
- Kumar, Pradeep and David Cowan. 1989. Gender Differences in Union Membership Status: The Role of Labour Market Segmentation. Queen's Papers in Industrial Relations, No. 1989-2. Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University.
- Leah, Ronnie. 1989. Organizing for Daycare. Reprint Series No. 83. Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University.

- LeGrande, Linda H. 1978. "Women in Labor Organizations: Their Ranks Are Increasing." Monthly Labor Review 101 (August): 8-14.
- Mitchell, Nancy. 1980. "Equal Opportunities." The Civil Service Review 53 (June): 3-5.
- NUPGE. [National Union of Provincial Government Employees.] nd. "Women in the National Union."  
\_\_\_\_\_.1984. NUPGE Update (September 19).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1985. NUPGE Notes (Spring).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1987. NUPGE Update (June 3).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1989. Affirmative Action Survey.
- OFL. [Ontario Federation of Labour.] nda. Women's Committee. Organizing for Affirmative Action. A series of six pamphlets.  
\_\_\_\_\_. ndb. Affirmative Action Report.  
\_\_\_\_\_.1978a. Ontario Labour (November/December).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1978b. A Woman's Place Is In Her Union. A document prepared for the 22nd Annual Convention, November 13-16.  
\_\_\_\_\_.1979a. Ontario Labour (January/February).  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1979b. Ontario Labour (July/August).  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1980. Ontario Labour (May/June).  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1981. Ontario Labour (January/February).  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1982. 25th Annual Convention, November 22-25. Statement on Women and Affirmative Action.  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1983. Ontario Labour (Fall/Winter).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1985a. Ontario Labour (Fall).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1985b. Women's Committee. Women's Rights Bulletin (July).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1987. Statement on Equal Action in Employment. A Policy Document.  
\_\_\_\_\_.1990. "Taking Stock and Moving Forward: Union Women in the 1990s." A discussion paper prepared for the Women's Conference, March 21-24.
- OPSEU. [Ontario Public Service Employees' Union.] 1985. OPSEU News (April/May and June/July).  
\_\_\_\_\_.1990. Policy Manual.
- Phillips, Carol. 1990. Personal Correspondence with Marina Boehm, May 31.
- PSAC. [Public Service Alliance of Canada.] 1979. The Civil Service Review (September).

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. "Policy Document No. 20: Equal Opportunity.' In Policy Papers and Resolutions of 1983 87-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984. Argus-Journal (May).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. Argus-Journal (May).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. Argus-Journal (March and June).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. National Women's Conference, November 5-8. Equality for a Change! Report of the Conference.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. Alliance (July/August).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. Alliance (November/December).
- Till-Retz, Roberta. 1986. "Unions in Europe: Increasing Women's Participation." Labor Studies Journal 10: 250-60.
- Townson, Monica. 1975. "Organizing Women Workers." Labour Gazette 75:349-53.



Industrial Relations Centre (IRC)  
Queen's University  
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6  
[irc.queensu.ca](http://irc.queensu.ca)



SCHOOL OF  
**Policy Studies**  
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY