Women in Trade Unions: strategies for the representation of women's interests in four countries

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where sources and references are provided, the material in this thesis is my own independent work.

Jennifer Curtin
January 1997
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Abstract

This thesis is about the variety of strategies employed by women trade unionists in their efforts to make trade union structures and policy agendas more inclusive of the interests of women workers. The perspective of the thesis is broadly comparative, but it also uses a case-study approach, focusing in greater detail on the recent development of women's unionism in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden. The thesis investigates the issues around which women trade unionists have employed either class or gendered strategies in furthering the interests of women workers. In analysing how trade union women have articulated their interests and defined their plans of action across these four countries, it is apparent that a mix of gender-specific and class-based strategies have been adopted. Why these mixes result is dependent on the differing political arrangements, historical and cultural contexts, the welfare state and the character of working class organisations themselves. The ways in which women's inclusion and exclusion is constructed within these contexts necessarily impacts on the utility of certain strategies. By exploring what combination of factors best explains the cross-national similarities and differences that exist in the choice of strategies made by women unionists, it becomes evident that viewing solidarities as contingent allows for a better understanding of women's collective actions as workers.
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Abbreviations

ACTU  Australian Council of Trade Unions
AS    Austrian Schillings
DUES  The Development of Trade Unions in Western European Societies Project, Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, University of Mannheim.
EEO   Equal Employment Opportunity
EPAC  Economic Planning Advisory Commission
ETUC  European Trade Union Confederation
HREOC Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
KOM   Women and Men Working Together
ICFTU International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO   International Labour Organisation
LO    Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions
NSW DIRETFE New South Wales Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ÖGB   Austrian Confederation of Trade Unions
SACO  Swedish Confederation of Academics
SAF   Swedish Employers' Association
SSGCW State Secretariat for the General Concerns of Women
TCFUA Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia
TCO   Central Organisation of Salaried Employees
TDC   Trade Development Council
UK    United Kingdom
US    United States
WTUC  Women's Trade Union Commission
WTUL  Women's Trade Union League

(The abbreviations used to identify interview sources are listed in Appendix One).
Chapter One

Introduction

The Research Topic

Trade unions are organisations which seek to represent the interests of workers, enhancing and protecting wages and working conditions by means of both collective and political action (Taylor, 1989: 1). Korpi (1983: 34-35) argues that it continues to be trade unions that best represent the concerns of wage earners (more so than left wing parties). Yet, since the emergence of modern trade unionism in response to industrialisation, trade unions have a mixed record on the representation of women workers (Cook, Lorwin and Daniels, 1992). Women were often excluded from membership and once included, denied access to decision making positions. In addition, many trade unions have acted to reinforce rather than to challenge women's inequality in the paid workforce (Milkman, 1985: xi).

From the 1960s onwards, women have become a permanent fixture in the paid labour force and in many countries they make up a substantial component of trade union membership. It is in this context that Cobble notes "the potential for forging a creative productive partnership between working women and unions is greater now than at any other time" (Cobble, 1993: 4). This thesis seeks to examine how women trade unionists have sought to make trade union structures and policy agendas more inclusive of the interests of women workers. More specifically, I analyse the extent to which such a 'partnership' has been developed between women and trade unions in four countries: Australia, Sweden, Austria and Israel. In this introductory chapter I discuss the significance of my research, before embarking upon a more detailed outline of the research questions and the arguments developed. I then outline and justify the methodological approach taken and provide an overview of the remaining chapters.
Significance of the Research

This project is significant in a number of ways. First, the continuing absence of women within the elites of political institutions has become an increasingly salient topic of late, both within the theory and practice of politics. While the focus of new democratic theorising and practice has been primarily on the absence of women within parliaments (Phillips, 1991; 1995; Sawer & Simms, 1993) and the bureaucracy (Sawer 1990, Yeatman, 1990; Eisenstein, 1991), trade unions also need to be included in this debate since they play a critical role in the representation of workers' interests to both employers and governments. This research will contribute to an assessment of democratic practice within trade unions by examining how workers' interests are defined and redefined and how women are provided with a voice in this process.

Trade unionism is a product of solidarity between workers based on the opposition between capital and labour and initially resulting from workers uniting to maintain rates of pay and conditions of work. However, this form of solidarity, which I label conventional solidarity, has precluded the acknowledgment of differences between workers. By focusing on how women in trade unions have acted collectively with each other and/or with other groups of workers, this research provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which women have created new political spaces for themselves and their mobilisation within existing spaces. On this basis, it is possible to pursue some of the implications of these practices of women trade unionists as a means towards thinking creatively about alternative forms of solidarity between women and between workers of both sexes. This investigation reveals that the conflicts which often arise as a result of workers' sectional interests are not always best viewed as negative and/or detrimental to trade unionism.

There has been a considerable increase in research concerning women's studies over the last twenty years or so and with it the historical and contemporary situation of women in trade unions has emerged as an object of serious scholarly inquiry. Historical analyses of women and their interaction with trade unions rectify the previous invisibility of women's position within the labour movement (Soldon, 1985; Collette 1989; Frances 1991; Street, 1994; Shute, 1994; Milkman, 1985). Contemporary developments in the relationship between women and trade unions
have also received increasing attention in the literature (Gardner, 1983; Pocock, 1995a; Briskin, 1993; Acker, 1994; Bergqvist, 1991; 1995). However, with only a few exceptions (see Cook, Lorwin and Daniels, 1984; 1992; Gelb, 1989; O'Donnell and Hall, 1988), this literature is not comparative in nature. A systematic cross-national approach would clearly offer real dividends in terms of demonstrating the factors accounting for the variability of women's actions within trade unions. In this sense, the comparative approach taken in this thesis seeks to fill an important gap in the literature on women and trade unions.

As the work of both Whitehouse (1992) and Cook, Lorwin and Daniels (1992) indicates (albeit utilising different approaches), centralised and strategic unionism can prove an effective vehicle for providing beneficial outcomes to women workers. My study complements the work of these scholars. It focuses not on outcomes, but on the processes by which the interests of women workers are both formulated and represented. I survey the extent of women's mobilisation and representation within unions cross nationally and provide a systematic analysis of the similarities and differences in strategies employed by women trade unionists in four countries - Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden. My analysis provides new insights into women's collective actions within trade unions and seeks to generate new conceptual schemes through which to interpret such actions.

The empirical material for the case studies, on which this thesis rests, was accumulated through interviews with women trade union officials in four countries. Thus, methodologically, my research draws from the experience of women acting in positions which enable them to participate in both the identification and formulation of women's interests and strategies. While I do not submerge myself uncritically in my subjects, I believe that it is only by allowing these women to speak that insights may be gained which does their experience justice (see Anderson, 1992). By utilising this method at a macro, comparative level, I make connections between broad institutional arrangements and more micro-level negotiations around personal experience (Peattie and Rein, 1983; Marshall, 1994). This may be claimed to be a novel mode of analysis within the comparative politics literature, but one which integrates an analysis of both structure and process, allowing for the identification of women's agency.
There are significant practical implications of a study such as this. Although trade unionism is predicated on a collective identity and seeks to represent a unified working class interest, the findings of this thesis challenge this assumption. The collective actions of women may in some instances threaten the conventional solidarity of trade unions. Naming the gender-specific conditions that accompany women's participation in the labour market undermines the notion of a common work experience upon which trade unionism is based. Forming solidarities around the identity of 'woman' also has the potential to destabilise the male, full-time worker 'norm' that underpins trade unionism in the four countries examined here. Challenging this 'norm' may then encourage trade union movements to reconceptualise their membership as having diverse interests which are flexible and fluid. Such a reconceptualisation might serve as a stimulus for trade unions to become more representative of their membership.

Furthermore, in this period of globalisation, trade unions are having to adjust to substantial changes to the environment in which they operate, including declining membership in many cases. Accepting, acknowledging and providing a voice for different groups of workers within trade unions therefore becomes increasingly necessary if unions are to continue to be viewed by governments and employers as representative of 'the working class' in public policy making arenas.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

Several questions are addressed in this research. I ask what is distinctive about the strategies for change pursued by women unionists in each country and why? More specifically, I ask under what circumstances and around what issues have women trade unionists employed class-based or gender-specific strategies in furthering the interests of women workers? I define class-based strategies as derived from a specifically class-oriented ideology which views the capital-labour relationship as primary. All workers are considered to have a common interest arising out of this relationship. Class strategies may range from strikes to formal involvement in the policy making arena. Gender-specific strategies are those which invoke the notion of women and often include separate organising within trade unions, utilising legislative measures and seeking to feminise union hierarchies. I also ask how relevant to the choice of strategy is the history of women's inclusion and
representation by trade unions and the political and cultural environment within which trade unionism has operated?

In addressing these questions, this thesis offers two major propositions. First, that existing theoretical models of working class representation are inadequate. In response, I hope to offer a reconceptualisation of the ways in which we conceive of acts of solidarity and collective action by women in trade unions. I argue that reference solely to conventional notions of solidarity based on class assumes a unified working class interest, subsuming the tangible differences that exist between workers. A similar criticism can also be directed at feminist approaches which view women's interests as fixed and unified; in this situation the tangible differences between women are ignored and/or minimised.

What is revealed by my analysis is the particularity of the 'universal'. While universal claims may be made by trade unions on behalf of all workers, or by feminists on behalf of all women, the way in which claims are framed is necessarily selective and therefore exclusive of some interests. New claims for inclusion are then formulated, based on such exclusions, with alternative strategies and solidarities formed in an effort to have these claims addressed. With each new claim and solidarity, the boundaries defining whose interests are included and excluded are redrawn. In this sense, the construction of interests and the formation of solidarities around these interests is a continuous process rather than something fixed. I argue that when we view the claims of (women) workers in this way, emphasising rather than obscuring the heterogeneity of workers interests, the solidarities created and the strategies employed by women trade unionists are best conceptualised as fluid and contingent.

The second proposition offered in this thesis is that comparative empirical research is a useful means to explore the dimensions of these contingent solidarities. In analysing the ways in which trade union women have articulated their interests and defined their plans of action across four countries, it will become apparent that a mix of gender-specific and class-based strategies have been adopted. The specific mix that occurs depends on differences in political arrangements, historical and cultural contexts and the character of the welfare state in these nations as well as on the diverse organisational characteristics of the different national union movements. The ways in which women's inclusion and exclusion is constructed within these
contexts necessarily impacts on the utility of certain strategies. By undertaking a four country comparison it becomes possible to explore what combination of these factors best explains the cross-national similarities and differences that exist in the emergent strategies.

A similarity between the four countries that can be readily identified is the the early exclusion of women from participating in the labour force and joining trade unions. Women’s eventual inclusion in both these arenas has often been marginal and secondary and, with respect to trade union hierarchies, continues to be so. However, despite this significant similarity, the ways in which these exclusions and inclusions have in turn shaped and constituted the strategies employed by women in trade unions differ, both between and within countries.

While trade unions have not always acknowledged the ways in which gender intersects with class, thereby impacting on equality in outcomes for women workers, women have not abandoned class-based strategies as a means for pursuing equality. Rather, in environments where trade unionism has considerable strength and access to public policy making, there has often been an acceptance by women unionists that class-based outcomes can disproportionately benefit women who tend to be, for example, the majority of the low paid. There have also been explicit attempts by women unionists to gender the class politics approach, thereby making specific gains for women workers in addition to the overall class outcomes. However, the usefulness of the latter strategy appears dependent upon the existence of a broad-based political unionism which views the concerns of women workers as industrial rather than as social issues and upon an environment where gender equality is considerably politicised.

However, because class politics and the notions of equality that go with it have not always produced the desired equality in outcomes for women workers, women workers have often struggled for recognition by appealing to their identity as women, providing a focal point for collective action. The demand for increasing women’s presence in union hierarchies is a claim articulated by women unionists in all four countries examined here. This is a strategy which necessarily appeals to women’s identity as women and is employed largely as a result of existing union representation not adequately accounting for the concerns of women workers.
However, the utility of any strategy is not pre-determined since the concerns of women workers are continually changing. As one set of claims are settled, a new set of demands arise, around which a class-based or gender-specific solidarity by women may be an appropriate or inappropriate strategy in any given context. In this sense, I argue the formulation and constitution of strategies and solidarities around the notions of class and gender are not fixed, but contingent.

Methodology

Cross-National Comparisons

While many comparative analyses seek to establish generalisations which may then be used to account for the past and predict the future (Lane and Ersson, 1994: 10-11), comparison is also a mode of locating and exploring a phenomenon as yet insufficiently understood (Castles, 1989: 9). In this sense, comparative research allows for an assessment of the similarities and differences in the strategies employed by women unionists, and the specific historical and cultural contexts from which they arise. This assessment may in turn contribute to theoretical rethinking (Bradshaw and Wallace, 1991: 154). It is this which is a goal of this thesis. The objective is not to provide statements of causality nor predict future trends or possibilities in the strategies of women trade unionists. Rather, the intention is to critically examine in a comparative context the largely unexplored gender dimension of trade union politics.

In undertaking cross-national research, the nation can be made the object or the context of study, although it is not always easy to differentiate the two purposes (Kohn, 1989: 77). In this thesis, the nation is both of these. I am interested in understanding the strategies employed by women trade unionists within the individual countries in their own right, but, in addition, I critically examine the similarities and differences between these cross-national strategy profiles in an effort to investigate how conventional notions of working class solidarities are disrupted by the diversity and contingency of women's collective actions.
The Case-Study Approach

In exploring possible extensions to the way we conceive of women's political behaviour, the case-study method is employed, since case studies are "sensitive to complexity and historical specificity" and, as a result, are well suited for addressing empirically defined outcomes and for generating new conceptual schemes (Ragin, 1987: x). Case studies also have the potential to illustrate the inappropriateness of a particular theory. Large scale quantitative studies may obscure critical features which, when exposed through more intensive case studies, would lead to a more nuanced theoretical explanation. A theoretical rationale still guides the research, but the theory is open to modification and reinterpretation within the context of each case (Bradshaw and Wallace, 1991: 161-162).

Perhaps the most advantageous aspect of the case-study approach is that it allows the comparison of whole cases. Case studies focus on configurations of structures and discourses and attempt to unravel complexity by comparing configurations. The case-study approach also allows for a focus on human agency and process (Ragin, 1989: 59). Applying a lens which allows for the identification of agency is crucial in examining the strategies and solidarities articulated and formulated by women in trade unions. For feminist research, this focus on agency is appropriate, since a key feminist critique of comparative research to date has been its gender blindness in the operationalisation of variables (Orloff, 1996; O'Connor, 1993).

Case studies are, however, frequently criticised. Their specificity and richness of texture is seen as an inherent barrier to the broader generalisation often regarded as *sine qua non* of comparative empirical research. This difficulty is real and I have sought to avoid it in two ways. The first is to place the case-study approach in the wider context of an analysis of cross-national data on female union mobilisation and representation, found in Part One of this thesis. The second is to deploy more than a single case study. All research involves a trade-off between specificity and generality of focus. However, the combination of four country case studies presented in Part Two, with the theoretical analysis of Part One, provides a suitable mix of the two methodological approaches that feature most prominently in contemporary comparative analysis.
Finally, a case-oriented study is most appropriate for this thesis, since its concern is with processes rather than outcomes and the former are not easily converted into quantitative variables. Identification of the similarities and differences between and within these four countries will provide the means to understanding the diverse strategies and solidarities formed by women in trade unions.

**Choice of Countries**

I compare Sweden, Austria, Israel and Australia in an effort to make 'similar system' comparisons (Przeworski and Tuene, 1970). There exist several similarities between these countries. In Sweden, Austria and Israel, parties of the left have enjoyed a large electoral following and have participated as leading or co-equal partners in government for over 30 years. While this has not been the case with Australia, the Labor Party did have an uninterrupted thirteen year period of majority government between 1983 and 1996. In all four countries, a trade union movement exists which encompasses a majority of wage earners and is closely linked to parties on the left. All have had high levels of unionisation, (although in the case of Israel the concept of union membership is ambiguous for reasons expanded on later in the thesis). In addition, the trade union confederations in these four countries are strong and centralised.

Sweden, Austria, Israel and Australia have also been labelled, at various times, as corporatist. The term corporatism can be used to describe the institutional arrangements which allow for the effective participation of labour organisations in the formulation and implementation of policy across a range of key policy areas (Boreham and Compston, 1992: 146). Although there are numerous definitions of the concept, most definitions accept interest aggregation as a central feature of corporatism. There is a requirement for trade union elites to coordinate and limit the demands of their members in a way that will override sectional interests. In return they are granted a representational monopoly within the policy making arena, which in turn can have a significant effect on final policy outcomes (Shalev, 1992: 6).

We might expect that if trade unions are possible vehicles of change for women workers, it would be in countries where trade unionism is strong and centralised and provided with representation in the policy making arena. A question then
asked in this thesis is how have the trade union movements in Sweden, Austria, Israel and Australia sought to internalise the interests of women and how much visibility and voice have women had in the process of interest formulation and representation?

Data Collection

Primary research material was collected from interviews conducted with 50 women trade union officials working within the trade union confederations and in the head offices of national trade unions in Sweden, Australia, Austria and Israel (see Appendix One). A cross-section of unions was targeted to reflect the different proportions of women members, as well as various occupations and industries. Equality officers and/or women's officers were chosen as contacts since the interview questions revolved around what union policies existed or were being considered regarding issues relevant to women workers. The interviews took place between August 1994 and April 1995.

To allow for a systematic comparison, the same set of questions was asked of all the women interviewed (see Appendix Two). However, questions were open-ended and the issues considered of importance were identified by the interviewee. Thus women trade unionists were not treated as subjects to be studied, but rather were recognised as people who freely provided the researcher with valuable information (cf Devere, 1993: 13). They were informants rather than respondents. This approach was critical to the success of the study as I was provided with insights into the specifics of various strategies and was often directed to, or provided with, relevant corroborative evidence. The responses provided may reflect both the policy of the particular union and the interviewee's personal opinion.

Also consulted were officials from parties of the left, government officials, staff of international labour secretariats and international labour confederations about projects with implications for the countries under scrutiny and people of interest who could provide further information and advice. In addition, in each country I sought out academics and professionals who were concerned with the interests of working women and/or trade unions. Overall, 70 interviews were undertaken with those cited listed in Appendix One.
Most of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed by myself. No details have been altered. However, personal names are not used. Rather reference to the material gained from interviews is made using the occupation/industry title or the organisation represented and a list of the interviewee's position and trade union or organisation is provided in Appendix One.

The description and analysis undertaken in this thesis has involved condensing, excerpting and interpreting what respondents said. While this allows for women's voices to be heard, it also involves an editing process which often goes unnoticed, and may in turn obscure aspects of women's experience or alter meanings (Devault, 1990: 107-109). In attempting to circumvent these pitfalls, considerable descriptive material has been included in the empirical chapters in a careful effort to "let women speak". Such descriptive work is important in that there remains much about women's representation within trade unions that we do not know. However, this has been placed within a specific conceptual framework and in this way avoids degenerating "into ad hoc description" (Castles, 1989: 9). As a result, I have been able to link the relevance of broad institutional and political configurations and discourses within each country with the articulated experiences of women trade unionists in the process of more micro-level representation (cf Peattie and Rein, 1983). In so doing, this research embraces fully what are the key features of the case-study method; that is its focus on holism, agency and process.

Chapter Breakdown

The remainder of the thesis is broken down into three parts. Part One includes Chapters Two, Three and Four and provides the background to the empirical material which follows later. Chapter Two offers a quantitative profile of the membership and representation of women in trade unions and, although the analysis is predominantly descriptive, it contributes to a significantly under-researched area by drawing together statistical data on women in trade unions. In presenting this data, this chapter sets the scene for the remainder of the thesis, displaying the dimensions of women's trade union membership and how it compares to men's. It also offers some speculations as to the reasons for cross-national variations in women's trade union membership.
Chapters Three and Four provide the analytical framework for the remainder of the thesis. Because the focus of the research is on the representation of women workers' interests by trade unions, I begin in Chapter Three with traditional and contemporary views on working class representation generally. I identify the strategies which are derived from such perspectives and critically examine the assumptions that underpin this approach. I follow this with an examination in Chapter Four of the various feminist arguments regarding the representation of women's interests. In juxtaposing these two broad sets of ideas, what I label 'class-based' and 'gender-specific' strategies become the two organising principles and evaluative mechanisms of the thesis. I do not set these strategies up as oppositional or an either/or choice, but rather argue that as the interests of women workers are not fixed or unified, the choice of strategy is dependent on the particular claim, the historical and cultural contexts and the nature of the trade union movement itself.

Part Two covers Chapters Five through to Eight which are the individual country chapters. Each chapter is divided into a number of sections. The first section offers a consideration of contextual factors, including the development of working class representation, the contemporary industrial relations setting, and the current position of women. Because the strategic choices made by women trade unionists are constrained by both institutional arrangements and past choices and priorities which are then mediated by the perceptions of the women themselves (Scharpf, 1984: 260; Castles, 1989: 11), an identification is required of the organisational and discursive environment within which women trade unionists constitute their interests and formulate their collective actions.

The second section of each country chapter examines how the respective trade union movements have historically excluded and/or included women and the means by which women have sought inclusion. It reviews the representation of women in trade union hierarchies and the barriers that exist to restrict further entry by women into union structures. The third section concerns women's wages, with a particular focus on equal pay for women and women's predominance in low wage sectors in the context of the broader collective bargaining environment and trade union wage policy objectives. In the fourth section, women's working conditions are examined. The working conditions examined include the conditions or policies which facilitate women's labour force participation as well as conditions of work
on site. The claims identified by women trade unionists vary across countries, seemingly dependent on what has already been provided by state action through welfare or labour market policy. However, in all countries, facilitating the mix of paid work and family responsibilities is an important issue for women trade unionists, as is equal employment opportunity and issues concerning sexual harassment. Throughout, the different strategies articulated and solidarities constituted by women unionists are identified and analysed with reference to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapters Three and Four. In the concluding section of each chapter, I summarise the major themes and identify the patterns that emerge in each national context.

The third part of the thesis contains the final concluding chapter. In Chapter Nine the cross-national similarities and differences in the strategies pursued by women trade unionists in their quest for labour market equality are explored in some depth. In particular, the chapter identifies and analyses what is unique about the utility of gender-specific and/or class-based strategies within a given country and, in so doing, provides a new conceptualisation of women’s collective actions within trade unions.
Part One

The Place of Women in the Trade Union Movement

This section of the thesis sets the scene for the country chapters which follow in Part Two. The purpose of Chapter Two, which provides a comparative overview of trends in women's trade union membership, is to establish whether it is feasible to expect trade unions to become more responsive to claims for an increased presence of women in trade union hierarchies and to better represent the interests and claims of women workers.

Chapters Three and Four offer a critical examination of the literature on class and gender as identities around which collective actions are focused and solidarities formed. The variety of possible strategies derived from such positions are also identified. From this analysis, several questions are formulated regarding the construction of interests, the choice of strategies and the nature of solidarities, in this way providing an analytical framework by which the remainder of the thesis is organised.
Chapter Two

The Feminisation of Trade Unions: comparing membership and representation

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the divergent development of trade union membership in western countries (Wallerstein, 1989; Stephens, 1990; Rothstein, 1992; OECD, 1991b; Visser, 1992, Korpi, 1983; Shalev and Korpi, 1980). However, to date there has been little comparative research on unionisation which incorporates a gender dimension. Three reasons for this dearth of research immediately spring to mind. First, the data are difficult to find and time consuming to collect. Second, women as a focus of study is relatively recent and largely a result of urging by the women's movement to include women in academic investigation. Finally, analyses of trade unions are often underpinned by a 'labour versus capital' approach, with a view of the working class as a homogeneous group, while feminist analyses have often defined unions as male-dominated and inherently antagonistic to the interests of women. Yet, as will become evident, women are a sizeable component of the union movement and clearly warrant investigation in their own right.

It has been suggested that women's presence in trade unions not only provides them with economic benefits, but also gives women access to important political skills and political elites and provides them with opportunities to influence the policies being demanded of governments (Lovenduski, 1986: 165). However, for women to have the opportunity to influence the content of trade union agendas, trade union membership is crucial. The aim of this chapter, then, is to survey cross-national patterns in women's unionisation and representation within trade union hierarchies across countries. To this end, the chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I identify the reasons why we might expect a feminisation of trade unions to have occurred, with particular regard to the influence of women's increased labour force participation. In the second section, I describe the different dimensions of women's union density across countries and examine how it compares with male union density. I then examine how far women have come in terms of representation within trade unions. Finally, I speculate as to what explanations might be appropriate in explaining the variations
that exist and discuss the implications of these statistical profiles for women in trade unions.

Why Feminisation?

To begin with it is necessary to clarify what is meant by feminisation. The term has become increasingly popular with reference to the rise in women’s labour force participation (Jenson, Hagen and Reddy, 1988; Karvonen, 1995) and to the high proportion of women in particular occupations (Cook, 1984: 12), and is defined as an increase in the number or share of women among that particular group. However, it can also mean the process by which institutions or societies come to incorporate feminist values, and/or become more "feminised" in structure, placing more women in decision-making positions and becoming more sensitive to issues important to women (Lenz and Myerhoff, 1985).

Within Australia, reference to the feminisation of trade unions has been portrayed as a combination of both the aspects mentioned above: differences in women’s labour force participation rates and their unionisation rates, as well as the (in)ability of unions to place issues surrounding the sexual division of reproductive and productive work onto the agenda (Simms, 1987: 23). In the context of this chapter, however, feminisation will refer to the increasing unionisation of women in terms of absolute numbers and share of union membership as well as the representation of women in union hierarchies. Later in the thesis, I examine the strategies by which women trade unionists have sought to place women’s issues onto union agendas. However, a numerically strong base and women representatives are often requirements for such gains to be made. It is the question of whether such pre-conditions exist that I examine here.

Women can no longer be seen as a supplementary and temporary feature of the paid labour force. In the past thirty years, women’s participation in paid work has dramatically increased in western countries, although there has been significant cross-national variation in these increases. Between 1960 and 1985, female labour force participation in Sweden, Denmark and Norway rose by 40 percentage points, with the US, Australia and the Netherlands close to 30 percentage points, while the German speaking countries, along with Italy, Ireland and Japan, manifested much smaller increases (Schmidt, 1993: 182).

Regardless of this variation, these participation rates have proved remarkably resilient to the various periods of economic crisis experienced cross-nationally
since the early 1970s. Thus, while a high proportion of women remain in low paid, low-status, and part-time and casual employment, the fact remains that the paid labour force across western nations has become increasingly feminised.

Much of the growth in women's paid employment has occurred through expansion in the service sector. However, the growth of the service sector can be regarded as ambiguously related to female union mobilisation. On the positive side, a large part of the growth of services has been through the growth of public services - particularly with respect to health, education and welfare. The increased role of government has been significant for women's employment and, although cross-national variations are evident in this trend (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 201), the more public employment increased, the more likely it has been that public employees would be women (OECD, 1982: 29).

It is argued that in every major European country, public employees are more likely to be in unions than their private sector counterparts (Rose, 1985: 40). This is also true with respect to Canada and Australia, and more recently in the United States (Rawson 1988: 11; Bakker 1988: 35). The nature of employment relations in the public sector is such that unions are often active in broader tasks than wage negotiation. This, combined with the fact that the public sector has in the past offered greater job security, and exhibited lower turnover rates, makes union membership recruitment and retention more favourable (Visser, 1990: 51). Thus, in countries where women’s public sector employment increased, it follows that their unionisation rates should also increase.

On the negative side of the equation, expansion of employment in service industries such as retail, finance and personal services is unlikely to lead to an increase in unionisation since these tend to be 'low-density' occupations. The same can be said of the small firm sector (where women often work in clerical jobs), since unionisation is often non-existent or difficult to sustain (OECD, 1991b: 106).

A second feature of the feminisation of the labour force has been the increased attachment to the labour force shown by women workers. One way to view such attachment is in terms of a decrease in interruptions in paid labour market participation. When looking at the activity rates of women, there are obvious cross-national differences (for example in Ireland and Italy many women still drop out to have children without returning, while in Sweden and the US very little interruption is apparent for the same age group). Yet compared to the mid-1960s,
women in all OECD countries display an increasing attachment to the labour force (OECD, 1988: 132-33).

It can also be argued that increased attachment may act as an incentive to increase women’s trade union membership. Unionism can be viewed as an asset which provides a flow of services over time to utility maximising employees (Fiorito and Greer, 1986). This utility may vary according to personal characteristics. For example, being less attached to the labour force, potential women members may perceive union benefits (grievance procedures, redundancy rules and superannuation) as being unnecessary. However, as women’s attachment to the labour force extends, it might follow that their membership would increase, since the benefits unions provide would outweigh the cost of membership for more women. Furthermore, as women become more permanent participants in the paid labour force, and in some cases compete with men for jobs, trade unions might be expected to organise women in order to avoid male workers’ wages being undercut.

This notion of attachment could also be applied to women as part-time workers. Since the 1970s, part-time employment has become a widespread phenomenon in many western countries and is mostly taken up by women (OECD, 1984). This may be seen as potentially inhibiting the feminisation of unions, since work-related matters are considered to be less central to the life interests of part-time workers than of full-time workers and, as such, women part-time workers might be less likely to become union members (OECD, 1991b: 117).

However, the extent to which part-time employment contributes to lower levels of women's unionisation is unclear, for it appears that unionising part-time workers is closely related to the way in which part-time employment is distributed across industries. For example, public employers have been favourable in organising both full-time and part-time employees (Bain and Price, 1983: 24), while a Swedish study has shown that the discrepancy between unionisation rates of full-time workers and part-time workers is explained by the fact that part-time workers tend to predominate in branches, demographic or socio-economic groups that have a lower level of unionisation even if they work full-time (Sundström, 1982: 566). Also important is the attitude held by the relevant trade union movement toward part-time work. In Sweden, part-time employment accounts for more than 30 per cent of the jobs held by women (Bakker, 1988: 21), yet a very high percentage of women workers are unionised, which is, in part, the result of Swedish trade union
confederations actively seeking to include part-time workers as members (Cook et al, 1992: 210).

The third point important to trade unionism is that the rise in women's labour force participation has corresponded with the raised profile of women in the public consciousness and 'women's' issues have become a subject for political debate and action. Women's formal economic participation combined with the rise of the new women's movement has enabled women to put pressure on unions (and state institutions) to remove inequities that exist within them (Bakker, 1988: 33; Cook et al, 1984; 1992). In addition, with unionism in decline in many countries, and women's issues of more relevance, unions might be expected to recruit women members and to promote issues of concern to them, assuming that the costs are not excessive.

Such a stance has been taken by union confederations in a number of countries. In both Germany and Austria, special women's divisions were created in national unions and at confederation level after World War Two, while in most of the English-speaking countries, women's caucuses and committees have been set up in response to demands by women workers. Cook (1991) argues that providing women (and minorities) with the opportunity to organise within unions, allows for substantial gains to be made in attaining more women in leadership, and a higher priority for issues important to women (Cook, 1991: 254).

In the past, it has often been assumed that women are less interested in trade unions, while conventional wisdom has also insinuated that women were less 'organisable' than men. However, the latter is explained not by gender differences per se, but rather by a worker's occupation or industry position (Gottfried, 1992; Grimes, 1991). Furthermore, both historical and contemporary accounts of women and trade unions indicate that the assumption regarding a lack of interest on the part of women to be unfounded. As I elaborate later on in the thesis, historically women were often excluded from membership in existing trade unions and, as a result, women organised themselves into separate trade unions (Balser, 1987; Cook et al, 1984; 1992; Boston, 1987). Research undertaken over the last ten years also indicates that gender does not significantly influence workers' attitudes to trade unions (Benson and Griffin, 1988; Fiorito and Greer, 1986). Indeed, in many cases it is women more than men who view unions as positive and useful in gaining workplace reforms (Schur and Kruse, 1992).
In conclusion, there are a number of reasons why we might expect a move toward the feminisation of unions. Not only has women’s labour force participation increased, but so has their attachment and their overall visibility in the 'public' arena. The employment of women in the government sector may serve to increase their unionisation and research shows that women’s attitudes to unions are often more positive than men’s.

Patterns of Women’s Unionisation

The time period looked at here is 1960-1989 (with the exception of Denmark for which data was available only from 1970) with data for ten yearly intervals. While long-run time series studies have been undertaken with respect to overall union density (Neumann, Pedersen and Westergard-Nielsen, 1989; Kjellberg, 1983), lack of data disaggregated by gender prevents a similar picture being drawn here. Initially all OECD countries were examined for inclusion. However, it was only possible to obtain cross-national time series data on women’s union membership for ten countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US)). Data for Israel are unavailable with trade union confederation membership granted by virtue of membership in the Sick Fund, rather than unionisation.

Figure 2.1 Female Union Density, 12 Countries, 1989

Sources: see Appendix Three.
When looking at the unionisation rates of women across countries the most obvious aspect is the variation that exists between countries. In 1989, for the 12 countries for which data is available for that time-point, female union density levels vary between 98 per cent in Sweden and 12.6 per cent in the United States. This variation across countries remains considerable when looking at the development of women's unionisation over the last three decades (see Figure 2.2 below). Reasons for such variation are considered later in the chapter. What is apparent here, however, is that despite the cross-national differences in women's union density, the patterns of change over time have been somewhat similar. Between 1970 and 1980 women in all but two countries (United States and the Netherlands) showed an increase in unionisation, while in the final period in seven of the ten countries, a decline in women's union density is evident. Only Sweden, Canada and Denmark show any growth tendency during this period. Such patterns seem to reflect what has occurred with respect to overall union density during the same period. Neumann, Pedersen and Westergard-Nielsen's study indicates that post-1960 union density in the United States and the Netherlands dropped off considerably, while increases have been apparent in Denmark, Sweden and Belgium. (Neumann et al, 1989: 6-9).

![Figure 2.2 Female Union Density, 1960-1989](image)

Sources: see Appendix Three.
Certainly when measured in terms purely of female density, there has been a halt or something of a reversal since 1980. Table 2.1 shows more exactly the extent of this decline.

Table 2.1 Changes in Female and Male Trade Union Density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>-6.9</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
<td>-8.5</td>
<td>-7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>26*</td>
<td>0.4*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
<td>-14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>-9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
<td>-14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>-17.2</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* represents the change from 1970-1989.
Sources: see Appendix Three.

However, when comparing the decline in female union density to the patterns of male unionisation over the last ten years, we can see that in all but two countries (Australia and Austria), female union density has declined less than male union density. The fact that, despite the gender differences, both female and male union density have declined during this period would suggest that there are general factors affecting trade unionism as a whole. Yet, because women’s union density has not declined to the same extent as men’s since 1980, this indicates that the feminisation process evident prior to the 1980s, is still occurring.

In measuring the change in female unionisation over the whole period 1960-1989, it is apparent that in seven of the ten countries studied women’s density has increased. In taking a closer look at three of the four countries examined in depth in this thesis, it is possible to make an interesting contrast in terms of diverse growth trends in female unionisation which shed light on the impact of service sector growth on feminisation as discussed earlier. In Sweden and Denmark, female union density increased quite substantially between 1970 and 1980. This appears to have been influenced by the fact that increases in service sector
employment were primarily a result of increases in public sector employment. In Sweden, large expansion in public sector employment of women was evident during this period, with women accounting for 87 per cent of total health, education and welfare growth (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 201). In Denmark, public expenditure and particularly welfare state expenditure increased by 46 per cent between 1968 and 1974 (Castles, 1978: 82), much of which was picked up by women (OECD, 1991a).

In contrast, women's union density in Australia has decreased even more than their male counterparts between 1980 and 1989. While women's labour force participation rates have increased by 18 percentage points between 1973 and 1995 (OECD, 1996), much of this growth in women's employment was in the areas of retail, finance, recreation and community services rather than in public sector employment. In these industries, new jobs have largely gone to young part-time women workers, whom the union movement has been slow to recruit (Shute, 1994: 168).

In Austria, women's unionisation rates have also declined even more than in Australia, despite Austria being a country with moderately high union density. (In 1989, total union density was 55.4 per cent and female union density was 43 per cent) Furthermore, Austria is often heralded as a country where women's divisions have a long history as an integral part of the union movement and women are represented by full time staff at both confederation and national level (Cook, Lorwin and Daniels, 1992: 65-68). However, an interesting difference between Austria and other nations with moderately high union density is that it is a country with relatively low female labour force participation, which has remained almost stagnant over the last thirty years. This is largely a result of low growth in the service sector which increased by only one percentage point during the 1970s, while public sector employment increased by only four percentage points during the same period (Scharpf, 1984: 267). Thus, the lack of service sector growth via public employment seems to have constrained the growth of female union density in both Australia and Austria.

However, density calculations control for labour force participation, thereby providing a ratio of the number of actual female members compared to the potential number of female members. In so doing, density figures obscure the growth in the absolute numbers of women in trade unions. Yet, as the data in Table 2.2 indicate, there has been an almost continuous increase in the number of women
joining trade unions since the 1950s, the exception being in Austria between 1960 and 1970.

Table 2.2 Numbers of Female Trade Union Members Selected Countries, 1950-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Austria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numbers 000s</td>
<td>% increase</td>
<td>Numbers 000s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>347.4</td>
<td>303.5</td>
<td>334.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>487.0</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>378.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>753.5</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>564.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1430.4</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>946.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1733.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>1205.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: see Appendix Three.

Nevertheless, what remains evident is that women's unionisation rates in Sweden have increased considerably, especially between 1970 and 1980, adding weight to the argument that public sector employment is highly conducive to unionisation. Looking to Australia and Austria, and comparing the growth in female union density from Table 2.1 with the data in Table 2.3, suggests that increases in the number of female union members have not kept abreast with increases in women's labour force participation.

Comparing Women and Men

Whilst most countries display an increase in female unionisation over time the next consideration is how do women compare with men? Has women's share of union membership increased? In other words, has there been a feminisation of the unionised workforce? As Figure 2.3 demonstrates, with the exceptions only of Sweden and Finland, women's unionisation rates are lower, and quite significantly lower, than their male counterparts.
A number of micro-studies have been undertaken to examine why women’s unionisation rates should be less than that of men. Using the United States as a case in point, Fiorito and Greer (1986) have argued that gender differences in union membership are due to labour force attachment, industrial and occupational distributions, exposure to experiences with unions, and different levels of satisfaction with particular aspects of the job. Several Australian studies have also found that gender has virtually no effect on the propensity to join (Patmore, 1992; Deery and De Cieri, 1991). However, like Fiorito and Greer (1986), Deery and De Cieri argue that occupation and industry related characteristics are strong explanatory factors for the difference between male and female rates of unionisation (Deery and De Cieri, 1991: 236). Thus gender does not directly impact on propensity to join: however, these factors do have an indirect relationship with gender. This implies that gender differences in union membership may diminish as occupational and industrial distributions become more gender neutral (Fiorito and Greer, 1986: 161-164). Therefore, occupational segregation is a factor for union consideration.

Although women remain less unionised than men, it is also interesting to note what is happening to women’s membership figures relative to those of men. In other words, has women’s union density remained a constant fraction of men’s union density over time or have they grown at different rates? Taking the female to male density ratio is a useful way to analyse the gender differences that exist in
union density. If the propensity of women and men to join unions was changing by the same proportion, then we would expect the ratios to remain the same: that is with reference to Figure 2.4 below, we would expect all the countries to manifest horizontal profiles.

![Figure 2.4 Female/Male Union Density Ratio, 1960-1989](image)

Sources: see Appendix Three.

There are few horizontal profiles evident, demonstrating that women and men’s unionisation rates exhibit different growth rates both across countries and over time. With respect to feminisation, this is indicated by upward sloping lines moving towards one on the vertical axis. In the case of Sweden, parity has been attained with Denmark not far from the point of parity. Upward trends are also shown by Ireland, Canada, UK and US, with less change in Germany, Australia and the Netherlands. Furthermore, because the Netherlands has increased little since 1960 and Sweden shows a sharp rise, the range in this group of countries has increased considerably over the last three decades.

What is evident then is that, over time, in most of the countries presented here, the difference between male and female unionisation rates has been decreasing. However, Figure 2.4 fails to demonstrate to what extent this process of feminisation is due to differential changes in male and female unionisation. In other words, it is not possible to discern from Figure 2.4 the extent to which the narrowing of the gender density ratio is due to changes in women’s and or men’s unionisation rates. To examine this further, the change in the gender-ratio of union density rates is decomposed and presented in Table 2.3. The proportions of
this change which are attributable to changes in female density and male density are also shown in columns three and four respectively.

**Table 2.3 Gender Differences in Union Density, 1960-1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Change in Female/Male Ratio 1960-89</th>
<th>of which due to women</th>
<th>of which due to men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: see Appendix Three.
Method of Calculation: see Appendix Four.

With respect to the first column, the two Scandinavian countries manifest considerable increases in the gender-ratio, whilst four of the five English-speaking countries display moderate increases. Decomposing this change in the gender-ratio of trade union membership reveals that in the top five countries the moderate-to-high increase in the ratio is largely as a result of changes in the female density component. In the UK, Denmark and Ireland, almost all the change in the gender-ratio was due to women, with changes in male union density influencing the ratio only marginally.

The United States also showed a moderate change in ratio. However, unlike the countries previously noted, the change in the United States ratio was influenced considerably by male unionisation. Female union density declined during this period, but, because male density declined to a greater extent, the ratio was compressed. In the remainder of the countries, there were only small changes in the gender-ratio. Austria was the only country where the ratio decreased and of this decline, somewhat more can be attributed to changes in women’s union...
density. However, because male union density also declined during this period (indicated in Table 2.1), there was minimal change in the gender density ratio.

This decomposition illustrates that the sizable changes in the gender-ratio in a number of countries can be attributed to an adjustment in women’s union density relative to men’s. Overall, not only has there been an increase in women’s trade union density over the last thirty years, but there has also been an increase in women’s unionisation rates compared to men’s unionisation rates, indicating a feminisation of the unionised workforce over time.

Cross-National Variations

Lovenduski outlines a number of possible explanations for the cross-national variation in female union density, including historical and cultural factors, as well as the provision of specific union policies on the recruitment and representation of women and their interests. The presence of all-women unions and/or specialised women’s caucuses within unions also may contribute to an increase in women’s numbers in trade unions (Lovenduski, 1986: 170). In addition, various facets of women’s increased labour force participation may also play a part - in particular the levels of public sector employment.

However, the relationship between variations in male and female unionisation rates is also relevant to increases in female union density. Figure 2.3 demonstrates that, where female unionisation was high, male unionisation was also high (Sweden, Denmark and Finland), while countries with low female unionisation rates, such as the United States and Switzerland, also showed relatively low levels of male unionisation. This does not necessarily mean that male density causes female density, but rather that those factors influencing male union density also impact on women’s union density.

An overview of the relationships between some of these variables can be obtained through bivariate analysis. Female union density for 1989 was taken as the dependent variable and run against female labour force participation, size of the government sector, size of the service sector and male union density for the same year. The correlation coefficients provided in Table 2.4 below indicate that government employment is highly correlated with female union density, thereby supporting previous arguments made with respect to the relevance of growth in public sector employment to contrasting levels in female unionisation. Female labour force participation was moderately correlated but was insignificant, as was
service sector employment. This latter finding again tentatively confirms arguments that the structure of employment is important in understanding cross-national variations in women's unionisation rates.

Table 2.4 Correlation Coefficients Female Union Density, 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Union Density 1989</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Union Density 1989</td>
<td>0.94*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Labour Force 1989</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov emp % total emp 1989</td>
<td>0.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service emp % civil emp 1989</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant at the 5% level. 10 cases.
Sources: see Appendix Three.

The highest correlation is that of male union density, indicating significant interdependence between the two variables. As a result, one might reasonably expect that the explanatory factors presented in the literature with respect to cross-national variation in total union density would also apply to female membership. In recent years, much emphasis has been given to providing reasons for the variation in union membership across nations. A number of explanations have been put forward including inverse relationships with the size of the labour force (Wallerstein, 1989) and economic concentration (Stephens, 1990). Others focus on degrees of cultural homogeneity and the strength of left-wing parties (Visser, 1992). Of late, emphasis has been placed on the existence of union controlled unemployment schemes (gent systems) as the most significant explanation for cross-national difference in union density (Neumann et al, 1989; Rothstein, 1992).

A fuller understanding of what drives the cross-national variation in women’s union density would require a more comprehensive analysis that included the variables listed above. This has not been possible here however, since there is insufficient time series data available to calculate women's union density across countries. However, what is evident is that first, women’s union density cannot be looked at independently of men’s, and second, that public sector employment may prove an especially important factor in understanding any differences that may be apparent in male and female unionisation trends.
Women's Representation in Trade Unions

For many years now, women in most western countries have experienced *de jure* equality in citizenship rights, including the right to vote and participate in politics. However, statistics continue to show that in terms of political representation in most arenas, women remain disproportionately under-represented. In recent years, this phenomenon has come under scrutiny in both the theory and practice of politics (Sapiro, 1981; Jonasdottir, 1988; Haavio-Mannila et al., 1985; Hernes, 1987; Sawer and Simms, 1993; Phillips, 1991; 1993; 1995; Bergqvist, 1991; 1995).

While the focus of new democratic theorising and practice has been primarily on the parliamentary arena, other political institutions such as trade unions could also be included in this debate. In a number of countries, including the four examined in this thesis, trade unions function as a major institution of the labour market and often play a significant role in the policy-making arena, as well as negotiating for wages and working conditions. However, the advent of declining union membership in a number of countries, as highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, threatens to undermine trade union confederations' representational capacity. Thus, recognising the need to recruit and retain women members and to include more women in trade union structures is imperative for the continued relevance of the union movement to the public policy making arena.

Increases evident in women's trade union membership over the last thirty years have not led to a corresponding increase in the numbers of women in decision-making positions. In 1993, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC, 1994) conducted a survey of its affiliates to establish more precise statistics on the current position of women in trade union hierarchies. Among the national confederations which responded, only two had female leaders (by 1994, this had increased to four): the French CFDT, the Belgian FGTB, the Swedish TCO and the Australian Confederation of Trade Unions (ACTU).

At the executive committee level the comparative position of women in national confederations is slightly better. The data in Table 2.5, below, indicate there has been an increase or at least the maintenance of existing levels of women's representation in most of the countries listed. These improvements have required pro-active strategies, such as a commitment from trade unions to adopt policies to improve the position of women in the workforce and within unions (Trebilcock, 1991: 407).
Table 2.5 Women on Executive Committees in National Trade Union Confederations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% women 1981</th>
<th>% women 1993</th>
<th>% of women members 1991-93</th>
<th>Policy for increasing women on Executive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>OGB</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>FGTB</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>DGB</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>ICTU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>CGIL</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UIL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>FNV</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TCO</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>SGB/US</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>AFL-CIO</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R = reserved seats, Q = quota, A = other measures, na = not available.

An increase of women on the executive is evident in about half of the trade union confederations listed in Table 2.5. Several confederations have a system of reserved seats, which appears to ensure at least a minimum level of representation and, in the cases of Australia, Italy and the United Kingdom, has served to increase the representation of women quite substantially. Such developments have focused on rule changes concerning the selection of officers and committee members, which is usually effected by adding seats rather than displacing the existing seat holders. This strategy has the immediate effect of increasing the numbers of women on boards and committees, but carries a risk that the women
occupying the reserved seats will be regarded as token figures and excluded from important decision-making and collective bargaining (Trebilcock, 1991: 420).

Although such strategies appear promising, the picture is still grim. The data in Table 2.5 reflect approximately 15 years of trade union advocacy of policies to promote women, yet in only six confederations does the number of women on executives come close to matching the proportion of female membership.

Conclusion

I now return to the original question 'has there been a feminisation of trade unions?' If it is accepted that the notion of feminisation refers to an increase in number and/or share of women in union membership, then the evidence provided here suggests that, over time, both have, indeed, occurred. Some specific points regarding the extent and dimensions of this development need highlighting.

First, there has been an increase in women’s union density between 1960 and 1989 in seven of the ten countries examined here. The increase was substantial in Denmark and Sweden and moderate in Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Second, while women’s union density has recently begun to decline, similar trends are also evident with respect to male union density, suggesting that general factors such as increasing unemployment, affect unionisation rates regardless of gender. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that female unionisation is not declining as rapidly as male unionisation in eight out of ten countries.

Third, when we compare female and male union density more closely, it is possible to see that there has been a feminisation of the unionised workforce. In other words, over the past three decades, women’s union density relative to men’s has increased. Degrees of variance are evident in this phenomenon and while it is not a universal pattern, it is possible to pick a pattern of convergence appearing in the gender ratio in six of the ten countries. Furthermore, much of this change in gender difference is attributable to distinctive adjustments in women’s union density relative to men’s.

Finally, the simple statistical analysis undertaken in this chapter suggests that much of the cross-national variation in female union density may be explained by similar trends in male union density. However, when we consider change over time this does not necessarily provide a comprehensive explanation. While women’s and men’s unionisation rates are inextricably linked, other factors appear
to have affected the variation in gendered density rates over the last thirty years. One factor that needs further investigation is the importance of public sector employment to women’s unionisation.

Increases in women’s labour force participation could be expected to have at least four effects on trade unions: an influx of women into trade unions; an increase in women on the decision making bodies of unions; an accommodation of women’s demands in union agendas; and more women being nominated by these organisations onto corporate bodies (Lovenduski, 1986: 166). While the first of these effects is evident, the cursory overview of women’s representation at confederation level indicates that there has been a considerable lag in the promotion of women into union hierarchies. A more detailed assessment of women’s representation in trade unions is provided in the individual country chapters.

It is not inconceivable that increases in women's trade union membership and representation could lead to an accommodation of women's demands within trade unions. Certainly, recent feminist analyses indicate that trade unions are being reconceived, if not as completely gender neutral, at least as moving in this direction, with a view to being open to the concerns of women workers (O’Donnell and Hall, 1988; Crain, 1991; Cook, 1991). Examining whether this is indeed the case, both in theory and in practice, is one of the objectives of the remainder of this thesis.
Chapter Three

Women and Working Class Mobilisation: Identifying Class-Based Strategies

Introduction

When it comes to looking at working class action as manifest through trade unions I begin this chapter with Marx, since it is his analysis of capitalism and its transformation that stimulated consequential ideas on social democracy. While the strategies for working class mobilisation espoused by Marx were revolutionary in character, they sparked continuous revision and debate. I then examine contemporary social democratic approaches toward trade unionism, which view a democratic class struggle as more appropriate than a revolutionary struggle in pursuing the interests of the working class. This approach sees trade unions as being inherently concerned with both political and economic struggle, but through the democratic means of negotiation with the state and employers.

Although these approaches may differ, both rely on notions of conventional solidarity; that is, while there is an acceptance of the heterogeneity of workers interests, the redefinition of these interests is seen as a necessary trade-off for outcomes. Furthermore, the interests of workers are viewed as given, concrete and fixed around the structurally defined core of capitalism.

Feminist critiques have highlighted the gender-blindness of the assumptions underpinning class perspectives and the way in which other identities are subsumed by that of class thereby subsuming difference. These analyses have also identified how class approaches ignore the issue of intersectional and multiple identities and what this, in turn, means for the ways in which workers interests are articulated and later redefined.

I refer to two sets of literature: classical and contemporary literature on class, and various feminist literatures which critique and build on the class approach. I identify the various strategies available to trade unions to improve the position of workers and provide some critical reflections on these class-based strategies, illuminating the gender bias inherent in the assumptions underpinning much of the work on trade unionism. I also critically examine whether there is space for
the representation of women's interests through such strategies. Finally, I investigate the way in which the idea of a fixed and unified class interest impacts on the strategies taken up by trade unions and suggest that reconceptualising class-based solidarities as contingent rather than based on a unified working class interest allows for a better comprehension of the exclusive and inclusive forms of representation undertaken by trade unions to date.

Marxism and Trade Union Strategies

Marxism is a complex theory which has been interpreted by many different writers in many different ways. However, central to Marxism is the idea that productive activity is the key to understanding historical development and that changing the direction of this development is dependent on class struggle. Marxist ideas about trade unions are derived from these tenets.

Marx argued that the nature and development of capitalism is such that workers eventually realise that the individual pursuit of interests is ineffective. Instead, a strategy of collective action was the only basis for the pursuit of better wages and working conditions (Marx, 1955: 145). Industrialisation allowed for the concentration of workers and, while competition divided their interests, "the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance - combination" (Marx, 1955: 145). Trade unions, which resulted from this combination, were seen as a vehicle for securing better wages and conditions.

Although Marx and Engels were not always consistent on the issue, they did believe that trade unions were potentially revolutionary organisations. While the value of trade union action around economic issues was considered limited, primarily because unions were viewed as ultimately powerless against the economic forces of capitalism, both Marx and Engels maintained that trade unionism challenges capitalism on a political front. Collective action was thus seen as both a means to a greater end and an end in itself in that it allowed workers to move from being a mass of unorganised individuals with competing interests - "a class in itself" - to become aware of their common interests and thus engage in collective political struggle - "a class for itself" (Marx, 1955: 45). In this way, workers' consciousness is developed spontaneously through experience in trade union struggles. Trade unions act as "schools of war" (Engels, 1950: 219) and, as such, are deemed "a very necessary and effective means, ....towards a higher end: the abolition of the wages system altogether" (Marx and Engels, 1953: 477).
Thus, Marx and Engels saw the strategies of strike action and of political protest as necessary strategies for trade unionism in bringing workers together as a unified class.

While Marx acknowledged that it was possible for contradictory interests to exist within a class, based on ethnic, national or religious differences, he considered conflicts that arose from such differences as directly or indirectly derived from, or related to class conflicts. In other words, the mode of production and the consequential relations of production determines and influences all other activities with working class unity an essential precondition for the transition to socialism (Marx, 1959: 762-763).

Marx was thus critical of the narrow outlook of the craft based unions, which were paying little heed to the interests of non-unionised largely unskilled labour. He argued that trade unions must act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interests of its complete emancipation. It was not the trade unions’ role to become elitist (Lozovsky, 1935: 19). In addition, Marx and Engels denounced the system of division of labour within the working class which was occurring with the advancement of capitalism arguing that divisions between workers with respect to skills, function, pay, conditions and status would further erode class solidarity and necessarily class consciousness (Marx and Engels, 1953; Hyman, 1971: 8-9).

In contrast, Lenin saw sectionalism based around particular industries or occupations as natural for trade unions and this undermined considerably the revolutionary potential of trade unionism. While the labour movement by its own efforts could develop trade union consciousness through economic struggle, (made apparent through the conviction to combine in unions, fight the employers and compel the government to pass labour legislation), Lenin believed this form of consciousness would not transcend the hegemony of bourgeois ideology (Lenin, 1902: 41). Workers, when left to their own devices, would never discover the level of ideological consciousness required for socialist revolution. Instead, Lenin argued that worker enlightenment through trade unionism was only possible if the trade union movement was brought under the vanguard of the party (Lenin, 1902: 76).

Lenin was responding to what he termed 'economism', whereby trade unions seek to achieve their economic objectives within the framework of capitalism and, in Lenin's view, displayed a natural tendency to integrate within the system, rather
than act as a revolutionary challenge to it. Unions contribute to the development of union consciousness by making the fight against employers their primary task. Yet economic concessions are the cheapest and most advantageous concessions to be made by capital, and "by these means it hopes to win the confidence of the mass workers" (Gay, 1979: 229). In arguing this way, Lenin did not see trade unions as "traitorous organisations failing to promote working class interests", but rather by undertaking a reformist-type politics trade union activity would become compatible with bourgeois domination (Kelly, 1988: 32).

Lenin (1902) and Luxemburg (1906) both argued that the strategy of economic militancy and industrial action is a requisite for obtaining improved wages and working conditions, but is most unlikely to lead to the overthrow of capitalism. Because strike activity is such a key element in the consciousness-raising process, classical Marxists were hostile to the institution of collective bargaining with its potential to demobilise workers' struggles, and they remained sceptical of its outcomes for workers. Gramsci, in particular, saw the growth of collective bargaining as enveloping trade unions in a myriad of rules and regulations and, as such, binding them to ongoing capitalist development (Gramsci, 1919).

The interaction of trade unions with the state is also seen as undermining the growth of working class consciousness. Both Lenin (1902) and Luxembourg (1906) were highly critical of the parliamentary route to socialism, with Lenin's critique of economism explicitly seeking to separate a revolutionary politics from that of the reformists. Lenin viewed the state as a capitalist institution which can only serve to benefit the interests of capital. In response to the issue of democratic socialism, he argued that labour movements are deluded if they believe first, that parliaments actually wield any power and, second, that the state can be transformed from within (Lenin, 1902).

One of the key insights produced by classical Marxists is that wherever capitalism exists, there also exists a working class, which in time would organise itself. Their analyses of trade unionism which I have presented, albeit briefly, indicate that improving the wages and working conditions of workers through industrial militancy is a necessary (but not sufficient) strategy to achieve (revolutionary) class politics. There is some debate as to whether this kind of trade union activity would allow for the spontaneous development of a political class consciousness necessary for the transition to socialism. However, classical Marxists concur in opposing trade union strategies involving collective bargaining or direct dialogue with the state.
Trade Union Strategies and Democratic Class Politics

With the onset of male and later female suffrage, the parliamentary route to socialism became an option increasingly debated. Indeed social democratic theory is derived from a challenge to the apparent uncompromising revolutionary position of classical Marxism by those interested in reformism, in particular in the possibilities of attaining and maintaining democratic government control as a means for transforming capitalism. Kautsky and Bernstein were influential in this debate at the turn of the century.

Kautsky, similarly to Lenin, argued there were only limited gains to be made via economic struggle; in particular, insurrection and general strikes were deemed useless when utilised by a minority of the people. However, in contrast to Lenin, he maintained that democracy when coupled with freedom of the press, speech and organisation, was the shortest, surest and least costly road to socialism. Indeed, “without such institutions the workers cannot emancipate themselves economically” (Kautsky, 1910: 121). This emancipation would involve a clear break with capitalism and as such would be revolutionary in nature.

Bernstein (1909) however, believed that the transition to socialism would be much more evolutionary in nature. He challenged some of the more fundamental elements of Marxism: rejecting capitalist crisis as inevitable; maintaining the continued immiseration of the working class was not apparent; and that the working class was becoming more differentiated not less, with the emergence of a white-collared, middle class to further undermine a polarisation of the classes. In this way, Bernstein’s perspective undermined the possibility of militant trade union strategies being based on a unified working class interest.

Instead Bernstein argued for an incremental development into socialism through democratic means rather than via class conflict. He maintained that the labour movement should move away from confrontation and seek to bargain and compromise within the capitalist system. An organised labour movement and Social Democratic government could build upon piecemeal gains and, in so doing, better the position of workers in society. Gradual improvements of the workers’ social conditions would also serve to both maintain and recruit members, strengthening the organisational base (Bernstein, 1909; Gay, 1979: 229).
Contemporary Social Democrats who accept the possibility of incremental change toward socialism focus on the mobilisation of power resources by the working class and its allies. This approach is clearly identified by Korpi (1983) and Esping-Andersen (1985) who argue that while capitalism's resources exist within the market, workers' resources are within the polity - having opted for the parliamentary strategy, labour's power advantage lies in its numbers - a democratic class struggle (Korpi, 1983). According to this position, trade union strategy involves developing a strong and centralised unionism for coherence and to subordinate exclusive unions so that the bargaining advantages and disadvantages of each worker are socialised to the entire working class (Esping-Andersen, 1985: 33).

Working class political strength is considered to grow out of (universal) welfare reforms and full employment which endow all citizens with a greater capacity for participation within the political sphere. Trade unions act in conjunction with left-wing parties to ensure the presence of Social Democratic government through which such reforms are provided. Ultimately however, it continues to be trade unions that best represent the concerns of wage-earners both economically and politically (Korpi, 1983: 34-35).

Drawing from the analysis of Korpi, Higgins (1985) argues that there can be no separation between the economic and political interests of unions; rather, all economic interests are inherently political. Higgins maintains the capitalist political programme is one which cannot be fought against with strikes: recessions, economic policies which stimulate unemployment, and the general insulation of the market undermine workers' job security, wages and conditions. In this way, class struggle is explicitly a political struggle and, therefore, needs to be fought in the political arena (Higgins, 1985: 357).

Higgins refers to a trade union strategy, which focuses not only on wages and working conditions, but on challenging capitalist politics, as "political unionism". He argues that political unionism rests on a broad definition of class conflict which incorporates "all manifestations of capitalist social power and economic control" and one that necessarily involves working class interaction with the state, employers and left wing parties in a pro-active manner (Higgins, 1985: 364). This perspective sits in contrast with economism. The latter refers to an industrial unionism interested solely in improving workers' wages and basic conditions, usually through collective bargaining, and in this way is thought of as a narrow form of unionism (Simms, 1987: 126; Martin, 1975). Political unionism, as
espoused by Higgins, does not ignore wages and working conditions but in virtue of its wider focus, has the potential to extend the legitimate scope of what are labelled trade union or industrial issues.

The involvement by trade unions in the political arena necessarily requires the formulation and implementation of a unified class interest, which is then represented through institutionalised and centralised union involvement in politics and public policy making. The participation of trade unions in bi or tripartite policy making arrangements thereby allows non-bourgeois interests to gain a legitimate voice in the process of defining the policy direction of the capitalist state (Dow, Clegg and Boreham, 1984). The term corporatism is often used to describe these institutional arrangements. While as a concept, corporatism remains contested (cf Boreham and Compston, 1992; Higgins, 1985), a central feature in all definitions is a requirement that trade union elites coordinate and limit the demands of their members in a way that will override sectional interests. In return, trade union confederations are granted a representational monopoly within the policy-making arena and this in turn has a significant effect on final policy outcomes.

Recent comparative analyses reveal that the involvement by centralised trade union movements in corporatist policy-making environments, combined with a left-wing government presence, is significant in explaining cross-national differences in economic performance, employment and welfare reform (Schmidt, 1982; Korpi, 1983; Scharpf, 1984; Hicks, 1991; Boreham and Compston, 1992; Compston, 1992; Boreham, Hall and Leet, 1993). Stephens (1979) indicates that socialist rule and strong labour organisation are important determinants of income distribution, while Cameron (1984), in examining cross-national variation in employment, finds that the combination of left-wing governments and strong labour confederations in dialogue with government undermines increasing unemployment. Boreham, Hall and Leet (1993) also argue that it is formal labour movement participation in economic policy making which leads to higher levels of welfare effort. It would appear, as Higgins (1985) and Korpi (1983) both suggest, that by involving itself with the state and capital through an institutionalised presence, trade unions gain a new and more effective strategy against unemployment and reductions in living standards.

These contemporary ideas regarding the role of trade unions in politics contrasts with classical Marxist strategies for trade unionism. Those who still adhere to the classical Marxist position see antagonistic capitalist and working class interests as
shaped solely by the exploitative relationship between capital and labour at the point of production, which is the only legitimate site of working class resistance (Panitch, 1981).

However, if the site of production is the only legitimate site of resistance for workers, this suggests that strike activity is the best indicator of high levels of working class mobilisation. Higgins takes issue with this, maintaining that assessment of strike activity in this way would suggest that the United States and Ireland are countries with high worker mobilisation, because despite their low levels of unionisation and decentralised union movements, they exhibit significant levels of industrial conflict. He argues that, rather than being a sign of weakness and demobilisation, a decline in strike activity may indicate that the union movement views the value of such action as limited and instead seeks political strategies which better suit the daily requirements of workers (Higgins, 1985: 363).

Furthermore, Hobsbawn, although described as Leninist (Kelly, 1988: 90), has also argued that avoiding trade union militancy requires a higher level of political class consciousness and organisation. While, in Hobsbawn's view, this means revolutionary propaganda or radical reforms, his view is that if trade union action was directed towards non-wage objectives it would be more likely to generate class consciousness (Hobsbawn, 1981). This is similar to ideas of political unionism whereby a higher level of political consciousness comes with widening the scope of union activities into the new areas opened up by societal bargaining (Higgins, 1985: 363). However, it has been noted that industrial action may also be political in the sense that it may be designed to influence the policies of government (Rawson, 1978: 136).

There are apparent differences in the strategies which can be derived from traditional and contemporary theories concerning working class mobilisation and representation. Yet despite these differences, both perspectives accept that there is a need for trade union elites to coordinate and limit the demands of their members in a way that will override sectional interests in an effort to achieve conventional working class solidarity. Within corporatist environments, the trade union movement is then granted a representational monopoly within the policy-making arena. Higgins acknowledges that synthesising a unified working class interest can be difficult, in that this task involves both overcoming the conflicts between particularist interests and addressing the complexity of issues that confront modern unionism (Higgins, 1985: 357). However, little assessment is
provided of how the process of interest aggregation by trade union elites might impact on the representation of the interests of women workers.

Feminist Critiques of Class Politics Perspectives

Marx says little regarding the position of women. However, what has become known as the 'woman question' was picked up and debated among socialists over the half century 1870-1920 (Coole, 1993: 160). Engels attempts to explain women's oppression by linking sexual exploitation to class exploitation and the development of capitalism. As a result, drawing women into the paid labour force is an important element of their liberation (Engels, 1972). Early Marxist 'feminists', Bebel (1904), Zetkin (1929) and Kollantai (1909) identified the existence of special 'problems' faced by women, particularly with respect to the double burden undertaken in productive and domestic labour. However, debate remained focused on how these interests were to be best represented; that is, as part of the class struggle or specifically as women's concerns.

What is beginning to develop in these early analyses of the 'woman question' is the identification that women have differing interests as women workers which are not addressed by traditional Marxist theory. However, these interests remain secondary to their class position as proletarians. While Engels viewed the participation of women in paid labour as a strategy for their emancipation, his emphasis on class necessarily assumed that once in the labour force, women were viewed simply as workers; assumed to share with working men a common class interest in overthrowing capitalism. Furthermore, although social democracy involves raising "the worker from the social position of proletarian to that of a citizen, and thus to make citizenship universal" (Bernstein, 1909: 147) through the provision of both political and economic rights, it is not evident that the notion of citizen is any less gender-specific than that of worker (Orloff, 1996; 1993; O'Connor, 1993).

At a theoretical level, the primacy of class has been challenged by feminist thought. Jaggar (1988) argues that because classes are defined by their relationship to the means of production and the economic system determines all else, procreation, sexuality and child rearing practices which are taken to be part of the non-economic realm have attracted little analysis within traditional Marxism. Indeed various feminists have argued that the domination of women cannot be explained without reference to the domestic and reproductive sphere.
and its interaction with the 'productive' sphere (Ferguson, 1989; Hartmann, 1981; Jaggar, 1988; Vogel 1983).

It is also argued that the category of worker within Marxism is 'sex blind' as it obscures the sexual division of labour that operates on two levels: with respect to the interconnections between home and outside work, and within the paid workforce itself (Barrett, 1980: 8). In this vein, Pateman maintains that the notion of worker is sexually particular, "constructed on the basis of male attributes, capacities and modes of activity" (Pateman, 1986: 7). Although socialists may believe that a class revolution may bring universalism into being, fitting women into this universal undifferentiated framework necessarily assumes sexual difference is less than fundamental.

Thus it is apparent that class-based perspectives have ignored the way that society, in general, and trade unions, in particular, are structured by both class and gender and have failed to acknowledge that "men and women experience class in different ways, and that the unities of class politics are disrupted by conflicts of gender" (Phillips 1987a: 12). This necessarily has implications with respect to whose interests are being represented as the (unified) working class interest.

Certainly, the desire for a unified working class struggle was not reflected in practice during the late nineteenth century. Numerous studies have revealed the exclusionary and or discriminatory policies of trade unions around the world. For many years, working women had to fight to establish their right to organise and to gain acceptance as workers. In the early days of unions, women were excluded from the male unions, sometimes explicitly, sometimes through restrictions to apprenticeships and high membership fees (Balser, 1987; Drake, 1920; Ryan and Prendergast, 1982; Shute, 1994; McBride, 1985; Qvist, 1985). Craft unionism, in particular, excluded women, as well as other unskilled groups of workers. Some women were organised in ladies auxiliaries whereby they undertook tasks considered suitable to their position in society, such as the running of soup kitchens during a strike (Cook et al, 1992: 49; Needlemans and Tanner, 1987). However, exclusion as workers from the trade unions themselves meant that women had to organise separately if they were to be organised at all.

Once it was realised that the issue of women workers would not go away, trade unions began to include women in their membership, often through amalgamations with women's unions or through the setting up of women's divisions. However, this inclusion did not lead to an increased focus on issues of
particular interest to women workers. Rather, women were expected to join with men in fighting the common cause.

**Gender and Working Class Strategies**

The masculine conception of worker has also had implications for the relevance of various trade union strategies for women workers. For example, some feminists have argued that industrial militancy around economistic demands for increases in wage differentials provides limited outcomes for women and primarily benefits well-organised groups of skilled and hence mostly male workers. While women unionists have undertaken militant action themselves (O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 1996; Street, 1994; Balser, 1987; Soldon, 1985), in general, occupational segregation has concentrated women in low paid and poorly organised jobs.

The strategy of collective bargaining is often pivotal in gaining better wages and working conditions, but limited in focus, with women's demands for equal pay or child care being defined as social issues requiring legal action. Legislative strategies have often been placed in contrast with the strategy of collective bargaining, since the former may interfere in what is thought of as the trade unions' domain. However, the distinction is not clear cut, as trade unions have often sought legislation on occupational health and safety standards and industrial democracy to strengthen union demands (Phillips, 1983; Acker, 1994). In the case of Australia, the state has both fostered and protected trade unions since 1904, and while certain legal restrictions came with this protection, trade unions have continued to accept the role of the state in industrial relations (Rawson, 1978: 44-45). Thus, setting up collective bargaining and legislation as oppositional strategies causes problems with respect to many of the demands made by women, especially since the implementation of legislative measures may often depend on supporting institutions and policies which are derived from a collective framework (Whitehouse, 1992: 83).

Centralisation is a key feature in the political unionism perspective on union cooperation with the state and/or employers in making broad-based incremental gains for workers. As will become evident in later chapters, centralised wage bargaining in particular can be significant in undermining gender-wage differentials. Decentralised collective bargaining can be problematic for women's wages, since dominant groups are able to protect their differentials leaving other
Critics of centralisation emphasise that such organisational structures create limited space for rank and file membership involvement (Briskin, 1993). More specifically, it has been recognised that with hierarchical organisation comes male power, privilege and leadership, which function to exclude and disadvantage women (Briskin, 1993; Acker, 1990). Pateman (1988: 257) argues that while moves have been made toward industrial democracy and workers' control, they continue to be based on a masculine image of 'worker', thereby failing to address the separation of industry and economic production from private life.

In contrast, decentralisation, while problematic given the increasing centralisation and concentration of capital, may increase membership participation in general and women's in particular, thereby strengthening the unions and their ability to resist the encroachments of economic restructuring, while also allowing women to participate more fully in union activity. Higgins (1985) argues that the imperative of centralisation within political unionism does not preclude decentralisation at a localised level. However, it is from the centralised decision-making elite that representatives are selected to negotiate with other organised economic interests.

This system of collaboration between organised interests, often described as 'corporatist', has primarily involved the representation of the collective interests of labour and capital. However, providing workers with a voice in the political arena is predicated upon the homogenisation of the heterogenous demands of workers. Offe and Wiesenthal note:

union leadership is constantly caught between attempting to provide comprehensive representation for all the interests of its working class constituency and being limited in its ability to find a formula that reconciles these partly contradictory interests without endangering their internal acceptability and/or external negotiability (1980: 83).

Trade unionism is thus met with the "paradox that interests can only be met to the extent that they are partly redefined" (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980: 79). This redefinition is dependent on the processes of internal government, the interaction
of membership and leadership and through the struggles around which workers are mobilised (Gardner, 1986: 173).

However, Cook and others have argued that trade unions do not always adequately allow for the representation of women and their interests at decision-making levels (Cook et al, 1992). The existing literature highlights a number of obstacles that impede women obtaining that presence within trade unions: family responsibilities which are compounded by the way trade unions organise their business activities; traditional views and stereotypes about the role of women as representatives; occupational and industrial segregation whereby women are concentrated in a handful of occupational groups, and often have limited access to committees and negotiating teams (more evident when trade unions reflect the sex-segregated character of the labour market); and the male dominated environment often associated with traditional trade union culture (Trebilcock, 1991; ICFTU, 1991; ETUC, 1994).

Political reality indicates that male dominated elites, including trade unions, are seldom good arbiters of women's interests and concerns, unless these interests coincide with those of working class men. Indeed, Offe argues that the process of conflict resolution between workers interests is often done at the expense of poorly organised, politically vulnerable groups (Offe, 1985: 154, 227-228). Thus, several feminist authors argue that if women are not present in these environments, interests particularly relevant to women may fall off the agenda (Phillips, 1991; Haavio-Mannila et al, 1985; Hernes and Voje, 1980). Female representation is also important if, as Schmitter argues, the concept of interest intermediation allows for the possibility that interests may be generated from within the corporatist decision-making environment, independent of member preferences (Schmitter, 1981: 295).

Research by Kanter (1977: 977) indicates that although merely adding a few women at a time to an organisation is unlikely to erode notions of tokenism, having women in these positions does make a difference in shaping outcomes for women. Following on from Kanter's work, Izraeli (1984: 220) argues while most men elected to union committees perceive themselves to represent adequately the interests of all workers, including those of women, few women think this to be the case. In contrast, elected women tend to see themselves as representing the interests of women workers.
The issue of representation within trade unions will be looked at further in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it appears that although the institutionalised representation of the collective interest of the working class is considered a useful strategy by many trade unionists, it is not clear that the definition of this interest adequately takes account of the differing interests which make up the working class. While political unionism has the potential to broaden its agenda well beyond the confines of wages and conditions to include issues such as child care and equal employment opportunities, which are not traditionally thought of as industrial issues (Simms, 1987), feminist critics argue that the presence of women in trade union elites is required for these issues to be included on the union bargaining agenda.

In contrast, Gardner has argued that implicit in many feminist arguments regarding the marginalisation of women and their interests is the suggestion that such strategies are an intentional choice made by the union movement. She takes issue with this, arguing that trade union strategies are constrained by a number of exogenous factors (Gardner, 1986: 173). Milkman also questions the explicit intention of unionism to exclude women. When craft unionism in many countries gave way to industry unionism which lacked the structural bias toward exclusionism, this allowed for the organisation of large numbers of women, although they were not recruited as women (Milkman, 1990; see also Gabin, 1990; Balser, 1987). The unionisation of white-collar sectors produced the same effect - that is increases in the numbers of women unionised - but as an unintended consequence of seeking to increase the overall strength of the labour movement (Milkman, 1990: 101).

In addition, Milkman has expressed caution with respect to arguments that presume men's gender interest in maintaining male domination will necessarily take precedence over their class interest in equality (Milkman, 1990: 91). Nor does it follow that women's interests are always in opposition to those purported (male) class-based strategies. There is evidence to suggest that in the past women have willingly supported men in the demands for a family wage (May, 1985), and protective legislation (Henry, 1923). Cobble (1990) has detailed how various features of craft unionism, including sex-segregation were actually embraced by women waitresses in the United States to organise collectively within a separate space (Cobble, 1990: 541). There have also been instances when men have supported women in their fight for equal pay (Curthoys, 1988; Gabin, 1990).
These comments highlight the importance of recent feminist approaches which argue that seeking a single cause to women's oppression, or describing a distinct woman's perspective or culture, leads to generalisations which obscure differences between women and transcend the particular historical contexts which have contributed to the formulation of particular strategies by, for example, men and women within trade unions (Nicholson 1990: 6). Similar criticisms can be made of class theory which identifies the capital-labour dichotomy as the primary and fixed constituent of workers' identity. In neither Marxist/social democratic nor socialist feminist discourses is there space for multiple gender or class identities (Connell, 1987: 59-60).

Such criticism challenges the validity of categories such as the working class, woman and man and denies the existence of stable and objectively knowable interests defined by either capitalism or patriarchy. The notion of universal experience is replaced with a focus on the multiplicity of experiences and subjectivities that have previously been subsumed by such categories as 'woman', 'man' and 'worker' (Bryson, V., 1992: 253). These ideas have not gone unopposed within feminist and other circles. Fears of destabilising feminist politics, endless relativism and the death of theory, abound (Marshall, 1994; Walby, 1992; Di Stefano, 1990).

Ideas which challenge the possibility of a unified interest also have the potential to destabilise the conventional notion of solidarity upon which trade unionism is based. Trade unionism is predicated upon the possibility of collectivising the heterogeneous demands and experiences of workers (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980: 79). Indeed, Offe argues that despite the difficulties that come with the redefinition of workers interests, it is imperative that unification remain a key objective or risk the union movement disintegrating completely (Offe, 1985: 154). However, in many instances the representation of a homogenous working class interest has involved a redefinition of workers as male, manual and skilled, thereby excluding women from both the theory and practice of trade unionism.

Yet we see that capitalism has never delivered a homogenous working class. Sectionalism has always been a part of trade union development: craft unionism, the emergence of white-collar unionism and public sector unionism have challenged the supposed unity of the larger labour movement and the 'woman question' has been no different. Both Lenin and Bernstein identified this at the beginning of this century, and Gramsci also acknowledged that workers may identify themselves and their interests in a variety of ways: with a section of their
class, with the working class as a whole and/or with the revolutionary interests of the working class and thus society as a whole (Gramsci, 1919). Kelly (1988) argues that this means thinking about sectionalism (and difference) not in terms of overcoming or suppressing it, but rather in terms of how articulation of the different levels of consciousness among different groups can become possible so workers will realise that their sectional interests are compatible with socialism. Similar arguments could be made with respect to the various gender, class and other subjectivities which are constantly being formulated. If articulation of difference is encouraged, rather than suppressed, trade unions might become more encompassing of women and other groups and would be able to facilitate a process whereby different groups of workers recognise their common interests.

Several authors have noted that even unwitting exclusionary tactics are detrimental to trade unionism. They suggest, for example, that obtaining equal pay for women through class-based strategies is beneficial to all workers since the absence of equal pay has a depressing effect on all wages (see Donaldson, 1991: 111; also Kelly, 1988; Rowthorn, 1992). In 1953, the Federal Conference of the Australian Bank Officers Association agreed that "both sexes must surely benefit by the introduction of equal pay because it makes it more difficult for employers to lower wage levels" (Riches cited in Fieldes, 1992: 9). Fieldes (1992: 9) maintains that restricting women's involvement in various trades and arguing for equal pay on the grounds of male notions of skill, while seeing women as interlopers, debilitated the building of a truly industrial and more effective union in the clothing trades.

Thus, much feminist criticism does not dispel the need for class-based strategies, since the salience of class continues to exist. Rather, feminists engaged with class politics suggest the need for a flexibility which recognises the historical specificity of any situation and the possibilities to which it gives rise: strategies and solidarities are not fixed, but are based on subjective understandings of existing circumstances (Bryson, V., 1992: 259). The specific trade union strategies articulated and employed by women unionists will be examined in more depth in the case-study chapters which follow.

Conclusion

Classical Marxist theories concerning the role of trade unionism are predicated on class as the primary basis of exploitation, on the assumption that the worker is male and have left unchallenged the public/private dichotomy. In terms of trade
union politics, the whole question of women's oppression has tended to be subsumed by questions of class. Certainly, Marx ignored the idea that women as a group might have shared interests, which might sometimes be in opposition to men's interests (Bryson, V., 1992: 77). For some later Marxists, this approach was interpreted as meaning that gender inequalities would be resolved after the revolution and that, in the meanwhile, separating out the 'woman question' would divide the working class.

Despite various feminist attempts to rescue Marxism for feminism, critics have argued that the key concepts of Marxist theory are not gender neutral, but based on a male view of the world that excludes women's needs and experiences. A similar criticism can be made of social democratic ideas. For example, Phillips has argued that a politics of equality based on class tends to direct its energies to the spheres that are occupied by men; women are expected to fit into slots devised for men. While some needs may be met through this approach, other needs that differ to those of the dominant group are ignored or subsumed. Equality in this sense may mean women shaping themselves to a world made for men (Phillips, 1987b: 19).

However, here, the class approach is set up as an either/or situation for women. That is, women cannot seem to achieve class equality without becoming like men. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that women have interests both as women and as workers and, as such, trade unions, as class-based organisations, are potentially useful in representing women's interests as workers. Indeed class strategies may be embraced by women unionists under certain circumstances: for example when outcomes are perceived to benefit both men and women, when industrial muscle is a possibility, particularly for women in public sector unions, and as a tactical decision in order to gain support from their male counterparts (Gardner, 1986).

While it is necessary to challenge conventional assumptions and categories represented in mainstream working class political theory, it is also important not to assume women are a homogenous group. By doing so, feminists become as reductionist as the Marxists they criticise. Women have needs, interests and concerns that arise from being women workers, which may or may not coincide with the interests of male workers. There are differences between women who work in terms of class, race, age, ethnicity, parental status, and so on. There are also differences between women who do and do not work in terms of orientations to work and in the way they are treated by employers. These paid work-related differences between women may be greater than gender differences.
What has become apparent in this chapter is that tensions exist between class and gendered explanations of the position of women workers, tensions which in turn permeate the analysis of the relationship between women and trade unions. I have not sought to resolve these tensions at a theoretical level. Rather, I have suggested that the salience of class remains, but that other differences also exist, not in parallel to class, nor in a hierarchy with class or gender as primary, but rather in a state of flux, ever-changing, intersecting, and very much conditional on a particular historical context. This means that we should accept that conflicts between sectional interests will always exist. It therefore becomes helpful to reconceptualise trade union strategies and solidarities as flexible and changing, depending on the particular historical and discursive context.

A number of questions arise out of this examination. Under what circumstances and around what issues have women trade unionists employed class strategies in furthering the representation of issues for working women? What factors impact on the choices women trade unionists make? More specifically, how relevant are a number of factors - the history of women's inclusion and representation by trade unions, the institutionalisation of women's interests, the political cultural environment within which trade unionism operates - to the choice of class strategy made by women in trade unions? These questions will act as a guide in examining the strategic choices made by women trade unionists in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden.
Chapter Four

Women's interests and collective actions: Identifying gender-specific strategies

Introduction

Invoking the category of woman has often been used as a strategy by women involved in trade union politics. Women-centred strategies are also continually being advocated by both feminist academics and practitioners alike in their campaign to make trade unions better address the many concerns of women who undertake paid work. How such strategies eventuate is "always determined by the historical context in which they operate" (Yeatman, 1995: 42; see also Cook, et al 1992; Scharpf, 1984). How best to conceptualise the process of identity formation which manifests itself through the collective actions of women has been the subject of much interest and debate amongst feminist theorists of late. It is this debate and its relevance to the formation of gender-specific strategies and solidarities by women trade unionists that is the subject of this chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, I identify the various strategies for achieving gender equality derived from ideas of both first and second wave feminists. In particular, I focus on the gendered legislative, labour market and organisational strategies. In the second section, I explore two very different perspectives on the usefulness of invoking the category women and women's interests as a way of organising for social change. The first position is that women as a group have a distinct set of interests derived from a number of different sources, but ultimately determined by their gender, therefore providing a common ground from which women as women can seek representation. Naming woman as a collective is considered the essence of a feminist politics. By contrast, in more recent feminist texts, this idea of women has been contested and replaced with the idea that women's interests are fluid, relational and constituted through interaction with others. Women are best seen as a volatile collective, thereby undermining the idea that there is an objective set of women's interests. In the final section, I argue that both perspectives have useful elements with which to analyse the gender-specific strategies undertaken by women in trade unions. In doing so, I return to an examination of the specific strategies of representation by women, the creation of women's spaces and legislative and labour market strategies. I suggest
that reconceptualising women's collective actions as contingent solidarities allows for a better understanding of the myriad of strategies employed by women trade unionists.

**Identifying Feminist Strategies**

Feminism is not, and has never been monolithic. Indeed feminism in the nineteenth century was as diverse as feminism is today. Despite the diversity over the last century, feminists have argued that women should be seen as a separate group in society with shared interests and experiences. This approach suggests that women as a group have interests distinct and often opposed to those of men. It has also frequently been accompanied by a celebration of female solidarity or sisterhood and by the belief that changes in the public sphere require changes in private life (Bryson, V., 1992: 37).

In this section, I do not present a detailed review of the development of feminist thought over the last 150 years but instead focus on the ideas and strategies which have focused on achieving gender equality for working women. While it is predominantly liberal and social-democratic feminist perspectives that I draw from here, I do not categorise the strategies as such. Instead I refer to 'legislative', 'labour market' and 'organisational' strategies, since, over time, feminists of a variety of perspectives have supported a variety of strategies, depending on the claim, the actors and the context.

**Legislative Strategies**

The pursuit of legislative strategies began with nineteenth century feminism and has often been labelled reformist in that it did not challenge the rule of law, but instead sought to extend legal protection and rights to women (Bryson, V., 1992, Tong, 1989, Evans, 1977). In particular, early feminist strategies focused on educational, legal and political reform, which in many cases culminated in the campaign for the vote. Demands were also made for reform of divorce and child custody laws, married women's property rights, as well as equal access to education and employment (Bryson, V., 1992: 38).

Early attempts to regulate women's working conditions often resulted in women arguing for protective legislation which, for example, exempted them from night work and from working while pregnant. Many men also supported protective legislation, which some feminists have interpreted as male workers seeking to
protect their jobs from intrusion from women. However, in many cases, women themselves argued for these restrictions and, in the first half of the twentieth century, the International Labor Organisation also advocated conventions protecting women (Henry, 1923). Put in context, legislative regulation was often the only means by which women's working conditions could be improved, since many female occupations were non-unionised and were therefore not covered by the rules of collective agreements. Such regulations were often supported by both liberal and social-democratic feminists (Evans, 1977; Anderson, 1992).

More recently, these restrictions have been overturned, often as a result of lobbying by women who now view this protection as encroaching on equal opportunity. This emphasis on equality of opportunity is the latest in a resurgence in demands for legislation made by second wave feminists around issues of women's employment. Legislation requiring equal pay for equal work became the focus in the 1960s; its aim was to provide women with the same pay as men when undertaking the same work. However, a substantial decrease in the gender wage differential has been thwarted in many countries by the fact that few women undertake the same work as men. Nor has legislation addressed issues of access to overtime, fringe benefits and hours of work. In some countries, legislation has been extended to equal pay for equal work of equal value, thereby requiring the revaluation and reclassification of skill levels and the comparison of male and female dominated jobs. Whitehouse (1992) argues this form of equal pay legislation has possibilities for women, since it often requires collective strategies for implementation which are considered more effective than implementation dependent on individual grievance procedures.

However, not all equal pay legislation is implemented through collective action, nor are other gender-specific laws around issues of sex-discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action. Rather, while these latter forms of legislation in themselves provide women with formal equality, the means of implementation is often dependent on individual action and, therefore, is only of benefit to women who have the resources and support to exercise these rights (O'Connor, 1994; Whitehouse, 1992; Yeatman, 1995).

Labour Market Strategies

The pursuit of strategies designed to change the material conditions of women's lives are largely derived from modern socialist/social democratic feminist perspectives. I refer to 'modern' socialist feminism because since the 1970s,
notions of revolution have been displaced within feminism by more pragmatic ideas of reform within the system through alliances with other groups. Although sometimes supportive of legislative strategies, social democratic feminists argue that it is inadequate to remove barriers to women's entry to jobs and to encourage entry through affirmative action programs, if no effort is made to address the domestic structural inequality which underpins women's labour market inequality (O'Donnell and Hall, 1988: 60). In this sense, social democratic feminism exposes the inherent links between the productive and reproductive and seeks to develop strategies which destabilise this dichotomy.

While traditional Marxists have claimed that free productive activity requires the restructuring of the labour process to overcome the distinction between mental and manual labour, socialist feminists take this further arguing that work must be redefined to eliminate the distinction between masculine and feminine work in both the productive and reproductive spheres. Reproductive freedom involves increasing women's options, so that motherhood does not mean economic insecurity or dependency on a man (Jaggar, 1988: 326). Thus, claims have been made for paid maternity leave, the provision of state funded child care, wages for housework, family leave and welfare provision for single parent families (Norris, 1989; Marshall, 1994).

Addressing issues within the reproductive sphere necessarily impacts on women's freedom in the realm of productive activity, allowing women better access to economic independence. Similar to earlier Marxist (feminist) perspectives, participation in paid work is considered a necessary component of women's emancipation. However, modern socialist feminists argue that the sexual division of labour within the paid workforce, which results in the low status and low wages of women, undermines the possibilities for gender equality. To this end, strategies are required which dismantle the family wage principle, eliminate sex segregation and revalue women's skills (Tong, 1989: 181; Bryson, V., 1992: 257; Jaggar, 1988: 326). Furthermore, for many social democratic feminists, legislative strategies can best deliver labour market improvements for women if supported by a strong trade union movement and centralised wage bargaining (Whitehouse, 1992: 67).

The relevance of trade unionism to feminist action highlights how the social-democratic feminist tradition has retained the analytic tool of class. At a critical level, this has involved linking the concept of patriarchy with the concept of capitalism (Jaggar, 1988: 317; Walby, 1990; Hartmann, 1981).
themselves to the abolition of both class and gender oppression, social democratic feminists have supported interventionist economic, welfare and employment policies and industrial strategies (as outlined in the previous chapter) which, while primarily designed to reduce class-based inequalities and market exploitation, often also indirectly benefit large groups of working women. In supporting these strategies, feminists have sought alliances with trade unions and social democratic/labour parties, although this in itself has often demanded women challenge the sexism existent within these organisations (Bryson, V., 1992: 259).

Organisational Strategies

As already noted, during the nineteenth century, the organisation of workers in most countries was limited to skilled workers and, therefore, mostly to men. If women were to have their interests as workers represented they were required to organise separately. Women-only unions were established in several sectors including the textile and clothing industry and amongst waitresses, laundresses and retail clerks (Balser, 1987; Street, 1994; McBride, 1985; Meyerowitz, 1985; Boston, 1987; Dye, 1980).

Apart from women only unions, towards the end of the nineteenth century reformist umbrella organisations were created whereby women activists sought to encourage trade unionism amongst women. In Britain, the Women's Protective and Provident League, the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and the Women's Trade Union Association were established (Seldon, 1985: 15; Boston, 1987, Lewenhak, 1977) while the WTUL in the United States had branches across the country (Dye, 1980; Drake, 1920). These organisations resulted from alliances between working class and middle class women who saw themselves as both feminists and unionists. The women in these organisations believed that women of all classes working together could organise women into trade unions and persuade the labour movement to integrate women into its ranks (Dye, 1980: 2).

While mobilisation of women workers was encouraged through strike action and labour negotiations, other strategies focused on women's experiences. The WTUL in the United States emphasised the community as well as workplace, with visits to women's homes, providing places for young women to meet and sponsoring afternoon teas and storytelling sessions (Hyman, 1985: 29). In this way, advantage was taken of the already existing networks among women, as well as creating new ones in order to facilitate women's collective actions.
Over time, the relationship between women and the labour movement has changed. As the number of women in the labour force increased, so too has the number of women potential union members. Women's unions gradually merged with general or male unions and the various women's trade union leagues were absorbed or disbanded. Separate organisation of women workers outside of the mainstream trade union movement is now rare. Some exceptions are the US-based Coalition for Labour Women and Nine to Five and the short-lived Women's Alliance to Gain Equality (Balser, 1987; Milkman, 1985; Cobble, 1990).

Thus, gender-specific solidarities within the trade union movement are a century old tradition. The incorporation of women into male unions did not necessarily lead women unionists to accept that their concerns were being addressed. Nor has the increase in women's membership been reflected in the numbers of women representatives within trade unions (McBride, 1985; Qvist, 1985; Quataert, 1985). In 1920, Barbara Drake argued that although mixed unions were the best option for women workers, their interests and point of view "tend to be if not actually overlooked, yet accounted as of secondary importance" (Drake, 1920: 213). To remedy this, she noted that the most commonly adopted devices put in place were the all-women's branch, the reservation of places for women on management committees and the women's advisory council (Drake, 1920: 213). The role of the latter was to provide a real means of expression to women members, encourage women to be active in branch affairs and promote their election through education and propaganda (Drake, 1920: 215; see also Soldon, 1985: 22).

While such strategies have not always been viewed as constructive by (male) unionists, they have continued to be seen as a means to mobilise women workers and to increase the participation and representation of women within trade unions (Gabin, 1990; McBride, 1985; Soldon, 1985; Trebilcock, 1991; Quataert, 1985; Briskin, 1993; ETUC, 1994; ICFTU, 1991). Over the last fifteen years there has been an increasing (at least rhetorical) acceptance and legitimation of separate organising and an institutionalisation of structures to facilitate this process. This has included women's conferences, committees, departments and officers, reserved seats on executive bodies, proportional representation, new approaches to union business, education for women workers, consciousness raising through networks and the use of international organisations (Sapiro, 1981; Briskin, 1993;
Trebilcock, 1991; ETUC, 1994; Lawrence, 1994). That women have organised themselves separately as women workers, both within and outside of trade unions, indicates the perceived importance by women of gender-specific representation in the formulation of strategies around the claims of women.

Thus a variety of gender-specific strategies can be derived from a range of feminist perspectives, most of which are reliant on a notion of women having a shared set of interests. In the next section of this chapter, I examine the theoretical advantages and limitations of a focus on the notion of a 'woman's interest', and discuss the possibility of reconceptualising gender-specific claims and strategies and the solidarities which form around these claims.

Representing 'Women's Interests'

In her article "When are women's interests interesting", Sapiro argues that women as women should be considered as a group with a set of representable interests. In addressing this issue, Sapiro maintains that the term 'women's issues' most often refers to public concerns that impinge primarily on the private (especially domestic) sphere of social life and particularly those values associated with the family, children and nurturance. More specifically, she suggests that the division of labour within the home, the differential impact of law and public policy on women and the differences between women and men in their socioeconomic position indicate that women do have a distinct and shared set of problems that characterise a special interest worthy of representation (Sapiro, 1981: 703-704).

Sapiro also notes that having different interests is not the same as saying that women are conscious of these differences, that they define themselves as having special interests requiring representation or that men and women as groups necessarily disagree on policy issues on which women might have a special interests. In other words, Sapiro is arguing that women have certain objective interests derived from their unequal economic and social position. Furthermore, she states that representation or response to these interests will only come when women become aware of these interests and overtly define them as political interests warranting attention (Sapiro, 1981: 704).

While criticism has been made of Sapiro's use of the concept of interest, these critics have been less concerned with the focus on a fixed set of women's interests. Diamond and Harstock agree with Sapiro that women share common interests across class boundaries, and that these are objective interests which may
not be recognised by women themselves (Diamond and Harstock, 1981: 717). Drawing on psychoanalytic theory they concentrate on the division of labour in private life as the source of commonality between women which "grows from women's life activity of producing and sustaining human beings" (Diamond et al, 1981: 718-719). From this position, Diamond and Harstock argue that only women can represent women when invisible problems affecting the lives of large numbers of women require political identification (Diamond et al, 1981: 720).

More recently, Jonasdottir (1988) has drawn from both Sapiro and Diamond and Harstock in an effort to reassess the usefulness of the concept of interest. In so doing she too argues that women are a valid interest category. However, Jonasdottir suggests that the social contrapositions outlined by Sapiro are too narrow and a focus on women versus the state should be replaced by a focus on 'women vs men', or sex/gender versus sex/gender. With respect to women having particular interests, Jonasdottir asks us to see women as more than another interest group, but as one part in an historically determined, antagonistic relationship to men (Jonasdottir, 1988: 47).

In terms of representation of women, Jonasdottir maintains women have an objective political interest in building up and controlling as sex/gender a concrete presence or attendance in the political system (Jonasdottir, 1988: 53). She argues that women should be represented as women, politically visible and empowered to act as women, since their interests will often be different to those of men. Jonasdottir argues that this does not imply that women have no needs and preferences in common with men, but rather that "women and men are beginning to constitute themselves as two basic societal corporations" (Jonasdottir, 1988: 53). More specifically, she states

the essence of the problem of the sexes is even more about the body-and-the-soul of concrete, socially related *individual people* than is the problem of class and race. In the struggle of the sexes even more areas of life and values are affected, and in different ways. The striving to 'be among' and, in the capacity of sex/gender group, to control this presence also demands that each individual person as far as possible gains perspective of his/her own actions and powers to exist and function as precisely sexed/gendered persons (Jonasdottir, 1988: 55).
From this perspective there seems to be little contest as to the relevance of the category 'women' when referring to interests. There is some acknowledgment of the differences between women. Race, class and ethnicity are highlighted as factors which "mediate this common female experience" (Diamond et al, 1981: 718) and such differences "fragment strategy development amongst women" (Jonasdottir, 1988: 55). However, despite this, it has been consistently argued that there exists an objective set of interests for women based on sex/gender. (This claim is based on the inherent differences between men and women, the public/private split and/or the socioeconomic position of women as a group).

*Rethinking 'Women's Interests'*

More recently, much feminist theorising has moved away from assuming that 'woman' refers to a set of universal commonalities and interests, a shared oppression and, that from this, a unified feminist strategy will attend to all women's needs (Calhoun, 1995: 9). Feminist ideas which focus on a unified feminist politics have been challenged on two fronts by theorising that takes a politics of difference, rather than a politics of gender, as its centre. This challenge arose from within feminism, with criticisms made by women of colour and other groups of women, whose identities and interests have been ignored, marginalised or subsumed under the universalising category 'woman' which was representative of dominant groups of women (Nicholson, 1990). A notion of sisterhood which draws on the shared politics of experience of women as women is considered to be restricted by the experiential differences that result from the various divisions of society (Dill, 1983: 132). Hooks, for example, has argued that the family is a site of resistance and solidarity against racism for women of colour and, thus, the family does not hold a central place in accounting for women's subordination as it may for white women (Hooks, 1984: 37). As a result, a feminist politics of unity rather than representing and encompassing all women, actually serves to generate and reinforce borders, dichotomies and exclusions.

A second challenge has arisen from a general questioning of the modernist project of universalist assumptions and theories. Feminists in this camp have argued that the varying identities of women are constructed and constituted through language and discourse (Scott, 1990: 134-135; Pringle and Watson, 1992: 64). Rather than seeing women as a unified and fixed category, they argue that the 'woman' category is relational; woman is only knowable in so far as she is similar to, different from or complementary to man, making "women and their interests
virtually unrepresentable except in relation to a masculine norm" (Pringle and
Watson, 1992: 68). While feminism has played an important role in revealing
that there are no generic 'men', it follows from this that neither can there be any
generic women. In other words, dissolving the essential and universal man
necessarily leads to the dissolution of the essential woman (Harding, 1991: 17).

While the opposition of male/female constructs particular exclusions and
inclusions it also serves to obscure the differences among women in behaviour,
character, desire, subjectivity, sexuality, gender identification, and historical
experience (Scott, 1990: 143). Butler (1992: 15-16) argues that the minute the
category of women is invoked as describing the constituency for which feminism
speaks, an internal debate invariably begins over the descriptive content of that
term. Thus, every time the specific content of what is 'woman' is named, there is
resistance and factionalisation within the very constituency that is supposed to be
unified by such articulation.

In this way, Butler claims that any effort to give universal or specific content to
the category of women cannot hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist
political movement, since such identification is always more than descriptive. It
is also normative and, as such, exclusionary. Butler concludes that we should not
be searching for a new, more inclusive feminism, since a more comprehensive
universal identity "could only be achieved at the cost of producing new and further
exclusions" (Butler, 1992: 7).

The ideal of an all-inclusive feminism is also challenged by Ang (1995) who
seeks to deal with the complex interconnections between feminism, race and
ethnicity within a "multi-cultural" Australia. She argues that while contest and
conflict are important means by which exclusions of feminism are identified, it
does not necessarily follow that such conflict will lead to a more inclusive
feminism and nor should we want it to. Instead, she argues feminism will have to
develop a "self-conscious politics of partiality", accepting its limitations and the
untenability of absorbing difference into an already existing feminist community
(Ang, 1995: 57; 60). An idealised consensus sought by feminism incorporates an
ethic of assimilation; an ethic that a politics of difference is supposedly striving to
avoid.

At the centre of what has been called a 'women's movement' is the shared
experience of being oppressed as women. The movement has taken this shared
experience as its foundation and rationale. Following Ang and Butler's positions
to their logical conclusions, leads us to question whether feminists should desire a concrete foundation from which to act, for it is precisely such a foundation which new feminist analyses are contesting. Furthermore, it appears unclear historically, that it has ever been possible in either feminist or trade union politics for a single voice to represent the interests of all women or all workers respectively.

Gatens (1996: 78) argues the strategy of invoking an identity of womanness is one that has unwelcome effects because of the manner in which institutionally encoded essentialisms in turn play an active part in the construction of female subjects. Invoking an identity of womanness could, then, lead to the further oppression of women. Butler (1992) also notes that, in the past, a set of meanings, such as those created through a feminist politics seeking solidarity amongst women, have in turn been taken to inhere in the real nature of women themselves. Or, as Yeatman has argued, the identity, which is the referent for the interest concerned, is made to appear as though it precedes politics (Yeatman, 1993: 236). In other words, invoking the category women may mean that women are made to appear a stable identity with their own inherent culture and nature. Thus, women can end up participating in the fixing of their interests in a way that becomes a controlling mechanism, a fixed exclusion or inclusion, with detrimental (policy) consequences.

The Sears case is an oft-cited example of the negative consequences of invoking fixed gender differences (Scott, 1990; Gatens, 1996; Bacchi, 1990; Milkman, 1986). A sex discrimination suit was brought against Sears retailing company by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) in the United States, charging Sears with discriminatory hiring practices. The defence argued that fundamental differences between women and men, which resulted from culture and socialisation, led to women's presumed lack of interest in commission sales jobs. They argued that sexual difference and not discrimination could explain the hiring patterns of Sears. In doing so, Sears suggested that the EEOC was arguing that women and men had identical interests (although the EEOC had not taken this position at all). Rather, the EEOC representative argued that Sears' hiring practices reflected inaccurate and inapplicable notions of sexual difference (Scott, 1990: 139). However, the judge accepted the Sears argument that the differences between women and men are real and as Scott notes "discrimination was redefined as simply the recognition of 'natural' difference" (Scott, 1990: 141), entranching within the United States legal system an essentialised perception of
women. Thus, the assertion of difference in the face of gender categories is not a sufficient strategy for feminists (Scott, 1990).

As a case in contrast, Sullivan (1990) has evaluated feminist strategies which focus on achieving sex equality through the use of degendering strategies, with particular reference to the passage of sex-discrimination legislation in Australia. Sullivan argues that in seeking to degender the public sphere, feminists may unwittingly encourage a depoliticisation of issues particularly relevant to women's public and private lives, since it is women who are required to forfeit their sexual specificity. In this way, the "lived experience of a female body", which may involve abortion, pregnancy, child birth and child rearing, may no longer be considered relevant to the public sphere (Sullivan, 1990: 174, 184). For example, women were demanding the outlawing of discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy without mandatory maternity leave provisions being put in place. Sullivan argues this implies women would have "only the same rights as men, regardless of some major differences in needs and concerns" (1990: 186). In this sense, strategies of degendering only degender the feminine aspects of the public sphere, leaving the explicit masculinity of public sphere intact.

In order to avoid this encoding and substantialisation of the category woman as either essentially different or the same as man, some feminist theorists have preferred to understand women not as a fixed or unified category. They suggest that gender categories should be regarded as normative statements that organise cultural understanding of sexual difference (Scott, 1990: 144-145). They reject the view that women simply know their material and other interests, or have fixed objective interests of which they are unaware. Rather, women's interests are seen to be actively constructed in the process of engagement with other actors. Women form conceptions of their interests in the process of articulation and interaction and therefore these interests are unstable, fluid and momentary (Pringle and Watson, 1992; Yeatman, 1993) as are the solidarities women form around these interests.

Rethinking the Interpretation of Gender-Specific Strategies

There are several reasons for suggesting that feminist accounts of women having an objective, fixed and unified set of interests around which feminist strategies should be based, are inadequate. First, assuming that women are an already constituted, coherent group with common and identical interests, regardless of other locations such as class or ethnicity, implies a "notion of gender .... or even
patriarchy which can be applied universally or even cross culturally" (Mohanty, 1991: 55). By constructing universal theories about the essential nature of women and their interests, even if universalities are only made with reference to women's labour force participation, it can become impossible to reveal and analyse the specific differences and problems facing women workers. It also encourages feminists "to regard all women as equally powerless and oppressed victims" (Young, 1994: 715).

Yet there will necessarily be differences in interests between women who undertake paid work in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden. The cross-national differences in the development of welfare states, labour movements and political systems and how the needs of women have been interpreted in each context, means the environment within which women in trade unions constitute their interests and therefore their political strategies may be different. In addition, within each country there will be differences between women workers according, in the very least, to whether they are full-time or part-time; blue-collar or white-collar; skilled or unskilled; in male-dominated or female-dominated occupations; have parental responsibilities; not to mention differences arising from ethnicity, race and/or religion (and so on). This does not mean there are no similarities between women's interests either nationally or cross-nationally. However, feminist perspectives which seek to interpret women's collective actions as resulting from a essentialised identity as women around a unified and objective set of interests are problematic in that they ultimately assume a common identity between women as workers and fail to recognise differences.

Alternative accounts of women's collective actions, which see women's interests as fluid and dynamic, highlight the multiplicity of differences that may influence the grouping of women; it changes the emphasis from how women's interests are best represented to the specificity of the process through which women constitute their interests and strategies and the contingent and specific nature of the claims themselves. In this way it is possible to take account of how the political strategies put in effect by women unionists rest on analyses of the usefulness of certain arguments in certain discursive contexts, without invoking absolute qualities for women or men (cf Scott, 1990).

While viewing women and their interests as constantly in flux, never pre-given or universal, there nevertheless remain pragmatic political reasons for thinking about women as groups with interests (not a single group with interests). Riley (1988: 98) suggests medical discoveries regarding the prevention of cervical cancer is an
example of a valuable outcome resulting from invoking women as a group with special needs. Scott too has argued that there are times when it makes sense for mothers to demand consideration for their social role or for women in paid work to demand a revaluation of the status of what has been socially constructed as women's work (Scott, 1990: 144).

However, it does not follow that motherhood equals womanhood or that women workers epitomise womanhood (Scott, 1990: 144). In other words, we should not reduce everything related to women to their womanness, but accept that women can be very differently positioned, thus making the continuity of woman as subject unreliable (Riley, 1988: 2-3). So when women come together as a group, that they are women will not be the only factor which unifies them; there are other locations which give them affinity (Young, 1994: 737).

In this context, Spelman maintains, "I am not saying that we ought never to think about or refer to women as women or to men as men. I am only insisting that whenever we do that we remember which women and which men we are thinking about" (Spelman, 1988: 186). It would never be possible to identify the multiplicity of influences that have led women to formulate some common interest around which to organise. As Young argues, "groups of women are usually more socially, historically and culturally specified than simply women" (Young, 1994: 736). However, an inability to nominate all that influences women's choice of identification, does not preclude women organising as women.

Furthermore, although feminists may not presuppose unity or universality in making claims about women, thereby acknowledging that not all women-centred strategies will help all women, the naming process in itself will result in a normalisation and exclusions will necessarily (re)occur (Butler, 1992: 16). This process means new boundaries of the included and excluded are drawn up and provide a context for further groupings and interest (re)formulations. This process is unavoidable, but, as such, requires a review of the possibility of an all-inclusive feminism and a realisation that feminism is best viewed as a politics of partiality (Ang, 1995: 57-58).

History has already provided us with many examples that indicate the inadequacy of viewing women's interests as objective and fixed. As earlier noted, there have often been opposing groups of women seeking to represent what they claim to be the interests of women: those who have argued for and against sex-based protective legislation, both of which have been claimed as feminist strategies.
(Cott, 1987). Contrasting arguments regarding the interests and nature of women were made in the fight for women's suffrage (see Riley, 1988). In addition, contemporary feminist perspectives are divided into liberal, socialist and radical, all of which claim to know and represent the interests of women.

In contrast, not accepting women and their interests as predetermined means debates over what constitutes women's issues as opposed to other kinds of issues cannot be resolved by references to clearly understood and agreed upon differences between one's gender and other experiences through which women might be situated. In this sense there can be no theoretical agreement on what 'women' are and what women's issues and interests will be (Ang, 1995, 58). Thus feminism and feminist theory instead becomes concerned with embracing the "inherent shakiness" of the term women which exists prior to its political deployment (Riley, 1988: 98), and through this develop a flexibility in understanding these deployments.

This is why the notion of contingent or temporal solidarities becomes a useful tool for interpreting women's collective actions. It provides a means of analysing women-centred strategies in a way that avoids essentialising the concept woman and their interests. It allows for the identification of the myriad of power relations and political subjectivities that come into play as interests are articulated in a variety of competing ways" (Pringle and Watson, 1992: 69). It also allows for the examination of women's agency in the process of the (re)formulation of interests and strategies through which women seek to have these interests addressed. This in turn enables an analysis of how and perhaps why women have defined themselves and their concerns in the way that they have.

It is possible, therefore, to accept that the category woman has often provided a foundation for collective action and has informed women's interpretation of their daily experience and "underscored their sense of self as historical actors" (Berger, 1992: 285). However, who this category has included and excluded and the solidarity that is generated, is the function of a particular historical moment and so is not fixed around a stable notion of woman.

I am suggesting then, that the focus on gender-specific strategies employed by women within trade unions should be seen as being about the different ways in which women as acting subjects have been represented; how feminist theory has conceived of women as subjects involved in political action; and how women can mobilise to effect social change (Gibson-Graham, 1995: 172). It is not therefore
about feminists acting around a set of objective and fixed interests. Gibson-Graham have argued that fixing the interests of women to a structurally defined core (such as capitalism or patriarchy) sets them in concrete and requires a revolutionary change, which makes the feminist project an exhaustive one and one which leads to pessimism (Gibson-Graham, 1995: 182). Analyses which perceive women's collective actions as determined by the structural context within which they occur view the results of such actions as either successful or unsuccessful. The position taken by Gibson-Graham enables an alternative understanding of women's collective actions. The articulation of interests and the solidarities with which it is accompanied are seen as an exertion of power, thereby revealing the many examples of women's agency. While not affecting social change in a traditional revolutionary sense, such solidarities can affect change in women's own lives.

This perspective would, if taken up, provoke a reinterpretation of the numerous alliances made between middle class women and working class women in the late nineteenth century around issues of unionism, working conditions and suffrage in the United States. Many middle class women had taken an interest in the working conditions of women at the time when an increasing number of women were entering paid work, but labouring under intolerable working conditions. However, the alliance dissolved when suffrage became the primary interest of middle class women. While this dissolution could be interpreted as an inability to integrate the goals of feminism with those of unionism, it could also be argued that such a dissolution was not a failure per se, but rather a change in the formulation of interests resulting from the interactions not only between the two groups of women, but also with other actors. In this sense, the solidarity between working and middle class women can be conceived as contingent, constituted by a variety of influences and discursive contexts, which are not stable but in flux.

In summary, I have argued that there are problems with seeing women's interests as fixed for three reasons: first, because naming the content of the category 'woman', for example, to mean nurturers of children or within a heterosexual relationship, necessarily excludes some women; second, because women are not only women and their interests are not only defined by their womanness; third, because the category 'woman' is relational to the category 'man', women's interests are also relational, not predetermined. However, it remains possible to talk of women's interests. In fact, this is a crucial strategy open to women in that it names the particularity of existing and assumed universal categories. But invoking women's interests involves an awareness that, in so doing, reference is
not being made to all women, but to groups of women who have come together in
the process of forming their interests. In the remainder of the chapter, I illustrate
how viewing women's interests from this perspective changes the interpretation
of the variety of gender-specific strategies undertaken by feminists. In doing so, I
focus on three gender-specific strategies - the notion of representation of women
by women, the construction of separate spaces for women and gendered labour
market and legislative strategies.

Gendering Representation

One important recent feminist strategy has been to argue that women's interests
before her, suggests that specific interests and needs that arise from women's
experience would not be adequately addressed in a politics dominated by men.
However, unlike Sapiro, Phillips argues that challenges to ideas about an
objective set of interests shared by all women does not undermine but instead
strengthens the case for increasing the number of women representatives. If
women's interests are varied, fluid, even still in the process of formation, it would
become problematic to separate out what is to be represented from who is to do
the representation. Thus, if interests are not always fixed, representation concerns
the formulation of identities and interests as well as how they are dealt with. As a
result, there is a stronger case for more women as representatives to help define
areas of concern and construct appropriate policies (Phillips, 1994: 15).

With respect to the femocrat strategy (that is of feminists entering the Australian
bureaucracy as feminists), Pringle and Watson (1992: 60) argue it was recognised
that femocrats were not giving voice to interests that were pre-given, but rather
these interests were constructed during the process of interaction and articulation
within the policy making context. While this meant that conflicts occurred over
whose interests were being represented, there was little denial that such
representation resulted in a range of positive policy outcomes for women (Sawer,
1990).

To date, there is limited evidence to suggest that women are more likely than men
to bring women's issues forward when in representative positions in trade unions
(see Heery and Kelly, 1988), primarily because a critical mass of women do not
yet exist in decision-making positions within most unions. Certainly, the election
of women will not ensure the representation of all interests. However, as Phillips
has argued "different experiences do create different values, priorities, interests"
(1991: 65) and democratic process should allow for the representation of these different interests via political presence.

However, male dominance of trade unions, often both at membership and executive level, has meant that it is men who have defined the interests to be taken up by trade unions. Whether male unionists can represent the interests of women workers without an awareness or comprehension of what those interests are is questionable. In this sense, it could be argued that women are needed within leadership positions to provide such an awareness and to allow for women's interests to surface, thereby altering the discursive contexts through which women's interests are then constituted.

Theoretically, it may not be possible for the diverse interests of women to be represented by women. As Gatens (1996) argues, knowledge concerning others cannot be acquired like possessions. She states there are real limits to empathising with, and gaining an understanding of, the specific and total context of the lives of those seeking representation. A practical solution argues Gatens, may only be one where women are represented at all levels of legal, social and political life (Gatens, 1996: 141). Thus, including women from a range of occupations or industries as representative within union hierarchies would at least ensure a broad range of working women's interests received a voice.

Institutionalised Separate Spaces

A second gender-specific strategy often suggested within feminism is that of separate organising by women. Brown (1991) argues that a new feminist politics requires the cultivation of political spaces for posing and arguing about feminist political norms, for discussing the nature of the good for women and for developing a discourse on justice. She suggests such political spaces are scarcer and thinner today (Brown, 1991: 79). And yet within the trade union movement cross-nationally, the creation of women's networks, committees and councils has only continued to increase since the 1970s. Such spaces clearly provide women workers with the opportunity to develop their skills and ultimately allow for a variety of women's voices to be heard (Cook et al, 1992: 76; Briskin, 1993: 92).

Brown argues that while such spaces require elements of definition and protection, they cannot be "clean sharply bounded disembodied or permanent: ......they would be heterogeneous, roving, non-institutionalised and democratic to the point of exhaustion" (Brown, 1991: 80). Yet it does not necessarily follow
that the institutionalisation of separate spaces for women within trade unions has proved constraining for women unionists. Indeed, it seems that Brown's position assumes it is the institution rather than the voices spoken within the institution, that is important. Yet, if women's networks and committees within trade unions allow for continuing and varied discussions on what strategies should be pursued to improve the lot of women workers, this is likely to be useful to the process of formulating and representing women's interests.

It is impossible to claim that separate spaces either succeed or fail by virtue of being separate; rather the ability of women trade unionists to have their demands voiced, heard and addressed is dependent on a complex set of contextual circumstances, including the governmental structure of the union confederation (cf Gardner, 1986: 174). Nevertheless, it is women's agency which has provided them with political space within trade unions; women have agency within this space which is an important strategy in the process of formulating and making claims. Cook maintains that where women

have an organisational home within the unions - formal or informal, existing by union statute or custom, independent or dependent - they eventually seek ways to gain political skills, educate their male colleagues, and claim their representational rights (Cook, 1984: 19).

Thus, although separate spaces for women may be institutionalised at various points in time (something which Brown opposes) institutionalisation in itself should not be viewed as negative. Indeed, just as women's interests and claims are viewed as dynamic, so are the discursive contexts within which they are formulated: agendas change, those participating change and such spaces may often be a window of opportunity for women to participate in agenda-setting and to alter the discursive frameworks through which women's claims are constituted.

**Legislative and Labour Market Strategies**

Finally, I re-examine the utility of choosing legislative and labour market strategies which are explicitly gender-specific in focus. As outlined earlier, both Gatens (1996) and Butler (1992) argue that invoking the identity of women in the formulation of strategies can result in the rigidification of sexual difference that is then taken to represent the essential nature of women. Gatens (1996: 78) is critical of "essentialized conceptions of female and male sexualities that, if
encoded in the law, will entrench conservative and destructive active/passive notions of male and female embodiment”.

Certainly protective legislation, although perceived by many women trade unionists to be of benefit, has allowed, over time, for the signification of women workers as less able than men in a variety of working environments. Similarly, the institutionalisation of the family wage principle, often with the support of working class women, has contributed to the representation of women as transitory labour force participants whose labour value is secondary to that of men’s. Even with the massive influx of women into labour markets since the 1960s, which for many feminists was to be the answer to women’s oppression, women’s predominance in a limited number of occupations and in part time work indicates how even economic activity constructs woman as other, unskilled, subordinate.

Over time these ‘encoded’ representations of women have become contested, with women in trade unions demanding the removal of protective legislation and clauses in collective agreements, using arguments of equal employment opportunity. Women workers have made claims for equal pay, either through the wage bargaining system or by enactment of legislation and are seeking the reclassification of women’s skills. In many of these instances, the category of woman has been invoked as part of a strategy for change.

Interpreting woman-centred strategies as inherently leading to rigidification implies that the results of such strategies are fixed and in turn, not open to contest. Yet as Butler (1992: 16) argues, as soon as the interests of women are named as such, a process of normalisation and exclusion occurs (my emphasis). This process necessarily creates new interactions between those included and excluded, with further conflict and contest, further interest and identity construction around which claiming strategies are built, perhaps again around a notion of woman. However, such exclusions are not problematic if our ultimate goal is not one of an all-inclusive feminist strategy. Rather it may be more useful to interpret legislative and labour market strategies as modest feminist strategies which continually redraw boundaries between women, with the outcomes as part of a claiming process and not ends in themselves.
Conclusion

Just as feminist challenges (amongst others), have sought to undermine the concept of a unified working class interest around which trade union strategies might be based, so too has recent feminist thought challenged the notion of a unified and fixed set of interests shared by women around which gender-specific strategies are formulated. While early second wave feminist theory and practice was predicated on the assumptions of women's common identity as women, and of a united global sisterhood, such conceptions were drawn from the experience of white, middle class women's lives. Feminists now acknowledge that not all women share the same experience of being a woman.

This does not preclude women from organising as women around what are often labelled 'women's interests'. However, such solidarities should be reconceptualised as contingent or continually transforming. At any particular point in time the interaction between various women and other actors can result in women constituting themselves as a group with particular interests. Consequently, a useful strategy may be to seek the institutionalisation of structures through which 'women's' (and other) interests might be dealt with. This means both the construction of interests and the construction of strategies should be seen as contingent.

The concept of contingent solidarities is a useful way of interpreting both women's collective actions and the class-based actions outlined in the previous chapter. The concept of contingent solidarities provides us with a way of analysing class-based and gender-specific strategies in a manner that reveals women's agency regarding the (re)formulating of interests; we can identify how and why women have defined themselves and their concerns in the way that they have. In terms of the empirical material in this thesis, the concept of contingent solidarities presents an important explanatory device for exploring the choices women unionists have made in advancing what they perceive as their cause within the various trade union movements. In particular, it allows for a cross-national analysis of the ways in which class, welfare state, labour market and cultural discourses have included or excluded women and how women trade unionists' themselves have influenced the construction and formulation of claims, strategies and solidarities. My overall argument, then, is that the concept of contingent solidarities provides a better explanation for the varied, multiple and often conflicting strategies adopted by women trade unionists in order to advance the position of women at work.
Part Two

Women's Strategies in Four Countries

In this part of the thesis I focus on four countries in turn, Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden. The aim of each chapter is provide an in-depth examination of the issues of concern to women workers and the strategies chosen by women unionists to address these concerns in each country, thereby allowing for a detailed understanding of the historical and discursive contexts which help shape the constitution and articulation of women's interests as workers as espoused by women trade unionists. In each chapter, I seek to gain an insight into why certain strategies are considered more useful than others by asking what is it about the particular claim and context that influences whether class or gendered strategies are most appropriate? The intention, then, is not to offer anything which could be labelled an explanation, but rather to identify the trajectory of choices made and the reasons why this might be so. Comparing the similarities and differences which emerge between the four countries and how these might facilitate further theoretical development follows in Part Three.

As previously noted in the introduction, in order to understand the strategic choices made, each country chapter is divided into five sections. The first section focuses on the development of trade unionism and industrial relations, which is important in gaining an understanding of the institutional constraints within which women unionists have had to operate. The second part provides a brief overview of the position of women in each country with respect to economic and social equality, highlighting in advance the issues of possible relevance to women workers. The next three parts deal with the issues women unionists themselves raised in the interview context. In all four countries, the representation of women in union structures and the continuing existence of a gender wage differential were considered issues of concern to women workers, while more cross-national variation became evident with respect to women's working conditions. There is no theoretical rationale for the ordering of the country chapters, which is simply alphabetical. Reference to interview material is denoted by an abbreviation of the occupation, industry or organisation represented.
Chapter Five

Australia

Introduction

Class politics in Australia has been labourist in its orientation, focusing primarily on the needs of wage earners in terms of both economic and social security. In satisfying these needs, trade unions have relied heavily on the mechanisms of the state, particularly those of compulsory conciliation and arbitration. For many years a unified working class politics was undermined by the plethora of craft unions and the separate organisation of white-collar and professional trade unions. However, with the election of a Labor Government in 1983 came a change in orientation of the trade union movement in Australia. A 'consensual corporatist' framework was established between the ACTU and the Labor government, through which wage and social wage policies were negotiated in line with the overarching macro-economic agenda (Gerritsen, 1986).

This chapter explores how trade unions have sought to represent the interests of women workers in the context of state regulation and more recently, corporatism in Australia. Also analysed is how these contexts have in turn affected the way women trade unionists have articulated their claims. What becomes evident is that while trade union rhetoric has often been explicitly masculine and exclusive of women, women trade unionists have been able to utilise the industrial mechanisms in place to further the interests of women workers, both with and without the support of their male colleagues. These solidarities with male unionists have fluctuated depending on the claim. In addition, women unionists have sought out a separate political space for themselves within trade unions, within which new claims and strategies have been formulated. It appears that women in trade unions, like their sisters in the women's movement, have taken a pragmatic approach to the pursuit of change, utilising the mechanisms already in existence, but supplementing this strategy with explicitly feminist discourses and policy platforms.
The Labour Movement in Australia

Working class ideology in Australia involved the adoption and adaptation to Australian conditions of political ideas from overseas as well as incorporating values originating from the specific Australian experience. The ethos of mateship, which focused on egalitarian principles, solidarity and fellowship and arose first from the hardship of outback bush life, was picked up in the 1880s by trade unions of unskilled and semi-skilled miners, shearsers and waterside workers (Archer, 1992: 381-382). In addition, collectivist 'new liberal' ideas which had replaced earlier espoused notions of laissez faire encouraged the state to play a central role in assisting and empowering its citizens (Macintyre, 1989: 11). This notion of state involvement was not new. As a settler society, the Australian state was considered crucial to national development, required to provide much of the infrastructure of economic development such as roads, railways and urban amenities and, as such, become a large employer of labour. Governments were also expected to set an example as an employer with respect to wages and working conditions (Macintyre, 1989: 11). As a result, the labour movement in Australia did not regard the state as oppressive, but rather expected it to play an active role in the protection of the welfare of workers.

Hence, in a comparative perspective the most striking feature of the labour relations environment in Australia is the extent to which government has sought to regulate the system. Indeed, conciliation and arbitration has dominated Australian industrial relations since the turn of the century and this is what distinguishes it from European systems of regulation of industrial disputes. Compulsory conciliation and arbitration was established at both state and federal (Commonwealth) level, with industrial tribunals having powers to settle disputes and enforce decisions (Macintyre and Mitchell, 1989: 6). This system of arbitration evolved into a comprehensive method of state determination of wages and conditions (Macintyre and Mitchell, 1989: 18).

Indeed, it was the 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act which led to substantial growth in trade union development in the early twentieth century Australia. While trade unions had existed in Australia since the 1850s, under the Act, trade unions were explicitly recognised through registration and the operation of the system was both formally and effectively dependent on their participation. All registered unions could compel their employers to negotiate before an industrial tribunal and thereby obtain wages and conditions comparable to those which stronger unions had gained through direct negotiations (Martin, 1975: 5-6).
The craft origins of trade unions in Australia led to the formation of large numbers of unions. General and industry unions have also developed over time, with over 300 unions in existence for most of this century (Archer, 1992: 384). This large number of disparate trade unions thwarted the creation of a peak union organisation until 1927, when the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) was formed. However, its coverage was far from universal and until the late 1970s represented only blue-collar workers. While the white-collar workforce had grown substantially during the affluent 1960s, these workers had formed their own confederations. In 1979 and 1981, the white-collar peak organisations, the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations and the Council of Australian Government Employee Organisations, respectively amalgamated with the ACTU. This broadened the ACTU’s representation of the workforce considerably (Manning, 1994).

In terms of wage determination, the most famous ruling of the Court of Arbitration was the Harvester Judgement of 1907, whereby the court ruled that a fair wage must be based on need and not on either profit or the market value of labour. The minimum wage was set as the amount by which a (male) worker could support his wife and three children in frugal comfort (Macintyre, 1985: 55). This decision was underpinned by the assumption that tariffs and restricted immigration provided employers with enough protection to pay wages according to need.

This basic wage became the foundation component of all award wages until the 1960s. The second component of award wages was the margin for skill which recognised differences between occupational classifications. Within this component the arbitration courts incorporated the principle of comparative wage justice, whereby tradesmen in general should receive similar wages. This principle was the basis for the flow on of wage increases. In 1967, a 'total wage' concept replaced the previous wage setting process and this transition undermined the family wage concept and opened the way for equal wages to be paid to men and women (Gardner and Palmer, 1992: 323-329).

The importance of wages policy should not be underestimated in the Australian context. The dominant philosophy of the trade union movement has not been one of revolution but of 'labourism': the objective being to obtain a combination of strong unionism and Labor in government to facilitate the management of the economy in a way that benefited wage earners. This philosophy underpinned the
development of Australia's welfare state with the primary premise being wage security rather than social security. Castles (1985: 102) has coined the phrase "wage-earners welfare state" to best describe the way in which the principle of a living wage set the foundation for social policy development in Australia; the latter could be considered residual rather than universal in nature due to the provision of wage guarantees.

The creation of one large peak council in the early 1980s meant binding agreements between the ACTU and governments and/or employers and covering all wage and salary earners, were a possibility for the first time (Carney, 1988: 67). In February 1983, an Accord was created between the ACTU and the Australian Labor Party (which later that year became the Government). Prompted by continuing stagflation of the 1970s, the Accord process followed the labourist tradition of maintaining the emphasis on wage-earner security, but with additional focus on wage restraint backed up by tax reform and increases in the social wage in the form of state sponsored medical insurance, increased family allowances and a government subsidised superannuation scheme. There were a number of revisions of the Accord, with Mark VIII released in May 1995. Despite the arguments as to whether this bipartite agreement benefited workers (cf Manning, 1992; Stilwell, 1986), the Accord continued to provide the framework for policy making at a macro level until the election of a conservative Coalition Government in 1996.

While in the international literature, Australia has tended to be listed close to bottom in the corporatist rankings, within Australia there has been considerable debate amongst political scientists (cf Head, 1994, Matthews, 1991) as to whether corporatism is and ever was a feature of the Australian political system. In comparing Australia with other 'corporatist' nations, including those looked at in this study, it is apparent that while business benefited from the Accord process, it has not been a participant (Matthews, 1991: 191). Instead it is argued that the corporatism framework established by the Labor Government and the trade union movement was partisan in nature and would always be an unacceptable political option to the conservative Liberal and National parties (Matthews, 1991: 211). This argument has been borne out with the extinction of the Accord on the arrival of the Liberal/National Coalition government. In this sense, the 13 years of 'consensual corporatism' which existed in Australia between 1983-1996 is considerably different to the European corporatist frameworks looked at here.
In addition to the Accord there were three other major developments in Australian labour relations in this period. In 1987, the ACTU published *Australia Reconstructed* which outlined the confederation’s strategy regarding the reality of increasing unemployment, inflation and external indebtedness (Castles, 1988: 309). A significant feature of this report was the promotion of the concept of "strategic unionism". This concept involved unions moving "beyond the narrow focus of wages and conditions" and developing through the ACTU centrally coordinated goals and integrated strategies for full employment, labour market programs, industry policy, productivity, industrial democracy, social welfare, and taxation (ACTU/TDC, 1987: 169). This was followed by another ACTU report in 1987, *Future Strategies for the Union Movement*, which amongst other things emphasised the need for industry-based unionism. The most immediate outcome of this report was the reconstruction of unions through substantial amalgamations, with the number of unions decreasing from 326 unions in 1986 to 56 in 1995, with a view to an eventual 20 super unions.

The second development was the move toward a more decentralised wage bargaining structure. Between 1987 and 1988, the two tier wages system was introduced whereby all workers received a flat rate increase and further increases of up to four per cent could be negotiated between unions and employers in return for concessions on efficiency and productivity (Gardner and Palmer, 1992: 337). The Industrial Relations Act of 1988 replaced the Conciliation and Arbitration Act and, while it provided a framework for continued conciliation and arbitration, there was an emphasis on increased flexibility in the means for settlement and a lessened emphasis on arbitration. In this way, the scene was set for moves toward enterprise bargaining, backed by further legislative changes in 1993. Both the ACTU and the Labor Government actively pursued enterprise bargaining although for different reasons. The Government hoped enterprise bargaining would enhance economic growth and productivity, while the ACTU saw it as a means of "appeasing the employers' desire to promote greater efficiency and productivity" (Peetz, 1995: 20). However, in the shift to a more decentralised system, the award system was retained to protect minimum wages and conditions for workers not covered by agreements.

The third major change in Australian unionism has been the decrease in membership. Since the 1920s union membership has fluctuated with downward tendencies in the early 1930s and again, during the late 1950s and 1960s. However, the overall rate tended to remain above 50 per cent. Membership rose again in the 1970s, which has been attributed to compulsory unionism and union
growth in the public sector (Rawson, 1978: 39-40, cf Peetz, 1990: 221). However, union membership has declined throughout the 1980s, dropping from 48.3 per cent in 1982 to 41.6 per cent in 1988 (Peetz, 1990: 198). This decline now threatens the legitimacy of the union movement as a powerful participant within the policy-making arena. The Evatt Report, *Unions 2001*, has concluded that democratisation, worker participation, and the creation of a recruitment culture are essential if the Australian union movement is to arrest the decline in its membership (Evatt Foundation, 1995: 56).

Finally, it is necessary to note that as of March 1996, with the arrival of a conservative Liberal Government, the industrial relations environment has undergone substantial change, with many of the foundations of the state regulated system being altered. Under the new Workplace Relations Act, 'Australian workplace agreements' have been introduced, whereby workers may be expected to sign an individual contract and forfeit award coverage. These new forms of workplace agreements however, will be monitored and, if they do not match the existing award conditions (which themselves have been considerably refined), the Industrial Relations Commission can review and recommend change or reject the agreement. In addition, legal recognition of trade unions has been weakened in terms of rights of entry and representation. The interview material in this chapter relates to the period before the arrival of the Coalition Government. However, what becomes apparent here is that the shift to enterprise bargaining under the previous Labor Government has received a mixed reaction from women unionists, with those in marginal employment being considered most at risk of having their conditions of employment undermined. It remains to be seen what further decentralisation will mean for women workers.

**The Position of Women in Australia**

In Australia, a man's right to work was given precedence over a woman's and this was reflected through a wages system that paid a man a family living wage, based on his need to provide for a wife and children. Thus married women's participation in the labour force was for many years viewed by workers, trade unions and government's alike as being as a result of economic circumstance. It was not until 1967, that the marriage bar for female public servants was abolished and in 1977, that the Arbitration Commission ruled that dismissal of women on the grounds of marital status equated to sex discrimination. Furthermore, it was only after considerable lobbying from women trade unionists, that the ACTU dropped its policy of trying to ensure that women were not forced to work,
affirming instead the right to work for anyone who chose to do so (Hargreaves, 1982: 9, 63; Ryan and Conlon, 1989).

Over the last twenty years or so, the participation of Australian women in the labour market, both married and single, has continued to increase. Between 1973 and 1995, women's labour force participation rates increased from 47 per cent to 65 per cent. Much of this increase resulted from the considerable growth in the service sector from 57 to 72 per cent of civilian employment. During the same period part-time employment increased from 11.9 to 24.8 per cent, although between 1970 and 1990 government employment as a percentage of total employment remained static (OECD, 1991a).

Corresponding with the increase in women's labour force participation came a surge in women's political activity. During the late 1960s, women of the new left in Australia embraced women's liberation movement ideas with 'consciousness raising' groups established throughout the country. Women lobbied politicians and political parties to have their demands met, often employing overtly feminist discourses to do so. Two Equal Pay Decisions were ruled by the labour court after considerable effort by women unionists (and some of their male colleagues) and by women outside of the union movement. The Whitlam Labor Government elected in 1972, provided funds for services sought by feminists for rape crisis centres, women's refuge and women's health. Child care funding increased and a significant number of feminists entered the bureaucracy (Curthoys, 1994: 16-17, Sawer and Simms, 1993). During the 1980s, this presence resulted in a range of feminist-inspired legal reforms in regard to sex discrimination and affirmative action (Sullivan, 1994; Curtin and Sawer, 1996). Just as the labour movement looked to government to have its interests addressed earlier this century, so too did the women's movement, later in the century. In this sense, feminist groups in Australia have viewed the state as potentially 'user-friendly' and as a result, have been described as 'pragmatic' in their approach to representing the interests of women in the political arena (Eisenstein, 1991; Sawer, 1990; see also Sullivan, 1994).

Despite such activism, women's wages remain lower than men's. For the decade from 1981, women's average earnings for full-time ordinary hours of work were between 81 and 83 per cent of men's and remained at this level until the late 1980s. By 1991, this gap had narrowed further, with women earning 84.5 per cent of their male counterparts. However, women earn substantially less than men, when such factors as part-time work and access to over time are taken into
account. Furthermore, early research suggests that with the shift to enterprise bargaining, the gender-wage differential has begun to widen (Bryson, 1994: 186).

Women and Representation in the Australian Union Movement

In this section I provide an overview of the inclusion of women in trade unions in Australia over the last century and of women's representation in decision-making positions in more recent years. I also examine the barriers that are thought to hinder women being elected to higher office the strategies women unionists have undertaken to remove these barriers and to increase women's representation. All of the women unionists with whom I spoke considered the presence of women in union hierarchies to be a necessary condition for the representation of women workers' interests and of particular importance to the issue of recruitment.

Inclusion and Representation

Various feminist writers have argued that the labourist tradition in Australia has embodied an ethos of mateship, which has strongly encouraged male bonding and enhanced the exclusion of women (Sawer and Simms, 1993: 183; Pocock, 1995a). Lake maintains that, in the late nineteenth century, sections of the trade union movement were strongly influenced by the idea that wage labour undermined manhood. Socialism would enable working men to retrieve their male status, but until socialism was achieved, "workers could assert their masculinity through trade unionism" (Lake, 1986: 54). Lake suggests that the preoccupation with manhood has permeated union culture and defined the union movement as inherently male (Lake, 1986: 55).

Late last century, women were seldom encouraged by men to undertake paid work let alone become active participants within trade unions and those women who did work were concentrated in factory and domestic jobs (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982: 267). This occupational segregation was aggravated by the activities of male unionists who fought successfully to exclude cheaper female labour from the better paid male crafts. There is debate as to whether this exclusion by male unionists can be attributed to sexism, with men defending their privileges against women, or class, in that workers were protecting themselves against employers' attempts to erode male wages (cf Frances, 1991). As a result, women who wanted to unionise were forced to do so separately. In 1882, the first women's union, the Victorian Tailoresses Union, was created and, after 1890, more women's unions were established, some of which were restricted to a single
occupation, while others spanned several occupational groups. Women sometimes received sponsorship from labour councils and individual unions in setting up their unions (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982: 266-267).

Few of these unions survived into the twentieth century and those that did were gradually subsumed into unions encompassing both male and female workers. Ryan and Prendergast (1982: 268) argue that the arbitration system put in place in 1904 stifled the continued development of women's unions. Registered unions gained the sole right to represent employees in their particular industry or occupation and women usually lacked the precise coverage of a distinct occupational or industry group required by the labour courts. In addition, in New South Wales for example, domestic workers were excluded as an occupation eligible for registration, thus prohibiting union representation in this area of work where women dominated (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982: 268).

Despite the demise of women's unions, there continued to be pockets of activity from women within the union movement. Campaigns for equal pay occurred in the 1920s with the Council of Action for Equal Pay established in 1937. Women of the left were also active in the Union of Australian Women (established in 1946). However, it was during the 1970s that more concrete links were established between the women's movement and trade unions. Groups such as the Women's Action Commission, the Women's Trade Union Commission and the various Working Women's Centres through conferences and meetings, produced objectives and guidelines for the trade union movement to address the needs of working women (Booth and Rubenstein, 1990: 124-126). A Working Women's Charter was drawn up, which was then adopted by the ACTU Congress in 1977. Booth has argued that the adoption of the Charter marked the end of one era and the beginning of another, in that a broad coalition of trade unions and women's liberation activists had united to achieve the adoption of a comprehensive women's policy (Booth and Rubenstein, 1990: 126). Following the adoption of the Charter, the ACTU women's committee was established to ensure the goals of the Charter were implemented by the movement.

Within the Charter, emphasis was given to the need for women workers to "be actively encouraged by trade unions to stand for elected office to ensure that union executives are fully representative of all union members" (cited in Deery and Plowman, 1991: 294). Although this goal was set in 1977, in 1989 Bill Kelty, secretary of the ACTU stated that,
The Australian trade union movement cannot pretend to be representative of women if we have within the ranks of Congress and union leadership far fewer women than is warranted. (Kelty, 1989).

More recently, in the report *Unions 2001*, the issue of women's role and voice was considered essential for unions, with particular emphasis given to increasing women's involvement at every level of the organisation (Evatt Foundation, 1995: 61).

Little systematic data exists concerning the representation of women within the various levels of union structures. Various small studies have been undertaken to gauge the extent of women's under representation, and while little of it is comparable across states, the general indication is that while the number of women in decision-making positions has increased over the last 20 years, women remain disproportionately under-represented (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982; Wilkinson, 1983; WTUC, 1976; Martin, 1975; Donaldson, 1991; Nightingale, 1991; Pocock, 1994).

At national level, in 1976, there were no women on the executives of two of the major union confederations, while the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations had two women out of eighteen. By 1995, the ACTU had 26 per cent female membership of its executive. A substantial part of this increase resulting from the establishment of three affirmative action positions in 1987. At state level, reserved places for women have also been created on the executives of Trades and Labour Councils in four of the eight states and territories.

Although consensus on affirmative action strategies may be achieved at conference, initiation at branch level is ultimately up to the unions themselves. Pocock notes that it is the full-time elected union officials, particularly union secretaries, who shape union strategies, priorities and methods. Thus, she argues, that the absence or under-representation of women in these positions may be detrimental for the "public face of unionism" (Pocock, 1995a: 14). The data in the table below have been collated from the directories of the ACTU and various trades and labour councils and, as such, cannot be subjected to a rigorous assessment. However, it is sufficient to give an indication of the changes in women's representation in decision-making positions at branch level over the last twenty years.
Table 5.1 Distribution by Gender of Major Office-Holders in Local Trade Unions 1975 and 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women Branch Presidents</th>
<th></th>
<th>Women Branch Secretaries</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>4% (3/74)</td>
<td>30% (7/27)</td>
<td>4% (1/25)</td>
<td>22% (12/54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>1% (1/100)</td>
<td>5% (1/21)</td>
<td>3% (3/102)</td>
<td>17% (10/59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>0 (0/28)</td>
<td>6% (1/18)</td>
<td>3% (2/40)</td>
<td>15% (6/41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>0 (0/24)</td>
<td>6% (1/17)</td>
<td>3% (2/58)</td>
<td>15% (6/39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Looking at the number of women presidents it is evident that while the percentage has increased, with amalgamations, the number of women in these positions has not increased at all in NSW and only by one in Queensland and Tasmania. However, larger increases have occurred with respect to branch secretaries, particularly in Victoria and NSW. The inflation of the percentage representation is a result of the amalgamation process which has reduced the number of available official positions. While amalgamations have been cited as detrimental to levels of female representation (Bergqvist, 1991; Pocock, 1995a), it appears that while still limited, women have been able to maintain a representative presence within branches during the amalgamations.

Within the Australian context, it has been suggested that amalgamations "offer unique opportunities for unions to start with a clean slate and build up structures that are more responsive to women's needs" (Nightingale, 1991: 19). The amalgamation process includes the creation of new constitutions and several amalgamated unions have sought to address the issue of women's representation by writing specific rulings into the constitution guaranteeing women greater representation. The Australian Services Union has a female Vice-President elected by women members and a National Affirmative Action Officer, while the Australian Education Union's rules provide for 50 per cent female representation at their National Council. The ACTU also has a target of 50 per cent women's representation at all levels of the union movement by the year 1999.

More research is required before these examples are accepted as the rule rather than the exception. In South Australia, 80 per cent of unions surveyed recently were in the process of amalgamation, but only 25 per cent were adopting...
measures to improve women's representation in the new union. In addition, internal political prioritising, including the balancing of factional interests, may override the discussion of women's interests and the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of union structures has become more complex, despite the rationalisation of positions (Pocock, 1995a). Despite these potential problems, key people in unions are committed to extending affirmative action measures, and several publications have been released to assist unions with planning, implementing and evaluating strategies for action (Muir, 1994; Nightingale, 1991).

In addition to the dearth of women in decision-making positions, women remain under-represented at lower levels of the union hierarchy. In 1975 only 3 per cent of the delegates to the ACTU national conference were women. This increased to 13 per cent in 1983 and 17 per cent in 1987; (1995 figures were not available). Estimates suggest an increase in women's share of full-time union positions from less than 5 per cent in 1971 to about 11-12 per cent in 1985, although women still predominate in the appointed rather than elected positions (Pocock, 1995a: 8). With respect to industrial officers (who participate in direct negotiation with employers), recent figures for South Australia indicate there is 41 per cent female representation in these positions, and 28 per cent in Victoria (Pocock, 1995a: 14). With the move towards enterprise bargaining, the involvement of more women in negotiation has become increasingly important. If women are not on a negotiating team, then it is considered "unlikely that women's special needs will be addressed, unless there are some very enlightened men present" (Transport).

Dismantling the Barriers

In recent years there has been an increasing amount of research undertaken in Australia to investigate what is preventing women from participating more fully within trade unions. Several studies show that women have negative feelings about participating in the internal governance of unions, they lack confidence and sometimes there was little encouragement from within unions to change this view (Nolan cited in Deery and Plowman, 1991: 295; Griffin and Benson, 1989; Pocock, 1994). There is also evidence to suggest that women and men attach priority to quite different issues, with women's interests often being with equal employment opportunities, child care, part-time work and equal pay issues. Yet with male dominance at meetings, these issues are often not addressed, creating disillusionment and a lack of interest amongst women members (Deery and Plowman, 1991: 296-298).
Family responsibilities and a lack of child care are impediments to women's participation in trade union activities (Pocock, 1994). In recognition of this, some unions now vary their meeting times and, if evening meetings are held, then child care and a meal are provided (Public Service, ACT Nurses). Several women unionists noted that many women do not see themselves or their occupation as being one with industrial muscle. Such perceptions are thought to deter not only participation but membership (Clerical, Municipal, ACT Nurses, Public Service). In addition, active discouragement, especially within the more male-dominated occupations, is considered a problem. Some women shop stewards and organisers continue to face sexism from male organisers in their own unions, in other unions, as well as from employers. This can include regular 'baiting' in management meetings, being 'bad mouthed' on site or more covert harassment, such as the withholding of relevant union information (Cleaners, Metal, Public Service, Construction).

Union education has been emphasised as a means by which women can overcome these obstacles. In the Working Women's Charter, unions were told that where necessary "positive discrimination in favour of women attending courses should be exercised to redress current imbalances" (cited in Deery and Plowman, 1991: 294) Within a number of unions, training courses are designed to target women members, shop stewards and consultative committee representatives. Such courses deal with a variety of issues ranging from consciousness raising and developing skills such as assertiveness, minute taking, nominating for elections and negotiating (Textile, Transport, Metal, Public Service, Municipal, Retail). In addition, the Trade Union Training Authority provided specialised courses for women on a regular basis. These courses were often over two days in a live-in environment, encouraging further informal networks to develop between women from a diverse range of industries and occupations (Construction, Nurses).

Participation by women in union activities is facilitated by the Anna Stewart Memorial Project. This project allows women to come out of their jobs, fully paid, for two weeks to work with their union, and gain experience with industrial issues. The individual unions finance this and so participation is ultimately dependent on funding. However, it is viewed by many women unionists as a positive way of encouraging women to become more active (ACT TLC, Textile, Metal, Vehicle Builders, ACT Nurses, Clerical).
Recruitment

There is also significant concern within the union movement at the decline in union membership in Australia. Women's unionisation rates have fallen less than men's, but continue to be less than men's. In this sense, the recruitment of women is a challenge to unions. The ACTU executive has prioritised the issue of recruitment, as have a number of unions. While not all unions see women as a major source for recruitment, some women unionists believe this view will change as male unionists accept the traditional areas of union coverage are shrinking, while the growth sectors in the economy such as finance, tourism, hospitality are industries where there is a high proportion of female employment (ACTU, Bank, Clerical). However, much of this new employment is dominated by casual and part-time employment and outwork - areas which unions have not traditionally targeted.

In some industries, part-time workers have already been targeted, but this tends to be in large worksites (Retail, Vehicle Builders). The trade union representing bank employees is trying to make itself relevant to part-time employees by maintaining a high profile in the enterprise bargaining process and by providing part-time staff with access to the hierarchy of the bank through staff committees. Access to new bank employees, both full-time and part-time at induction courses has been negotiated locally. This has been facilitated by the bank maintaining as members many of the supervisors and managers (Bank). While permanent part-time workers in large workplaces are relatively easy to recruit, reaching part-time and casual women workers in small worksites remains a challenge.

Several unions are seeking to recruit young people as organisers, many of whom are women, in an effort to provide both men and women workers with a view of youth and women in the union movement (Storepersons, Public Service, ACTU). Gains made by unions with respect to gender issues have been highlighted to indicate the relevance of unions to women workers. For example, recruitment campaigns in local government areas have been based on publicising union gains in the areas of Equal Employment Opportunity within the workplace and the provision of family leave (Municipal). Media attention has focused on sexual harassment, recognition of the highly skilled nature of secretarial work, as well as a substantial recruitment campaign within the legal industry, emphasising the usefulness of wage regulation in "protecting the value of the skills these professionals have to offer" (Clerical). Publicity of union activities around
women's issues is also communicated through mainstream and specialised union newsletters (Metal, Retail, Textile, Bank, ACTU).

While still few in number, women are however, becoming increasingly obvious in the upper echelons of the union movement in Australia. In 1983, Jennie George became the first woman on the ACTU national executive and in 1987 became the first woman assistant secretary on the same body. The presence of several female national secretaries and three women occupying the affirmative action positions have also increased the visibility of women on the ACTU executive. In early 1994, the feminisation of the upper echelons of the union movement made the media headlines (Wilson, 1994: 9; Loane, 1994: 13). The most recent significant achievement in this regard is the election of Jennie George as ACTU President in September 1995.

Having women in high profile and powerful positions within the union movement is seen as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to further the participation and representation of women. While women leaders do not guarantee that women's issues will be dealt with, they are part of the overall strategy (Textile). Women's visibility may help to change members' perceptions of unions, undermine the dominant images of the ACTU as a "bastion of male superiority" and controlled by "out of touch men" (Teachers, Textile, Public Service, ACTU) and has implications for recruitment in that it may give women workers a feeling of association with the union movement.

**Gender-Specific Strategies**

Women in the Australian union movement have, over the last two decades, been quite explicit in identifying the representation of women in gender-specific terms and have adopted strategies which reflect this. Women's committees and caucuses began to appear in a few unions in the early 1970s, but now exist in many unions at national, state and branch level. While they are varied in nature, women's committees are considered important avenues by which issues relevant to women reach the mainstream policy agenda. They are also seen as a crucial part of the overall drive to increase women's participation and representation in trade unions and in the implementation of policies (O'Donnell and Hall, 1988: 14; Trebilcock, 1991).

Many committees facilitate the participation of rank and file women in union activities, providing them with an environment which is comfortable and where
they can meet other union women. In some male dominated unions, women's committees are the only forms of representation and participation to which women have access (Construction, Metal, Transport). Informal networks also exist both within and across unions, providing women unionists with substantial support (Teachers, Textile, Nurses, Metal, Vehicle Builders).

More generally, women's committees are seen as a means by which "women can empower themselves" and see unions as organisations that can "work for them" (Metal, Clerks, Nurses, Municipal). Meetings range from discussing issues and strategies to inviting guest speakers and organising social activities. At branch level, committees tend to be run by rank and file women (which in itself is seen as a training mechanism), but they are also often used as a forum to provide additional training (Construction, Vehicle Builders). Women from outside with specialist training may also be coopted to provide advice or input (ACT TLC, Construction). Getting more women workers active through such committees is considered a key to increasing the numbers of women in representative positions (Metal, Teachers).

Women's committees also provide a forum in which otherwise marginalised issues can be raised, discussed, and policy recommendations formulated. Many of these committees feed into women's conferences where policies are finalised and forwarded to the National Executive and Congress. Union policy statements on women workers, and women's position in unions are now common, but the impetus for change in these documents, and their supplementation with affirmative action programs has often been the result of the activity of women's committees and women's conferences (ACTU, Clerical, Metal, Teachers, Construction).

Women's committees are also cited as an important tool in the implementation of policies, and in monitoring how other union decisions have a differential impact on women. While the ACTU provides guidelines, encouragement, strategies and seeks to set an example, ultimately implementation can only occur at branch level. Most women unionists acknowledged that few men overtly block strategies to increase women's representation. Rather it is inactivity and discouragement on the part of their male colleagues which is most likely to stall implementation. As a result, women's committees are crucial in encouraging women to put themselves forward for nomination at elections, providing women already in such positions with support and continuing to remind union executives of their obligations with respect to policy (Municipal, Metal, Construction, Teachers, Cleaners).
More recently women's officers have been appointed within some unions, either as a result of an amalgamation commitment or as a position jointly funded by state, territory or federal governments and trade unions (the latter then is dependent on a sympathetic government and thus temporary and conditional). In addition to a job description of policy formation, recruitment and changing union culture, women's officers act as a focal point for women's committees, collecting and disseminating information and easing the isolation often felt in policy creation (Municipal, Public Service, Teachers). In turn, women's committees provide the women's officers with contact with women at a grass roots level, necessary for the identification of issues requiring attention. In this sense, women's committees may act as an accountability mechanism for the women's officers (Municipal, Vehicle Builders, Public Service).

At confederation level, the ACTU Women's Committee was established in 1977 after the adoption by the ACTU of the Working Women's Charter. Women from a number of different unions are represented on this committee and its function is to ensure that the goals of the Charter are taken up and implemented by the union movement. There are mixed feelings as to the committee's impact on ACTU policy. The organisational culture of the ACTU is such that committees are seldom formally integrated into the decision making process. In addition, the women's committee is the only ACTU committee without its own budget, thereby limiting the time and resources available, and the extent to which it is seen as a powerful forum. However, providing women's committees with legitimate connections to the union power brokers is constantly pursued and considered essential if women's concerns are to become part of the mainstream union agenda (Retail, Municipal, Public Service, ACTU).

Despite these drawbacks, women unionists maintain that the ACTU women's committee has contributed to changing the consciousness of the ACTU executive with respect to women (ACTU, Public Service, Teachers). Similar comments are also made with respect to the affirmative action delegates, in that while these three women may have no direct impact on the agenda-setting process, their presence in a predominantly masculinist environment "pricks their conscience" and can "provide a different flavour to the way the meetings are run, moving the image away from the grey cardigan old-style male trade unionist" (ACTU, Bank). This in turn has both encouraged and facilitated the inclusion of issues, such as women's representation, parental and family leave and equal pay, on the ACTU's policy agenda (ACTU, Textile).
More and more women unionists are focusing on the strategy of affirmative action to recruit more women members, both in terms of getting women into the industry (Storepersons, Transport, Construction) and into the union (Public Service, Municipal). The ACTU target of 50 per cent women by 2001, and the various targets set by trades and labour councils, have set the tone for individual unions to follow. A number of unions already have affirmative action plans in place, such as the Australian Services Union with its target of proportional representation at all levels by 2003 and the National Union of Workers' target of 20 per cent women by 1998. For these unions implementation is now the challenge. Other unions have accepted the need for affirmative action but are still debating the form this should take (Textile, Public Service, Vehicle Builders, Metal). While affirmative action remains a controversial strategy in several (mostly male-dominated) unions, many of the women unionists believe that without it change would occur too slowly (Metal, Bank, Storepersons, Vehicle Builders, ACT TLC).

Strategies for the implementation of affirmative action plans are still being developed. Training is being provided on affirmative action by some state trades and labour councils, while, in a number of industry unions, delegates and officials are being trained to monitor affirmative action and equal employment opportunity in the workplace (Construction, Transport). Finally, an important incentive for unions to undertake affirmative action is the Affirmative Action Act, 1986, whereby any union with more than 100 employees must develop an affirmative action program and submit an annual report to the Affirmative Action Agency (although from 1997, employers who have met certain criteria need only submit a report every three years (Affirmative Action Agency, 1997)). With the amalgamations that have taken place, more unions have been bound by this law. While there is an acceptance that no one strategy alone will solve the problem of representation and recruitment, women unionists are looking to "affirmative action strategies to achieve the appropriate balance" (Storepersons).

Representing Diversity

Although women-centred strategies are common, acknowledgment is made of the differences that exist between women in the Australian union movement. Politically, women, like their male colleagues, are divided factionally between
right and left, and in some cases this has been exacerbated by the amalgamation process, where unions representative of opposite factions have now merged. Differences are evident between public and private sector women, with gains made in the public sector not always flowing on into the private sector. As a result, large gaps still exist in wages and conditions between women in these two sectors (Clerical, Textile).

A blue/white-collar division is also apparent, particularly with respect to inter-union committees. In some instances blue-collar women felt white-collar perspectives dominated the definition and prioritisation of issues to be pursued, with a focus on issues that did not "recognise the reality of blue-collar women's experience" (Textile). For example several women argued that, as many of their women members are in low paid, low status, casualised and highly exploitable jobs, basic wages and working conditions were just as relevant, if not more relevant than, child care, parental leave and equal employment opportunity (Cleaners, Textile, Retail). However, the presence of blue-collar women on the ACTU women's committee is considered by women unionists as important in encouraging a diverse group of women unionists to share ideas and experiences, thus facilitating an awareness of the differing interests of women workers (Construction, Metal, Nurses). Furthermore, while there are mixed feelings as to whether notions of sisterhood can override these differences (Bank, Textile, Municipal, Public Service, Nurses), maintaining solidarity between women is cited as necessary while the numbers of women in leadership are few. This means seeking to contain and deal with the differences between women inside the women's committee, thus avoiding an ill-afforded splintering at national executive level (Municipal, Metal).

Several women with whom I spoke also noted the difficulties in representing the diverse interests of women within individual trade unions. The wide mix of migrant women, who are often concentrated in the blue-collar, female dominated industries, can contribute to disagreements over selection of delegates (Cleaners). Difficulties arise in ensuring that all workers understand their rights, particularly in regard to the consultation required in the process of enterprise bargaining (Cleaners, Vehicle Builders, Textile). With respect to the latter problem, several unions have most of their information handouts on workplace issues, such as sexual harassment, translated into as many as ten different languages, while unionists continue to push for the incorporation of English-language training into general workplace vocational training programs (Vehicle Builders, Textile).
More diverse representation has been achieved within the Clothing Division of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union (Victorian Branch), where there has been enormous change over the last ten years with respect to full-time union officials. Now, all officials bar one are shop-floor women from non-English speaking backgrounds. They reflect the nationalities, cultures, languages of the workers, and thus have a better capacity to work with membership in ways that involve understanding and acknowledging the differences that exist. "This has made an important difference to how the union is perceived by the members and how we can more easily respond to their needs" (Textile). Within the Vehicle Builders’ Division of the Metal Workers’ Union in Victoria, migrant workers are well represented as shop stewards, facilitating the dissemination of union information to workers from different cultures (Vehicle Builders).

With respect to Indigenous peoples, the Community and Public Sector Union, which is probably the largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, has tried at national level to involve more indigenous women by encouraging links between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee and the women's committee, although there has been little success to date. Within the Australian Education Union the Women’s Officer is involved with policy development concerning the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in educating members on the Native Title Act.

In addition, women unionists commented that although organising separately, they were not seeking to isolate themselves from their male colleagues, many of whom were sympathetic to the cause of women. Because the union movement continues to be male dominated, it is necessary to recognise men as allies. Isolating men would do the cause of women little good (Retail) and as the union movement is based ultimately on collective action so both men and women have to be able to represent women’s issues (Metal, Retail, Construction, Vehicle Builders, ACTU). However, complementing diversity between women and solidarity between women and men with a separate organisational space for women is considered an important part of the overall strategy to change women’s position both in the labour market and in union life (Municipal, Public Service, ACTU).
Assessment

The dominance of craft unionism and the ethos of mateship which permeated notions of solidarity within early trade unions initially served to exclude women from trade union membership. Although women are now members of trade unions, notions of mateship continue to be invoked in the ACTU's call for worker solidarity (Kelty, 1995).

This explicit masculine class discourse has influenced the way women have formulated their interests and articulated their claims, with arguments for inclusion and representation often being made with reference to women's interests. Since the 1970s in particular, strategies focused on the gender-specific have been numerous and their advent has not been unrelated to the increasing presence of a visible and vocal women's movement. Special women's courses, women's committees, caucuses, conferences and networks have burgeoned. Such political spaces have been considered important as support mechanisms and as forums for policy development and implementation. However, ensuring that these spaces have at least semi-formal links with the mainstream trade union decision-making channels has also been important in promoting and facilitating solidarities with men in order to gain support for women's claims.

The issue of representation is seen as critical enough for women unionists to demand targets for speeding up the attainment of proportional representation for women in union hierarchies. Strategies of affirmative action have also been pursued both at the highest level, which has substantially increased the proportion of women represented within the ACTU executive, and within individual trade unions.

Although there exists considerable diversity amongst women workers and trade unionists along factional, occupational and ethnicity lines, women's representation as women is not seen to override these differences, but rather, is viewed as a temporary solidarity, while the numbers of women in leadership are so few. Increasing women's representation is also regarded as necessary to maintain and make new solidarities with women workers who are, or are yet to become, rank and file members.
Women's Wages

With respect to women's wages, women unionists highlighted equal pay as an issue of major concern, despite the gains already made in this area. In this section, then, I discuss the various difficulties perceived by women unionists in achieving equal pay, in particular, the new decentralised wage bargaining environment. I also examine the way in which women unionists have been able to harness existing mechanisms and class strategies to produce gender-specific outcomes.

Equal Pay

In Australia women's inequality has been made explicit through several arbitration rulings made concerning equal pay. The establishment of a family wage in 1907 provided a basic wage for a male worker his wife and three children. This reinforced the notion that women were only to work if single. In 1912, it was established that where women performed men's work equal wages were to be paid so that the earning capacity of men was not threatened. Otherwise women were granted 54 per cent of the male rate of pay, which was increased to 75 per cent in 1950 (Deery and Plowman, 1991: 496-497).

While there were numerous campaigns around the issue of equal pay, it was between 1969 and 1974 that substantial improvements were made in women's wages, largely as a result of considerably lobbying by women's groups both within and outside of the union movement. The Equal Pay Case of 1969 introduced the concept of equal pay for equal work, but because of the sex-segregated nature of the paid workforce it was difficult to argue that women and men were performing equal work. As a result, only 18 per cent of female employees benefited from the decision. In response to this anomaly, the Federal Tribunal adopted a new principle of equal pay for work of equal value in 1972. Wage increases based on this principle were introduced in three uniform steps over the next three years (Deery and Plowman, 1991: 367). A 30 per cent shift in the female-male award wage ratio occurred between 1969 and 1976 (Gregory and Daly, 1990).

However, utilising the test case strategy to achieve equal pay has only proved successful when the claim did not challenge the accepted mode of wage fixation. For example, in 1972, the Arbitration Commission exempted the Male Minimum Wage from its equal pay decision because it contained a 'family component' to
which women were not eligible (Ryan and Conlon, 1989: xv), although in 1974, the equalisation of minimum wages was introduced. Again, in 1986, the ACTU test case on behalf of nurses regarding the introduction of a comparable worth concept was rejected by the Industrial Relations Commission because it sought to introduce a basis for wage fixation that would potentially affect relativities between all workers, not just between women and men.

By contrast, in 1989 the National Wage Case decision included the introduction of the Minimum Rates Adjustment. This process was to ensure that "rates for classifications throughout awards are related appropriately on the basis of relative work value" (Equal Pay Unit, 1992: 1). In this way, Minimum Rates Adjustments were an acceptable alternative to comparative worth, fitting within traditional notions of wage fixing. A significant example of using the Minimum Rates Adjustment process to rectify the historical undervaluation of women's work was the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory child care workers' case. A test case was presented between 1987-1990 and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission eventually decided that a child care worker level three, with one year's experience, was equivalent to the metal/building industry tradesperson, on the basis of the level of competence and training required (Equal Pay Unit, 1992: 4). In addition to a considerable wage increase, the decision also had spinoffs in terms of increased recognition of the professionalism in the industry (Cleaners).

In 1992 a Report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission entitled *Just Rewards* found that the difference in overaward payments reflected practices which constituted direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of sex (HREOC, 1992). While the introduction of supplementary payments and Minimum Rates Adjustments between 1988 and 1991 have compensated many women workers who do not receive overaward payments, these have not been sufficient to overcome the discrepancies in the female-male pay ratio (ACTU, 1995b: 32; Retail). As a result, the ACTU, during 1995 gathered material for an equal pay test case which focused on inequities in overaward payments, to which women workers have had less access primarily because they have been employed in less strategic areas of employment. While several of the claims included in the test case have since been settled by particular unions and employers, the test case is proceeding for at least one other claim. The test case strategy has also been applied within industries with the Clothing Union winning a case in 1987 which allowed outworkers to have same rights to pay and conditions as those working in factories (Textile).
Women unionists see the test case approach as effective, but only as part of the broader agenda of change. While it helps to address systemic discrimination, relying solely on test case rulings “does not encourage grass roots understanding” of the struggle around issues of pay and conditions (Textile). Verbal struggle through submissions and the witness box is not seen to contribute to the ever-important consciousness-raising of workers (Cleaners, Textile). Nevertheless, the test case is cited as an important strategy in establishing new minimum standards on a national basis which unions and labour councils then seek to have flow on into awards (ACTU).

**Award Restructuring**

In Australia, wages and working conditions are generally set out in awards made by industrial tribunals, which are legally binding. Awards play a significant role in extending and maintaining industrial benefits for workers and provide the primary safety net for workers. Within this context, industrial relations legislation has been concerned with setting the boundaries and the rules by which labour market players abide and with setting minimum standards for those not covered by awards. The latter has been particularly important in those occupations not covered by awards. For example, in areas such as home care, child care, and outwork - employment undertaken predominantly by women - awards have, until recently, been non-existent. Several women unionists highlighted that putting awards in place to provide decent wages and conditions is their primary goal. Maintaining these awards is also cited as crucial, particularly as the structure of the workforce continues to change with new jobs arising and with changes in the overall political and industrial relations environment (Cleaners, Textile).

In 1988, the ACTU won a decision from the Arbitration Commission to remove discriminatory provisions in awards. This was significant in that many awards had different wages and classifications for women, restrictions on women working overtime and shifts, or with dangerous machinery and heavy weights (Donaldson, 1991: 111). Section 150A of the new Industrial Relations Act (1993) has strengthened this decision by requiring the Industrial Relations Commission to review awards every three years to ensure they are non-discriminatory. Several women’s officers within unions have made reviewing all award provisions their priority (Municipal, Public Service, Teachers, Transport). This is quite a substantial task as some industries have over 200 awards.
Perhaps the most significant change in the area of awards has been their restructuring. Since 1988, there has been a process underway whereby awards have been simplified and classifications broadened but the number reduced. Award restructuring has been seen by some as offering possibilities for women, in terms of recognising and reclassifying women's skill, providing access to skill related career paths and redesigning jobs in less sex-stereotyped ways (Henry and Franzway, 1993:135). In seeking to facilitate such possibilities, the ACTU has produced a set of guidelines for unions to recognise the issues especially important for women in restructuring awards (ACTU, 1990).

For some industries, such as banking, this has been detrimental to women workers who predominate in the low-status jobs, which have been downgraded (Bank, Pocock, 1995b). However, for other women workers, this reclassification has actually meant an increase in the number of grades to better reflect their varying degrees of skill and often an increase in wages (Retail, Clerical). A top-level machinist is now recognised as equivalent to a trades person, while a grade three clerical worker is ranked alongside a class one fitter or a truck driver. In the past, the definition of skill has been an important factor in justifying lower pay levels for women. Linking 'women's jobs' to trades is an important step in overcoming the under-valuing of many occupations, as was evident in the child care workers' case, and such an outcome is described as very important to the unions' ability to push for continued improvements in wages and training (Clerical, Retail, Textile, Cleaners).

Women unionists have also sought to harness the concepts of career structure and professionalisation, explicit goals of award restructuring, to improve the promotion and wage prospects for women, particularly in female dominated industries such as teaching and nursing (Teachers, Nurses). However, career paths are also becoming more blurred with the increasing casualisation of work and the increased use of contractual arrangements (Teachers, Nurses, Bank).

Within male dominated industries, undermining the traditional views of skills remains a problem. Strength and stamina are still considered the important qualities in heavy industry environments. Gender segmentation continues to exist within these industries and, as a result, combating pay inequity is seen as inherently connected to combating gender segregation (Vehicle Builders, Metal). This has been achieved to some extent through workplace reform within the vehicle building industry, with a move away from the Taylorist mass production
model to a job-rotation system, enabling workers to partake in a wider variety of jobs and providing them with greater control over their work. This rotation has led to an increase in women's skill acquisition and some increase in wages. This workplace reform was not sought from a gendered perspective, as it is seen to benefit all workers, but it is thought to have the potential to have an impact on the division of labour within male-dominated industries (Vehicle Builders).

Countering Decentralisation

During the mid-1980s, the ACTU began to shift the focus of wage fixation away from the Arbitration Commission to collective bargaining, where low paid workers are disadvantaged. The two-tier wage system introduced in 1987 helped low paid women workers by first providing a flat-rate increase for all workers with the second increase dependent on negotiation between unions and employers.

However, it was the move to an enterprise focus in the 1990s which represented the most significant change in the wages system since the development of the award system in 1907. Enterprise bargaining, it is argued, offers opportunities for workers to take more direct control over their wages and working conditions (Evatt, 1995: 38). Within the vehicle building industry, enterprise bargaining has been in place for some time. In addition to the regular log of claims, paid maternity leave has been agreed to in principle, while family leave arrangements and some child care provisions have been accepted by several large companies (Vehicle Builders). In several larger banks, enterprise bargaining has enabled employees to have some power over regulating their own work hours and work days, with compulsory consultation on this process, as well as access for more women to structured training programs (Bank). Large retail employers are also working with unions over enterprise agreements to eliminate inconsistencies across states, restructure awards, incorporate penalty payments into wage rates and extend the spread of hours, all of which are considered beneficial to employees (Retail).

With enterprise bargaining has come a new commitment to detailed training plans. However, it appears, at this early stage, that the jobs and skills of well organised and powerful groups of workers are usually well defined and linked to formal training structures. By contrast, in industries where women predominate, traineeship courses are often not given the same weighting and recognition as trade certificates. In addition, several analyses have indicated that full-time
workers predominate in the acquisition of training, while part-time, casual, non-English speaking and lower-status workers (many of whom are women) are less likely to be represented in structured forms of training (Smith and Ewer, 1995; Textile, Vehicle Builders). Family responsibilities are also highlighted as potentially restrictive on women's access to training (Transport, Public Service, Bank, Vehicle Builders). Despite these difficulties, women unionists still see accredited training as a necessary strategy for increasing women's economic equality but argue that such training should be linked with affirmative action and equal employment policies and monitored accordingly (Henry and Franzway, 1993; Smith and Ewer, 1995, Municipal, Public Service).

Jennie George, now President of the ACTU, argued that enterprise bargaining is a form of "managed decentralism", in that the award system continued to underpin enterprise bargaining (ACTU). Indeed, maintenance of awards is considered by several women unionists as a crucial strategy for securing at least basic wages and conditions for those unable to conclude agreements. The Industrial Relations Act (1993) also provided several safeguards for women, through compulsory consultation with "special interest groups", new equal pay provisions, the award review process and continued access to conciliation and arbitration.

However, despite the award safety net, several women unionists argued that there exist considerable differences in capacity between unions to partake in enterprise bargaining, since it is a resource-intensive and time-consuming process. In smaller workplaces and sectors which are industrially weak and are not highly unionised, the employers' ability to undercut costs by cutting wages and conditions is accentuated (Clerical, Retail, Textile). Such disparities in bargaining power between unions has the potential to undermine worker solidarity and increase the gap in both wages and conditions between groups of workers (Textile, Cleaners, Clerical).

Furthermore, the new emphasis on productivity which accompanies enterprise bargaining encourages concession bargaining, enabling conditions to be traded off for wage increases. In this sense, protecting gains made in the areas of equal employment opportunity (EEO) and occupational health and safety (Nurses, Transport, Vehicle Builders, Bank, Clerical) is considered a priority by several women unionists. There have been some successes in this area with many employers creating EEO programs, and committees (Retail, Municipal, Bank, Nurses, Teachers, Public Service, Metal). With respect to health and safety, the training of union officers and job delegates is a strategy used to better monitor
workplace environments and, in some industries, national committees on occupational health and safety exist which are representative of both unions and employers, (Nurses, Public Service). However, for several of the women unionists with whom I spoke, the priority of maintaining wages and job security for their workers was higher than the provision of EEO initiatives (Cleaners, Textile, Retail).

Several women unionists argued that trade unions which have primarily focused on the needs of male workers in the past need to rethink this position, especially as male-dominated unions have more industrial strength and set the scene for other unions (Municipal, Nurses, ACT TLC Transport). Teaching men to see "women's issues" as mainstream industrial issues, relevant to men as workers and, hence, requiring effective representation at the bargaining table, is also seen as crucial (ACTU, Construction, Storepersons). To this end, considerable work is required educating unionists generally and male industrial officers specifically of the differential impact of policy on women and men. Training courses are now being provided in a number of unions to change the attitudes of unionists and workers alike. Guidelines on the importance of the negotiation process in seeking provisions for family leave and child care have been produced and women's officers are also monitoring the way in which women's issues are negotiated (Municipal, Clerical, ACT TLC, Textile).

Assessment

For many years, women were marginal to the wage fixing system in Australia. Women had different basic wages to men and their skills were considered of less value so their marginal rates were lower. After the transition to a total wage concept, different total wages were maintained for men and women and it was not until 1974 that the explicit male minimum wage was replaced with an adult minimum wage.

However, women within the trade union movement have been most adept at using the state regulated system, particularly the test case mechanism, to pursue better wages and conditions both within an individual industry and with respect to equal pay across all sectors. The 1972 Equal Pay Decision was particularly important in reducing the gender wage differential. Women unionists have also used the process of award restructuring to remove discriminatory clauses from awards and to reclassify women's skill levels, thereby providing women workers with access to better wages. The increased emphasis on training that followed the shift to
productivity-based bargaining in 1993 led to strategies focused on providing better access to training for women workers. Finally, the introduction of job rotation within male dominated industries was supported by women as having the potential to provide women with multi-skilling and ultimately higher wages. All of these mechanisms were initiated as class-based reforms, but have been seen by women trade unionists as having the potential to increase the wages of women and have, accordingly, been harnessed and imbued with gender specificity thereby providing particular benefits to women workers.

It is the move to enterprise bargaining which is considered by most women unionists to be the biggest threat to women's wages and conditions. Studies indicate that the more decentralised the wage system, the wider the gender gap between male and female earnings (Ruggie, 1984, Whitehouse, 1992, O'Donnell and Hall, 1988). Since the inception of enterprise bargaining several studies have been undertaken analysing the impact of workplace bargaining on women, the findings of which have been mixed (Stephen, 1995). In 1992, the Department of Industrial Relations found that women and part-time workers were less likely than men and full-time workers to be covered by a workplace wage agreement. In female-dominated workplaces, employees were less likely to have the bargaining strength to obtain wage increases as productivity increased (Evatt Foundation, 1995: 90). Similar results were found in a NSW study of 345 enterprise agreements (NSW DIRETFE, 1993). While ACTU figures suggest that women have kept pace with average wage rises, this is only where agreements are concluded (ACTU, 1995b).

Women trade unionists have shown concern as to how this change in bargaining will affect women workers, particularly those concentrated in casualised, low unionised and smaller work sites; areas where workplace agreements are scarce. In response to this change, women unionists in less powerful unions have focused primarily on preserving benefits already achieved, such as award conditions, since it appears unlikely that from a weak position women can bargain for more. Some women in stronger unions have been able to obtain better conditions. Further research monitoring of how women fare under enterprise bargaining is being conducted by several unions, the ACTU, the Human Rights Commission and the Equal Pay Unit of the Industrial Relations Department. However, ensuring a gender perspective is represented at the negotiating table is considered crucial in maintaining women's levels and pay and conditions.
Women's Working Conditions

In this section, I examine the working conditions which women trade unionists view as requiring further attention if women workers are to achieve equality in the workplace and the strategies employed by women unionists to address these concerns. What is apparent is that all of the women unionists with whom I spoke saw the issue of reconciling paid work with family responsibilities as important, while most also expressed concern over the conditions of part-time workers and with sexual harassment.

Reconciling Paid and Unpaid Work

Labourism in Australia has an orientation toward wage earner security and welfare provision based on need. To this end universal welfare provision and welfare state expansion has not been seen as an important policy priority. The dominant view has favoured selective policies designed to alleviate poverty and promote income redistribution (Castles and Mitchell, 1993: 94). However, provision has also reflected a traditional belief in a male breadwinner model in which women were, at best, secondary participants in the labour market. Prior to the equal pay decisions, the structure of the wages system reinforced these dependencies and up until the mid-1980s, a woman was eligible for support from the state by virtue of her dependent status as wife, widow or mother. However, the industrial arena has proved a fruitful environment through which women could pursue an extension of provisions to ease the conflict between the dual responsibilities of paid work and family.

While a Maternity Leave Act had been passed in 1973, this was limited to federal public servants. In 1979, working women won twelve months unpaid maternity leave in a test case before the Federal Arbitration Commission. This ruling applied to all women working under federal awards, although the provisions had to be inserted into each federal award on application by individual unions. Women received protection against sacking or demotion as a result of being pregnant and, for some women in the private sector, this is still seen as an important achievement (Vehicle Builders, Textile).

During the mid-1980s, there occurred a change in the rhetoric and direction of welfare policy, with pensions being redefined as parental or individual allowances rather than in terms of being a wife or mother. Bryson argues this represents a
reconstruction of women as workers as well as mothers, moving beyond the "legitimate dependent" status (Bryson, 1994: 191). This redefinition is reflected in the strategies employed by women trade unionists, with the ACTU commencing a test case on Parental Leave in 1989, claiming one year of unpaid parental leave for fathers, three weeks of which would be available to fathers at the birth and the remainder being available up to the child's second birthday. The Commission provided the 52 weeks leave for a parent. Once again affiliated unions were then expected to make application to vary federal awards to incorporate the new parental leave award clause (ACTU, 1991: 1-2).

More recently, the test case strategy has been used in conjunction with ILO Convention 156, which the Government ratified in 1990 after substantial lobbying from the ACTU and women's organisations. This Conventions calls for governments to implement policies which cater for the needs of workers with family responsibilities. To this end, the ACTU ran a test case during 1994 seeking the provision of five days special family leave. The Commission ruled that there be an aggregation, extension, and more flexible arrangement of existing leave entitlements: more specifically that access to sick and special leave be available to provide care for sick family members. Other facilitative provisions were introduced: one week of annual leave may be taken in single days; that employees be allowed to make up time for time off and that employees be allowed to take unpaid leave to care for sick family members (Australian Industrial Relations Commission, 1994: 38-41). However, these provisions are decided upon and applied at enterprise level, once again highlighting the importance of having a gender perspective represented at the local negotiation table.

There have been mixed reactions as to whether this test case was a success. The ACTU sees it as a such, while others view it as a disappointment since no extra leave was provided and note the danger that what was given "may actually be a threat because people don't fight the issue any further" (Public Service, Clerical). In addition, several public sector unions have awards with more favourable conditions, which women unionists may have to fight to maintain (Municipal, Public Service).

Nevertheless, running test cases is considered an effective way of getting issues raised and an excellent way of providing conditions that have not previously been achievable in particular industrial areas. Strategies for further gains in this area
include making a case for the extension of the definition of family, an initiative that came out of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community (Public Service, ACTU, Metal).

Women have also been able to make some gains through the involvement of the union movement in the Accord process. While the ACTU has continued to advocate that paid maternity leave for all women workers be recognised as a basic necessity for achieving equality for women in the workforce, this was considered too difficult to win industrially in the private sector (ACTU). Instead, the Accord context enabled the ACTU and the Government to negotiate a maternity allowance for women, regardless of whether they are in the workforce. In 1995, a means tested maximum allowance of $816 was introduced which provides women in the private sector with a minimum form of paid maternity leave. This is not a comparatively generous provision and maintains the labourist view of state support according to need. However, this initiative was lobbied for and strongly supported by many of the unions covering private sector workers (Retail, Vehicle Builders, Metal, Clerical, Textile). This is a gain that would have been difficult to win through industrial channels (ACTU, Metal, Vehicle Builders). Several of the women unionists with whom I spoke with also felt that the social wage outcomes of the Accord, such as a state-funded medical insurance scheme, an 8 per cent real increase in pensions and an increase in family allowances for low income families had also been of benefit to women workers, compensating for the lack of real wage increases (ACTU, Retail, Cleaners, Textile).

Through the Accord relationship, improvements have also been secured with the expansion of the number of federally-funded child care places by 98,000 between 1983 and 1989 (Deery and Plowman, 1991: 293). The child care cash rebate introduced in 1994 applies to part of the expenses incurred for the professional care of children when a working parent needs to pay for care in order to go to work (other forms of Government support for child care include fee relief for low income families and subsidies for the operating and capital costs of some child care centres). Not all unions supported the child care cash rebate, since it was not means tested, undermining the labourist tradition of needs-based social welfare and seen by some to be providing for the "fat cats and femocrats" rather than women in need (Retail, Cleaners).

Despite the increase in places and rebates, most women unionists suggested that access to affordable child care remained a problem for many of their women workers (Public Service, Nurses, Municipal, Transport, Bank). Admittedly, some
of the larger unions with progressive bargaining agendas were able to include child care provision in their enterprise agreements (Vehicle Builders, Bank). However, for most women unionists the key strategy in the area of child care was continuing to lobby the Federal Labor Government for funding of places, as well as industry initiatives to encourage more employer-provided child-care (Bank, Vehicle Builders, ACTU). The Accord process was useful for such lobbying but with the arrival of the new Conservative government it is not self-evident that such gains will be retained, with universal child care benefits already under threat (EPAC, 1996).

The New Flexible Workforce?

Traditionally, trade unions in Australia have fought to protect full-time jobs, viewing the use of casual or part-time workers as a threat to the best interests of both employees and unions. Over the last twenty years, the number of part-time jobs has increased substantially and women have always predominated in what part-time work has been available, at present making up 81 per cent of the part-time workforce. However, it is only recently that unions have begun to see this work as legitimate and unionisation rates of part-time workers remain low.

Three quarters of all part-time workers are concentrated in three industries, community services, wholesale and retail, and recreational and personal services (Donaldson, 1991: 91). These are all industries in which women predominate. Some trade unions covering these industries have had safeguards for part-time workers built into award provisions, as well as entitling these workers to pro rata award conditions and wages (Retail, Clerical, Public Service). Award restructuring and enterprise bargaining has facilitated an increasing emphasis on permanent part-time work, as opposed to casual work (Retail, Bank). While such a move may provide gains for these workers, early research suggests that, during the negotiation process, care must be taken that this work is not just casual work renamed (Whitehouse, Boreham and Lafferty, 1995).

Despite the ACTU-driven emphasis on permanent part-time work, the more casualised sectors of the work force continue to grow. Low-paid, low status part-time work continues to exist in hospitality, cleaning and other service-based occupations, organisation of which is difficult because of worker mobility and shift work (Cleaners, Textile). Casualisation within banking, retail and the tertiary sector of education has increased and there has also been a substantial increase in outwork in the clothing, clerical and home-based care occupations.
Outwork is performed in the main by women and workers from non-English speaking backgrounds who are easily exploited. The nature of their work is such that they are difficult to organise, receive very poor wages and often face intimidation from employers (Textile, Clerical, Cleaners). Even where awards cover these workers, they are difficult to enforce.

Recently a multi-media campaign was run by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union resulting in a report entitled The Hidden Cost of Fashion. The campaign identified an estimated 330,000 outworkers in the clothing industry in Australia. The campaign provided outworkers with a greater awareness of their rights and the problems associated with outwork were given substantial publicity. The union is looking to continue its work in this area by building networks between the union and ethnic community groups, seeking an extension of the award to force employers to keep better records on outworkers, lobbying government for changes in taxation and social security to better meet the needs for these workers and supporting the establishment of an ILO convention on outwork (TCFUA, 1995: 22-28).

More generally, women unionists are investigating ways of more effectively identifying and communicating with part-time, casual and outworkers, with a view to increasing their levels of unionisation and facilitating the process by which unions can enforce the rights of these workers (Clerical, Cleaners). While enterprise bargaining may have undermined the ability of weaker unions to 'piggy back' on the gains made by stronger unions, recent research does show that unionisation is important in protecting and, in some cases, enhancing the conditions of work (Boreham, Hall, Harley and Whitehouse, 1996: 62). In this sense, the recruitment of those in part-time and casual work is crucial for both unions and workers.

**Sexual Harassment**

ACTU policy is that all employees be allowed to work in an environment free from sexual harassment. However, sexual harassment is still considered by women unionists to be a problem for many women workers. Most commented that there was a need continuously to remind both unions and employers of the existence of sexual harassment and to provide both groups with strategies for dealing with it. Several unions have adopted comprehensive policy positions on sexual harassment, much of the initiative for which has come from women's committees within the unions (Clerical, Metal).
Education has been one of the key strategies applied in implementing policies on sexual harassment. Union organisers, officials and shop stewards have been targeted through training programs. Information on sexual harassment and methods for dealing with complaints are integrated into mainstream training courses and complemented with specialist courses. These are run by individual unions and through the Trade Union Training Authority. Teaching organisers how to handle sexual harassment is seen as important so that cases may be resolved quickly at the workplace, as long and drawn out cases are considered detrimental to all involved (Transport, ACT TLC, Textile).

Trade unions have sought to involve employers in a number of ways. Documents and booklets have been published to provide employers with procedural guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment (ACT TLC, Transport, Metal, Construction). Women unionists are also pushing for the enterprise bargaining agenda to include explicit policies and procedures to be adopted and implemented within a workplace. Some employers have begun to take their role in this process seriously and understand their obligations for involvement. This is thought to have resulted from a combination of continuing pressure by unions for policy changes, as well as highly publicised cases against employers (Bank, Metal). Continuing education of union officials to view sexual harassment as an industrial issue is considered necessary in the new enterprise bargaining environment, particularly if it is to become an integral part of an agreement (Metal, Storepersons, Construction).

Training is also provided for members, informing them of their rights and the avenues through which complaints may be pursued. Information has been provided in booklets, with a large demand for translation (Metal, Textile). Providing access to this material for non-English speaking workers is necessary as in some industries sexual harassment is combined with racial harassment, with many migrant women too afraid to make complaints for fear of losing their jobs (Textile, Metal). The Industrial Relations Act (1988), which has been replaced by the Workplace Relations Act (1996), and the Sex Discrimination Act (1984) guarded against unfair dismissal and discrimination on the grounds of sex. However, turning the grievance into an official complaint to be taken to court is seen to compound the problem. Instead, emphasis has been placed on providing unionists with the skills to provide mediation on site (Textile).
Women's officers and women's committees often become a crucial means of monitoring the issue and ensuring the implementation of preventative strategies. Posters and campaigns have been aimed at encouraging male workers to police the behaviour of colleagues, thus setting in place an internal peer-group monitoring process. Publicity through union publications has also been used to let women know about cases won by their fellow members, thus encouraging them to feel more confident about reporting harassment. Women unionists emphasised that to be seen to be dealing with sexual harassment effectively was necessary not only in upholding the rights of workers, but also for women workers to see unions as relevant (Clerical, Public Service, Municipal, Builders, Metal).

Assessment

For many years, married women were not seen as legitimate participants in the paid labour force and, as a result, social policies which would facilitate this participation were slow in developing. While twelve weeks paid maternity leave was provided for women in the public service, extension of this to all women workers has been dependent on negotiation through enterprise bargaining. Women trade unionists have exploited the Accord that existed between the ACTU and the Labor Government, extracting increases in child care rebates and maternity leave payments to women in the private sector. However, as a strategy, this was dependent on Labor Government encumbancy, which ended in March 1996.

Despite the change of government, many of what in the past have been labelled 'women's issues' have gained credence as industrial issues. Equal employment opportunity, family leave and policies for combatting sexual harassment are now working conditions for which trade unions are expected to bargain. In addition, the wage/social wage trade off that came with the Accord has provided women trade unionists with the opportunity to broaden what is seen to be part of the social wage, in this sense making policies which facilitate women's labour market participation part of the mainstream union agenda.

However, trade unions have been slow in adapting themselves to the changing demographics in the labour market. Women still make up a large number of potential union members, many of whom are in part-time work. Indeed part-time work has increased considerably over the last two decades and, over the last ten years or so, the number of those undertaking outwork has also increased, with the
latter dominated by migrant workers who have different needs again. While women trade unionists were pursuing a variety of strategies, to at least stay in touch with these workers, this is an area which will continue to be a challenge for Australian trade unions. This is especially so with the introduction of enterprise agreements and bargaining on the basis of productivity gains, which provide increasing incentives to move to a more 'flexible' workforce. Arguably, however, obtaining benefits for workers in this context is dependent on their being unionised.

Conclusion

The Australian labourist tradition is one in which class has been inherently linked to ideas of masculinity and mateship. Within the union movement, women were initially excluded and, even when included, unions remained "a product of a distinctive culture of male solidarity" (Aitkin cited in Shute, 1994: 167). Today, despite the increases of women in the paid labour force and overt feminist activity, several women unionists argued that women continue to see trade unions as masculinist institutions.

The links between maleness and class have permeated both wage and social policy. Bryson argues the development of the welfare state in Australia can be seen as an expression of male class politics (Bryson, L., 1992: 161). Through the arbitration system, male workers were provided with a family wage based on the needs of a married man with a family. In this way, the position of women was officially rendered different to that of men and women's exclusion from the paid labour force was officially reinforced (Bryson, 1995: 49). Just as wages were set according to need, so too was welfare provision, although for many years the assumption of women as dependent on a husband remained in place (Bryson, 1995: 69).

The explicit masculinity of the class discourse in Australia, and its reflection in wage and social policy outcomes, has meant that women's struggle against exclusion within the trade union movement has led them to argue for inclusion in a gender-specific manner, embracing the notion of a 'woman's interest' as a means of having their 'needs' met. The insistence on the gender-specificity has had an impact on both the identification of issues and the means by which women unionists have sought to have them addressed. Strategies of separate organising were first expressed early this century with the formation of women's trade unions and are now apparent with the increasing number of women's committees,
conferences, networks and officers. This mode of organising has been crucial in providing women with their own form of solidarity within the union movement. More recently, there has been an emphasis on the importance of increasing the presence of women at all levels in trade unions, evident through the creation of affirmative action delegates.

The separate presence of women has also led to the politicisation of concerns of explicit interest to women, which have then reached the union movement's policy agenda. The issue of sexual harassment, parental leave and equal pay have begun to gain currency in the mainstream industrial arena. In this sense, women's representation as women has been seen as critical in undermining the male-dominated agenda-setting process of the union movement and strategies to further improve this representation are increasingly including affirmative action. To some extent, this strategy reflects previous feminist strategies for the representation of women's interests within the bureaucracy (cf. Sawer, 1990).

Although women have organised separately, they have nevertheless looked to the arbitration system to have their needs met as workers. While the national test case of 1907 set highly restrictive boundaries for women at the time, women subsequently have been able to use this strategy to redraw these boundaries. Achievements in the areas of equal pay, maternity and parental leave and other conditions have been made in this way, which then flow on into awards. Because awards are legally binding on employers, this is considered the most effective means by which gains can be made for women. Furthermore, the Sex Discrimination Act has set standards to which awards must adhere, while affirmative action legislation required trade unions themselves to report on the representation of women. In this way, legislation has supplemented the industrial relations system in encouraging both unions and employers to implement gender-equity reforms.

It is not surprising that, with the recent unprecedented changes to the environment within which Australian trade unions operate, maintenance of the award system and national wage cases are a substantial issue for women workers. Enterprise bargaining, although still underpinned by awards, threatens many of the previous gains made through a centralised negotiation system. To some extent women unionists are still reacting to these changes, seeking protection through special provisions in the amalgamation process and upgrading award conditions. This is not an unusual strategy: women often make gains during times of economic expansion and attempt to preserve them in times of recession.
However, the move toward enterprise bargaining supported by the ACTU and the further deregulation of the industrial relations system under the Coalition Government has favoured, and is likely to continue to favour, those with the most bargaining power, that is, full-time workers in industrially strategic positions, usually men (Nightingale, 1995: 136).

Introduction

Austria is often cited as a corporatist model state. During the 1970s, when many countries were adjusting the effects of hyperinflation, Austria's inflation was contained, unemployment remained low, and economic growth proceeded. At a political level, the corporatist policy-making arrangements have been accepted as legitimate and have remained largely unchallenged (Kemmis, 1994). As will become evident, the labour movement has played a significant role in the creation and maintenance of this corporatist framework. Analyzing how this framework has impacted on the representation of women's interests as workers in the purpose of this chapter is to examine, 1 examine how the historical preconditions in Austria and the corporatist model itself have contributed to the formulation and articulation of women's interests by current trade unions and the emergence that have been instrumental in forming these interests. In doing so, I identify a tendency toward gender stereotypes that a shift in a very real does not disrupt the consensus-oriented politics of Austria and analyze why this has been the case. What appears to be a gender-neutral approach taken by women's trade unions has nevertheless been accepted because of the extended amount of women's labour force participation in Austria.

The Labour Movement in Austria

Austria remained part of the Habsburg Empire until 1918. During the nineteenth century, the conservative regime applied repressive measures in response to the demands of those seeking recognition of national identity and to an effort to control working class organizations. The association of workers was forbidden until 1854 and even after 1870 the working movements were still subjected to harassment by state authorities (G.O. 1949: 24). The number of trade unions nevertheless multiplied in the second half of the nineteenth century, although they were dispersedly organized and composed under Christian or Social Democrat ideas.
Chapter Six

Austria

Introduction

Austria is often cited as a corporatist success story. During the 1970s, when many countries were suffering the side effects of economic crisis, in Austria inflation was contained, unemployment remained low and economic growth continued. At a political level, the corporatist policy making arrangements have been accepted as legitimate and have remained largely unchallenged (Katzenstein, 1984). As will become evident, the labour movement has played a significant role in the creation and resulting outcomes of this corporatist framework. Analysing how this framework has impacted on the representation of women's interests as workers is the purpose of this chapter. In particular, I examine how the historical precursors to corporatism, and the corporatist context itself has contributed to the formulation and articulation of women's interests by women trade unionists and the strategies that have been harnessed to further these interests. In doing so, I identify a tendency toward gender-specific solidarities, albeit in a way that does not disrupt the consensus-oriented politics of Austria and analyse why this has been the case. What appears to be a rather moderate approach taken by women trade unionists has nevertheless begun to create tensions over the entrenched norms of women's labour force participation in Austria.

The Labour Movement in Austria

Austria remained part of the Hapsburg Empire until 1918. During the nineteenth century, the conservative regime applied repressive measures in response to the demands of those seeking recognition of national identity and in an effort to contain working class organisation. The association of workers was forbidden until 1868 and even after 1870 the workers' movement was still subjected to harassment by state authorities (ILO, 1986: 24). The number of trade unions nevertheless multiplied in the second half of the nineteenth century, although they were disparately organised and espoused either Christian or Social Democrat ideas.
The development of social policy in Austria in the 1880s enhanced this conservative/socialist split within the labour movement. The social policy framework developed by Catholic thinkers was aimed at preserving stability and social order, while also mitigating the excesses that capitalist advancement imposed upon farmers and workers (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1984: 179-180).

The system of social policy provision was also explicitly designed to undermine the organisation of the emerging industrial working class. While social reform from above is not uncommon cross-nationally, in Austria, it was imposed in a way which institutionalised divisions between groups of workers. In particular, manual workers were separated from salaried employees, with the latter receiving substantially greater privileges. As a result, wage earner unification was subverted.

Nevertheless, the socialist platform in Austria, labelled Austro-Marxism, saw the state in a positive light and the development of social policy as an important means of persuading the working class of the reformist possibilities under capitalism (Esping-Andersen et al, 1984: 191). Ideologically, they rejected both Bernstein’s revisionism and Bolshevik revolutionism, viewing themselves as standing between the two; rhetorical revolutionaries committed to class struggle, but also dedicated to maintaining political unity and achieving pragmatic reforms (Lafleur, 1978: 217). It is argued that a dualism still persists in that radical party statements are often at odds with the moderate approach actually adopted by the Social Democrats (Sully, 1982: xii). This ideology had a profound influence on Austrian trade unionism, in particular, distinguished by its rejection of violent action and an emphasis on moderation and compromise between both the labour and the state and, later, capital (ILO, 1986: 26).

The reformist orientation of the union movement was disrupted several times between 1920 and 1945; by a conservative authoritarian regime in 1933, civil war in 1934, and the Anschluss in 1938, when independent trade unionism ceased to exist. However, after 1945, consensus and co-operation became key features of Austrian politics. The willingness of the socialists to co-operate with former political and economic rivals was influenced by the tragedies of the inter-war period, 25 years of turmoil and conflict and by a desire for quick independence from allied occupation (Sully, 1988: 57). What resulted was a ‘grand coalition’
between the two major parties between 1945-1966 and a social partnership which has involved institutionalised co-operation between labour, business, agriculture and government around all key aspects of economic and social policy (Guger, 1992: 346).

The Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (ÖGB) founded in 1945 united former members of Christian, Socialist and Communist Unions. Representation of the different parties is provided internally with the parties drawing up lists for elections to the executive of the ÖGB and, while the Social Democrats always predominate, there is a minority voice which helps to stop absolute identification between party and union. The ÖGB covers all sectors of the economy: public, private, and primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. There are now 14 national trade unions, which are not theoretically affiliates, but subdivisions of the ÖGB, with the ÖGB alone being endowed with legal authority. The structure of the ÖGB is highly cohesive and centralised: accentuated by the presence of presidents with "strong personalities" who have remained in office for long periods of time (ILO, 1986: 28). This centralisation is supplemented by organisational unity in that no unions remain outside the umbrella of the ÖGB.

At the local level, the work council is the source of employee representation; there are no shop stewards. If a workplace has five or more employees, a works council must be established if the workers so desire. Councils are elected by proportional representation for a period of four years. In multi-plant enterprises, each works council is entitled to elect a number of its councillors to a central enterprise works council (Traxler, 1992: 274; Cook et al, 1992). While work councils are independent of the trade unions, there is, in practice, substantial overlap. More than 90 per cent of work councillors are estimated to be union members and the use of work councils elections by trade unions to determine representation provides for a highly integrated system. Work councils have become "the backbone of the unions, providing them with organisational essentials such as collecting dues, explaining union policy, and ..... in recruiting members" (Traxler, 1992: 281-282).

In addition to trade union representation, workers have their interests protected by Chambers of Labour, membership of which is compulsory (unlike trade unions). Established by law in 1920 in response to long standing demands by trade unions for bodies similar to those already existence for employers, there is a Chamber of
Labour in each of the nine Austrian provinces and single uniting body at Federal level. At the political level, all proposals for legislation at local, provincial and federal level must be submitted to the Chambers of Labour (as well as to the Chambers of Business and Agriculture) for expert appraisal before being considered by the appropriate legislature.

Although the membership and leadership of the Chamber of Labour and the ÖGB often overlap and the two organisations co-operate on many issues, they do, nevertheless, have different functions. The ÖGB is responsible for collective bargaining, while the Chamber provides training, cultural activities, legal advice for workers and statistical and technical information to trade unions (Traxler, 1992: 270; ILO, 1986: 28-33). The existence of two networks of labour organisations, representing the interests of workers to the government and employers, is unique to Austria.

Austria has been labelled the most corporatist of states, since the members of the social partnership, the Chambers of Business, Labour and Agriculture and the ÖGB, play a significant role in regulating the labour market, planning the social security system and coordinating trade policy (Milner, 1994: 120). There are considerable links and influence between the ÖGB and the Social Democratic Party with many senior union leaders being members or ministers in parliament and business has equally strong links with the Peoples Party on the right (Gerlich, 1992: 133). The integration of the four major players with their associated political parties both strengthens their authority over members and guarantees representation in parliament and government (Traxler, 1992: 277; Gerlich, 1992: 138; see also Sweeney, 1988; Tálos and Kittel, 1996).

Although the government has no formal place in the social partnership, cabinet ministers and state secretaries often take part in meetings with the economic interest groups (Compston, 1994; Gerlich, 1992: 135). Governments have also sought to formulate economic and social policy within parameters set by the social partners and often obtain their consent prior to implementation (Compston, 1994: 127).

A key feature of the partnership is its informality. Although the Chambers are by law required to be consulted, involvement by the ÖGB and government representatives is accepted by convention. A small number of functionaries who
know each other attend the meetings in which compromises are negotiated. It is argued that such informality is necessary for the successful operation of the consensus mechanism by creating "a climate of great mutual respect and understanding" (Gerlich, 1992: 137; see also Traxler, 1992). It is taken as given that the issues and options discussed are only those on which compromise and agreement are possible. Alternatives which would be unacceptable to one of the partners are not raised (ILO, 1986: 63; Gerlich, 1992: 137).

Corporatist policy-making is often seen as undemocratic in that it takes place outside of the parliament, it may suppress dissenting voices and involves a narrow and often purely functional conception of interest representation (Head, 1994: 279). In the case of Austria, exclusion of populist movements from the policy-making process was intentional in an effort to maintain social cohesion in the immediate post-war period. Since this time, Austrian corporatism has proved considerably durable, arguably for a number of reasons: as a result of the need for national unity in the post-war period and in an effort to exploit Austria's location as an extension of Western Europe into the East (Milner, 1994: 121). There is also a culturally based belief in the value of the social partnership (Katzenstein, 1985), accentuated by the successes produced in regard to economic growth and low unemployment. More recently, however, with Austria having recently joined the European Union, the relevance of this corporatist model and the social partnership is coming under scrutiny (Prisching, 1993; Nowotny, 1993).

Despite the institutionalisation of labour representation in the social partnership, the equally strong presence of the right in the electoral arena of politics has undermined the potential for a hegemonic social democratic presence in Austria. Indeed, it was not until the formation of a one-party Social Democrat government in 1971 that reform of the status-oriented social insurance system occurred, with 1979 being the year when conditions in key areas of social protection were equalised between workers and salaried employees (Esping-Andersen et al, 1984: 193). Furthermore, although the creation of the ÖGB in 1945 united both Christian and Social Democratic trade unions, factions still exist, the representation of which is determined through the use of party lists in local work council elections. This is an informal channel through which workers interests are processed and unified, then represented within the policy-making arena of the upper echelons of the ÖGB (Traxler, 1992: 281-282; Nowotny, 1993).
The central instrument of Austria's social partnership is the Parity Commission for Wages and Prices, wherein the framework for wage agreements is negotiated, linking incomes policy with state economic policy. Within this environment, the ÖGB's position has been to pursue full employment by promoting economic growth and wage restraint rather than through active labour market policies. While the focus on productivity as a basis for wage policy development has helped keep unemployment comparatively low, a solidaristic wage policy has not been forthcoming, with substantial wage differentials evident between sectors (Traxler, 1992: 282; Traxler, 1994). Indeed, the Austrian trade union movement has no explicit distributive goals, with its policy based instead on an ideology of strong economic growth. It has been argued that seeking redistribution through wage policy would lead to lower investment, reduced long-term productivity growth and ultimately lower real wage increases (Guger, 1992: 35).

While Austro-Marxism never espoused a revolutionary overthrow of the state by the working class, it was primarily the disruptive political upheavals between 1918 and 1945 which led to cooperation between the social partners. The desire for national unity in an effort to rebuild the state of Austria was espoused by both the left and the right. As a result, class politics in Austria in the post-war period has been very much more about class consensus than class struggle, with strikes and lockouts seldom pursued. While the social partnership and its intimate links with the parliamentary arena have provided labour with an opportunity to participate in the economic and social policy making process continuously since 1945, class politics has been conservative in the sense that status-oriented social policy and broad economic inequalities were largely sanctioned by the left prior to 1970, with little change since this time with respect to the market orientation of wages policy.

The Position of Women in Austria

While the Hapsburg Empire was Catholic, conservative and authoritarian, it took a somewhat inconsistent position regarding the rights of women. In terms of political rights, women were granted considerable legal powers over their own property and, in 1848, the property franchise explicitly included women, although it pertained to only a small number, since most women lost their property rights on
marriage (Bader-Zaar, 1996: 61; Evans, 1977: 93). In contrast, a law of 1867 banned women in Austria from joining or forming political associations.

With respect to economic rights, the 1812 Code of Law required that women obey their husband's directions for managing the household and children, yet women were legal persons entitled to enter into contracts and take up any job except a trade without asking permission from their husbands (Evans, 1977: 93; Anderson, 1992). However, this legal freedom to participate in the labour force was later abolished and not reinstated until the reform of family laws in the mid-1970s. While middle class women worked only prior to marriage (the norm up until the post-war period), both married and unmarried women laboured all their lives as domestics or in menial factory jobs (Nowotny, 1981: 149). Catholic trade unions sought to prohibit all labour force participation by women, but this was not considered feasible, since proletarian families were unable to survive on one income (Lafleur, 1978: 237).

Instead, both Catholics and Social Democrats sought protective measures for working women, with the latter arguing that their support for protective legislation was based on "no separate protection for women as such, but protection for woman as mother .... This lies not only in the interests of women but is significant for the whole proletariat" (Lafleur, 1978: 237). As will become evident, this motivation to protect women as mothers continues to permeate arguments surrounding the provision of maternity leave and night work in Austria.

During the 1950s, Austria had a comparatively high rate of labour force participation, primarily a result of post-war reconstruction (Biffl, 1996). In 1960, the female labour force participation rate in Austria was 52.1 per cent, surpassed only by Japan and Finland (Schmidt, 1993: 182). However, over the last 30 years, the female labour force participation rate in Austria (like its German-speaking counterparts) stagnated, with the rate at 53.5 per cent in 1990 (OECD, 1995). In 1995, women's labour force participation had risen to 62 per cent, probably as a result of a five per cent growth in service sector employment and a similar percentage point growth in part-time work over the last five years (OECD, 1996).

There are several significant factors that have contributed to the long period of stagnation in women's labour force activity in Austria. To begin with there has
been far lower growth in Austria's tertiary sector than elsewhere in the OECD, while the industrial sectors have remained relatively large. Austria's industrial sector is dominated by small and medium-sized specialist firms (Katzenstein, 1984), which are characterised by jobs, skills and subcultural patterns, arguably resistant to the recruitment of women (Schmidt, 1993: 194). Public sector employment as a share in total employment rose from only 14.1 per cent to 18.5 per cent between 1970 and 1979. The same pattern is evident in respect of the functional classification of community, social and personal services, the share of which in total employment only increased by one percentage point (from 23 to 24 per cent) between 1972 and 1980 (Scharpf, 1984: 267). With little expansion in this sector, it is not surprising that women's labour force participation has stagnated.

Part-time work is also a means by which married women are drawn into the labour market. However, in Austria the growth in part-time work has been minimal. In 1973, part-time employment made up 6.4 per cent of total employment and this had risen to only 9.1 per cent in 1992. In 1975, 14 per cent of women in the labour force worked less than 35 hours per week, while 86 per cent worked full-time (Steinberg Ratner, 1978: 15). By 1987 this had risen to 16 per cent and had increased to 20 per cent by 1990 (Wolf and Wolf, 1991: 13). Since much of the growth in part-time work occurs through the expansion of the tertiary sector, a phenomenon not evident in Austria, it is not surprising that part-time work has also remained stagnant.

Finally, it should also be noted that there remains a large reserve of women who are potentially available for employment but are not officially classified as unemployed and receive no unemployment benefits. Statistics indicate that approximately 50 per cent of women of working age are without paid employment of any kind, a large proportion of them married (Rowthorn, 1992: 124). These labour market conditions, combined with the traditional view of the role of women within the family which has long since predominated in Austria have, as will become evident, impacted on the responses of both trade unions and women to policy issues relating to women's paid work.

In terms of wage inequality, women wage and salary earners on average receive only 70 per cent of what their male counterparts earn. This figure takes account of
the larger share of women in part-time work. Women are over-represented in the low wage earner category, with 26 per cent of female blue and white-collar workers earning less than 10,000 Austrian Schillings (AS), which is considered to be the minimum wage, while only eight per cent of men earn less than this (Wolf and Wolf, 1991: 20). There are also a considerable number of women foreign workers whose earnings are lower still (SSGCW, 1991: 52). While corporatist arrangements in Austria have led to economic growth and low unemployment, they have not led to an increase in employment, particularly of women, nor to a decrease in the gender-wage differential.

Women and Representation in the Austrian Union Movement

In this section I outline the means by which women workers have sought to organise themselves in Austria over the last century and review the contemporary position of women in trade union elites. I also assess the barriers that are considered to constrain women's election to higher office and the strategies women unionists have undertaken to remove these barriers. Particular regard is given to the role of women's divisions, which have a long history in the Austrian trade union movement. All of the women unionists with whom I spoke considered increasing the representation of women to be an important strategy in providing women workers with a voice.

Inclusion and Representation

The employment conditions of women became a focus for women's organisation as early as 1866 with the creation of the Vienna Women's Employment Association, which, amongst other things, campaigned for the admission of women to jobs in the postal and telegraph service (Evans, 1977: 93). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the representation of the interests of women workers took a variety of forms. Self-help organisations were initiated by middle class women in paid work to combat discrimination in their workplaces. Women were also often excluded or ejected from membership in existing unions and, in response, established their own, with the Association of Women Teachers and Governesses set up in 1870 and the Association of Women Postal Officials being created in 1876. In 1901, the Union of Working Women was founded to represent women officials in banks, railways, insurance and legal offices, as well as secretaries.

Another middle class women’s initiative was the General Austrian Women’s Association founded in 1893, which was not confined to any one concern but encompassed many issues, including women’s suffrage and the employment conditions of working class women (Anderson, 1992: 39). In particular, the Association was committed to reform regulations concerning domestic service where every eighth woman in Vienna was a servant whose conditions were “brutal and anachronistic” (Anderson, 1992: 76). While these various associations remained autonomous from political parties, they did not view their feminist ideology as separatist. Dependence on male members of Parliament was necessary without direct representation. This cooperation with men was considered acceptable since the women’s movement was viewed as more than just concerned with women’s rights, but rather as one of a number of social reform movements with the same goal; the progress of humanity (Anderson, 1992: 17-20).

While the middle class women’s associations supported several issues relevant to working class women, the latter also found representation in the Social Democratic or Catholic unions and parties (Anderson, 1992: 35). Working class women had extended their labour force participation from agricultural and household work into industry in 1890s and women’s participation in industry was further stimulated by the advent of World War One. However, male workers considered this participation to be unfair competition and responsible for the lowering of wages. In response, socialist women called on women to join their male colleagues in trade unions and working women were provided with representation by the Chambers of Labour established in 1920 (Lafleur, 1978: 237-238).

Women’s separate organisation was substantially restricted by a law established in 1867 which banned women from joining or forming political associations. Prior to 1914, all attempts by women to have this law repealed were unsuccessful and this impacted on the demands women’s associations could make, since too radical a programme would result in the dissolution of their organisations (Evans, 1977: 94). As a result, these women’s organisations tended to focus on a wide range of reforms including vocational training, pension rights and health insurance which were acceptable to the authorities (Anderson, 1992: 37, Evans, 1977: 95). For
working class women, this law made it difficult to organise separately from the Social Democrats. This position was reinforced by Social Democrat leader Victor Adler who was openly opposed to a separate women's movement and accordingly advised women not to risk violating the Law of Association by engaging in political action independent of the Social Democrats (Evans, 1977: 166).

Within the Social Democrat Party, the rhetoric was one which emphasised class over sex as the driving force for social change, with women's emancipation to follow socialist revolution. As a result, most socialist women subordinated their demands and their interests to Party policy and Party unity (Bader-Zaar, 1996: 63; Lafleur, 1978: 219). This was exemplified by Social Democrat women in Austria abandoning the call for women's suffrage in 1906 to concentrate on the fight for universal manhood suffrage.

Evans (1977: 167) has argued that the Austrian Socialist women's movement benefited considerably from the granting of universal manhood suffrage in 1907. In 1896, women were unable to get party backing for an official women's organisation and despite resolutions passed by women's congresses in 1898 and 1903, trade union opposition had prevented the formation of local women's clubs. After manhood suffrage, women at local level threatened to break away and the Social Democrat Party and trade unions, fearful of losing the women altogether, allowed for the establishment of official women's organisations.

In 1925, the Vienna Chamber of Labour entrusted Käthe Leichter, a socialist feminist, with creating a department for problems concerning women's work. Leichter began collecting survey data on the position of domestic workers and industrial outworkers, which showed that 95 per cent were women, 60 per cent of whom were paid poor wages. Leichter used this material to push demands for improved working conditions, more factory inspections and equal pay. In the process, Leichter made contact with women union activists, working with them to make further gains for working women. This established a link between the top echelon of women unionists and the head of the women's department in the Chamber of Labour, a link which still exists today (Bei, 1990: 2-4; see also Lafleur, 1978).
By 1934, women workers in Vienna made up 26.4 per cent of trade union membership. Despite this presence, trade unions did little to alter the impression that women were unwanted in the workplace. Generally, there was little effort made to integrate women workers or to accord them positions in their organisations either as shop stewards or as delegates to congress (Gruber, 1991: 153). While women's divisions were maintained at both national and confederation level within the trade unions and the Chambers of Labour, Cook et al argue (1992: 64) that these were not intended by male trade unionists to be divisions with any power.

Separate women's divisions continued to be a feature of the Austrian trade union movement in the post-war period. The structure of the ÖGB, created in 1946, included a women's department and most trade unions today have organised women's divisions which are replicated at the provincial level. These divisions often have full-time staff at confederation and national union levels and in regional and local offices wherever women make up substantial portions of union membership (Cook et al, 1992: 65).

The existence of women's divisions guarantees at least minimal representation of women since the division head is usually an ex-officio member of the trade union's national executive. However, in the four national trade unions with close to, or over, 50 per cent female membership (listed in Table 6.1), in none does women's representation at the executive decision-making level (the Praesidium) reflect their proportion of membership.

| Public Service | 0% (0) | 42% |
| Textile       | 40% (2/5) | 70% |
| Hotel         | 50% (2/4) | 75% |
| Private Sector| 14% (2/14) | 43% |

Source: Interview data.

However, in the Union of Hotel, Restaurant and Personal Services Workers and the Union of Textile, Clothing and Leather Workers, where the proportion of
female members is 70 per cent and above, female representation stands at 40 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. Of the fourteen unions affiliated to the ÖGB, only the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment has a woman head.

At confederation level, under-representation is also apparent, although there are two women out of ten at the highest level, one of whom is the head of the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment and the other is the head of the ÖGB’s women’s division. Women’s representation on the national executives, however, fails to reflect their proportion of membership, with women making up 31 per cent of ÖGB membership in 1993 but only eight per cent of representation. Within the ÖGB, in 1993, women made up 17 per cent of officials assisting senior leadership in policy making, were chairs of two confederation committees (women’s and health and safety) and made up 38 per cent of members of ÖGB committees (ETUC, 1994: 30-31). Similar patterns of under-representation are evident within the upper echelons of the Chambers of Labour. All women workers are members of the Chamber (42 per cent), but, in 1989, women made up 10 per cent of the General Assembly and 12 per cent of councillors in the provincial chambers (SSGCW, 1991: 42).

At the ÖGB Congress, although the percentage of female representation has almost doubled over the last twelve years as indicated in Table 6.2, but representation remains poor in comparison to female membership. While women receive guaranteed representation on union executives through the representation of women’s divisions, no reserved places exist at Congress. Yet it is at both ÖGB and national trade union congresses, held every four years, where overarching policy platforms are decided. Several women unionists with whom I spoke considered Congress to be a critical forum at which women required a presence (Private Sector 1, 2, ÖGB, Metal, Public Service).

Table 6.2 Women's Representation at ÖGB Congress Various Years

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Finally, with respect to collective bargaining committees, the representation of women as negotiators varied according to trade union, although in general the picture was generally grim. For example, the women with whom I spoke noted that there were few women negotiators in the union representing public servants, the private sector white-collar union and the Metal Workers' Union. Within the garment area covered by the Textile Union, 98 per cent of the workers were women and almost all negotiators were also women. However, in the textile area, where the membership was evenly split between men and women, the negotiators were predominantly men. Within the Banking Section, the woman head recently made a conscious effort to encourage more women to join negotiating teams. As a result, in 1994, three of the seven representatives on the Banking Section's negotiating team were women (Bank).

**Women's Divisions**

Women's divisions within trade unions, as mentioned earlier, provide women with at least minimal representation in the upper echelons of the trade unions, the Chambers of Labour and the ÖGB. These divisions also provide a multitude of services in an effort to encourage the further representation of women workers and their interests.

The ÖGB Women's Division has three officials and three support staff. While it does not have its own budget, requests for funds from the ÖGB Executive are rarely refused. The division organises annual conferences with 50 women from the various trade unions attending. In addition, every four years a larger conference with over 200 delegates is held. In this forum issues are debated and policy directives are drawn up to be presented at the ÖGB Congress which follows immediately. The officials of the women's division also travel to the different regions talking to union women and running workshops. These activities provide the ÖGB women's division with feedback from the grass roots membership on the issues concerning women workers, which is considered necessary, since the women's division has input in the making and amending of legislation regarding the status of women (ÖGB).

Raising public awareness regarding the problems women workers face was also listed as important. This was achieved by using the media and holding discussions
with women on the shop floor. Such contact was referred to as "a consciousness-raising exercise", whereby encouraging women to pass on their issues of concern made the women workers themselves aware of their problems. The head of the ÖGB Women's Division saw meeting with women members as crucial, both in terms of gaining an understanding of the major issues and informing women workers of their rights (ÖGB).

Women's division's are replicated within the national trade unions, several of which have women's secretaries at both national and provincial levels (Cook et al, 1992). In a manner similar to the practice of the ÖGB, small conferences and workshops are held throughout Austria by a number of women’s sections to maintain links with women workers. More recently, the divisions have been used to facilitate networks of women so as to increase the dialogue and communication between women and their representatives. Several respondents considered this particularly important for those groups of women that were otherwise isolated or unorganised, such as office workers, typists, hairdressers and so on. Again, the information gathered from these women was seen as vital for the divisions' involvement in trade union policy making (Hotel, Metal, Public Service, Private Sector 2).

_Dismantling the Barriers_

In order to achieve an increase in representation in upper echelons of the union movement, several women unionists argued that strategies must target the local level. However, they maintained that women often lacked the confidence to involve themselves in a political environment dominated by men (Chamber, Textile, Public Service). Where women had a large majority in a workplace, for example in the garment industry, there was little problem in encouraging women to stand for election. Where there were equal numbers of men and women, it was more likely that men were elected (Public Service, Textile, Private Sector 1, 2). Even when women were elected at shop floor level, a number of interviewees claimed that women did not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to rise through the ranks of the union (Private Sector 1, 2, ÖGB, Public Service).

Confidence was regarded a vital prerequisite for coping with the often unsupportive environments facing women union officials. One women said that she noticed in
meetings of the ÖGB, where all the other secretaries were male, that the "men did not appear to take her as seriously as they took themselves" (Private Sector 1). Another woman commented that "sometimes you get the feeling you are doing something important and serious but sometimes it feels just the contrary" (Chamber). A third claimed that many men did not want to see women elected, claiming it equated to special representation which was unacceptable (Public Service).

Family responsibilities were seen as major barriers to women's participation in trade union activity. Union officials have long working hours, sometimes as many as 50-60 hours per week. Child care facilities in Austria were considered inadequate to facilitate the mix of family responsibilities and trade union politics and many women felt they did not have enough time to take on the extra responsibilities of a shop steward (Private Sector 1, 2, Metal, Hotel, Textile, Chamber, SSGCW, 1991).

In attempts to overcome these barriers, the ÖGB Women's General Council adopted a nine point resolution in 1982. The nominated strategies included motivating more women to stand as candidates, seeking measures to promote women from positions of shop steward and increasing the number of delegates. In practice, women unionists have continued to fight for increased child care, and called for men to take more responsibility for unpaid work in the home. Women's sections involved themselves in encouraging more women to take up union positions by facilitating the development of support networks and helping women to see their representation as an important issue (ÖGB).

In addition, most women's divisions provide training courses to help women overcome their fear of participation (Hotel, Textile, Metal, Private Sector 2, Chamber). Women were taught public speaking, time management, supervision and research skills. Women were made aware of their rights and the benefits to which they were entitled. Many courses also sought to build up women's self-esteem and confidence. One women unionist with whom I spoke noted that over the last ten years of running such courses, significant differences in the behaviour of women negotiators were apparent. Where "women used to cringe at the negotiating table, now they are talking the men down" (Textile).
Promoting Women’s Representation

Quotas and affirmative action strategies for increasing the numbers of women in executive positions have been issues under discussion in Social Democratic Party and trade union circles, but such strategies have acquired some negative connotations. Within the ÖGB, quotas have been discussed, although they have not been realised as a policy objective (ÖGB). Several women unionists commented they were trying alternative strategies to get women elected (Textile, Hotel, Metal), with one official arguing that many of the women who worked hard would "push themselves to the top" (Textile).

The woman head of the Banking Section within the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment employed a strategy of actively seeking out women to put on negotiating teams and this has proved successful in increasing the numbers of women on bargaining teams. Within the Public Service Union, women officials have argued for a policy whereby official places vacated through resignations or retirements be filled by women. Reactions to this strategy have been mixed and the interviewee acknowledged that, even if it were accepted, changes in the numbers of women would be slow (Public Service).

At the public policy-making level, both the Chambers of Labour and the ÖGB are members of the social partnership. However, the consensus and compromise which results from this partnership has been described as the result of "a kind of gentlemen’s agreement", with the two male presidents of the chamber of business and ÖGB dominating the scene for almost 25 years (Gerlich, 1992: 137). While it is claimed that such corporatist arrangements have proved successful in terms of maintaining economic and political stability in Austria (Boreham and Compston, 1992: 146), they have also been successful in excluding women (amongst others) from influencing and participating in the public decision-making process. This stems from the limited influence of outside interest groups and the failure of women to reach the upper echelons of the movements involved in the social partnership (cf Neyer, 1996, 108-109).

However, women within trade unions have created their own informal networks. Women in trade unions, the Chambers of Labour, the government and the bureaucracy meet to discuss issues as they arise, with such meetings organised
with a phone call (ÖGB, MWA, Chamber, Private Sector 1, 2). Women from the various national trade unions also meet regularly to compare problems and strategies. These networks were considered vital for the dissemination of information and the coordination of joint campaigns and mobilisation of the social partners. However, although women unionists felt they could influence members of the social partnership, this was not to be seen as a substitute for increasing women’s representation in this forum (Public Service, ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2).

The women unionists with whom I spoke argued categorically that, without women as representatives or women’s divisions, they doubted the issues of most concern to women workers would be addressed (Public Service, ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2, Textile, Hotel, Metal). Women within the ÖGB saw their division as relevant because their women members wanted to be supported by women - "the special problems that women face require representation that is often different to that provided by men" (ÖGB).

Women officials from the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment noted that having a woman as head of the trade union, who was also a member of Parliament (which is an aspect of corporatist intermediation in Austria), has meant women's issues have been prioritised more highly than they would have otherwise been (Private Sector 1, 2). Within the Banking Section, the woman head was crucial in implementing the active recruitment of women negotiators. She maintained that "women shop stewards know the problems women face from their own experience and so of course it is absolutely necessary to have them on the bargaining teams, especially in the bank where over 50 per cent of employees are women" (Bank). In addition, with some unions, for example the Private Sector Union, being more powerful than others with lower membership numbers, several women considered it important that these stronger unions be seen to have a commitment to women's equality (Private Sector 2, Textile).

Finally, several women unionists maintained that representation by women was important in teaching their male colleagues how to take women's interests into account when negotiating collective agreements (Public Service, Private Sector 2, Metal). While there was acknowledgment that some men had become more sensitive to women's issues, further work on informing men how to negotiate with a gendered perspective was being undertaken (Private Sector 1, 2, ÖGB). In
general, most women unionists argued that, until women were treated equally within the trade union movement, the representation of women was the best means of ensuring women had a voice (Textile, Hotel, Metal, ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2, Chamber).

Assessment

The conservative and authoritarian character of the Hapsburg Empire legally restricted women's participation in politics and this restriction was implicitly supported by the male-dominated trade union movement. However, women's exclusion from the Social Democratic Party and trade unions was revoked when local women began threatening to organise separately from the labour movement. Women were then allowed to join and form, at their own request, separate sections within the trade unions. This gender-specific means of inclusion was not viewed as a challenge to the primacy of class politics, but rather was a means by which the 'woman question' could be absorbed and remain subordinate to issues of class. This segregated inclusion also reflected women's then marginal position in the labour force, with trade unions providing little open support for women's labour force participation at the turn of the century.

With the creation of the encompassing ÖGB, women's interests continued to be represented through separate sections. Over time, however, the women's divisions have increased in number and are now replicated at both national and provincial level within most of the 14 national trade unions and within the Chambers of Labour. While these divisions have provided women with token representation at decision-making levels, women remain under-represented at all levels within trade union and Chamber of Labour hierarchies. This impacts not only on the representation of women's interests within individual trade unions, but also within the public policy making process as a whole. The corporatist arrangements in Austria provide the labour movement with an institutionalised involvement in decisions made around macro-economic and wages policy and social policy. However, these forums include only those at the peak of the ÖGB and Chambers' hierarchies, who have been, to date, only men. This now entrenched and accepted form of consensus-oriented political decision-making has also deterred groups, including women, from organising their interests separately from the social partners.
The main factors impeding women's participation within trade unions are gender-specific. Male-dominated trade union culture and family responsibilities and gender-specific strategies have been developed to counter these impediments. Strategies such as creating women's networks, seeking increases to child care and shared parental responsibilities, providing confidence-building courses for women and the development of women-centred policy platforms through women-only conferences have been organised by women's divisions to further mobilise women workers. While women unionists have stopped short of demanding quotas for women, the representation of women by women through separate divisions continues to be considered necessary if the interests of women workers are to be addressed by individual trade unions and by the trade union movement as a whole.

**Women's Wages**

With respect to women's wages, the women unionists with whom I spoke saw equal pay and the level of minimum wages as important. In this section, I discuss the barriers perceived by women unionists to reducing the gender-wage differential, such as the decentralised wage bargaining system and the discrimination that continues to exist within collective agreements. I also examine the way in which women unionists have sought to utilise gender-specific legislative strategies within a corporatist environment which does not hold wage equality as its primary objective.

**The Collective Bargaining Process**

Collective bargaining takes place nationally, regionally and locally in Austria. The ÖGB, as a member of the social partnership, is involved in the general coordination of wages and employment on the basis of national economic indicators. This is not the level at which actual wage increases are decided upon; only the initiation of negotiations is approved (Katzenstein, 1984: 47). Although, in a formal sense, the power to engage with employers in collective bargaining lies with the leaders of the ÖGB, the vast majority of collective agreements are concluded at the sector level between the relevant section of the Chamber of Business and the appropriate trade union (Traxler, 1992; 1994). The extent of autonomy of individual trade unions in
this respect suggests that too much emphasis should not be placed on the high degree of centralisation of bargaining in Austria (Guger, 1992: 348).

Bargaining may also take place at regional and local level and separate agreements are sometimes made for manual workers and employees (ILO, 1986). This makes the bargaining situation extremely complex. However, in general, collective agreements covering a single company or smaller unit are rare, with the capacity to sign agreements seldom being granted to individual employers. In 1968, only three per cent of the 602 agreements were concluded at the level of the firm (Katzenstein, 1984: 47). By 1986, over 1500 collective agreements were in force, 180 of which were framework agreements determining wages and conditions, while the remainder were agreements which supplemented the framework and wage agreements.

Collective bargaining agreements regulate the wages of all workers employed in the sector covered by the agreement, irrespective of whether the workers belong to the signatory union. The wage rates are legally binding for the life of the contract. These tend to be minimum rates and it is not uncommon for higher wages to be paid, with the negotiation for higher rates often undertaken by work councils (Anon, 1992: 25).

There were two major aspects of the collective bargaining process that were identified by my interviewees as problematic for women workers; sectoral wage differences and qualifications for pay increases. The general wage policy orientation taken by the ÖGB has revolved around preserving employment by promoting economic growth. Accordingly, productivity is the guiding principle of Austria's wage policy rather than wage solidarity. This has had an impact on the gender-wage differential since many women workers are concentrated in a limited number of economic branches within sectors. Women make up over 50 per cent of those employed in clothing, leather, retail, restaurant, personal services, health, education and household services (Biffl, 1996: 144). In all these occupations except health, women wage and salary earners receive less than the median female wage across all economic branches (Wolf and Wolf, 1991: 23-25). In 1989, the female median wage was 67.5 per cent of the male median wage (Biffl, 1996: 143).
The women I spoke with argued that the differences in wages between sectors contribute to the gender-wage differential in Austria (ÖGB, Bank, Textile). Even within sectors differences exist, exacerbated by the large number of collective agreements in existence. For example, while the women official from the Banking Section of Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment felt much had been achieved in terms of wages for women working part-time in the Banking Section, the same could not be said for women in the insurance or savings and loans sections. In this sense, it was difficult to provide consistency in wage gains across the jobs within a sector.

The wage bargaining system was seen by women unionists as very decentralised and, for the gender-wage differential to be addressed in this environment, the women I spoke with maintained that remedies were needed at lower levels; in particular, an increase in the numbers of women on sub-national bargaining committees (ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2, Bank). Although in theory, the ÖGB concludes all collective agreements, because this does not happen, in practice, there is little scope for the ÖGB to estimate the impact of high-low wage sector outcomes on women workers or demand corrective measures in this area (ÖGB). Furthermore, although there has been rhetorical support for reducing the gender-wage gap at ÖGB Congress (Gruber, 1991: 153), there has been little action taken by national trade unions who negotiate sectoral wage agreements (Cook et al, 1992: 149).

Although separate collective agreements for men and women workers have long since been abolished, within collective agreements the criteria used to classify occupations into wage groups still proved linguistically problematic. For example, there is no male equivalent in the German language for the job titles seamstress and embroiderer, so these were immediately recognisable as jobs designated for women. The opposite was also apparent, with no female equivalent in German for such jobs as electrician, mechanic or driver (Metzker, 1980: 246). Job descriptions of 'light' and 'heavy' also existed, with 'heavy' jobs being ranked higher than those entailing mental demands, thus indirectly reinforcing notions of gender-specificity (Metzker, 1980: 243, Cook et al, 1992: 161).

Open discrimination within collective agreements is now outlawed as a result of the Equal Treatment Act (1979) and, in 1994, the Supreme Court ruled that the
distinction between 'light' and 'heavy' work constituted a form of indirect discrimination. However, there remain some elements of gender differences evident within agreements. Gender-specific job titles may still exist within smaller agreements, since it is only the wage schedule which is updated each year, with renegotiation of the whole agreement occurring less often. The Equal Treatment Officer revealed that agreements made by some firms have provided male workers with private insurance for themselves, their wife and children, while women were entitled to receive insurance only for themselves (Equality Ombuds). While a few women have approached the Equal Treatment Office with requests to review their contracts before being signed, most women unionists felt increasing the numbers of women negotiators, and/or educating male negotiators on the issue of gender-wage differentials were important strategies (Private Sector 2, Bank, ÖGB, Metal, Textile, Equality Ombuds).

The women with whom I spoke thought that occupational segregation was critical in the issue of equal pay for women. Several noted that, as a result of the continuing occupational segregation, the issue for the future is pay equity, in that comparisons of women's and men's work need to be undertaken, with a substantial revaluation of the work undertaken by women (ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2, Metal, Equality Ombuds). While some individual comparisons have been made by officials within individual trade unions (Metal, Public Service), to date no confederation-wide policy on pay equity has been adopted (ÖGB).

Women's predominance in low wage occupations had also focused women unionists attention on the issue of raising minimum wages. Minimum wages are set economy-wide and several women unionists noted that their trade unions were generally able to negotiate more than the minimum for their workers. The Metal Workers' Union sets the new minimum standard for each bargaining round and in 1994 this was raised by 3,000 to 13,000 Austrian Schillings (AS) per month. However, the woman official from the Hotel, Restaurant and Personal Service Workers' Union commented that just achieving the previous minimum target of 10,000 AS had taken much hard work during negotiations, and the same was expected in acquiring further increases.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged by the official from the Hotel, Restaurant and Personal Service Workers' Union and others I spoke with that there were still over
a hundred thousand workers not receiving the minimum wage, many of whom were women (Metal, Textile, Hotel, ÖGB). Addressing this could not come through minimum wage legislation, since in Austria wages remain the sole responsibility of the trade unions and employers. Rather women unionists were looking to employ strategies of further negotiation with employers. Discussions around the minimum wage were not couched in terms of "women's" wages, but were argued as being necessary for both men and women: thereby being defined as a general union issue (Textile, Metal).

A number of women unionists expressed concern about the large number of women who earned less than 4,000 AS per month (Metal, ÖGB, Hotel, MSL). Employers who hire cleaners or other workers under contract often encourage women to work only a few hours per day. This means that while the women may pay no tax, they are also ineligible to receive social security benefits, including pensions and no accrual of benefits occurs. A number of unionists believed many women workers were unaware of this potentially detrimental outcome (ÖGB, Hotel, MSL, Metal). As from 1993, employers were required to reveal how many casual workers they employed, but this had achieved little and so the issue was to be discussed further at the Women's Congress in 1995. The main strategy undertaken to date has been the lobbying of Ministers by women unionists to allow these workers access to benefits (ÖGB).

The second aspect of concern to women unionists has been the different qualifying conditions for pay rises. This sort of discrimination arises when women require a longer period of service than men to secure a promotion to a higher wage group. While this form of discrimination is now less explicit, the relevance of longevity of service to wage increases nevertheless impacts on the gender-wage differential. Within the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment, for example, every two years workers receive two wage increases, one of which is bargained for, the other which is an automatic incremental increase based on length of uninterrupted service with the company. This system advantages men, who tend to have long periods of uninterrupted labour force participation, particularly in the banking and industry sectors, whose incomes over time increase considerably more than their female counterparts. Women are disadvantaged since maternity leave taken to raise a family is not always counted in as service (Private Sector 1, Bank).
One woman unionist I spoke with had been involved in a cross-national research project which indicated that interruptions to labour force participation to have children, significantly influences the earning disparity between women and men. In theory, women who leave to have children are supposed to restart on the same salary as they received prior to taking up maternity leave. In reality, however, women often start two or three steps behind where they left off, thereby losing six years worth of salary increases (Private Sector 1, Industry). As a result of these findings, when the proposal was made for an increase in maternity leave from two to three years, women unionists within the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment opposed the move, arguing that this would further inflate the gender-wage differential (Private Sector 1, 2, Bank).

In 1994, officials within the Industry Section of the Union for Salaried Employees in Private Employment sought to revamp the way in which wage increases were allocated, whereby larger increases were to be made to younger workers, with smaller increases being made according to length of service. This was to involve condensing the wage scales, so that there were more groups vertically and less horizontal positions. This change to wage policy was driven by the problem that, as a result of increasing levels of qualifications, younger people entering companies are eligible to start on the same scale as workers who have been there 20 years (Industry).

This new wage system was pursued not because of a major concern with women's pay, but because of the entrance of increasing numbers of young highly qualified workers. It has become apparent however, that such a system would also help women workers, since if women started on a higher salary earlier, before interrupting their careers, then on their return to the labour market these women would be able to restart on a relatively high salary. It might also make women's salaries more comparable with men's and so encourage fathers to take up a share of the parental leave (Private Sector 1, Industry).

Traxler (1992: 292) has argued that the "well-tuned institutional framework has given rise to highly ordered industrial relations". Certainly, strong internal discipline has meant that signing a collective agreement is considered in Austria to mean an obligation to maintain industrial peace. Even during the negotiation process, industrial action is unusual, with few strikes or lockouts being recorded.
Thus, no women unionists saw militant industrial action as an appropriate strategy for improving the wages of women. Rather, the strategies articulated by the interviewees reflected the mainstream approach of unionism in Austria of co-operation through continual discussion and negotiation. Because of the significance of the negotiation forum, there was a strong wish espoused by women officials to see more women involved in these forums.

**Legislative Strategies**

Although collective bargaining tends to be the realm where wages are determined, Austria nevertheless has a long history of defining specific labour rights and conditions in law and applying them through established enforcement bureaucracies (Cook, 1992: 36). However, the trade union movement in Austria has historically only made modest commitments to equal pay. The principle of equal pay was introduced into the ÖGB constitution in 1958, but legislation in the area did not come about until the passage of the Equal Treatment Act in 1979 (Steinberg Ratner, 1978: 31). The advent of this legislation was the result of a number of factors, including considerable evidence of discrimination within collective agreements (Cook et al, 1992: 97).

The Equal Treatment Act (1979) prohibited any discrimination on the grounds of sex in the fixing of wages. It was also illegal to advertise jobs using gender-specific language. An Equal Treatment Commission was set up under the Act to deal with all questions relating to discrimination in wage fixing within a collective agreement. Employers, works councils or trade unions or an individual worker could apply to the Commission for an investigation into both the provisions of collective agreements and/or individual cases of discrimination. The Commission could also initiate its own investigations (SSGCW, 1991: 45).

Despite the good intentions behind the creation of the Equality Commission, it was clearly apparent by 1990 that few women were prepared to seek redress by these means. In the 11 years from 1979-1990, only 18 cases were taken before the Commission. The Equal Treatment Officer noted that while some men argued that women's failure to use the Commission showed they were not suffering discrimination, "it was quite apparent that this was not the case. No-one believed that the grievances did not exist" (Equality Ombuds). Rather, trade unions had
often been remiss in failing to pick up the causes of women workers, hence the need for the Equal Treatment Office, although trade unions did actively support the creation of the Office.

As a means of better implementing the Equal Treatment Act, the position of Equal Treatment Officer was created in 1991, whereby women could receive both advice and representation. Over 500 requests for advice have been received per year since 1991. In 1994, there was only a single office located in Vienna to deal with cases for the whole of Austria, although pressure is being brought to bear by the Minister of Women's Affairs and some of the women in trade unions for other branches to be opened in the western provinces. The Equal Treatment Office now provides representation for approximately fifteen cases per year, which are usually precedent-setting cases in areas of income and promotion. Women in the workforce are then notified of the findings from the various cases, which is seen as a means of informing women of their rights (Equality Ombuds).

The Equal Treatment Officer suggested that informing women in this way was an important strategy in that women would then be in a position to make more demands of their trade unions, thereby stimulating change at the institutional level. Ultimately, it is hoped women will eventually take up their grievances at firm-level through their works councils. The Equal Treatment Office has prepared material to aid shop stewards and negotiators in this process (Equality Ombuds).

Other Strategies

Another important issue is that of equal employment opportunity in terms of promotion and the problem of vertical segregation for women. Several women unionists were making increasing women's access to education and training an issue in work councils' elections. Acquiring promotion is dependent on vocational training and is especially important for women, since in many cases they already have the same qualifications as their male counterparts, but begin their career in lower positions. (Private Sector 2, Bank, Metal, Textile).

Within the insurance and parts of the Bank Section, income inequalities only become apparent after women have been in the job about five years and the Equal Treatment Officer argued this was related to access to in-firm training. Employers
make the decisions as to who receives training and access has tended to be easier for men, who then receive wage increases and promotion. She noted that often women will pay for themselves to get extra training, but this was not always considered by employers to be as worthwhile as in-firm training (Equality Ombuds). In this sense, the Equal Treatment Officer maintained it was important for women to have the issue of access to training addressed as soon as possible, since once their male counterparts have received the training, the resulting income inequalities "become irrelevant because the employer can argue that it (the wage difference) is a result of the man being better qualified" (Equality Ombuds).

Within the public service, there has been a push by the women's division for increased training for women who are located in clerical jobs. With the typing pool and typist-secretaries becoming almost redundant, retraining these women and providing them with a broader skills base was considered necessary for their own personal career development and to increase their chances of earning further wage increases. The women's section representative has made several field trips to Germany to identify the best means by which to undertake such retraining and small group discussions were being held with the relevant Ministers. To date, positive responses from government officials have been forthcoming, although detailed plans for increases in access to training are still in the early stages, and negotiations may be difficult since the process is a costly one (Public Service).

The training system in Austria, until the 1970s, depended almost entirely on gender-segregated apprenticeships. Cook et al argue that it was only alarm over youth unemployment which led to the creation of additional publicly funded full-time vocational schools in most provinces. However, in 1986, over 87 per cent of female apprentices were training in the ten skilled occupations most frequently chosen by their sex, thereby maintaining the occupational segregation trend (Cook et al, 1992: 57).

More recently, the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs has established courses designed to encourage more women into the labour market and to counter occupational segregation. Government stimulation of labour market policies was considered important not only in terms of addressing rising unemployment, but also as necessary for women while the social security system is linked closely to labour force participation (MSL). However, while young women are now
receiving training at state technical institutes, firms are not giving them jobs after the completion of training (Equality Ombuds).

Finally, the women's officer from the union representing textile and clothing workers acknowledged that saving women's jobs rather than increasing wages has been a major issue of late. Many textile and clothing factories have been under threat of closure since the East European countries have begun trading openly in Europe. As a result, the union has been involved in negotiations around compensation and redundancy packages for workers. The union has also participated in plans for restructuring in an effort to keep enterprises afloat, and thereby save jobs and maintain union membership. During such negotiations, low wages and equal pay for women have been given a lesser priority compared to other unions (Textile, ÖGB).

Assessment

While it was impossible to exclude women in Austria from participating in the labour movement, inclusion, when it occurred, was not on equal terms with men. Although separate wage scales no longer exist, the payment of different wages according to gender-specific titles and the distinction between light and heavy work has implicitly guaranteed different wages for women and men. In the late 1970s, trade union women exposed the discriminatory nature of collective agreements, but, arguably, because of their lack of influence within the collective bargaining sphere, pursued legislative remedies, specifically through the enactment of the Equal Treatment Act and the establishment of the Equal Treatment Commission.

The Commission's creation in 1980 was seen as helping to achieve "a breakthrough in the implementation of the equal treatment rule at all levels of labour law and in all fields of working life" (Metzker, 1980: 253). However, in itself, it proved inadequate and required institutional reinforcement through the creation of the Equal Treatment Office in 1991. Even with this improved implementation mechanism, there has been little systematic change in the gender-wage differential. Individual women are required to seek advice and then action, often without the support of their work council or trade union.
Married women's labour force participation has not been strongly encouraged in Austria, evident through the lack of both demand side (the availability of part-time work and growth in public sector employment) and supply side policies (child care provisions, individual taxation). Generous maternity leave benefits do exist, but these have been promoted by natalist and protective motives rather than through a desire to increase the employment of married women. Lately, however, Social Democratic women trade unionists have begun to challenge this norm of marginal labour market status by refusing to support the increase of maternity leave from two to three years, arguing that it is detrimental to both the career and wage prospects of women workers. In this sense, women trade unionists are seeking to undermine the rigidifying process often associated with gender-specific strategies.

Nevertheless, women unionists have continued to apply a gender-specific focus on providing women with better access to in-firm training, retraining and vocational training in non-traditional occupations, but changing employers' attitudes to women's employment is proving difficult. However, around issues of minimum wages and unemployment, a more gender neutral approach is taken in negotiations, although it is primarily women who are paid under the minimum wage.

Wage bargaining is decentralised, with wage increases being negotiated at the sector level, leaving the ÖGB largely powerless to demand that gender-wage differentials be addressed in contracts. National trade unions have shown little commitment to the cause of equal pay and to counter this, women trade unionists are seeking to increase the number of women negotiators on bargaining teams. This gender-specific strategy is considered necessary to address the issue of equal pay for women workers. Increases in women's representation are doubly important in Austria since the overarching framework of consensus means that all gains are made through negotiation, with militant or industrial class action unheard of.

The lack of commitment to equality in wages emanates from the top of the corporatist hierarchy. The trade union confederation in Austria, although both economically and politically strong, has not pursued a solidaristic wage policy, but has instead sanctioned an inegalitarian wages structure, which has led to the creation of high and low wage sectors, with women predominating in the latter.
Thus corporatist political arrangements in Austria have favoured a wages policy which advantages already powerful groups of mostly male workers.

Women's Working Conditions

In this section I examine the working conditions which women trade unionists view as requiring further attention if women workers are to achieve equality in the workplace. While provision for women as mothers has been considerable in Austria, this has not resulted in progressive policies regarding women's combined interests as workers and mothers. How this has impacted on women unionists choice of strategies is discussed below, as are the issues of equal employment opportunity, part-time work and sexual harassment.

Combining Work and Family Responsibilities

While archaic family laws were overhauled during the 1970s, as a result of pressure from the women's movement and the realisation by Chancellor Bruno Kreisky that such laws were counterproductive to the modernisation of the Austrian economy (Kaplan, 1992: 133; Fischer-Kowalski, 1994: 97-102), a strong emphasis on the protection of women in paid work was maintained. Austria has always been particularly progressive in the area of maternity leave. In 1885, legislation was amended providing pregnant mothers with four weeks compulsory leave after confinement. Three years later further legislation entitled women with new born children to a daily benefit of between 60-75 per cent of their earnings (Krebs, 1975: 273).

After the Second World War, women in trade unions and trade unions themselves lobbied for the Maternity Protection Act, passed in 1957, which initially provided most women workers with six months unpaid maternity leave, extended to 12 months in 1960. In addition, trade unions were successful in having outlawed the employment of pregnant women six weeks before and after child birth. Later the entitlement to leave was backed up with protection against dismissal until four weeks after resuming work and trade unions have also fought for and succeeded in having the period of maternity leave count toward pension entitlements (Krebs, 1975: 274-275).
In 1990, the Parental Leave Act was passed which provides the opportunity for either (employed) parent to take or share leave. Protection from dismissal applies to fathers and mothers and a fixed allowance is provided for 12 months. This was a first step away from the previous legislative definition of parental responsibilities as solely the province of women, but because the payment for leave was a fixed amount, rather than a percentage of previous earnings, there has been little (financial) incentive for fathers to leave work and take up parental responsibilities (Bank, Private Sector 2). Either parent may also use family leave to care for sick children.

In 1991, maternity leave was extended to two years and more recently arguments were put for increasing it to three years. Although support for extending maternity leave was forthcoming from men in the labour movement and the government, several women with whom I spoke thought that men supported it more for conservative reasons than for progressive ones, since extended maternity leave provisions would encourage women to stay longer at home (Bank, Private Sector 1, 2, MWA, ÖGB). A number of women unionists said they had vigorously opposed the extension of maternity leave provisions, fearing it would further restrict women's employment opportunities (Private Sector 1, 2, Textile, Bank, ÖGB).

While provisions for women as mothers were considered progressive and were strongly lobbied for by women in trade unions (Metal, Textile, Hotel, ÖGB), benefits have been constrained by the fact that social security in Austria is linked to labour force participation. While paid maternity leave counted toward the pension stipend, unpaid family responsibilities did not, disadvantaging many women who chose to stay at home beyond the two years maternity leave provision. To qualify for a full pension fifteen years of labour force participation is required. However, in 1992, new legislation was passed which provides women with a deduction of four years per child. Now a woman with one child need only work eleven years to qualify. While this has not yet reduced the disparity between women's and men's pensions, there are many women who were not previously eligible for a pension, but are now in receipt of one. The women unionists I spoke with saw this as a substantial gain for women workers (Metal, Private Sector 1, 2, Bank, Textile, Hotel, ÖGB).
This pension reform was part of what has been labelled the 'equality package' and was very much a product of lobbying undertaken by women in the various trade unions, women from the ÖGB and the Chambers of Labour, and the Minister of Women's Affairs. Discussions were held between these women and government ministers, with several interviewees commenting that considerable effort was required to encourage male ministers to accept the relevance of women's interests as workers (ÖGB, MWA, MSL, Private Sector 2, Chamber, Public Service). Much use was also made of the media, whereby the united stance taken by women from the various organisations on this issue was publicly highlighted (ÖGB, Kreisky-Interview).

The emphasis on motherhood and the provision of benefits for women workers to stay at home and care for their children has allowed the issue of child care to become less of a priority for governments in Austria. Maternity leave was cited as a cheaper option which did not disrupt the status quo (Bank). However, most of the interviewees maintained that more kindergartens and child care facilities were essential for women workers (Private Sector 1, 2, Hotel, Public Service, Metal, Textile). In 1990, the Ministry of Women's Affairs acknowledged there were considerable shortages in pre-school child care places. In addition, 85 per cent of all creches and 64 per cent of child care centres were located in Vienna, with very little access to child care available in the regions (SSGCW, 1991: 15). It was claimed by several women unionists that this shortage was problematic for women who wanted to return to work after their maternity leave expired (Textile, Metal, Hotel). Without access to child care, these women were unable to obtain high paying positions, and many resorted to part-time or more casual employment, where chances of promotion were limited (Private Sector 2, Public Service).

The issue of child care is also linked to the hours of schooling in Austria. Primary school hours are eight in the morning until lunch time and several women unionists noted there were considerable problems in finding child care for the remainder of the day (Private Sector 1, 2, Bank, ÖGB). In addition, the fact that there is a limited amount of part-time work available acts as a strong disincentive for women to continue their labour force participation. Women unionists have been lobbying the government to increase the hours of school to a full day since the early 1970s, but to date with little success (Krebs, 1975: 276; Private Sector 1, Bank, ÖGB, Metal).
Women from a number of unions have also had regular discussions with various ministers on the possibility of obtaining more child care places (Private Sector 1, 2, Bank, Metal, Textile, ÖGB, Public Service, Hotel). Little child care is provided by firms and in general it is considered the government's responsibility. In this sense, child care is not taken to be an industrial issue and so is not discussed in the collective bargaining process (Private Sector 1, 2). Rather, child care is considered a social issue, along with many other issues defined as women's issues, making legislation or government policy the main target for strategies by women unionists (Private Sector 1, ÖGB, MSL, Public Service).

Provision by government in this area is further complicated by two factors. First, although the federal government is charged with supplying funds for child care centres, the administration and setting up of these centres is undertaken by the Länder (or provinces). Most of the Länder have conservative administrations that do not wholeheartedly embrace the idea of extra-familial child care (MWA). In the early 1990s, the federal government offered a financial contribution to the Länder for increased child care and the education of kindergarten teachers. However, this option failed to eventuate as a result of disagreements between the two levels of government regarding control over funding targets (MWA).

A second complication is that, as a result of a coalition government between the Conservatives and Social Democrats, the Social Democratic Minister of Women's Affairs, when seeking initiatives on child care, must liaise and obtain the consent of the Conservative Minister for Family, Youth and Education. While the two have had regular discussions on the issue, little progress has been made. The conservative minister also regularly came under pressure to maintain a conservative position from the Länder administrations (MWA).

**Part-Time Work**

Where other countries have substantially increased the share of part-time work, this has not been the case in Austria (Schmidt, 1993). Trade unions, including women trade unionists have been reluctant to encourage the development of part-time work (Cook et al, 1992) and this is a position still held by several of the women unionists.
I interviewed, with women unionists noting little part-time work was available (Textile, Public Service, Private Sector).

While these women acknowledged that part-time work would allow women to better juggle work and family, part-time work was considered to have a number of disadvantages. Part-time workers were expected to be more productive in fewer hours of work than full-time workers and were viewed as difficult to organise. Part-time work was considered detrimental to the careers of women, reducing their chances of promotion and would lead to losses in pension payments (Private Sector 1, 2, Public Service, ÖGB). One woman unionist commented that the lack of career prospects, combined with the likelihood of part-time work becoming a predominantly female domain, would further marginalise women's role in the labour market (Private Sector 1, 2).

Although not supportive of part-time work as a labour market strategy, women unionists were nevertheless involving themselves in the fight for improving the conditions of those in part-time work and providing them with the same rights as full-time workers (Private Sector 1, Bank, Metal, ÖGB). Several women were attempting to have pro rata rights for part-time workers written into collective agreements. For example, in the Banking Section, women unionists have managed to negotiate for the provision of better parental leave payments for both full and part-time workers than are provided for by law (Bank). Better conditions were also being sought for women who work from home (Metal) and, as mentioned earlier, several women representatives were working to provide better access to social security for women who work very few hours per week. However, a number of women representatives also acknowledged they were not always successful in achieving parity for part-time workers with respect to overtime rates and other conditions (Bank, Private Sector 1, 2, ÖGB).

An alternative to part-time work being proposed by women in the labour movement is the reduction of working hours for all employees to 30 hours per week. This strategy was put forward by the Minister of Women's Affairs in the early 1980s, but at that time was dismissed by many women trade unionists (Kreisky-Interview). The strategy now being applied to achieve this is incremental in its approach, whereby at present several unions are seeking to have the week reduced to 35 hours (MWA, ÖGB, Private Sector 1, 2).
Equal Employment Opportunities

Gender differences in retirement age and access to night work have also acted as constraints on women's labour force participation in Austria. Prior to 1992, women were expected to retire between the ages of 55-60, while the male retirement was from 60-65. However, a Constitutional Court ruling found the unequal pension age discriminatory and a legislative amendment was required (Falkner and Tálos, 1994: 59). Women in trade unions and the Ministry of Women's Affairs argued that as a result of raising the age of retirement for women, women, in turn, required better working conditions, if they were to stay longer in the labour force (MWA, Private Sector 1, 2, ÖGB, Metal, Hotel). The broad set of demands which were then proposed by women unionists and the Minister of Women's Affairs became known as the 'equality package' and involved an adaptation to corresponding European Community rules (Falkner and Tálos, 1994: 59).

Acceptance of the package in 1992 came after considerable lobbying of the social partners and the various government Ministers, by women both within and outside of the trade union movement. Women's divisions within trade unions were instrumental in getting the package accepted (ÖGB, Private Sector 2, Textile, Public Service), as was the Minister of Women's Affairs who threatened not to support the government if the package was not accepted (MWA). Again women unionists used the media to highlight the issue and gain public support. Several interviewees commented that reaching compromises on issues of equality had become somewhat easier over recent years. They also noted that this was probably a result of increasing sensitivity to both the issues and to the relevance of women as voters (MWA, MSL, Public Service, Private Sector 2).

With respect to night work, Austria has a history of 'protecting' women workers. In 1950, Austria ratified the ILO Night Work (Women) Convention and, in 1969, the provisions of the Convention were made directly applicable under Austrian law. By 1972, the Night Work (Women) Act applied to all women workers aged eighteen and over, although there were some exceptions (Krebs, 1975: 275). The trade unions, with the support of women, had hitherto always supported the restriction of women's participation in night work, since the protection of women
workers was viewed as an effective means of regulating their working conditions (Andersen, 1992: 66). Furthermore, Edith Krebs from the Vienna Chamber of Labour argued that such protection was a blessing for low paid women who go "little or no help in the home from their husbands" (Krebs, 1975: 275).

There has been increasing opposition to the prohibition of women working at night over the last ten years, with arguments concerning equal employment opportunity for women taking on a new salience for women within the trade union movement (ÖGB, Textile, Public Service, Metal). Such restrictions have arguably curtailed women's possibilities for promotion and women were constrained from undertaking rotating shiftwork. Under special circumstances women could get permission to work from ten in the evening until midnight, but this could only occur on a very short-term basis (Metal). Some women unionists noted that their women members were interested in night work, particularly in the police force and the textile industry (Public Service, Textile).

Austria's admittance to the European Union in 1995 required a commitment by the Austrian Government to overturn the prohibition on night work for women in line with new ILO and European standards, although a two year time lag was granted. In response to this move, the ÖGB called for unions to suggest what changes to the conditions of night work were required. A list of demands would then be drawn up and presented during the redrafting of the night work legislation.

In the textile and clothing industries, the issue of night work was of particular importance. Women officials from this union put together a substantial list of demands including shortening night shifts without reducing the penal rates, an increase in the number of breaks during the shift, more vacations, earlier access to pensions, and the provision of hot meals and on-site health services, which would provide compulsory and regular medical check-ups. Women unionists within the textile union pushed for support from their male colleagues by articulating these demands as being beneficial to men and women workers. The interviewee noted that, to date, the change to night work legislation was seen by many men as a women's issue, but she and her colleagues were trying to recast the issue as a general one, focusing on the importance of good night work conditions for all workers, both men and women (Textile).
Becoming a member of the European Union has impacted on the working conditions of women in other spheres. In particular, the issue of sexual harassment has been more explicitly addressed, with broad guidelines being set by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which are then specified through precedent setting cases heard by the Equality Commission. A spokesperson from the Ministry of Women's Affairs maintained that such provisions would not have eventuated if Austria had not been joining the European Union (MWA).

A pamphlet informing workers simply of procedures to follow if harassed and the reasons why sexual harassment is unacceptable behaviour was designed by the women's officer in the union representing public service employees and distributed to all unions by the ÖGB (Public Service). There has also been considerable public discussion around the issue of sexual harassment evident in Parliament, in the workplace and in the media (Equality Ombuds).

Assessment

Austria's long history of maternity leave provision was initially a result of a desire to protect and provide for pregnant women workers and trade union support for continued extensions to maternity leave benefits has continued over the last one hundred years. In isolation, Austrian maternity leave benefits appear progressive. However, when viewed in tandem with the stagnant labour force participation of women since the 1960s, the motivations for such benefits seem less about providing for women workers as mothers and more about reinforcing the role of women as mothers.

In this sense, strategies invoking the gender-specific interests of women workers appear fraught with tension. On the one hand, focusing on women's role as mothers has enabled women trade unionists to argue for more equitable pension criteria for women who choose to stay out of the labour market and raise a family. On the other hand, some women trade unionists have rejected extending maternity leave to three years for fear of further entrenching the low wage position of women in the labour market. This focus on motherhood has also undermined arguments for increased child care facilities and extending the school day, both of which continue to inhibit women's labour force participation. Thus, in this context, gender-specific arguments have proved a double edged sword for women trade
unionists. However, in the case of part-time work, the lack of support by trade unions, argued from a class perspective, has been reinforced by women trade unionists. They argue, albeit from a gender perspective, that part-time work would only increase women's marginal status in the labour force.

That changes to working conditions such as child care, measures against sexual harassment and parental leave have not been addressed by trade unions in the industrial arena, but have been dependent on women's sections lobbying and negotiating with the state, indicate the narrow agenda of trade unionism in Austria. While new government policies on such issues are discussed with the social partners, open union support for demands around issues of concern to women workers are not always forthcoming. The fact that strong (male-dominated) industry unions largely control the ÖGB bargaining agenda, combined with the lack of interest in stimulating an increase in women's labour force participation, could account for this lack of interest.

Conservative attitudes to women's participation in the labour force were also reflected in trade union attitudes to women's access to night work and gender differences in the retirement age, which for many years were also supported by women trade unionists. It was entering the European Union and a Constitutional ruling rather than lobbying by women which forced Austria to change its position on these issues. When changes were being discussed regarding women's access to, and the general conditions of night work, women trade unionists sought to mobilise support from their male colleagues using class-based rhetoric, but with little success. This could be viewed as an example of the problems which result from rigidification of gender-specific solidarities.

Conclusion

Austria has been labelled as displaying an inherently conservative form of class politics (Esping-Andersen et al, 1984). After 1945, the Social Democrats became participants in a social partnership with business, and linked themselves with the conservatives in a grand coalition at the parliamentary level. This corporatist environment was marked by consensus and compromise. With this came a forfeiting of trade union rights to militant action, and a freezing of the status quo, with the Social Democrats, albeit initially the weaker partners in the relationship,
sanctioning the maintenance of status-based financial rewards and welfare benefits. This, combined with wage agreements being linked to productivity and economic growth, rather than to a solidaristic wage policy, has undermined the potential of class politics to embrace universal notions of equality.

This conservative stance necessarily impacted on the position of women. Notions of women as mother and wife were already embedded in Austrian culture and the renewed emphasis on consensus and maintenance of the status quo allowed these norms to become rigidified. As a result, women's entry into the labour market did not become part of the transition to social democracy. Rather, women's labour force participation remained stagnant for thirty years and has only very recently begun to increase. There has been a continued emphasis on maternity benefits, but these have not been supplemented with child care policies, reinforcing women's role as mother. In addition, the collective bargaining agenda narrowly defines what are industrial issues, with women's claims largely defined as social issues requiring remedy through legislation.

It is in this context that Benard and Schlaffer (1984: 72) argue that the "linkage of 'women's issues' with social democracy in Austria" was a "fateful development". They maintain that the desire for political unity and consensus has suffocated any possible radicalisation of women's demands (Benard et al, 1984: 72-73). Reconciliation through the social partnership has been dependent on the encompassment of interests within the trade union movement, whereby the heterogeneity of workers' interests have been redefined as a unified class interest. This has necessarily impacted on the way women have organised their interests as workers. In 1945, women's divisions were reinstituted as the primary means of representing women and their interests. These divisions have provided women workers with at least some voice in the decision-making arenas of trade unions, albeit limited, and opportunities to lobby the government and social partners through the appropriate channels, but without disrupting the requirement for political unity or challenging the existing system of decision-making.

However, the corporatist decision-making environment in Austria remains a male-dominated arena, and change from within is difficult in that consensus is predicated on reducing input from sectional interests and there exists an agreement not to raise issues that would be controversial or unacceptable to any of the social
partners. These customs largely exclude the possibility of gender equality becoming a topic for consideration within this forum.

This consensual and conservative form of class politics has not provided women workers with much equality in outcomes. While women trade unionists have not directly challenged this form of politics, they have appealed to their identity as women in seeking a focal point for collective action. With this choice came the reinstatement of women as other in terms of their role in the paid work force. More recently however, women trade unionists, while continuing to use gender-specific strategies, have begun to challenge and redefine the conception of women's labour force equality. In particular, women have sought to expose as potentially rigidifying the existing night work restrictions and proposals for increased maternity leave. In this sense, the gender-specific solidarities employed by women trade unionists in Austria are being redrawn and increasingly politicised.
Chapter Seven

Israel

Introduction

Israel displays several features which enable it to be labelled corporatist: its system of industrial relations is one where a single and encompassing trade union confederation has sought to co-ordinate and limit the demands of workers in line with agreements made with the state and employers (Shalev, 1992: 6). However, the mix of socialist and Zionist ideas which underpinned trade union development has led to a unique brand of worker representation, which has in turn affected the way in which Jewish women workers in Israel have formulated their claims and solidarities.

In this chapter, I identify how Jewish women have sought recognition of their demands as workers through institutionalised inclusion as women within the labour movement. What becomes apparent is that the broader solidarity created around national Jewish identity, both rhetorically and organisationally by the labour movement overshadows the gender specific solidarities constituted by women around a variety of claims. Indeed, Jewish women's interests as workers have been largely marginalised by the trade union movement and this has been even more so for Arab-Israeli women and women from the occupied territories. For this reason, and others outlined below, it is not surprising that women in Israel look for and expect little from their trade union organisation.

In 1994, the Israeli Labour-Coalition lost control of the major trade union confederation for the first time since its creation. Following this, a substantial restructuring has been taking place within the confederation, with considerable repercussions likely for membership levels. This process is still in transition and it is not yet clear what form the industrial arm of the labour movement in Israel will take. This chapter thus only focuses on the period before January 1995.
The Labour Movement in Israel

The labour movement in Israel is quite different in origin and ideology, structure and functions to the models of unionism which exist in both Australia and Europe. In the late nineteenth century, discussions regarding the "Jewish problem" linked the idea of creating a new-Jewish society to notions of a classless society (Levin, 1978: 385). The vision was of a Jewish state based not on private property rights, but on the principles of cooperation and egalitarianism. These ideals were most explicitly manifest through the establishment of kibbutzim (Levin, 1978: 445).

Because pre-state Israel was not industrial but predominantly agricultural, workers were mobilised not around traditional class and political struggles, but around a combination of both socialist and Zionist ideals (Shalev, 1992: 30). These factors have impacted on both the structure and the functions of the labour movement, with the trade union confederation not only representing the interests of workers, but also involving itself in building up the economy and providing health and some welfare services.

The Histadrut, founded in 1920, translates as the General Federation of Trade unions. However, it is not a federation of trade unions in the traditional sense but, as in the case of ÖGB in Austria, workers are recruited directly by the Histadrut and are then assigned to a trade union. This direct membership system combined with the establishment in 1940 of a trade union department within the Histadrut has provided centralised and institutionalised control over trade unions at the local level, union finances and executive and committee appointments (Shalev, 1992: 169). The extent of this control has varied over time and, to make it acceptable to rank and file membership, the Histadrut has often permitted stronger unions to make opportunistic wage gains (Shalev, 1992: 156; Grinberg, 1991).

Political parties not unions created the Histadrut and, since its inception, the Histadrut has remained intimately linked to the party wing of the labour movement. Union officials are elected from lists put forward by political parties. Thus Histadrut leaders are answerable primarily to the political party which sponsored them (Shalev, 1992: 108). Nevertheless, the Histadrut's breadth of membership does provide it with a substantial capacity for political mobilisation and in this way was critical to the Israeli Labour Party's long-term governmental hegemony from
1948, when the state of Israel was created, until 1977 (Grinberg, 1991; Shalev, 1989; 1992).

There are approximately 40 national trade unions in Israel (Histadrut, 1993). These unions are organised by industry for manual workers and by occupation for professional workers. While labour councils provide the Histadrut with representation at the local level, Grinberg argues that the dominance of the Labour Party in labour council elections has stifled internal democracy and has undermined the legitimacy of the local labour council as representative of rank and file workers (Grinberg, 1991: 63). In addition, there exists a strong degree of detachment between the Histadrut's unions and the rank and file membership. It is only the workers' committees which exist at the shop floor level that represent the interests of workers. These are not an organic part of the Histadrut, and delegates are elected independently of the political parties (Shalev, 1992; Grinberg, 1991). Thus officials who want to move upward from the workers' committee are not dependent on those they represent, but on their status in the party.

In 1990, about 75 per cent of all wage earners were members of the Histadrut, the latter representing approximately 85 per cent of workers in the negotiation of collective agreements. However, the Histadrut does not only involve itself in trade union activity. It also supplies social welfare and economic services, including education, housing, culture, banking, insurance and sport. In particular, its involvement in and administration of the Sick Fund guarantees its membership, since access to these health services comes only by being a Histadrut member (Arian, 1989: 33-35) The Fund offers primary health care services to a variety of non-paying members such as students, pensioners and housewives. This has meant that specifically trade union membership is only around 30 per cent of the wider Histadrut affiliation (Shalev, 1992). It has also meant the Histadrut has not been dependent on organising workers to provide itself with a membership base and in many sectors workers remain unorganised (Grinberg, 1991).

The role of the Histadrut has been as much about nation-building as about representing workers. Indeed, the Histadrut was created to build a political, geographical and economic infrastructure for a future state of Israel. In pre-state Israel, it involved itself in economic activities that would not have otherwise attracted a capitalist investor and is now a major employer in its own right. While
the Histadrut's role in state building was redefined after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, in 1986, 27 per cent of the country's industrial product was still being generated by Histadrut firms (Arian, 1989: 35). Although the capital accumulation of the Histadrut has been referred to as being in the interests of the working class, little worker participation or ownership has ensued and industrial democracy reforms have had limited affect (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 130). Thus, unlike other OECD countries, the economy in Israel is divided into three sectors: the government sector (comprised of the military, public services and state-owned enterprises), the private sector and the Histadrut sector (Izraeli, 1994: 307).

The overlap of the Histadrut's economic and trade union functions manifests itself in the collective bargaining sphere. Representation of workers demands are constrained by its interests as an employer, providing Histadrut leaders with a wariness to possible detrimental outcomes of wage demands for employment and investment. It is argued that this contradiction in functions has often diminished the incentive for the Histadrut to centralise and control wage demands. The frame of reference embraced by Histadrut leaders has not been restricted to representation of the working class, but rather an instrument of building the national homeland. To this end, the Histadrut never desired unified working class mobilisation (Shalev, 1992: 30; Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 129).

It is important here to note the differential status of Arab-Israeli citizens and Palestinians who live in the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Arab-Israeli citizens are entitled to Histadrut membership, whereas the latter are not. However, even for Arab-Israeli's, affiliation and participation within the Histadrut has been dependent on the level of threat Arab workers have posed both economically and politically. In the years prior to 1948, Arab workers were in demand over Jewish immigrants as they were cheaper to hire and more productive. But an alliance between worker pioneers and organised Zionism provided the means by which Arab workers were excluded from both jobs and workers organisations in the Jewish sectors (Shalev, 1992: 64-69; Grinberg, 1991: 62-63).

The labour movement also promoted the connection between labourism and Zionism to protect itself from alliances between Jewish and Arab trade unionism. While the Histadrut accepted Jewish-Arab joint trade union activity by 1927, this was only within the sphere of public or foreign employers and Arab unionisation
was not actively encouraged. After 1948, Arab workers proved less of a threat either politically (many had left after the declaration of the state of Israel) or economically (after World War Two there was an substantial increase in industrialisation and a decline in citriculture which favoured Jewish workers more than Arab workers). As a result, the Histadrut set up a separate Arab department, separate activities, separate unions and branches, thereby controlling Arab involvement in trade union policy making. The separate Arab branch still exists today (Shalev, 1992: 42).

Welfare state provision has also been considerably segmented between Arab and Jews. While universal coverage and non-discriminatory benefits were introduced through national insurance in 1958, Arab citizens seldom received the same level of benefits as Jewish citizens. During the 1960s, this segregation was indirectly formalised with the established of separate scales for urban and rural residents. In reality, this ruling never applied to Jewish citizens in rural localities (Doron and Kramer, 1991: 175). Although this criteria was abolished in 1973, discrimination exists with respect to income maintenance, education, employment creation, housing and personal social services for Arab citizens (Shalev, 1989: 104). Furthermore, much social protection is now based on the employment relationship, putting at a disadvantage those in the more exposed and secondary sectors of the labour market (many Arab and women workers) (Shalev, 1989: 105).

In pre-state Israel, trade unionism and collective bargaining were highly decentralised. After 1948, the Histadrut attempted to develop several national wage policies with limited success. Strike activity has been a constant feature during some periods and, once again, the dualist tendencies of the Israeli labour market are evident, with white collar educated workers, and increasingly manual and technical workers in state-owned and exclusively Jewish workplaces, continuing to push for wage differentials and union autonomy. The need to maintain universal control over workers required that the Histadrut sanction these wage demands, contributing to the impossibility of corporatist restraint (Shalev, 1992: 123; Shalev, 1989; Grinberg, 1991). Today, bargaining takes place at three levels: nationally, within each sector and at the workplace.

Despite the existence of a centralised and strong labour movement, a universal welfare state and centralised wage bargaining system have not been forthcoming in
Israel. While the income gap between workers grew after the establishment of the state of Israel, this development has not led to any substantial increase in political mobilisation on the basis of class. Indeed, it appears that in the drive for nationhood, working class identification was overshadowed by Zionism (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989: 84-91). In this process, the role of trade unionism was, and has remained, marginal to the labour movement's political aspirations.

It is evident that Israel has many of the organisational features required to acquire the label corporatist. The Histadrut is encompassing in its scope of membership, it is both strong and centralised with an associational monopoly and it has always had intimate links with the party of the left. However, there are features which make the Israeli version of corporatism peculiar. While the rhetoric of class struggle was initially applied in pre-state Israel, this was soon overshadowed by the rhetoric of Zionism. In the practice of politics, the Histadrut has involved itself not only in working class representation, but in projects relevant to nation-building. In this sense, Israel's unitary labour organisation is not dependent on working class solidarity manifest through class-oriented trade unionism. Rather, the Histadrut has refused to foster a consolidated class solidarity between all workers, focusing instead on developing a unified Jewish labour movement.

**The Position of Women in Israel**

Between 1954 and 1993 women's labour force participation in Israel increased from 21 percent to 43.4 per cent (ILO, 1994) with considerable growth during the 1970s in response to the expansion of financial, public and community services following the 1967 war (Izraeli, 1994: 304). However, these participation rates vary considerably according to ethnicity, with considerably more European/ American Jewish women than African/ Asian Jewish women in paid work. In 1985, the participation by Arab women was only 11 per cent, although, once married, participation in paid work becomes less acceptable (Rakba, 1991: 189).

Regardless of ethnicity, large numbers of women predominate in a small number of occupations, such as clerical, service and semi-professional positions, although those of European origin are more likely to be found in higher positions. 60 per cent of women work in the public sector, yet 80 per cent of the lower-middle level
posts are held by women (Izraeli, 1991; Rakba, 1991). It should be noted, however, that the public sector in Israel is much broader in scope than in most OECD countries. In addition to the tertiary sector, where women public employees predominate, the primary sector also employs mostly public sector workers. This is because most Israeli capital, much of which is derived from foreign aid, is concentrated in the hands of the public employer (Grinberg, 1991: 36). Within this part of the public sector, which has considerable labour strength, the presence of women is marginal. The percentage of women working part-time has also increased from 30 per cent in 1970 to 42 per cent in 1987 (Izraeli, 1991: 172).

In terms of wage equality, women do not fare well in the state of Israel. A comprehensive study of gender differences in wages undertaken in 1980 indicated that women in the public sector earned 78 per cent of what men earned. The study also showed that, if women were paid the same as men for their human capital, their income would be two per cent more than men's (Izraeli, 1991: 171). In 1992 the gender-wage gap had widened to 30-35 per cent (Efroni, 1994: 1). More generally, Histadrut figures indicate that 65 per cent of those who earn $500 (US) a month are women, while women comprise only 9 per cent of those earning $2500 a month. In addition, 70 per cent of working women employees only earn the minimum wage (Levavi: 1991).

Unlike many OECD countries, women in Israel are formally included in the military. However, this has not guaranteed their equality either in terms of the jobs they undertake or in terms of the power they exercise (Yuval-Davis, 1985: 649). For example, of the 790 military occupational classifications, only 210 are open for women, most of them clerical and largely unskilled. Men are seen to be undertaking the 'front' tasks, with women provided support to men at the 'rear' (Ehrlich, 1980; Yuval-Davis, 1985: 662).

While initially women undertook training with men, women are now trained separately. The women's Corp is called Chen, translated to mean charm, and it is argued that this title reflects the role women are expected to play within the army: raising morale, making it a home away from home and displaying their feminine characteristics (Izraeli, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1985: 663). Thus women's role in the army is arguably no different to the role they play in the labour market or the home; the sexual division of labour appears ubiquitous in Israel.
However, the role of the military in both defining and institutionalising gender distinctions is considerable. The 1949 Military Defence Law, which portrayed military service as the essence of Israeli citizenship and ascribed the Israeli army with "the status of supreme social educator and social integrator, exempted married Jewish women from compulsory service and mothers from reserve duty" (Herzog, 1996: 5). Not only has this legislation categorised women as primarily wives and mothers or potential mothers, it has excluded them from access to a military career and consequently to roles and networks that have substantial value in civilian employment (Izraeli, 1994: 309). In this way, the military has considerable influence over both the private and public lives of women in Israel.

Women and Representation in the Israeli Union Movement

In this section I review the way in which women, as both workers and wives of workers, have had their interests represented within the trade union confederation in pre-state Israel and beyond, and the extent to which this has involved women's presence in the confederation hierarchy. I also examine the barriers that are considered to prevent more women being elected to decision-making positions, with a particular focus on the intimate links between the trade union confederation and the Israeli Labour Party. I then discuss the strategies women unionists have undertaken to circumvent these difficulties and the importance women unionists have placed on gendering representation.

Inclusion and Representation

The creation of a new society in pre-state Israel was based on a socialist Zionist rhetoric of equality which led many women to believe that Jewish national liberation would include women's liberation. However, although women themselves sought to discourage the re-emergence of old forms of inequality, nation-building, it seemed, required women to maintain their traditional roles of mothers and homemakers (Swirski, 1991: 286, Bernstein, 1987b). Women were often excluded from much of the paid work that was being undertaken; in particular, road construction work groups and agricultural communes avoided employing women and, if accepted, women were relegated to service jobs (Bernstein, 1987a: 456; 1987b). In response some women began organising
separately in collectives, tendering for construction jobs and setting up their own agricultural training farms (Bernstein, 1987a: 456). However, generally, women's labour force participation in these areas was also strongly resisted by the Histadrut-controlled employment exchange and frequent unemployment meant that there was little incentive for the male dominated labour movement in pre-state Israel to promote women's full participation in the labour force (Bernstein, 1987a; Izraeli, 1992).

Yet unlike women in the other countries examined here, women's exclusion from certain spheres of the labour forced did not exclude them from Histadrut membership. Indeed all women, paid workers and wives of workers were encouraged to become members. However, despite this inclusion, many women workers were disappointed with the small number of women delegates sent to the founding convention of the Histadrut and the under-representation of women on the Histadrut council. As a result, the Women Workers' Movement was formed, with its objective being to place the 'woman question' on the Histadrut agenda and thereby convince the rest of the labour movement that equality for women was an important issue in the creation of the new society (Bernstein, 1987a: 459; 1987b).

In an effort to achieve this, local committees for the affairs of women workers were formed to mobilise local women and focus on issues of concern to women. There was some debate, however, over the level of autonomy to be provided to these women's committees. Histadrut officials sought complete integration with the labour councils (thereby bringing them under direct Histadrut control), while some women wanted the committees to be autonomously elected by women workers (Izraeli, 1981; 1992; Bernstein 1987a; 1987b).

In the end, a Histadrut resolution required that the women workers committees be appointed by and accountable to the labour councils. While the women appointed were activists, this limited autonomy meant all decisions and initiatives undertaken by the committees needed the approval of the local labour councils. The women's committees were thus dependent on precisely those organisations the indifference of which to women's issues had initially stimulated their creation (Bernstein, 1987a: 464). Furthermore, this resolution was to have repercussions for the future power of the women's committees. Localised Histadrut control made it difficult to maintain links with women at a grass roots level, and this in turn curtailed the
possibility of mobilising local women around specific causes, thereby limiting the committees' impact on mainstream Histadrut policy making (Bernstein, 1987a; Pope, 1991, Izraeli 1992).

Women's labour force participation fluctuated regularly which altered the composition of female Histadrut membership. In 1926, 32 per cent of all women members were wage earners and 66 per cent were workers' wives. By 1930, the proportion of wage earners decreased to only 25.4 per cent and the proportion of workers' wives rose to 74 per cent. The reduction in the number of working women members was exacerbated by an employment crisis in the late 1930s, which prompted many Histadrut members to demand that only one member of each married couple be entitled to work. Although this did not become official Histadrut policy, it was implicitly accepted that married women were expected to be the non-workers (Bernstein, 1987a: 461).

Corresponding to the increase in the proportion of workers wives, the Organisation of Working Mothers was created within the Histadrut. By the late 1930s, the Organisation of Working Mothers had become a major organ of the Women Workers' Movement, involving itself in volunteer social work among immigrants and placing considerable emphasis on the role of mothers in state building. While the concept of workers wives gave symbolic recognition to women's domestic labour and provided a means by which women could remain socially active, it also reinforced traditional conceptions of women's activities (Pope, 1991; Bernstein 1987b).

In 1976, the Council of the Women Workers' Movement and the Organisation of Working Mothers merged and was renamed Na'amat. It is described as "the women's movement of the Histadrut whose aim is the advancement of women in legislation, society and at work" (Histadrut, 1994: 3). Today, Na'amat maintains a network of day care centres, vocational schools, and community centres for both Jewish and Arab women. It also provides legal advice on issues of discrimination and personal status. While 100 branches exist at local level, the structure, objectives and achievements of Na'amat are constrained by its connection to the institutional framework of the Histadrut (Pope, 1991: 232). Furthermore, although Na'amat represents over 700,000 women, these women are seldom mobilised around issues outside of their locality (Na'amat, DSW). In this sense, the role of
Na'amat is to service women members not organise them. In addition, Na'amat was developed as part of the Zionist movement, which has meant that at various times its objectives of equality for women have been diluted by national and partisan concerns (Pope, 1991: 232).

The representation of working women's issues has been taken up in a more specific way by the Department for Salaried Women within the Histadrut's Trade Union Department. Established in 1959, it is a small department which liaises with women elected to union secretariats and representatives from large national works committees. Through regular meetings and links with local women workers' committees, the Department for Salaried Women aims to organise the unorganised women workers, to improve working conditions and to oversee implementation of relevant rules and laws passed by the Histadrut and Knesset respectively (Histadrut, 1981: 15). However, the Department's resources are limited and the already marginal position of trade unionism within the Histadrut restricts its realm of influence.

Despite the existence of separate organisations for women and the fact that women make up half of the membership of the Histadrut, they remain conspicuously absent from the leadership of the Histadrut. The two top positions of Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General have always been occupied by men (Buber Agassi, 1991: 208). The highest committee is the central committee with 43 members, of which women made up 17 per cent in 1988. This an increase of 5 per cent over ten years. The executive committee of 196 members has a representation of 11.2 per cent (Benson and Harverd, 1988). This latter figure is almost the same as ten years ago (Status of Women, c1981).

Few women are heads of national trade unions. The Pharmaceutical Union elected its first female chairperson in 1990 and while several other female dominated unions also have women chairpersons (nurses, teachers and social workers), the predominance of women within an occupation does not guarantee this (Public Service, Textile). In the male dominated industry unions, there are few women representatives, with, for example, only one woman out of forty on the secretariat in the Metal Workers' Union. At the local level, women responsible to the Department for Salaried Women are represented in half of the 72 labour councils.
All the women are paid, although some of them only work part-time (DSW). Na'amat also provides representatives to labour councils.

In terms of workers committees, in 1977, women were represented on only one-third of the committees in workplaces where there were large numbers of women (Izraeli, 1982). Since this time, trade unions have begun to explore several quota options as a result of lobbying from the Department for Salaried Women. A workplace with more than 300 employees and with more than 25 per cent of them women was required to elect at least one women to the workers' committee even if she had fewer votes than a male candidate. This measure was amended in 1993 to read that where women constituted 10 per cent of workers, the election of at least one women must be guaranteed (Department for Salaried Women, 1993: 21-22).

However, segregation within the paid workforce appears to impact on women's access to workers' committees. Within the metal industry, for example, women predominate in the clerical and electronics sections, whereas the men are concentrated in the heavy metals areas, from whence most of the workers committee representatives are drawn (Metal). In addition, many private sector firms in which women work remained non-unionised and without workers' committees, thereby reducing women's representation in the negotiating process.

Quotas for Women

Histadrut elections are held every three or four years and delegates are elected from lists put forward by nearly all the political parties which are represented within the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset). Each party then nominates delegates, in proportion to its share of votes, to a quasi-parliamentary forum, which in turn elects several higher-level governing bodies (Grinberg, 1991: 5; Shalev, 1992). It is in this way that the industrial and political wings of the labour movement in Israel are so intimately linked. Thus, an assessment of women's representation in the Histadrut requires an examination of the way women are represented within political parties. I focus primarily on women in the Labour Party because, until 1994, the Israeli Labour Party held the majority of votes in the Histadrut.

A multi-party list system of proportional representation has been found in a number of countries to be highly correlated with the greater representation of women in
Parliament (Castles, 1981). While women's representation in the Knesset has never surpassed 9.1 per cent (Azmon, 1993), this is still quite high comparatively, although when limiting the comparison to countries with list systems, 9 per cent is low. Women's representation is a little higher on the Histadrut executive, but it is still far from proportional to women's membership of the Histadrut (50 per cent).

To remedy this, Labour women pushed for a quota of 20 per cent representation to be accepted within the Labour Party Constitution. This quota also applied to the Histadrut when controlled by the Labour Party. However, the women I interviewed noted that realising the quota required constant vigilance in reminding the Histadrut leadership of this commitment (DSW, Labour). A decision was taken at the most recent Histadrut conference to have a quota of 30 per cent representation of women in all Histadrut bodies, although how this is implemented remains to be seen.

Recent legislation was passed requiring all government directorates to provide adequate representation for women. It was then discovered that three ministers making appointments to directorates had included no women. The Israel Women's Network took this case to the Supreme Court, where, in November 1994, the Judge ruled against the Ministers. As the case received much media attention, it also raised the profile of affirmative action as a political issue (IWN). While not directly related to the representation of women within the union movement, having the issue of quotas accepted is seen to require a raising of public consciousness. Thus, women trade unionists and others saw the directorate case as a considerable victory and viewed any media attention raising the profile of the representation of women as an important strategy (Labour, DSW, IWN).

The key to quotas being successful however, is to ensure that women are placed in winnable positions on the party list. A bill was put before Parliament proposing that all parties be obliged to have affirmative action strategies to promote more women onto party lists, but was not passed. While Labour's unofficial number is one woman in every ten, the Israel Women's Network is lobbying for every second or third name on the list being a woman's (IWN). Furthermore, in the past, lists were compiled by an elected selection committee. More recently, however, primaries are held whereby candidates need to target 160,000 voters rather than 3,000 as before. This requires money and resources to mount a national publicity
campaign. Early research suggests that this system restricts the participation of women (IWN).

**Partisanship and Women's Interests**

Once elected, the political parties require their recruits to operate as a party faction and to accept party discipline. As a consequence, all levels of the Histadrut including local labour councils and individual trade union leadership as well as Na'amat and the women's section of the trade union department are administered by party nominees (Shalev, 1992). The only exception to this model are the committees established at the workplace level. Hence, this institutional framework prevents direct representation beyond the level of workers' committee.

Herzog (1996) has argued that, although women are selected as representatives of women, "they are expected to prefer the general interests of the party over their so-called particularistic interests as women" (Herzog, 1996: 3). Indeed, few of the women who have stood for Parliament have identified as feminist or seek to represent issues identified as 'women's issues' and women-only lists have proved unsuccessful and politically unacceptable (Freedman, 1990). During the 1990s, the issue of the political representation of women assumed a greater profile and several women members of the Knesset have openly identified themselves as feminists working for the cause of women's equality (Shalvi, nd; IWN, Mapam). However, it appears that women's interests are ultimately overshadowed by the party's interests should a conflict arise (Mapam, Labour, Izraeli, 1994: 317; Weiss and Yishai, 1980: 169), thereby reinforcing the notion that the common cause, whether it be security or the economy, take precedence over sectional interests. Thus, gender-specific strategies and solidarities are only acceptable and relevant within Israeli labour politics up to a point.

Despite the apparent secondary status of women's issues, women's divisions are an important and acceptable means for building a power base and graduating into party politics. Several women Members of the Knesset had previously been the Head of Na'amat, but again this has not meant them showing an exceptional interest in women's issues once in parliament. The numbers of women who make the transition from the women's sections to the mainstream political party, however, are few in number and they must display a commitment to the general
party interest. As a result, there is some concern that using the highest position in Na'amat to recruit support from male party members may involve making critical compromises on demands for women (Na'amat 3, DSW).

In addition, political parties hold a near-monopoly on local organising which has undermined the possibility for grass-roots activity by women within alternative organisations. Indeed, Na'amat as a party organisation has helped to preserve that organisational monopoly by co-opting new organisational efforts or by denying support to activities not initiated internally (Buber Agassi, 1991: 299). Thus increasing women's participation in trade union politics is inherently linked to participation in party politics.

In response, women from the Histadrut and other political organisations are tackling the issue of increasing women's representation by trying to recruit more women into politics at a local level (Labour, IWN, Mapam, Youth, Na'amat 1, 2). The Head of the Women's Division of the Labour Party has organised conventions around the country, some specifically targeted at drawing career women into labour party activities. She is also looking to counter the phenomenon that a large percentage of women who are unsuccessful the first time they stand for election, either locally or nationally, do not run a second time (Labour).

Educating young Histadrut members on the issue of women's representation is another strategy being applied by the women of the Labour Party. They are aiming to ensure that youth leadership courses will have equal numbers of women and men, with organisers being forced to find women representatives (Labour, Youth). In addition, at the 1995 convention, the women's division was looking to establish a requirement of 40 per cent women's representation in the young guard. Both Histadrut and Labour women argued that, since these are the people that will influence the party in ten years time, such a quota will change the gendered character of the party (Labour, Youth, DSW).

In 1991 a joint cross-party national campaign facilitated by the Israel Women's Network was set up to encourage more women to join any political party. It targeted the 1992 elections, and was repeated for the 1996 elections. The campaign received substantial media response, primarily "because it was the first time that anyone saw right and left women sitting together and saying join a party and get
The Israel Women's Network has also been active in running seminars and courses aimed at developing women's skills in different aspects of political life. These courses have become very popular and are now run nationwide. In addition, a book has been published entitled *Politics is for me*, providing women with what are considered essential tools for those who want to participate and succeed in the political arena (IWN). Similar strategies are also employed by Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women in trying to get more women elected to labour councils. Courses in political education are offered in cooperation with some universities, as well as more general courses on how to become politically active, get oneself nominated as a candidate and run for election.

Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women within the Histadrut act as the focal points for most of initiatives undertaken to increase women's representation and participation in party and union life. Through their local labour councils and women's branches, these bodies have provided a framework for the creation of networks amongst working women. Several women unionists acknowledged that these networks were necessary to counter the fact that Histadrut politics remained an 'old-boys network', which was difficult for women to enter, a problem accentuated by the fact that men enter this arena early, while women tend to come to it later in life, after having raised their families (Na'amat 2, Labour, DSW, Buber Agassi, 1991). While women unionists noted that women's family responsibilities hindered the increased involvement of women in party and trade union politics, no specific strategies existed to address this apart from encouragement to participate and the provision of support networks (Na'amat 1, 2, Labour, DSW, Clerical, Metal).

The Department for Salaried Women also held seminars for workers' committees, in which issues relating to women and work were integrated in order to provide exposure to men of such concerns. A variety of women-only courses were also provided which women unionists viewed as important in encouraging women to be more active. While individual unions also ran courses in union negotiation, the rights of workers, the pension system and elections, in which women were
encouraged to participate, few courses were specifically aimed at women (Metal, Pharmacy, Clerical).

However, neither the Department for Salaried Women nor Na'amat are considered core or powerful sections within the Histadrut, which makes it difficult to push women's issues, including that of representation onto the mainstream Histadrut agenda. A number of women with whom I spoke expressed concern over the lack of political power the women's sections appeared to have. These women maintained that the potential woman-power of Na'amat needed to be better harnessed, with more militant and aggressive demands made and action taken. Several women also argued that for too long women have been giving in to what are considered bigger problems such as the economy and security (Na'amat 3, DSW, IWN).

Representing Diversity

At the Parliamentary level, a women's cross-party alliance has been established and formalised as a Knesset Committee on the Status of Women. All 11 women Members of the Knesset (from different parties) are part of the committee and all have a very strong background and commitment to women's issues. This is a unique feature in the Israeli political landscape, in that it is unusual for women from different political perspectives to form a bloc, although party discipline is still required.

However, as mentioned earlier, party dominance at local level has thwarted the development of a grass-roots women's movement either independently or from within the labour movement. Furthermore, although most Israeli Jewish and Arab women are members of the Histadrut (necessary to receive health services), it is unlikely that many of those women working in the private sector or as part-time workers were unionised or represented by a workers' committee.

While a women's movement did emerge during the 1970s, this has not spread widely throughout Israel. The Israel Women's Network is a non-partisan organisation looking to represent the interests of women through litigation, legislation, advocacy, education and consciousness-raising. However, its membership remains small and it is not a grass-roots organisation.
Before moving on it is necessary to note that all the above material relates primarily to Jewish women. Within Na'amat, Arab women have their own section, which was headed by an Arab woman for the first time in 1978. However, in general Arab-Israeli women have limited visibility and voice in both the Histadrut and the political culture of Israel in general.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, the Histadrut does not represent Palestinians who live in the occupied territories. Instead, Palestinian women have organised themselves in the form of grass-roots women's committees across the country (Strum, 1992: 1-5). These committees have, amongst other things, encouraged Palestinian women workers to enrol in independent Palestinian trade unions. However, membership of married women has depended on the attitudes of husbands, who dislike women participating in gender-integrated groups. Objections are also raised by families to their unmarried daughters joining male organisations. In response, the committee leaders have set up union centres in their own homes where only women unionists meet. Approximately five per cent of Palestinian women workers from the occupied territories are unionised compared to 17 per cent of men (Strum, 1992: 59-65).

Relevance of Representation

The political representation of women has been the focus for several women's organisations in Israel. A number of women interviewed argued that for women's issues to be adequately addressed, women must have more of a voice within the Histadrut higher councils (Na'amat 3, DSW, Youth). The increased number of women in positions within local labour councils and the quota system for representation on workers' committees was the result of work by the Head of the Department for Salaried Women. She has a position on the Histadrut's executive committee and has lobbied constantly for these measures over the last twelve years. Using her position she was also able to gain an increased budget for lectures, seminars and literature to be provided to women in the workplace (DSW).

Several women also argued that employing more women with experience and concern for women in negotiations was vital if women were to avoid detrimental agreements being signed on their behalf (Na'amat 3, DSW). For example, an
agreement with the national airline was negotiated by the Histadrut that most of the male and female stewards would be temporary appointments only in an effort to attain a more 'flexible' labour supply. However, without tenure, access to social benefits is reduced. It is predominantly women who fill such positions and a legal adviser from Na'amat argued that, had women figured in the negotiations, a better understanding of the impact of such an agreement on women could have been articulated (Na'amat 3).

However, not all the women trade unionists with whom I spoke agreed on whether the representation by women made a difference to the visibility of women's issues. Several women maintained that the importance of having women union leaders depended on who the woman was and on her motivation (Pharmacy, Clerical, Youth). It was considered important to distinguish between whether they were women who were capable of expressing the position of women's needs as workers or whether they were just political appointments 'window dressing' (Na'amat 3). A few women suggested that it made little difference having men or women negotiating on behalf of workers (Public Service, Textile, Pharmacy), but one interviewee also noted that, while her male colleagues were supportive, she felt that men higher up in the Histadrut or in the Parliament may only be rhetorically supportive (Public Service, Labour).

Assessment

The institutionalisation of a separate division for women has, over time, become the primary means by which the labour movement addresses the woman question. However, although women's issues are provided with a political space within the labour movement in Israel, it is a space that lacks autonomy and resources. Both Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Workers remain marginal to the main decision-making arenas of the Histadrut and their role, particularly in the case of Na'amat, has often been defined in terms of the national interest rather than in reference to the interests of women workers. Channelling protests (in this case women's) into a manageable division is a tactic used often by the Histadrut. Its electoral system allows for internal opposition, thereby diverting workers' protests away from forming separate organisations and leaving the Histadrut’s structure unchallenged (Grinberg, 1991: 64). Certainly, the women's sections have proved no threat to Histadrut unity.
Women's representation within the Histadrut has nevertheless begun to increase over the past fifteen years. Over the same period, the adoption of quotas has been pushed by women unionists and politicians alike, with numbers beginning to increase on local labour councils and workers' committees, although, at the higher levels, adherence to quotas is less diligent. However, because workers' committees are not linked to the Histadrut this has resulted in a lack of interest representation upward to the Histadrut policy-making bodies and means that the women's quota implemented at worker committee level has not challenged male dominance in the Histadrut hierarchy. Indeed, women officials within Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women are party representatives, rather than women promoted from the shop floor through the ranks of the various trade unions. Thus interest redefinition appears to be dominated by those within the political party.

Nevertheless, women's representation at all levels is considered an important strategy in having the issues of women workers addressed by women both within and outside of the union movement. To this end, women within the Histadrut have employed gender specific strategies, such as establishing networks and running seminars, to encourage more women to become politically active at local levels. However, gender specific strategies have yet to provide any substantial representation for Arab-Israeli women or women in private sector work, where unionisation levels are low.

**Women's Wages**

With respect to women's wages, the women unionists with whom I spoke in Israel regarded equal pay and the level of minimum wages as of considerable importance to women workers. Below, I discuss the difficulties women unionists face in reducing the gender wage differential, including the decentralised wage bargaining environment and the discrimination that exists in the allocation of fringe benefits. I also assess the way in which women unionists have sought to utilise a variety of gender specific strategies, often without obvious support from within the trade union confederation.
Collective Bargaining Strategies

Collective bargaining takes place both nationally and locally in Israel. Before entering a centralised bargaining round, the trade union department formulates a wage policy, which includes a blanket increase in wages and benefits and sometimes additional benefits targeted toward low income earners (Brauer, 1990: 639). Economy-wide framework agreements are concluded every two years for each sector. In addition, a cost of living allowance is made to workers according to a general collective agreement negotiated between the Histadrut and the Coordinating Bureau of the Economic Organisations (the employers' umbrella organisation). National level collective agreements are also made for specific industries, occupations or large firms (Shalev, 1992: 26).

In addition, the Minister of Labour has the legal power to extend a specific general collective agreement, or part of it, to include other workers. This practice, combined with the frequent enactment into law of key provisions of central agreements, assures that particular conditions are applied universally. It also frees the Histadrut from needing to organise all workplaces, although there is no real need anyway as the health fund ensures them of membership. Indeed, many workplaces remain unorganised.

Despite the apparent highly centralised system, a significant degree of wage determination takes place at the sub-national level. While this arrangement has not always been acceptable to the Histadrut, its desire to represent the totality of labour meant that, by the 1980s, national wage settlements were accepted as the floor above which workers could expect to obtain additional benefits through negotiation at the plant level. Negotiation locally has also been considered by employers to provide flexibility in times of high inflation (Brauer, 1990: 647). Thus, workers' committees at the plant and enterprise level are primarily responsible for negotiating wage supplements, such as seniority pay, productivity bonuses, fringe benefits and overtime.

However, such decentralisation is viewed as problematic for women wage earners. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the allocation of fringe benefits can sometimes account for up to 40 per cent of net earnings (Izraeli, 1991: 171). Within the various financial industries (some in the private sector), fringe benefits may
contribute to a gender wage differential of 46 per cent for those in full time work. In this sector, fringe benefits may include not only the standard car and overtime payments, but also loans on easy terms, bonuses and profit allocations (Efroni, 1994: 5). Vertical segregation according to gender means that fewer women are entitled to these benefits and this is exacerbated by the often arbitrary issue of lower job rankings for women despite women having equal human capital to their male counterparts who occupy similar jobs (Efroni 1988 cited in Izraeli, 1991: 171, Textile, Clerical). The Equal Opportunity Law (1981) outlawed employers advertising positions or vocational training in a gender specific manner. However, several women unionists I spoke with indicated this had not prevented the allocation of gendered job titles within the workplace. For example, women's work is often graded as unskilled whereas men's is graded as skilled labour (Benson and Harverd, 1988: 18). A woman in the category of 'secretary' is thus paid less than a male 'administrator', even though they are doing essentially the same work (Clerical, Public Service).

Several strategies are being employed to counter the seemingly arbitrary allocation of fringe benefits. Some trade union women are collecting statistics, undertaking surveys of their members and monitoring agreements made at the workplace level (Pharmacy, Efroni-Interview, Public Service). Threats of strike action have also been made in an effort to obtain a more equitable allocation of fringe benefits in collective agreements (Pharmacy, Public Service). However, this latter strategy tends to be possible only for those unions or workers committees that are independently strong; predominantly those in the public sector.

The Department for Salaried Workers in the Histadrut consults monthly with women representatives in the labour councils regarding the nature and implementation of collective agreements. However, a stronger presence at the workplace is considered necessary for any real change. While the Department also meets with groups of women at the workplace level, informing them of their rights in terms of wages and encouraging them to undertake legal action to remedy problems when necessary, they do not have the resources to monitor all collective agreements signed at workplace level (DSW).

At national trade union level, the Department for Salaried Women works with women unionists from a variety of predominantly female unions in negotiations
over collective agreements (DSW). However, the influence of the women's section in influencing the Histadrut's stance on particular negotiations may not be considerable. Efroni claims that the Histadrut failed to investigate recent research findings which indicate a widening of the gender wage differential (Efroni, 1994: 4). She argues that, while the Histadrut may have good reasons for not publicly showing any interest, this in itself is worrying, considering the organisation is involved in signing general wage agreements which apply to both women and men. Indeed Efroni's research suggests that wage agreements for the years 1988-92 have disadvantaged those at lower levels (many of whom are women) in that a 23 per cent increase for all workers actually translated into a 32 per cent increase for higher level workers and a 9 per cent increase for those at lower levels (Efroni, 1994: 2).

The issues of fringe benefits and of more general wage increases have often been pursued through strike activity. Despite the corporatist appearance of labour organisation in Israel, militant strike activity is not uncommon and, from a cross-national perspective, is relatively high. Most strikes occur at the sub-national level, tend to be concentrated in the public sector and are often unauthorised by the relevant national or local Histadrut bodies (Shalev, 1989; 1992).

This applies to several of the female dominated unions in the tertiary section of the public sector. Between 1992-94, the teachers' union (which is independent of the Histadrut) and the nurses' union undertook several strikes over wages and conditions and, in doing so, achieved considerable gains for their women workers (Nurses, Efroni-Interview, Mapam). In some cases they received professional advice on planning strategies from Linda Efroni, an industrial relations consultant. Advances in wages have also been made for physiotherapists, pharmacists and social workers through the strike weapon. In many of these cases, support from other women's organisations such as Na'amat and IWN has been forthcoming; by the latter, in the form of public demonstrations and press releases (IWN).

Although predominantly a strategy employed by public sector unions, the use of the strike weapon is not restricted to these unions. In early 1994, workers in three textile factories went on strike over the provision of minimum wages. During this strike, the Department for Salaried Women supported the sewing workers trade union with legal advisory assistance (DSW). In 1995, women workers in a textile factory in an Arab village won a 30 per cent wage rise and improved working
conditions after a three year struggle and four strikes (The Guardian, 21 June, 1995). This struggle was led by a 23 year old Arab seamstress, who was hailed by trade union leaders as having achieved what most trade unions have failed to do - that is make a major industrial group comply with the minimum wage law.

While strikes are 'windows of opportunity' for some workers, for others in industries not as powerful or strategically placed or those that are unorganised, this kind of action is less feasible. Furthermore, while economy-wide wage restraint policies have often been attempted by the Histadrut, its simultaneous acceptance of certain trade unions deviating from such restraints, either by negotiation or through strike action, has undermined the possibility of equal pay, since women do not predominate in strong unions outside of the public sector.

**Labour Laws and Legislative Strategies**

Labour legislation is the means by which many basic standards are set which apply to all workers and employers. Thus, choosing to pursue the issue of fringe benefits through amendment of the Equal Pay Act is not an unusual strategy for women in trade unions in Israel.

In 1964, the Equal Pay Law provided that women be paid a wage equal to that of their male counterparts when undertaking the same work. However, the law did not succeed in achieving a reduction in the gender wage differential and few wage discrimination cases have been decided in the labour court. It is largely because of the failure of the law to date that attention has become focused on extending the definition of wages to include fringe benefits (Raday, 1991: 180; IWN, Na'amat 3, Mapam).

As a result, Na'amat, the Department for Salaried Women and the Israel Women's Network, amongst others, all see lobbying the government as an important strategy in the fight for equal rights for women, including pay (Public Service, Pharmacy, Nurses, DSW). This can be done either independently or through the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women. Regular discussions have been held on the issue of equal pay by the Committee; calling in expert opinions and collating data with which to press a case to the Government (Mapam, IWN, DSW). Meetings have also been held with the Minister of Labour (in 1994 this post was held by a
woman) and the Minister of Finance by women from a number of organisations (Mapam, DSW, IWN). However, as at the end of 1994, the petitions regarding fringe benefits had failed. While "it only requires adding one sentence so it reads equal pay for equal work and fringe benefits" (IWN), the Minister of Finance claimed that such an amendment would be too expensive (Clerical, Mapam, IWN).

In addition to the issue of equal pay is that of the minimum wage; women constitute 70 per cent of those on minimum wages. The Minimum Wage Law defines the wage components included in the calculation of the minimum wage for a normal work day. This is usually 45 per cent of the average wage and does not include fringe benefits. It is updated annually (Histadrut, 1994: 11). However, despite the presence of the minimum wage law, token supervision by the Histadrut at the workplace often means workers are not paid the minimum wage. This is particularly the case with immigrant and Arab workers. In response, the Minister of Labour recently introduced a monitoring and enforcement process using monthly data from the Institute of Social Security (Na'amat). What results from this strategy remains to be seen.

Many Israeli Arab women work in cleaning and in textile factories or shops which are characterised by very low wages, no overtime pay, no social benefits and few or no vacations or sick leave (Rakba, 1991: 189). While most firms pay the minimum wage, some do not or, instead, pay a daily minimum wage (based on a full working week), but then restrict the number of working days. To counter such practices, the Arab section of the Histadrut runs cultural activities for workers, conducts courses and seminars for workers committees and distributes literature in Arabic regarding workers rights (Arab Section).

It has been argued that the Histadrut itself has been involved in the exploitation of Arab women workers who have often found employment in Histadrut-owned factories in the textiles and electronics industries, where they provide a cheap and often unorganised labour source. Na'amat acknowledged the problems these women face, but has been unable to provide any effective opposition, either through the Histadrut or as a pressure group in its own right (Pope, 1991: 229). Indeed, the role of Na'amat in this sense is complicated by the fact that in many instances Na'amat was instrumental in bringing Jewish factories into villages to provide the employer with low paid labour, whilst, at the same time, seeking to
provide at least some economic security for Arab women. This example indicates the almost contradictory solidarities being constituted - with Na'amat attempting to support both the national interest and the interest of Arab women workers.

Several women in trade unions and other organisations argue that while the laws regarding women's employment and pay may be progressive, their implementation and enforcement remains a severe problem (DSW, Na'amat 3, Clerical, Public Service, IWN). Individual women must demand their rights if they are not already being provided, but many prefer instead to forfeit some of their rights in order to keep their jobs. Arab women in particular are often hesitant to go to court, as raising their profile in public runs counter to traditional views on the behaviour of women. Women can take their grievances concerning wages through their works committees, but a number of women with whom I spoke noted that women are often concerned about being labelled trouble makers. Nor is it obvious that the male dominated works committees are supportive in such instances (Na'amat 3, Clerical, Textile, Benson and Harverd, 1988). Representatives from both Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women encourage women to pursue issues of unequal pay and poor working conditions, but with unemployment rates much higher for women than for men, and with work often being scarce in development towns and Arab villages, many women refuse to lodge complaints.

Both Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women see their role as being about educating women in the workplace of their rights. They provide lectures, seminars and information leaflets on how to be 'legally literate', giving women workers self confidence and knowledge of their options. Also significant is the legal service provided by Na'amat. 40 offices exist across the state where woman can get free legal advice on any matter of concern. If a case is likely to set a legal precedent, Na'amat will represent the woman in the labour court. This service is presently being reviewed with the hope of expansion to provide fuller services including blanket (rather than the present selective) representation at a reduced cost. While few wage cases have actually been decided by the labour court, precedent cases are considered by Na'amat to be very important in providing benchmarks on interpreting legislation and for gaining (free) media publicity on the role and achievements of Na'amat (Na'amat, 3).
Other Strategies

The notion of comparable work has not been included in the Equal Pay Act. Comparing wage structures was seen as difficult because wage data is based on average income which included fringe benefits and overtime, the components of which differ between women and men. Detailed data on wages and its components are now being collected and several interviewees regarded this as an important step; in their view such data is necessary in testing and confirming the principles of equal pay (Efroni-Interview, Mapam, DSW, IWN, Nurses). However, while separate wage scales exist for women and men within collective agreements, job analyses indicating that work performed by women is of comparable worth to that performed by men are irrelevant since there is no obligation to pay comparable wages (Benson and Harverd, 1988: 19).

Women’s professional advancement and occupational upgrading are considered by white collar women unionists as necessary for achieving equality in wages (Public Service, Pharmacy, Nurses, Clerical). For example, seniority and promotion are important components of wage determination (including pension benefits) and may account for 30-50 percent of income (Benson and Harverd, 1988: 17). However, several women unionists acknowledged that in those occupations which are predominantly female, the possibilities for promotion are limited. The Status of Women Commission (1976) made several recommendations concerning the promotion of women, none of which had been implemented as of 1988 (Benson and Harverd, 1988). This predicament has led trade union and other women to focus on increasing the promotion prospects of women in the workplace. Several individual unions are concerned with the issue of professionalism, providing their workers with courses and seminars on the relevance of professionalism to promotion (Public Service, Nurses, Pharmacy).

Providing women workers with better access to training within their industry or occupation is also considered by the women from Na’amat and the Department for Salaried Women to be an important strategy in preparing women for promotion possibilities (Benson and Harverd, 1988; DSW, Na’amat 1, 2). Recently, a class action suit was taken by women working for Israel’s national airline (El Al). They charged that they were being excluded from an all-male training course which was a necessary requirement for promotion. While the Department for Salaried Women
supported the case from within the Histadrut, the union movement as a whole did not support the women in this dispute, nor did their male colleagues (Na'amat 3, DSW). Indeed, the male flight attendants appealed that the court allow them to participate as defendants with the employer. This right was granted, allowing the men of El Al to unite across class lines to counter women's claim to equal opportunity (Izraeli, 1994: 319).

Na'amat has also increased its focus on women in industry with the objective of getting more women into management and decision making positions. Courses have been offered to both Arab and Jewish women in management training, small business operation, and assertiveness, with some programs co-sponsored by business. At the legislative level, a bill providing affirmative action strategies to increase the number of women in management in the public service was being discussed in 1994 (Mapam). However, Na'amat officials acknowledged that such strategies did not help all working women, but only those in jobs where a career path already exists (Na'amat 2, 3).

Assessment

Whitehouse's work (1992, 1995) has shown that centralised wage bargaining is crucial in securing a decrease in the pay ratio between female and male wage rates. However, although the collective bargaining process in Israel appears strongly centralised, with general wage policies being agreed on at national level, the most relevant negotiations take place at the local level. Indeed, the Histadrut has demonstrated little commitment to a solidaristic wage policy, instead tolerating, often very high, wage differentials between and within sectors. The motivations for this are historical - related to the desire of the Histadrut to represent the totality of Jewish labour. However, the result has been a considerable gender wage differential for women workers in Israel; one that is continuing to widen, suggesting that women workers have yet to benefit from the corporatist arrangements evident in Israel.

Research indicates that in addition to the decentralised bargaining environment, women workers have incurred often explicit discrimination in wage determination. Within collective agreements, women's work is often graded lower than similar work undertaken by men. In addition, the allocation of fringe benefits is often
made in an arbitrary fashion by employers. Since many of these arrangements are negotiated between employers and workers' committees, women in trade unions are looking to increase the representation of women at this level, while some women-dominated unions have taken strike action.

In many instances, women do not make up a critical mass in a unionised workplace and, as earlier mentioned, may not be unionised at all. For this reason, and perhaps because the Histadrut has failed to see equal pay for women as an industrial issue, women in trade unions and elsewhere have looked to gender-specific legislative strategies as a remedy. To date, however, implementation and enforcement mechanisms have been limited and, since little support from the Histadrut and national trade unions is forthcoming, class actions are rare. Instead, women must pursue their grievances individually. While Na'amat provides legal advice for these women, few actually take their case to the labour court.

Because the trade union movement seldom invokes the language of class politics or pursues egalitarian wage policies, women, as the majority of the low paid, have received little benefit. In this sense, class-based strategies are not an option. In addition, gender specific strategies which utilise legislation without class support have also had little influence on reducing the gender-wage differential. Furthermore, while unemployment is the alternative to low pay it is unlikely that many women will pursue individual grievance procedures. Women in white collar occupations have been able to pursue strategies such as professional development, better access to training and comparable worth, but these gender specific strategies tend to exclude blue collar and non-unionised women.

Women's Working Conditions

In this section, I examine the working conditions that are considered by women to require further attention if women workers are to achieve equality in the workplace. While provision for women as mothers has been relatively generous in Israel, this has not resulted in progressive policies regarding women's combined interests as workers and mothers. The length of the school day and the provision of child care remain contested issues for women unionists. What becomes apparent in this section is that in addressing these issues, women have had to employ legislative rather than industrial strategies, for reasons I elaborate on below.
Combining Work and Family Responsibilities

Several Israeli scholars have argued that Israel is a family-centred society with most women marrying and becoming mothers (Azmon and Izraeli 1992; Izraeli, 1994; Herzog, 1996). Indeed marriage and motherhood are cited to be "social imperatives" (Izraeli, 1994: 311). Ben Gurion, first Prime Minister of the State of Israel, noted

when one discusses the position of women, two factors must be taken into consideration. First, women have a special mission as mothers. There is no greater mission in life ...... However, a second factor must be remembered: the woman is not only a woman, but a personality in her own right, in the same way as a man. As such, she should enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as the man, except where motherhood is concerned (cited in Yuval-Davis, 1985: 670).

In the Israeli Parliament, motherhood is constructed as a public role of national significance (Berkovitch, 1992). Similarly, the Equal Rights Law of 1951 gave women formal equality, but at the same time conceived of them as mothers, preserving both national unity and traditional family life (Herzog, 1996: 5). Finally, in terms of participation in the military, women do so only temporarily before embarking on marriage and motherhood (Yuval-Davis, 1985: 671).

It is not surprising, given this discursive context, that a considerable emphasis in Israeli public policy has been placed on the protection of mothers. While Israel has not had a comprehensive natal policy (for reasons of expense and in order to avoid encouraging Arab reproduction), there has existed a comprehensive health service, which was for many years supplemented with only minimal information concerning family planning options (Ehrlich, 1980: 95). Indeed, Israel has more publicly funded in vitro fertilisation clinics per capita than any other country (Izraeli, 1994: 311).

As early as 1954, women were provided with three months paid maternity leave and were then entitled to nine months unpaid leave or could resign and receive severance pay. Employers were prevented from firing pregnant women and
nursing mothers were allowed to work an hour less without pay deductions (Safir, 1991; Raday, 1991). Maternity leave began as a universal benefit, but is now linked to labour force participation. Some public and Histadrut sector collective agreements have also permitted mothers of small children to work a shorter day at the employers expense and use part of their own sick leave to care for children (Raday, 1991: 179; Izraeli, 1994). As part of the trend toward equal opportunities for women, fathers may now also use leave of absence to tend a sick child. However, special provisions for women (as potential mothers) are still included in collective agreements and are seen by some unionists as indicating their support of women in the paid labour force (Metal).

Izraeli has argued that women in Israel have been successful in "creating a support structure for encouraging women's labour force participation including high quality child care" (Izraeli, 1994: 318). Certainly, a network of child care centres exist for working Jewish mothers with children aged between six months and four years. However, 90 per cent of these are provided by women's organisations included Na'amat, and are only partly subsidised by the state, with payment for these services means tested (Pope, 1991: 229). Those women earning the average salary pay nearly 20 per cent of their monthly income per child. Several women unionists argued that this cost acts as a disincentive for women to enter the paid labour force in a full-time capacity (DSW, Public Service, Pharmacy).

The Department for Salaried Women has made written and verbal policy submissions on the issue of reducing the cost of child care, arguing that from an economic perspective, restricting women's labour force participation to part time work is a waste of educational resources. Rhetorically, government Ministers have shown an interest in the issue of child care, but, in reality, national security and economic stability are considered the major priorities, precluding further state expenditure on child care (DSW, Na'amat 1, 2, 3). Child care is not seen by the Histadrut as a union issue and so support from within has been limited. Instead it is considered to be the responsibility of Na'amat.

The notion that women should only work part-time is also reinforced by the length of the school day, which is, at present, only four hours in the morning for primary school children. Several women with whom I spoke considered the length of the school day to be directly relevant to increasing women's choices regarding labour
market participation (DSW, Na'amat 2, 3, Public Service, Efroni-Interview, Pope, 1991). Indeed, many educated women gravitate to teaching jobs in an effort to synchronise paid work with children's school schedules (Izraeli, 1994: 312). The Department for Salaried Women has undertaken much lobbying of Ministers but as yet to no avail. The Head of the Department believes that strategies employed to have the school day changed have been too moderate to date and that more tactically aggressive strategies are required, such as refusing to vote in elections (DSW).

**Equal Employment Opportunities**

From the mid-1970s, women's demands moved away from laws which appeared to legislate women's responsibilities as mothers and protect women, toward equal opportunity provisions. In 1981, an equal opportunity law was passed which criminally prohibited discrimination on account of sex, marital or parental status. It also outlawed employers advertising jobs or vocational training unless they were described in terms addressed to both sexes (Izraeli, 1994).

After considerable lobbying from women both within and outside of the labour movement, this law was amended in 1988 to extend the provisions previously granted to working mothers to working fathers (Nurses, Clerical, Public Service, Izraeli, 1991; 1994). Entitlement to severance pay, when resigning to care for a new born or adopted baby, can be transferred to the father, statutory leave without pay is transferable and fathers may also use their sick leave to look after children. Under this legislation sexual harassment is also prohibited. In addition, a law was passed in 1987 stipulating equal age of retirement for men and women and removing the prohibition on night work, although women still have the right to refuse night work and to retire earlier than men (Raday, 1991).

Despite the presence of such laws, women workers are still subject to discrimination. Sexual harassment is an issue, particularly for women in the army, but it has yet to gain a high profile, as women are often afraid to lodge complaints (Na'amat 3, Public Service, DSW). Nor is it uncommon for employers to fire women workers after they return from maternity leave. Although women are encouraged by Na'amat to make a case for unfair dismissal in the labour court, the court will not force an employer to reinstate a worker, but instead provide financial compensation. With women's unemployment figures much higher than those of
men, such an outcome often forces women out of the workforce for some time (Na'amat 3, Nurses, Public Service).

Women unionists view their laws as progressive in what they lay down, but lament the ineffective enforcement mechanisms. The 1988 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) law did not provide for enforcement agencies to implement the (undefined) principle of equality through the courts. The labour courts remain the major means of implementation, but again it is left up to women themselves, with the support of Na'amat and the Department for Salaried Women within the Histadrut, to initiate this process. To date, few cases have been forthcoming. It seems that, in many instances, workers' committees either did not support or openly opposed the woman plaintiff. During the 1980s, judges in the labour courts were rarely supportive of the discrimination claims that women did file (Izraeli, 1994: 319). Furthermore, due to the often hostile reaction made by union representatives and employers to women's actions, along with the lack of protection against unfair dismissal and the very real threat of unemployment, women are often hesitant to proceed with a case (Na'amat 3, DSW, Clerical, Textile, Arab Section, Efroni-Interview, Nurses, Pope, 1991; Raday, 1991).

EEO legislation bans discrimination on the basis of marital status. However, the issue of marriage has a heightened relevance for Arab women workers. Over 50 per cent of Arab women stop work after marriage as a result of traditional cultural pressures. According to the law, when a worker is dismissed or if the worker resigned under special circumstances (such as having a baby), he/she is entitled to receive one month's wages for each year of service. However, marriage is not covered under the law as a special circumstance and, as a result, individual complaints cannot be taken to the labour court for resolution. Instead, the Arab Section of the Histadrut seeks to convince the employers to provide compensation; a strategy which is sometimes successful, but, for continued success, the legislation concerning severance pay requires amendment. Lobbying for such an amendment is not an option at present (Arab Section).

Assessment

Until the mid-1970s, the development of supply side policies around women's labour market participation has been provided more in terms of paternalism and
protection than through an egalitarian desire to redress the gender imbalance of wages and conditions in the labour market. In the late 1970s, women workers began to view these protections as restrictive and sought new legislation around equal employment opportunities. However, although family-oriented policies have been extended to include both women and men and contribute to a supportive work environment, the focus of both employers and the union movement is one which continues to view all women as "candidates for the 'mommy track'" (Izraeli, 1994; 318).

In isolation, Israeli maternity leave benefits appear progressive. However, when viewed in tandem with the legislative and military rhetoric on the 'mission' of motherhood, the motivations for such benefits seem more conservative than progressive. The fact that the Histadrut sees issues surrounding women workers as mothers as social rather than mainstream industrial or economic issues suggests that the labour movement in Israel is reinforcing the marginalisation of gender claims.

In pursuing equal employment opportunities, women unionists have not looked to the Histadrut or the collective bargaining system for either reform or enforcement. Instead, strategies have been targeted at Parliament and legislative remedies. Lobbying has become an important tactic in achieving reforms: the emergence of the Israel Women's Network and the increased importance placed by Na'amat on initiated draft legislation or amendments is evidence of this.

Despite changes to equality laws, there is a distinct lack of implementation and enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure the legislative changes become a reality. In some cases, the law has been vague on definitions of equality and equal pay. Furthermore, implementation is dependent on individual representation through the labour court. O'Connor (1994) has argued enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation is very much dependent on government and trade union support. For women in Israel, it is not evident that support has been forthcoming from workers' committees, the Histadrut or from the labour court judges.
Conclusion

The Israeli labour movement is one in which class has been overshadowed by Zionism, with the Histadrut created more for the building of an independent Jewish homeland than for the representation of a unified class interest. Indeed, the whole notion of a unified class interest was undermined both ideologically through labourist links with Zionism and institutionally through the exclusion and then segregation of Arab workers by the Histadrut. To some extent, women in Israel have also been marginalised by the Histadrut. While Jewish women were never made to feel politically isolated from the labour movement in Israel, they were often excluded from the labour force. The mix of initial exclusion from paid work and inclusion as wives meant women (re)constituted their interests accordingly, focusing their attention through their separate organisation on voluntary work rather than on issues relevant to women in the paid labour force.

Initially the women of pre-state Israel organised collectively but separate from their men. With the creation of the Histadrut and the need for consolidation in the process of nation-building, women aligned their organisations with the centralised labour organisation. Furthermore, the corporatist mode of interest articulation in Israel has made women's divisions dependent on political parties and has discouraged the establishment of a grass roots independent women's movement. While forming solidarities within existing corporatist institutions is not in itself a problematic strategy, the fact that neither the Department for Salaried Women nor Na'amat are considered core or powerful sections within the Histadrut, has meant that women's issues have yet to gain currency in the mainstream industrial arena. Thus while gender-specific strategies are still deemed necessary to address the labour movement's neglect these are ultimately controlled by the Histadrut centre and have never seriously challenged the overarching objective of an encompassing Jewish labour movement.

Whitehouse (1995) has argued that women's employment is by definition "a class issue where politicisation of conflict and a proclivity for interventionist strategies may facilitate more egalitarian outcomes" (1995: 16). Trade unionism, she argues, is a necessary component in this process. However, the Histadrut's focus on nation building and lack of focus on class interests is highlighted by the marginal role played by the trade union department within the Histadrut. The Histadrut's
administration of the Sick Fund guaranteed its membership, negating the requirement to organise workers in the workplace or be held accountable to them. It remains unclear how many women workers are actually organised, particularly outside the public sector where they are most vulnerable. Perhaps as a result, women in Israel have seldom looked to the Histadrut *per se* to redress the equality imbalance. Rather, political mobilisation is predominantly partisan-based and gender-specific legislation is the major means through which women have sought to have women's equality addressed.

Women's inclusion into the paid labour force and the labour movement has been very specifically defined as part of the national cause rather than a class cause. This is reinforced by women's military service - whereby women are included but occupationally segregated from their male counterparts. Overall, this broader solidarity created around national Jewish identity has overshadowed and undermined the usefulness of both class-based and gender-specific strategies in pursuing the claims of women. Furthermore, since many of the gender-specific strategies are not supported by class-oriented institutions, little representation is provided for women workers who are not organised and are already marginalised. Women in Israel are seeking to strengthen their collective actions by unifying across party lines within the Israeli Parliament. Whether such a strategy is also hindered by the dominant discourses of the national and economic interests of Israel remains to be seen.
Chapter Eight

Sweden

Introduction

Much of the literature on Sweden refers to a 'Swedish model', and there are numerous views as to what this represents: a mode of regulation (Lane, 1991), pragmatism in policy development (Heclo and Madsen, 1987), compromise, consensus and corporatism (Sainsbury, 1991), public sector expansion and a universal welfare state (Premfors, 1991). Such definitions are not mutually exclusive: all in some way highlight features of what has come to be known as the Swedish model. The Swedish model is also often portrayed as one which has provided women with considerable gender equality. In this vein, Eduards has also referred to a Swedish gender model. It includes a conception of equality in all areas of the labour market, the home and the political decision making process and this has made it easier for women to put demands onto the political agenda. But Eduards argues this conception of equality, while appearing gender-neutral in form, has left unchallenged the possible existence of a conflict of interests between women and men (Eduards, 1991: 169-170).

In this chapter I investigate the extent to which the context set by these two interconnected models has influenced the demands and solidarities of women trade unionists. It becomes apparent that women have seen the Social Democratic labour movement as an ally in their efforts to further the interests of women in the labour force. However, many features of the Swedish (gender) model have come under threat with the shift to a more decentralised wage bargaining system, recent cuts to welfare state provision and increasing unemployment. This has led to the remobilisation of women around the identity of gender, which, while not overriding class altogether has highlighted the particularity of what have in the past been considered gender neutral reforms and universal class strategies.
Due to the late coming of industrialisation to Sweden, it was not until the 1870s that a fully-fledged trade union movement developed, with the first major strike occurring in 1879. The trade union movement was reformist in orientation, with trade unions constituting the "backbone of the Swedish Social Democratic Party from its inception in 1889" (Higgins, 1985: 365) and the union confederation (LO) being formed in 1898. This intimate connection between party and union continued with the party actively promoting unionisation and the unions stressing the importance of both suffrage and economic rights. The continued permanence of this intimate relationship has depended on the development of a common ideology of progressive social change and full equality based on a strategy of collective class action in both the industrial and the political spheres (Higgins, 1985: 365). The symbiotic relationship between both 'branches' of the labour movement was the cornerstone of the hegemonic position established by the Social Democratic government between 1932 and 1976 (Olsson, 1994: 46). The Social Democrats ruled again between 1982 and 1991 and were re-elected in 1994.

However, trade unions were involved in corporatist political arrangements established for policy making purposes at the local level long before the arrival of a Social Democratic government. For example, in 1902 both employers and the labour movement were represented on the boards that operated local labour exchanges and by 1920 representatives of the labour movement were involved nationally in policy development and implementation through the Insurance and Labour Councils (Rothstein, 1991: 157-160). The board of most significance for the labour movement has been the National Labour Market Board (set up in 1948) as it is the main administrator of labour market policies. Until recently trade unions had seven representatives, and employers six, on the 16 member directorate of the Board (Ahrne and Clement, 1994: 232-234).

Despite these corporatist developments, the first thirty years of this century were littered with class conflicts, and high unemployment in the early 1920s weakened the bargaining position of trade unions (Korpi, 1978: 80). The beginning of consensus politics came with the signing of the Saltsjöbaden Agreement in 1938 by the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Swedish Employers Association (SAF). The aim of the agreement was to encourage negotiation and co-operation between both parties (without state intervention), with a view to
reducing industrial conflict and providing an environment conducive to sustained economic growth.

Thus Therborn has argued the corporatist system in Sweden is organised around the principle of conflict. He notes that capital and labour are not "social partners' but 'labour market parties', whose autonomy and principled conflict rights are held sacrosanct" (Therborn, 1992: 36). While Sweden had low rates of industrial activity from the late 1930s until the mid-1980s, in 1990 the Social Democrats responded to increasing inflation and unemployment and a militant labour force by establishing a wages freeze and a ban on strikes. Both actions were considered cardinal sins in the realm of Swedish labour relations, where government interference in wage formation is unheard of and strikes and lock-outs are protected within the constitution (Elman, 1993: 516).

The 1938 agreement paved the way for centralised wage bargaining to emerge in the 1950s. Between 1955-65 the wage negotiation process was dominated by LO and SAF and their agreements served as the norm for the rest of the labour market (Olsson, 1991: 39). Full employment and equality were the central goals which underpinned the development in the 1950s of LOs economic policy program, which linked centralised wage bargaining with an active labour market policy. According to the Rehn-Meidner plan, wage solidarity would equalise wages across the economy, reducing differentials to the minimum required to adequately compensate workers. Over time this equalisation would put pressure on less efficient firms to either adapt or shut down. The provision by government of active labour policies to facilitate full employment combined with uniform wages would further accelerate modernisation by reducing worker resistance to firm rationalisation and redundancy while avoiding inflation (Rowthorn, 1992: 114).

The equality component of the Swedish model was epitomised by policies directed at wage solidarity and income redistribution. Wage solidarity involved nation-wide rates of general wage increases, and special increases for low wage earners to narrow differentials. This was supplemented with highly progressive taxes designed to contribute to the levelling brought on by wage solidarity through the provision of universal social policies (Milner, 1990: 106). Thus wage solidarity was both an instrument of economic efficiency and an expression of the egalitarian goals of Swedish social democracy, while full employment was seen by trade unions as "critical to a person's welfare and sense of belonging" (Tilton, 1991: 277).
This economic/wages policy was supplemented during the 1960s with considerable expansion in the social sector, including increases in funding for existing programs and the addition of new ones. Universal benefits based on citizenship were provided in areas of health, education, housing and pensions (Heclo et al, 1987). In this sense, despite the intimacy and common vision of the social democratic labour movement, the trade unions and the Social Democratic party undertake different functions in achieving this vision. Trade unions claim the labour market as their domain, while social policy has been considered the province of the party. Certainly, the hegemonic presence of the Social Democratic government has been instrumental in supplementing economic outcomes with social ones.

One result of the rapid growth of the welfare state was an increase in public sector employment, supplemented by a parallel increase in private sector white-collar employment. These workers increasingly joined unions and while, white-collar unions had played no major role as bargaining agents prior to the fifties, the changing occupational structure enabled white-collar unionism to become a stronger force. This development did not undermine the centralised model. From 1952, these unions also began negotiating centrally with the employers and, by 1974, over 70 per cent of the white-collar employees in Sweden were organised (Olsson, 1991: 39). The major white-collar union confederation, the Central Organisation of Salaried Employees (TCO), established in 1944, has since become quite powerful and, by the end of the 1980s, its three bargaining cartels were negotiating for approximately the same wage sum as LO (Åmark, 1992). Professionals are also represented through the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO). Despite this blue-white-collar split, the trade union movement has reflected the nature of Swedish society, in that it remained relatively homogenous, with no major divisions along religious, ethnic or political lines.

From the 1950s, centralised bargaining was pursued by the trade union confederations and employers organisations. However, in the mid 1980s, employers began to press strongly to undertake negotiations with individual trade unions on a decentralised basis and governments began to indirectly intervene in public sector negotiations to emphasise the relevance of low inflation. In general, the 1980s were characterised by high profits, high wage drift, inflation and industrial conflict. This, combined with the decision by employers in 1990 not to participate in centralised negotiations, suggested the end of the renown Swedish model (Meidner, 1994: 341).
With respect to social and family policy, the trade union movement supported legislative measures, but prior to 1970 had insisted on the primacy of collective bargaining in all issues relating to labour relations, wages and working conditions. However, strikes in the late sixties put added demands on the agenda for increased employee involvement, and further improvements of working conditions generally. Unions pushed for the passage of the Co-determination Act of 1977, which protected the job security of employees, safeguarded shop stewards in the performance of their functions, provided for worker participation in decisions concerning their workplace, as well as employee representation on company boards (Qvist, Acker and Lorwin, 1984: 273).

The trade union and the party branches of the labour movement in Sweden have, since their origins, been committed to creating a society where workers could participate on equal terms in the organisation and governance of society. In the process of implementing such equality, the trade union movement has focused on broad industrial issues while the Social Democratic government has supplemented economic outcomes with social ones. Thus, both arms of the labour movement have been intent on providing all citizens with economic resources and universal social security. More recently, however, as will become apparent, women in Swedish trade unions have begun to challenge whether the social democratic project does indeed provide equality of participation for all citizens, both men and women.

The Position of Women in Sweden

While women in Sweden were granted permission to work in trades and sales occupations as early as 1810 (Kaplan, 1992: 69), it was well over a century later before women’s labour force participation, particularly that of married women, became acceptable. During the 1930s, Swedish women’s organisations put up a considerable fight for the right of married women to undertake paid work and in 1938 they were successful in having a law passed which prohibited the firing of women who were married, pregnant, or single with children (Hobson, 1993). From the late 1930s onwards, the number of married women entering the labour force began to increase. Between 1950 and 1965, the participation rate of married women rose from 15.7 per cent to 36.7 per cent (Hirdman, 1994: 25).

With the goal of full employment and the substantial growth of the public sector, this trend continued during the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1960 and 1990,
women's labour force participation increased from 51 per cent to 81 per cent (OECD, 1991a), thereby entrenching women's position in the labour market. This dramatic increase can be attributed to the substantial growth in government employment, which increased by an average of 4 percentage points per decade between 1960 and 1989 (OECD, 1991a: 34), with the majority of this increase occurring before 1980. In addition, the service sector share in total employment also rose from 29 to 35 per cent between 1972 and 1980 (Scharpf, 1984: 266). Again, much of this employment was picked up by married women, largely as a result of growth in part-time work. By 1974, part-time employment was already 24 per cent of total employment (OECD, 1995).

While the focus of welfare policy during the 1930s and 1940s had been on women's role as wife and mother, which fitted with the vision of the 'People's Home' articulated by Per Albin Hansson in the 1930s (Hirdman, 1994), this changed during the 1960s. The increase in women's labour force participation had not been motivated primarily by a desire for increased equality for women, but rather for instrumental reasons, in that women were seen as an acceptable alternative to immigrant labour in a tight labour market situation (Cook et al, 1992). However, this phenomenon served both to highlight and politicise the obstacles facing married women's entry into paid work (Qvist, 1985: 159) and, thereby, provided a political space for what became known as the 'sex roles' debate. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Social Democratic government with the support of the trade union movement initiated programs which provided women as well as men with retraining courses and allowances, individually-based income tax, generous parental insurance and a considerable increase in state-subsidised child care (Baude, 1978: 153-161).

Social Democratic ascendancy has been an important factor in the continued development of economic and social equality in Sweden and has provided considerable gains for women. The growth of the welfare state provided women with increased benefits and increased employment opportunities. The continued pursuit of the Rehn-Meidner policy and wage solidarity up until the 1980s also disproportionately affected women, with the gap between men's and women's wages smaller in Sweden than elsewhere. Women now earn 90 per cent of a man's wage in private sector industry and 84 per cent of a man's wage in the government sector (Statistics Sweden, 1995: 56). In this way, the precise meaning of economic and social equality in Sweden, as translated into concrete proposals and programs, has shifted with time (Baude, 1978: 163) and has, since
the 1960s and 1970s, (after considerable pressure from women), become more inclusive of women as workers.

As a result, the claims articulated by women trade unionists on behalf of women workers differ somewhat from those outlined in previous chapters. Demands for child care and policies which facilitate the mix of paid and unpaid work have been largely provided for by the Social Democratic government, with encouragement and support from the trade union movement. Yet as will become evident, women unionists remain particularly concerned that despite the goal of full employment now including women, the structure of the labour market remains explicitly gendered and unequal in both conditions and outcomes. Before discussing these concerns further, I look first at the issue of women's presence in the trade union movement.

Women and Representation in the Swedish Union Movement

In examining the representation of women in the Swedish trade union movement I begin by outlining the early efforts made by women workers in seeking inclusion and follow this with an overview of women's presence in trade union elites. I also discuss the difficulties that traditional union culture presents for women unionists who are looking to increase the number of female representatives. I then assess the strategies women unionists have undertaken to circumvent these difficulties, giving special attention to the transitional utility of gender-specific strategies.

Inclusion and Representation

As noted above, Swedish unionism grew out of a social democratic labour movement, the underlying basis of which was an explicit class politics. While the 'woman question' had been highlighted in the 1880s by Clara Zetkin as a vital element of socialist politics, this argument was subsumed by the general feeling that women's liberation would automatically be resolved with working class liberation (Dahlström and Liljestrom, 1983: 11). Thus, although claims were made for a universal, classless politics, it was, nevertheless, the needs of working class men which dominated the agenda of the labour movement.

Separate organising by women's groups was seen as a bourgeois threat to working class solidarity. As a result, women in LO and the Social Democratic Party (SAP) were loathe to call themselves feminists and instead formed support
organisations to the male-run unions and parties (Hirdmann, 1994). While working women within the blue-collar sector initially organised themselves into female trade unions, these were absorbed into male unions by the turn of the century. Women's union membership in LO rose from ten per cent in 1920 to 17 per cent in 1930, but remained stagnant until the mid 1940s (Qvist et al, 1984). In the white-collar sector, women had also created national trade unions for nurses, female school teachers, women in the postal and telecommunications service and academic women. These women-only unions existed until amalgamations began around 1955, by which time women's membership in TCO had reached approximately 40 per cent (Qvist, 1985).

The post-war growth in women's labour force participation was reflected in substantial increases in women's membership in both LO and TCO from 1945 onwards (see Table 8.1).

**Figure 8.1 Increases in Women's Union Membership, LO and TCO**

![Graph showing increases in women's union membership in LO and TCO from 1945 to 1985](image)


The continuing increases in women's union membership persuaded trade unions of the need to better represent the interests of their women members. In 1947, the LO Women's Council was formed, with its own staff person and, in 1948, it initiated educational training courses for women. The founding of the Council was followed by the establishment of women's committees in the LO district organisations. In 1951, LO and SAF set up the Joint Women's Labour Council,
designed to encourage the entry of more women into the labour force. TCO followed LO's lead somewhat later, establishing a Women's Council in 1962, and in 1967 joined the LO-SAF Council (Qvist et al, 1984: 264).

The need to accommodate better the increase of women workers stimulated a debate on the concept of sex roles. It was argued that a change in the position of women, both at home and in working life, could never be accomplished without simultaneous change in men's lives (Baude, 1978: 155). In 1969, the Social Democratic Party adopted a program for women which reflected an emerging consensus that men would have to assume equal responsibility for family life, if women were to assume equality in the workplace. Men, too, were to strive for equality - equality as parents (Qvist et al, 1984: 266). Thus, a new concept of equality was embraced (jämställdhet), representing the equal standing of both men and women in all areas of social life (Acker, 1994: 9).

Within the union movement, this move away from ideas of an exclusive women's interest and toward an inclusion of men in the equation led both the TCO and the LO to abolish their women's divisions, and establish instead equality committees or councils for family policy. The Joint Labour Women's Council was abolished in the early 1970s. Yet despite an insistence on equality, women in Swedish trade unions remain under-represented.

Bergqvist (1991, 1995) has collected data on women's representation in the two major union confederations. Her data indicate that there has been an increase in women's representation, particularly during the period 1975-1985 (see the percentage columns in Table 8.2 below).

However, compared to their proportion of membership, women remain under-represented at all three levels. This is illustrated by the ratio columns in the table above. Within LO there is a general increase in the ratio over time at Congress, Assembly and Board level, with a slight downturn occurring between 1955-1965. Within the TCO however, the story is more interesting. Although in percentage terms, women's representation has increased at Congress, Assembly and Board level over the last forty years, in terms of proportions, this is not the case. During the 1970s, there was a drop in ratios to below the levels reached in the 1950s.
Table 8.2 Percentage and Representational Ratio* of Women in Upper Levels of Two Swedish Trade Union Confederations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>LO Congress %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>General Assembly %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>Executive Board %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TCO Congress %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>General Assembly %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>Executive Board %</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Bergqvist labels this an index and has calculated it as follows:

\[ X = \frac{\text{Number of female representatives}}{\text{Number of male representatives}} \div \frac{\text{Number of female members}}{\text{Number of male members}} \]

\[ X = 1 \text{ indicates proportional representation; } X > 1 \text{ indicates over representation and } X < 1 \text{ indicates under-representation.} \]

Most remarkable is the ratio for the Executive Boards, where, since 1945, women's positions has been consistently weakened, whereas, in relation to their share of membership, men have strengthened their position. The Executive Board, while not the highest decision-making body in a formal sense, does have more power informally, in that Board members meet several times a year and are more involved in the implementation of the union agenda (Bergqvist 1991: 13).

It has been argued that the amalgamation of several smaller unions into larger ones during the 1950s resulted in the decline in women's representation in decision-making positions within LO (Qvist et al, 1984). However, in the 1960s women's representation rates began to rise again, despite continued amalgamations. It has been suggested that this may be the result of women becoming a large minority within a new union, enabling them to improve their
possibilities to change the power structure (Bergqvist, 1991). As at 1994, there were two women on the LO Executive Board.

Amalgamations have also occurred within TCO, with all-female unions being absorbed by existing unions. Women had represented women within these unions at Congress, Assembly and on the Boards. However, amalgamations meant women's representational role within TCO decreased continuously until amalgamations ended after 1975 (Bergqvist, 1991). It has been argued that the absorption of women-only unions, while providing a greater influence for the new unions generally, also allowed for a growing male influence over the issues that concerned women (Nielsson-Interview; Qvist et al, 1984). This, combined with the dominance of men at executive board level, undermines the general assumption that TCO has been a more 'woman-friendly' union because its membership is predominantly female (Bergqvist, 1991: 114).

Amalgamations may have been more harmful to women's representation at lower levels of both union confederation hierarchies. Three-quarters of all union branches disappeared between 1960 and 1975. This led to a decrease in the proportion of women officials, since women tended to be more active at local level (Scott, 1982: 53). More recently however, the under-representation of women is becoming less pronounced at lower levels in the union hierarchy. In the Municipal Workers' Union, 80 per cent of members are women, and so too are 60 per cent of the organisers and shop stewards. Within the Metal Workers' Union, 12 per cent of the members are women with 14 per cent female shop stewards. The Police Union also has 12 per cent female membership but only six per cent of their officials are women. Some white-collar unions with around half their membership female also manifest an almost proportionate representation at the local level (Clerical, Public Service).

Combating Union Culture

Trade union culture has been described as particularly male-oriented: dominated by the "traditional view of a worker - a white man who goes to work" (TCO). Women in unions affiliated to both LO and TCO have shown an interest in working together as women, but within trade unions this was considered difficult as "they have been constructed by men and for men" (LO). This prevailing male culture was perceived to have made it more difficult for women to combine union responsibilities with family responsibilities. Women sometimes felt participating was difficult, with too many meetings, too late at night (Clerical, SACO).
Combining a union job with marriage and small children was quoted as "a hell of a job. It involves travelling two to three days a week, and you have to live with your calendar, and plan everything. I still feel guilty and I worry when I am away from my children even though they are being looked after" (Factory).

Several unions are now looking at reorganising meetings to make them more accessible to women; for example by changing meeting times, having smaller group meetings which are less confronting, less hostile and therefore make it less dramatic and difficult for women to speak out. Changing the type of language used is seen as important for creating a more woman-friendly environment - "the old male union culture uses very stilted language which is foreign to many women" (Municipal).

Recently within the Metal Workers' Union there has been a more active policy of encouraging groups of women onto the boards of unions. This shift was based on the view that the more women are represented, the easier it will become to deal with the male culture. "If the woman is isolated, she may decide to leave if the culture is too difficult to deal with alone. Being only one woman amongst nine men is a tough situation, but having two or three women with six men makes it much easier" (Metal). Other unions have also provided support for women on boards, and have organised conferences on female leadership and assertiveness (Clerical, Factory, Bank).

In the same vein, having women in visible positions was considered crucial to increasing women's participation and representation. Between 1989 and 1995 the largest blue-collar union in Sweden, the Municipal Workers' Union, had a woman chairperson. This was seen as having enormous importance in giving other women confidence, and displaying how women could actually take up leadership positions in the blue-collar trade unions (Metal, Factory, Municipal). While there is also a female head of TCO, at the time of interviewing, it was deemed too early to assess if her appointment had made an impact on women members. In general, it seems that more men than women are "openly" interested in being on boards and in high positions (Clerical, LO).

Dealing with 'Women's Questions'

While the under-representation of women in trade unions is considered a problem in Sweden, the traditional emphasis on collective bargaining to settle all labour relations questions has contributed to the absence of a strong national affirmative
action program. Indeed, strategies involving overt positive action for women are rarely considered. In 1987, the union representing clerical and technical workers in the private sector set the objective of proportionate representation of women on the board, but, in general, unions have appeared ambivalent toward quotas. Neither SACO nor TCO provide special programs to increase women's representation as this is seen as the responsibility of the affiliates, although they do undertake a monitoring role in this regard. While LO seeks to integrate women's questions into other questions, recently the executive board made a decision that, within the LO headquarters, all vacant positions should be filled by women. This is seen as a substantial step for women. Suitable justification must be made to the executive if women cannot be found for the positions. There is also a verbal commitment that, when research committees are set up for particular investigations, 50 per cent of the participants should be women (LO).

Several unions have concentrated on education, both as a means of involving more women and of changing both men's and women's attitudes. Within the union for clerical and technical employees, the education programs are not outspoken about helping women to be more ambitious in their union participation, but this is the notion motivating the programs. Some of the regional courses include courses on assertiveness and confidence for women. Education programs are also offered by both LO and their affiliate unions. Two years ago, the Metal Workers' Union moved from technical-type training to a more "soft education dealing with how to look each other in the eye and have a discussion about taking in each other's point of view". This is seen to facilitate the acceptance of different perspectives and to encourage women to speak out. Women are also being encouraged to participate in more workplace union activities, such as the co-determination projects. "We felt this was one way of showing the female members that this union is interested in the same things as we think they are interested in" (Clerical).

To some extent the recently amended Equality Act (1992) has forced unions to more actively address issues of equal access to participation and representation of women. Now an employer who has more than ten employees must draw up a plan for equality between men and women every year. This plan must contain an outline of the measures the employer intends taking in facilitating the combination of employment and parenthood, overcoming sex-segregation and the elimination of discrimination with respect to promotion, training, and pay. Many trade union branches employ more than ten people and so are required to submit a report each year. The results must then be listed in the following year's report.
Such intervention is a considerable step for Sweden. Although various labour laws were passed during the 1970s, both the union and the parliamentary arms of the labour movement and the employers were opposed to legislation addressing equal employment opportunities. The Act on Co-determination (1977) provided scope to further gender equality but this seldom occurred (Gelb, 1989: 159). It was a bourgeois government which passed the Act on Equality Between Women and Men at Work in 1979. However, a concession was provided to labour and employers by preserving the priority of collective agreements, in that the act was only applicable to the minority of workers not covered by such agreements and is generally considered to have had little impact (Cook et al, 1992). The amended Equality Act (1992) now provides the Office of the Equality Ombudsman with the power to scrutinise collective agreement objectives.

An official from the Equality Ombudsman's Office argued that trade unions were taking the Act seriously and were showing interest in pursuing better strategies for achieving gender equality: "the trade unions see it as a popular issue, and they want to be seen to be working with it" (Equality Ombuds). Proportionate representation of women was being listed as an objective in the equality plans of some unions. The means for achieving this have included reviewing the numbers of women on the boards and having training sessions for those who nominate for elections, so that they might select more women (Factory, Clerical).

**The Strategy of Separate Organising**

In an institutional sense, Swedish unions have, since the sixties, avoided acknowledging the existence of a special women's interest and instead have concentrated on equality between the sexes as a 'gender-neutral' interest. This has meant that equality ombudsmen rather than women's officers are the means by which equal opportunity issues in unions are addressed. Not all equality officers within unions are women, particularly in male dominated unions. Within the Metal Workers' Union, having both men and women working in this area is considered more effective, in that it undermines "sexist male attitudes and makes equality questions relevant to men and women" (Metal). In contrast, within the Factory Workers' Union, for many years, equality issues were dealt with only by men. The thinking behind this was that men would be more likely to listen to other men than to women.
TCO and LO both have full-time equality ombudsmen, while in SACO, equality is given a third of a position. Of the union affiliates represented in this study, the Municipal Workers' Union, the Bank Employees' Union and the Union of Clerical and Technical Employees also had full-time equality officers, while the unions representing civil servants, police and medical professionals had specifically delegated half a position, which is often shared amongst several people. Job-sharing has also been adopted by the Metal Workers' Union. Between 1978-1989, the Metal Workers' Union had a full-time equality officer, but this was changed to become a shared responsibility between four people: two men and two women. Their role is not only to deal with equality issues, but to provoke all departments within the union to consider equality questions when pursuing policy projects (Metal).

The strategy of integrating gendered analyses has also been adopted by LO. All policy papers and proposals considered by the board and by the daily leadership must include an assessment of how they will impact on women. To facilitate this process, all staff who work within LO must attend training courses to learn how to incorporate a gender dimension into all areas of their work. These courses are considered to have been a huge success by both the men and women within LO. The LO's equality ombudsman feels that not only is this strategy useful in terms of outcomes for women, but that it also has the potential to further change men's attitudes by providing them with a better understanding of women's position in the workforce (LO).

Officially separate organising by women has not been encouraged and there is strong feeling that this would be in conflict with the traditions and organisational culture of the union movement as a whole. In addition, feminism has been considered anti-men and unacceptable by mainstream Social Democrats (Acker, 1994: 22). Yet women at grass-roots level have continued to organise as women and establish their own groups to deal with women's problems, both at the workplace and in terms of participation within the union (Cook et al, 1992: 70).

More recently, however, the political representation of women has (re)surfaced as a contentious issue. In 1986, a high profile Commission on Women's Representation reported on the gender patterns of representation in other commissions and state administrative boards. These institutions are of considerable significance in the corporatist decision-making process in Sweden. They are also the institutions where organised interests including trade unions are
represented. The Commission found that women were rarely appointed as trade union representatives (Bergqvist, 1995: 211-215).

In addition, after the defeat of the Social Democratic Government in 1991, women's representation in Parliament dropped from 38 per cent to 33.5 per cent which, when combined with the Conservative Government's intention to scale down welfare state spending, undertake privatisation, reduce municipal spending and cut public employment, led to considerable disaffection amongst women in the labour movement. LO recognised this and undertook considerable research on the extent of women's exclusion from union hierarchies. What was remarkably new about this report was not the content but the title - *Class and Sex* - representing a symbolic abandonment that class came before sex.

Women themselves began to undertake political action in response to what were perceived as threats to their political representation and economic well-being. A separate women's party was touted as both an alternative and a threat to mainstream political parties and, within trade unions, the renewed emphasis on women's representation expressed itself through a substantial increase in women's networks throughout Sweden. Special women's projects now exist in every one of LO's 17 districts and a number of different kinds of women's groups, seminars and networks operate within several unions (Police, Clerical). These networks are considered informal mechanisms to encourage women's participation and facilitate the increase in women's representation within the labour movement. In 1994, women conference delegates from the Metal Workers' Union met before the conference to network for support. This was the first time that women from this union had officially come together separately from the men. Male unionists interpreted it as a conspiracy and protested, forcing the women to find independent funding and to meet outside the union headquarters (Metal).

Perhaps the most interesting new network is *Tjejligan* (the 'women's gang') established by a few LO women in 1991. Its function is to share news and bring women together to put pressure on the labour movement on various issues concerning women. Now *Tjejligan* has 14,000 members; it is still very informal, with no constitution. Much of the emphasis is on increasing women's representation within all levels of politics, but particularly within trade unions. A large number of women were actively involved in the Social Democrats' election campaign of 1991. The motive of this involvement was twofold: to increase women's self confidence about participating; and to maintain a profile on women's issues during the campaign. This was considered a highly successful
strategy as many women from Tjejligan have gone on to stand for local government and trade union election.

At the central level of the LO, acceptance of Tjejligan has been indicated by substantial executive financing of Clara, a glossy magazine designed specifically for women. While budget cuts have occurred throughout the confederation, there had been no funding cuts to women's activities (LO). Tjejligan has managed to popularise its slogan "half the power, the whole wage" throughout the union movement and continues to use its networks to keep newly elected women delegates in touch with the rank and file. In short, Tjejligan seeks not only to increase women's representation in trade unions, but also to see that women in elected office can work effectively for women's interests.

Assessment

While the initial exclusion of women workers from blue-collar trade unions in Sweden led them to organise separately, these women's trade unions had merged with male trade unions before the turn of the century. With these mergers came an expectation that the woman question would take a subordinate position to the question of class. Although white-collar women's unions did not amalgamate with other unions until the mid-1950s, the result was similar, in that women's interests and representation was overshadowed by concerns defined as more pressing.

Thus claims for a universal class politics which appeared genderless in character were in terms of representation, gender-specific and exclusive of women. Demands for universal political equality were not reflected within trade unions themselves and women's under-representation remains conspicuous. Because of the broad-ranging corporatist arrangements in Sweden, whereby trade unions are represented on a variety of Boards and Commissions that participate in the policy making and implementation process, the invisibility of women in trade union decision-making is then mirrored in these arenas.

The idea of women representing women has received mixed support within the Swedish labour movement. Although the 'woman question' was dealt with for a period in the 1950s by women's officers and women's councils, this gender-specific approach was replaced in the 1960s with a gender neutral concept of equality between the sexes. While outcomes which contributed to increasing gender equality were forthcoming, the gender-neutral approach remained
uncontested. However, during the mid-1980s, the political under-representation of women became a contentious issue, as a result of a number of factors, including an increasing gender-wage differential, welfare state cuts and a decrease in women's Parliamentary representation.

The explicitly gendered implications of these outcomes has sparked a renewed emphasis on gender-specific strategies for inclusion by women within the trade union movement. Through organising separately into women's networks, in the process mobilising large numbers of women across Sweden, women trade unions have openly challenged the traditional overshadowing of sex by class, the maleness of trade union culture and the ways these factors have constrained women's political participation in trade union activities and elections. This, combined with the new legislation requiring trade unions to actively address issues of equal opportunity within their own organisations indicates a significant shift away from strategies of gender neutrality and idealistic notions of the universal.

**Women's Wages**

With respect to women's wages, the women unionists highlighted equal pay as a major concern, despite the fact that LO implemented a policy of wage solidarity from the 1950s until the mid-1980s. In this section then, I examine the utility of class strategies in pursuing equal pay for women workers. However, as I discuss below, women unionists within TCO and more recently, LO, have begun to employ gender-specific strategies to address the continuing presence of a gender wage differential.

**Wage Solidarity and Workplace Reform**

LO provided support in principle for equal pay for women as early as 1909, but little active support was forthcoming. Implementation was left to the federations, many of which endorsed a system of separate wages for women, which left women earning sometimes only half that of men. With the increase in women's union membership from the 1930s and the emergence of a competing white-collar confederation, LO integrated women's wages into its overall wage policy. However, because of the lack of co-ordination amongst LO affiliates regarding wage policy, equal pay remained a myth. In addition, the practice of distinct female pay scales retained support from the LO secretariat (Qvist, 1985).
In the post-war period, equal pay gained a higher profile. The Social Democrats included equal pay for women in their platform in 1944 and, in 1946, the LO Secretariat report on equal pay recommended not only the implementation of equal pay for equal work, but also raising the overall salary levels of women to those of men (Qvist, 1985). A Council of Women and a Women's Ombudsman for LO were created to provide direction for implementation (although both had advisory capacities only). Once again, this commitment was tarnished by the fact that separate pay scales remained in place until 1960.

Reductions in the gap between women's and men's wages were not a result of a gender-specific policy. Centralised wage bargaining had begun in the 1950s between LO and SAF, with LO pursuing a solidaristic wage policy aimed at reducing the overall wage differential between high and low wage earners. Between 1959 and 1972, the wage differential was reduced from 30 per cent to 15 per cent between extremes in job classification in contracts negotiated in the blue-collar sector (Qvist, 1985: 162). Because women have been the majority of low paid workers, they benefit substantially from a policy of wage solidarity. By the end of the 1970s, women in LO affiliated unions were earning 85 per cent of men's wages and by the 1980s this had reached 90 per cent (Cook et al, 1992: 149).

Further closing of the gender wage gap has stalled and, in some cases, it has begun to widen again. This is attributed partly to the break-down in the mid-1980s of centralised wage bargaining. With negotiations around wages often occurring at local level, alternative strategies have been articulated by blue-collar women to maintain a profile on equal pay. The Municipal Workers' Union has been working on making its own local representatives, negotiators and activists more conscious of women's wages (Municipal). While the equality officer at LO is quietly optimistic about such strategies, she acknowledges there will be problems in terms of implementing these kinds of policies in the industries where there are fewer women negotiators. As a result, getting more women active and encouraging affiliates to include more women in their negotiating teams has been targeted as the next reform.

Strike activity was also a strategy undertaken by two predominantly female unions in 1990 in an effort to obtain better wages. Nurse aids (represented by the Municipal Workers' Union) and bank tellers went on strike after police officers and secondary school teachers received considerable salary increases. However, these unions were unable to obtain support from their confederations, with the LO
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openly supporting the government's crisis package of wage freezes and strike bans. Television coverage focused on the acute sense of betrayal felt by many Swedes in having the Social Democrat government and the LO undermine the right of workers to strike for wage increases (Elman, 1993: 516). This was another factor which contributed to Swedish women's disillusionment with the labour movement and the resulting resurgence in women-focused networks.

Attaining equal pay has also been undermined by the highly gender segregated nature of the labour force. 41 per cent of women work in occupations that are 90 to 100 per cent female and another 35 per cent work in occupations that are 60 to 90 per cent female (Higgins, 1996). New initiatives in the area of workplace reform are touted as potentially undermining this gender segregation. A number of industries in both the private and public sectors have undertaken organisational change, replacing the emphasis on individual output with a focus on group work and job rotation, so that workers participate in both direct and indirect production, including supervising and decision making on all things related to the internal work of the group. The upgrading of present skills, multi-skilling and solidaristic team work are the main facets of this strategy (Mahon, 1994: 296-297).

This reform was not initiated with a gender focus in mind, but rather as an effort to counter capital's move to divide the workforce between the skilled and unskilled and pursue individual negotiations with workers. Although the gender neutral approach could present problems in failing to recognise the gender division in reproductive work, which, in turn, is likely to impinge on women's involvement in team work, several women unionists were seeking to combat this by educating men about accepting domestic responsibilities, encouraging them to use the reorganisation of work as an opportunity to become more involved in family life (Metal, Factory, LO).

While the initiative came from the Metal Workers' Union, other unions such as the Retail Workers' Union and the Factory Workers' Union have also moved in this direction. Substantial workplace reform was also prompted by the Municipal Workers' Union in the mid-1980s in an effort to subvert restructuring and substantial job loss. This involved large scale training and reorganisation programmes to equip the rank and file with the skills to reorganise their own jobs. The union also established its own in-house consultancy through which it has been granted most local government consultancies. In doing so, it has utilised autonomous work teams, skill development and democratic 'bottom-up'
approaches to job redesign that have benefited the largely female workforce in terms of both wages and conditions (Curtin and Higgins, 1995).

Thus, many union women consider work reorganisation to be important in increasing women's wages and working conditions. Through its focus on multi-skilling, team work has the potential to reduce horizontal and vertical divisions of labour and, in turn, overcome some aspects of the gender segregated nature of the work force (Factory, LO, Mahon, 1994: 300). Multi-skilling also makes industrial work more interesting and rewarding for women by providing them with additional training, which in turn should lead to an increase in women's wages (Metal, Factory). Group work may also combat some of the occupational health and safety hazards that go with repetitive work. Overall, women unionists remain confident about the positive impacts these changes will have on women's wages.

**Gender-Specific Strategies**

According to Meidner (1995: 3), common strategies between blue and white-collar unions in terms of wage policy "seem far away". In terms of wage equality for women, TCO has followed a different tactic from LO. While they too have tended toward centralised agreements, they have neither the political affiliation with the Social Democrats nor the same commitment to wage solidarity; viewing some pay differentials as fair. Equal pay has been pursued through job evaluation, emphasising the human and social importance of work or, as with the union representing clerical and technical employees, through an individual salary system, based on individual performance and technical requirements of the job (Ruggie, 1984: 172). Narrowing of wage differentials within white-collared employment has been less than that achieved by LO; some reduction was realised in the public sector, but fewer gains were made in the private sector (Public Service, Clerical).

Job evaluation has remained on the union agenda and, as a strategy, it is gender-specific in focus. At present, working life is considered to reflect men's lifestyle, with too much emphasis on traditional work in heavy industry. Job evaluation is a way of challenging the male norm on which paid work is based and, instead, seeks to better value the work women do (TCO, Clerical, Public Service). Within the public sector research is underway in two sites covered by the union covering civil service workers (one site is the National Labour Market Board) and results to date indicate that men as a group earn around 500 Swedish Crowns ($75 US)
more than women in pay (per month). As this only compares women as a group to men as a group, further research (using workplace questionnaires) is being undertaken to locate more precisely the difference in income (Public Service).

Several such projects are underway (Bank, Clerical), with additional research in this area being funded by the KOM Programme (an acronym translated as 'Men and Women Working Together'). Sponsored by the Swedish Work Environment Fund and supported by both the trade union movement and employers, KOM funded various projects which investigated the gender wage differential and the valuation and economic compensation attributed to women's work. One project undertaken by the Municipal Workers' Union evaluated the jobs undertaken primarily by women in eight local communities in one county and used the results in the 1992 round of wage negotiations. The findings show that, as a result, gender wage differentials were reduced by between 25 to 30 per cent (KOM, 1994: 30).

Evaluation projects alone are not considered necessarily to lead to a change in women's wages. Rather they need to be supplemented with questions and answers on who has power in the union, who is negotiating for female members and what does it mean if there are men negotiating for women. Similarly to LO, TCO is looking at providing training for negotiators to encourage them to see women's work in a new way and negotiate wages accordingly. Training and education generally are highlighted as means to increasing women's wages. This is despite findings that increasing women's education will not automatically reduce the wage gap (TCO). Evidence from SACO and the Medical Association also suggests that women with similar education levels to men still end up on lower salaries. Nevertheless, salary and education are being linked with strategies formulated to reflect this connection by both blue and white-collar unions. Both unions and employers are being encouraged to target women for education and training (Public Service, Metal, Factory, LO).

One strategy providing more immediate outcomes has involved the negotiation for additional money, separate from the collective wage round, to be put aside to help close the wage gap. This initiative came from women in the public sector arena in 1989. Apart from the general increase given to both men and women, 60 million Swedish Crowns ($8 million US) was allocated to help improve women's salaries. In 1990, this was not immediately passed on to women, but instead invested, with the interest paying for special training courses for women to better
their skills, buy books, travel to workplaces and provide seminars (Public Service, Police).

In addition to the separate monies mentioned above, another demand in the name of women, cited as more radical and drastic was to provide women with a one per cent extra increase in salary every year compared to men, thus decreasing the wage gap by one per cent per year. This strategy was overwhelmingly rejected by male members and negotiators - "they were afraid that we women would take their increase in salary. Men don't see the wage gap as a problem because it has always been this way and it is not a problem specific to Sweden" (Public Service). While women unionists argued that the extra one per cent would not be extracted from men's wages, the proposal was still rejected. Heated discussions are continuing about such a strategy, with both men and women divided over the idea of giving women special treatment in the wage rounds (SACO).

Gender-neutral strategies to achieve equal pay are now being supplemented by ones which are more gender-specific. LO's traditional focus on general increases to low wages has been challenged by a number of blue-collar unions (particularly Kommunal and from women within LO). Pressure was brought to bear on LO to give a higher priority to women's wages and, as a result, in the 1994 centralised negotiations, one per cent of the margin for wage increases was to be specially earmarked to increase women's wages. The importance of having a woman on the LO executive in getting this issue addressed should not be under-estimated (Municipal).

Both white and blue-collar women unionists see publicity as a vital strategy if unions are to increase the consciousness and commitment of both the general public and union activists to equal pay. Several unions have attempted to do this: the Municipal Workers' Union through its high-profile chairwoman; the union covering factory workers, through an artistic poster campaign designed to expose myths about women's educational and occupational abilities, and highlighting the gender dimension of low wages; SACO, through daily and business newspapers designed to inform people of the difference in women's wages. They have also run exhibitions and courses encouraging women to be assertive when negotiating their starting salary.

Another common strategy is the use of statistics. In the past, statistics concerning the various dimensions of the gender wage gap were limited. Now women unionists from both white and blue-collar unions believe there is power in figures:
showing their male counterparts the wage differential in statistical terms, forces the men to acknowledge the problem exists (TCO, LO, SACO). These publicity and educative strategies appear to be having some effect: an LO survey indicates that many workers, both men and women, see pay equity as one of the most pressing problems requiring attention in the 1990s (LO). However, despite women in trade unions across the spectrum of occupations having employed similar strategies, LO women continue to highlight the differences between women as a result of their class position.

Finally, there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of legislation in the pursuit of gender wage equality. The initial Equality between the Sexes Act prohibited job discrimination on the basis of sex and mandated positive action to achieve equality. However, an agreement between labour market parties superseded the act, leaving only non-unionised workers covered. In 1994, the act was amended to apply to all workplaces, including those covered by collective agreements and, amongst other things, requires employers to provide equal pay. Where a wage gap between men and women exists employers must show it is not due to gender. To this end, equality plans are required to stipulate measures by which they seek to close the wage gap. Breaches to the legislation are heard by the Labour Court, but, in the past, equal pay cases have been rare, due to the expectation that wages were an issue for collective agreements. More recently, however, a local government was prosecuted for sex discrimination and the Equality Commission has experienced an increased workload with respect to equal pay complaints (Equality Ombuds).

Assessment

The labour movement in Sweden has had an inclusive and egalitarian thrust which is reflected in its commitment to wage equality through centralised wage bargaining and, in the case of LO, a solidaristic wage policy. However, equal pay was never viewed as a woman's right, but rather as key part of a broader set of reforms required for better functioning of the labour market and family, and the transition to a social democratic society. This gender-neutral approach was acceptable to women trade unionists since it fitted with the more gender-neutral discourse of equality between the sexes and because women, as the majority of low paid workers were the main beneficiaries of the policy of wage solidarity.

However, since the breakdown of centralised wage bargaining, the gender wage gap is once again beginning to widen. As a result, women unionists have
redefined equal pay as a woman's right and with this has come a renewed desire to focus on the gendered impacts of labour movement initiatives. Thus, while the class-based strategy of workplace reform in blue-collar industries has the potential to benefit women through job rotation and multi-skilling, the possible negative impacts on women have also been identified by women trade unionists and strategies put in place to counter them.

While women in blue and white-collar trade unions have approached the issue of wage equality differently in the past, of late, there has been something of a convergence in the types of strategies adopted, all of which are gender-specific. These include the re-valuing of women's work, drawing more public attention to women's low wage status and a strengthening of legislative measures, which although not actively sought by trade unionists, now receive active support from women unionists. Perhaps, the most radical proposal yet has been the explicit request by both LO and TCO unions for an extra one per cent increase in the wages of women in an effort to close the wage gap. This previously unheard of gender-specific wage claim in what had been considered an egalitarian framework has highlighted the acknowledgment by women trade unionists of the particularity of previous class strategies which have failed to view labour markets as intersected by both gender and class.

Women's Working Conditions

In this section I examine the working conditions which are perceived by women trade unionists to require further attention if women workers are to achieve equality in the workplace. As noted earlier, women workers in Sweden have access to generous parental leave and child care benefits which have eased considerably the difficulties in combining paid work with family responsibilities. Furthermore, trade unions have actively supported expanding the notion of full employment to include women. Below I discuss why, despite such comparative progressiveness, women trade unionists in Sweden remained concerned with the explicitly gendered character of the labour market and how they have sought to challenge it.

Labelling Labour Markets as Gendered

When equality for women was highlighted, it was done in relation to their paid labour. Olof Palme argued in 1972 that equality between the sexes had to be "grounded in the labour market and that women's right to employment had to be
emphasised" (Hirdman, 1994: 28). The various measures being put in place reflected this. Taxation reform in 1971 provided for individual tax returns without regard for partners earnings, removing the disadvantage married women had previously faced when entering employment. An Advisory Council on Equality between Men and Women was set up in 1972, one of the aims of which was to provide measures to advance the right of women to work on the same basis as men. In 1974, maternity leave was replaced with parental leave, in that either parents could take leave with insurance compensating 90 per cent of pay (Scott, 1982: 8). The number of places in child care also rose rapidly from the late 1960s, although demand for these still outweighs supply. Such facilities have been heavily subsidised by the state (Gelb, 1989: 169).

Trade union support for the development of this 'woman-friendly welfare state' (Hernes, 1987) was largely a result of the labour movement's emphasis on growth and an effective use of human resources and women's labour force participation was seen as essential to this growth. As Eduards (1991: 169) has noted, the element of woman-friendliness was driven by "productivity, pragmatism and paternalism" rather than any sense of gender equity. However, the existence of such policies explains why women trade unionists have made comparatively fewer demands in the areas of supply side policies which support women's labour market participation.

Although apparently utopian, the conditions of women's employment remain a contested issue in Sweden. Women are concentrated in only a few occupations and are the majority of low-status workers. It is predominantly women who interrupt their labour force participation, take up part-time work and as a result receive considerably less earnings-related superannuation, which supplements the basic flat-rate aged pension. 36 per cent of women pensioners, as opposed to just four per cent of their male counterparts are entirely dependent on the basic pension (Curtin and Higgins, 1995: 5).

Thus, the widely held expectation espoused by social democrats and feminists alike, that the labour market per se would lead to gender equality has not been fulfilled. As a result, women trade unionists have begun to take issue with the fact that gender remains a fundamental organising principle in working life. Women unionists do not deny the gains made for women through their entry into the labour market as was made evident in the lead up to the 1994 referendum on European Union membership. Rather, there has occurred a questioning of the ability of the gender neutral strategies to challenge the explicitly gendered
character of the labour market. In this vein, the KOM programme funded approximately 100 projects to look specifically at applying a gendered perspective to the organisation of work. These projects ranged from gendering local government working environments and developing a mentor scheme to the establishment of women's co-operatives and occupational networks (KOM, 1994).

Other projects looked at changing the imbalances in the roles of women and men at home. While comprehensive family policies have substantially ameliorated the combination of paid and unpaid work, women trade unionists noted, and statistics show, that the revolutionising of men's roles is an ideal that has yet to be realised. Mothers still assume most of the responsibility for their children. Only 7.5 per cent of parental insurance benefit periods are claimed by fathers (Eduards, 1991: 173) and this stimulated the introduction of the 'daddy month' whereby 90 days are reserved for the second parent - usually the father. Special dispensation is required if the second parent cannot take up this leave. However, as indicated in an earlier section, some women continue to find that family responsibilities prohibit them from becoming more active in their union.

The juxtaposition of family and work responsibilities is also problematic for women, particularly in male-dominated occupations where bosses see women with children as a burden (Police, Metal). Equality officers in the unions are trying to change this view with education and information that, for example, "women are good policemen even when they have children" (Police). Family responsibilities also impact on the availability to work overtime and undertake education and training, which may require moving to another city for a number of months (Police, Bank). In response, LO has called on its affiliates to undertake active work to alter the negative attitude of employers toward fathers who take parental leave. Various unions have also campaigned to encourage men to play an active part in achieving equality between the sexes (TCO, Metal). "We (the union) need to encourage more men to use the possibilities they have been provided with through the parental leave provisions" (Factory). Changing the conditions of women's working life is still seen as inherently linked to a change in the attitudes and behaviour of working men (TCO, LO, SACO, Bank, Metal).

**Part-Time Work and Unemployment**

It is women who predominantly work part-time, often in order to facilitate a better interaction between family and paid work. A high percentage of these workers
are unionised in Sweden. Union demands on behalf of part-time workers have included limiting the minimum number of hours worked per week, lowering the limit of hours to qualify for social insurance; and forcing employers to better inform part-time workers of their rights (Cook et al., 1992: 210). In general, however, the unions have pursued few strategies that challenge the traditional structure of employment. Organisation of the labour market is still oriented toward full-time work, despite women's demands for the general six hour working day and it is women who continue to undertake the dual role of paid and unpaid labourer (Blomqvist, 1990; Bank, Public Service). In 1990, the LO leadership was given the choice between shorter working days (favoured by women) and longer holidays (favoured by men). Priority was given to longer holidays (Åmark, 1992: 435).

Within the Municipal Workers' Union, 80 per cent of the membership are women, 60 per cent of whom work part-time. A number of these women want to work part-time, but there are some who do not. Much of the involuntary part-time work is an effect of cutbacks in public sector spending and has often meant these women no longer receive sufficient wages to maintain a good standard of living. In response, the union adopted the long-term goal of having part-time status abolished in its sector: the worker is to enjoy the right to cut down work hours in favour of family responsibilities, without losing full-time status or the right to return to a full working week when she/he decides to do so (Municipal).

The right to work has been considered sacred in Sweden and the continued emphasis on full employment across party lines is a tribute to this (Rollen, 1978). Thus the recent increases in unemployment are cited as an issue for concern both generally and specifically by many women unionists (LO, TCO, Factory). While men have a higher rate of unemployment, it is generally young men who are first employed in new jobs. Many new jobs are being created in the export industry, but many of TCO's women members are not employed in this area. There is a fear that less well educated women between 40-50 years old will be unable to re-enter the labour market (TCO).

In response to this fear, TCO has organised workshops with those in power - that is with government officials, other trade unions and employers - to discuss specific measures to deal with women's unemployment. In this sense, dialogue is considered a very important strategy. In addition, because Sweden has always had an active labour market policy, it is considered important to monitor the way in which government targets money in employment schemes. While it is
accepted that women and men get equal opportunities in retraining, the male-dominated programs tend to be more expensive, and as such get a bigger part of the budget. Again, the high levels of occupational segregation in Sweden reinforce this phenomenon.

The importance of working conditions was recognised with the passage of the industrial democracy legislation in the 1970s, and occupational health and safety remains on union agenda (cf Cook et al, 1992; Higgins, 1996). However, with respect to working conditions, perhaps least well-addressed is the issue of sexual harassment. In 1987, the Swedish government estimated that sexual harassment affected around 20 per cent of working women and argued it was used "to keep women out of male-dominated jobs" (cited in Elman, 1993: 515). The Labour Court heard the first sexual harassment case in 1995, and found no specific legal provision against it: the union involved had to rely on extending the boundaries of non-specific principles to establish that an offence existed at all (Elman, 1993).

Several women unionists noted that minimal acknowledgment of the issue of sexual harassment had been made by trade unions (Metal, Police, LO). The Equality Ombudsman's Office has begun work on projects that will force both unions and employers to address the issue and a booklet on how to deal with harassment complaints is being compiled. Several courses and information seminars are being designed to educate unions and employers on how to address harassment in their equality plans, something which SACO is already attempting to impress on their affiliates. The Ombudsman's Office argued that this issue will demand further attention if women workers are to believe their trade unions view them as full members of these organisations (Equality Ombuds). The labour movement's long-time refusal to support sex discrimination legislation meant the issue of sexual harassment was ignored, since it did not receive attention in the collective bargaining arena. Arguably then, the social democratic emphasis on a gender-neutral equality has been unable to address the gender-specific problems faced by women at work.

Assessment

Since the 1960s, women have been included in the drive for full employment. Women's labour force participation has been embraced by trade unions and particularly in the case of part-time work, in that a high percentage of part-time workers are unionised. Indeed, in both the blue and white-collar sectors Swedish women are in the position of being more unionised than men: 87.1 per cent of
women in the former and 86.3 per cent in the latter are unionised, as against male rates of 84 per cent and 79.8 per cent respectively (Curtin and Higgins, 1995: 1).

Trade unions have also provided considerable support for the development of supply side policies to further encourage and facilitate the labour market position of women, although several Swedish feminists have argued that motivations in supporting such policies have been less about a concern with gender equity and more about an instrumental desire to efficiently utilise all natural and human resources (Hirdman, 1994; Eduards, 1991). However, the provision of individual taxation, substantial government funded child care places and generous parental leave which has enabled women to enter the labour market en masse, have also provided women trade unionists and others with the environment in which to focus more on the gender-specific character of the labour market.

As a result, the quality of this labour market participation has come under increasing scrutiny by women in trade unions and feminist academics over the last decade. Towards the end of the 1980s, several reports indicated that although women had equal access to the labour market, they had yet to receive equal status within the labour market. Women's employment was still biased towards repetitive jobs in industry, low-level office jobs and health and child care (KOM, 1994). It was also apparent that while the gender neutral notion of equality between the sexes highlighted the disadvantages incurred by men by their lack of participation in the home, there has been little change in the take up rate by men of parental leave and it seems women still incur most of the domestic responsibilities.

Women trade unionists have begun to accept that, while the gender neutral approach has provided women with many benefits, it has also served to hide the gendered structure of the labour market. In response, women in trade unions are seeking to include a more gendered perspective in the development of active labour market policies, the organisation of flexible working hours and conditions for part-time workers. Further work is being undertaken in changing the attitudes of both male workers and employers to men's involvement in domestic responsibilities. Finally, this renewed gender-specific focus has enabled a greater emphasis to be placed on the issue of sexual harassment, although progress in this area remains slow.
Conclusion

Women have not been well represented within trade union hierarchies in Sweden. Both the white-collar and blue-collar confederations have a history of their executives being heavily dominated by men. However, despite this lack of a women's presence, the policy making and implementation which has been developed within this corporatist model as a result of a Social Democratic hegemony, has substantially improved the economic and social position of working women in Sweden. Initially, this did not come about as part of a particular interest of unions in women's rights, but had more to do with how the position of women might affect the labour market and the overall state of the economy (Cook et al, 1992; Eduards, 1991; Qvist, 1985; Ruggie, 1984). During the 1960s, gender equality did become an independent political issue on the trade union agenda, but in gender neutral rather than gender-specific terms. Women have benefited substantially from measures generated by such a strategy, as made evident by the lack of claims around issues of child care and parental leave provision. In addition, the gender neutral discourse has sought to incorporate men into the private sphere and encourage them to participate more fully in what was traditionally seen as women's work. In this sense, the class struggle led to solutions for both the working class and for working women.

The insistence by the labour movement that the class interest is the major concern of both sexes has impacted on the way women themselves have organised their interests; seeking to have them included on the mainstream political agenda by working within both the Social Democratic Party and the trade union movement. Class strategies such as centralised wage bargaining and workplace reorganisation are considered by women unionists in LO affiliates as having had positive implications for women. While more individualistic strategies have often been employed within the white-collar sector, these too have been pursued in ways that include rather than exclude men.

More recently, however, the focus on equality between the sexes and working alongside men has been supplemented, with women organising with other women around strategies for change and articulating strategies around wages and conditions which are explicitly gendered. This renewed emphasis on the gender-specific is women unionists' response to a shift to the right in public policy rhetoric and to a belief that, with respect to trade union policy and representation, the gender-neutral strategy has failed to challenge the explicitly gendered nature of paid work. Furthermore, while Swedish conceptions of equality include equal
status in the political decision making process, this has eluded the Swedish trade union confederations. The resurgence in women's collective action is a significant change in an environment where the social democratic strategy has been predicated on a universal, (genderless), encompassing class politics. Indeed, Eduards has suggested that these new collective actions by women are a challenge to both the power relations and the policy direction of the traditional Swedish model (Eduards, 1991: 177-178).
Strategies for the representation of women's interests in trade unions: Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden in comparative perspective

The Australian, Austrian, Israeli and Swedish labour movements are seldom compared, yet they manifest political and institutional similarities justifying such an approach. Common political and institutional features provide a common framework affecting the relationship of women and trade unions in these countries. In all of them, the political labour movement has been exceptionally strong. In Sweden, Austria and Israel, labour movement strength has been translated into long periods of political incumbency and even political hegemony. In Australia, the Labor Party has not historically been dominant as the party of government, but, over the century as a whole, it has been second only to the Swedish Social Democrats in terms of electoral strength (Castles, 1991) and, for much of that time, has initiated reforms of the industrial and social environment that have transformed twentieth century Australia (cf Rawson, 1968). More recently, the Australian Labor Party has enjoyed a period of 13 years in government, the second longest period of left majority rule in any English-speaking nation. Furthermore, in all four countries the trade union confederations have been strong and have taken a centralised form with close links to parties of the left and a designated role in a corporatist policy making environment (although again Australia is anomalous in that recent corporatist developments have been dependent on left-wing incumbency). In virtue of these similarities, trade unions in these countries arguably have both the strength and the salience required to advance the cause of gender equality in the workplace.

Despite these political and institutional similarities, women in trade unions in these countries have, over the years, responded in somewhat different ways in their efforts to make trade unions better represent the interests of women workers. The existence of these differences in the context of analogous industrial relations.
environments allows for the identification of the factors accounting for the apparent commonalities and contrasts in the choice of strategies for the representation of women's interests. The thesis advanced here is that the use of a feminist analytical approach to the assessment of the means by which women in these countries have sought inclusion of their interests on trade union agendas in recent times permits a reconceptualisation of women's collective and class actions as contingent solidarities, providing a more nuanced understanding of the myriad of strategies adopted by women trade unionists in different nations.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion

Introduction

The previous accounts of trade unionism and the strategies undertaken by women trade unionists in the four countries provides a profile of how, in each country, women have tried to make working class representation more inclusive of women and their interests. While my main aim in the country chapters was to provide detailed description of the strategies pursued by women trade unionists, this description was couched in particular historical and discursive contexts which allowed for an examination as to how such strategies and solidarities were constituted and why.

In this chapter, I re-examine the historical and contemporary experiences of women trade unionists outlined in the four previous chapters from an explicitly comparative and theoretical perspective in an attempt to explain similarities and differences in women's solidarities evident between the four countries. In doing so, I draw on the analytical distinction between strategies which invoke notions of 'class' and 'woman'. I argue that while universal claims can be made on behalf of the working class and/or women, the definition of interests is necessarily selective and exclusive. As a result, new claims are then formulated based on these exclusions and new solidarities formed. Examination of the commonalities and contrasts in strategies employed by women unionists across countries within this analytical framework allows for a reinterpretation of women's collective actions as fluid and contingent rather than fixed around a specific class or gender identity while also revealing the dimensions of these contingent solidarities.

The first three sections of this chapter examine the cross-national similarities and differences in the strategies pursued by women trade unionists in their quest for increased representation within union hierarchies, wage equality and better working conditions, particularly with respect to mixing paid work with family responsibilities. To this end, some repetition of descriptive material is necessary to draw out the contrasts in strategies. In the final section, I evaluate the usefulness of the notion of contingent solidarities in interpreting these strategies.
and speculate as to the possible implications of such a notion for trade unionism as a whole.

The Representation of Women within Trade Unions

Despite the different ideological origins of the labour movements in Australia, Austria and Sweden, women workers were initially excluded from trade union membership in these countries. Only in Israel were women included from the beginning as part of the trade union movement, although this was on the basis of their being Jewish, rather than workers. Indeed, in Israel, as in the other three countries at the turn of the century, women's labour force participation was often discouraged and viewed as a threat to male wages. Thus, from the very inception of trade unionism in the modern era, and despite Marx's call for the overriding of sectional interests, the notion of working class representation was not universal but rather harnessed a masculine norm of inclusion.

The inclusion of women as trade union members came only after some struggle, with women workers establishing their own separate trade unions in Austria, Sweden and Australia. Since these early days, and more recently with the increase in women's labour force participation, women's trade union membership has increased substantially. It is argued that with these increases in labour force participation and trade union membership there should also be an increase in the number of women in trade union hierarchies (Lovenduski, 1986: 166). However, just as trade union movement's were slow in including women as members, so too have they been reticent in electing and appointing women to decision-making positions.

The importance of women representing women was, and is, an issue for women in trade unions cross-nationally, both as an end in itself and as a means for making trade union agendas more inclusive of the interests of women workers. Attempts to increase the representation of women by women necessarily involves women trade unionists appealing to their identity as women. Yet the ways in which this identity has been invoked has varied both across the four countries under investigation and within these countries over time. The measures employed include encouraging women to become more active as union members, the formation of separate organisations and programs which provide women with special representation.
Theoretically, by virtue of their union membership, every member has the right to attend meetings, air their views and vote on relevant issues. In terms of equal access to participation, however, women trade unionists in all four countries identified a number of barriers which prevented women from participating, including domestic commitments, negative attitudes held by men regarding women's capabilities to undertake union work and a general lack of confidence on the part of women. In an effort to dismantle these barriers, women unionists have lobbied for the provision of child care at meetings, holding meetings during working hours and educating women workers on union politics and practices.

Participation in union activities at workplace level, while not the same as representation, is nevertheless important, since advancement in union office tends to begin with this type of political experience. Furthermore, without equal access to political participation, the democratic nature of trade unions comes into question. The fact that women trade unionists in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden have employed similar strategies in an effort to increase women's participation suggests that trade union politics continues to be viewed as a male domain and women trade unionists are seeking to name it as such through the employment of gender-specific strategies. However, measures which encourage women to participate have generally been acceptable to trade union hierarchies, since they do not challenge conventional notions of solidarity but may indeed strengthen these.

Separate organisation has been another way forward. At various times since their inclusion as trade union members around the turn of the century, women have sought to ensure and expand their voice through the creation of separate spaces within trade unions. Although separate organising and women representing women are strategies which, by necessity, are gender-specific in character, they have not become permanently entrenched or pre-determined and are often contested by both men and women in trade unions. Nor has there necessarily been the identification and representation of an objective or fixed set of interests held by women workers. Rather, as I demonstrate in the remainder of this section, the utility of a separate women's solidarity within trade unions across countries has in itself been contingent, fluid, constituted by the historical and discursive contexts within which they are situated.

In Sweden, although women's councils existed during the 1950s, in the 1960s through until the early 1990s, gender equality was redefined as equality between the sexes, with women's representation by women no longer considered to be a
fruitful approach in this context. As a result, women's councils were renamed equality councils and attempts were made to integrate officers, with the gender neutral focus very pronounced. Such a strategy was considered appropriate since class strategies were universal in their rhetoric and outcome and provided women with comparatively high levels of gender equality. More recently, however, with the emergence of threatened cuts to the welfare state and with continuing barriers to equal political voice, a new feminist organising has emerged within Swedish trade unions to stand beside the previously-dominant class discourse.

In Australia, the continuing increase in women's labour force participation and the emergence of a high profile women's movement highlighted the numerous barriers undermining gender equality in the work place. As a result, the specific representation of women's interests through separate organisation began to flourish in the 1970s, with women unionists organising committees, networks and conferences at federal, state and local levels. These spaces provided women with the opportunity to formulate policy statements and demands and, once accepted by the union movement, to monitor the implementation process. With the recent reshaping of the union movement through amalgamations, diminished rights of representation and declining membership, the issue of gendered representation has taken on new significance for women trade unionists.

In contrast to both Sweden and Australia, women's divisions have existed in Austria and Israel since the incorporation of women as members. While this has provided women with token representation within the upper echelons of the trade union confederations, in neither country have the women's divisions any considerable power, with many of the issues of concern to women workers yet to gain currency in the industrial arena. Furthermore, in Israel, Na'amat has a female constituency of over 700,000, yet its role is to provide women with services, not to organise and mobilise women. Therefore, Na'amat's ability to politicise issues of concern to women as workers is limited.

However, as Cook, Lorwin and Daniels argue, "power is not all or nothing" (Cook et al, 1992: 72). The fact that women's divisions are seldom accorded institutional power within the trade union hierarchy does not foreclose women's collective action as a strategy for empowerment. At various times, women's sections in all four countries have facilitated contact with women at the grass roots level and have proven an important contact for women working in isolated or unorganised occupations. Women's committees and officers have also been viewed as critical in the gathering and dissemination of information in politicising
women's claims and, along with women's conferences, have provided a space for women to discuss policies and formulate strategies in an effort to further feminise trade union agenda.

Instances of effective separate organising are not difficult to find. In Australia, the ACTU women's committee is not required to be formally consulted by the confederation executive nor does it have its own budget. Nevertheless the women on this committee have provided both visibility and voice for women workers and their interests, continually seeking to deliver gender equality at work through their presence. In Sweden, the example of Tjeligan (the LO's women's network) also indicates how informal women's networks can politicise the issue of gendered representation within and outside of the trade union movement.

Although the structural positioning of women's representative spaces is relevant to the integration of women's interests as workers into the discursive arena of industrial relations, the often marginal status of such spaces does not necessarily equate with powerlessness. Indeed, conceiving of women's collective actions as without power precludes the identification of more local, partial and emerging acts of empowerment, such as generating confidence among women members, increasing the recruitment of women and disseminating knowledge to women of their rights as workers. Furthermore, viewing women's sections as without power may also lead to "political disappointment and exhaustion" (Gibson-Graham, 1995: 175), particularly in environments, such as Israel, where discursive space in the public arena is dominated by issues of 'national' and 'economic' security, thereby limiting the avenues available for the representation of working women's interests.

Women's sections, conferences and designated women's officers have been, at some point, strategies common to all four countries. In Austria, Sweden and Israel, the strategy of harnessing women's interests as workers to class politics (in the case of Israel a national/class interest) has a long history. Women's divisions have been an acceptable means of incorporating and addressing the 'woman question' without undermining the overriding cause of national or labour unity. While this has often led to women's concerns being subordinated to those of class, it is not a strategy in which women were necessarily passive. In many cases, women chose to prioritise the generic working class political interest over the gender-specific, since it was thought that benefits would flow to both men and women with the arrival of socialism. Moreover, women's power resources were
limited and establishing regulated wages and working conditions was difficult without the support of their male colleagues.

In addition, the entrenched corporatist frameworks in Sweden, Austria and Israel have reinforced the efficacy of women linking their interests with those of labour. Corporatist policy making is based on the capital-labour nexus and groups that are considered peripheral to this nexus are seldom provided with official access to this closed environment. Thus, there is little space for independent women's organisations to have their interests represented. Indeed, it could be argued that the dominance of corporatist decision-making arrangements has stifled the development of an exogenous and independent women's movement in these three countries, making the labour movement the primary means of representation for women. Under these circumstances, the creation of separate spaces for women workers within trade unions is useful in that it facilitates the collectivising and redefinition of the diverse interests of workers into a unified representable working class interest.

The case of Australia contrasts with these three nations in that it was not until the 1970s that women's sections and committees in trade unions began to burgeon. No formal corporatist framework came into existence until 1983, with the arrival of a Labor government which remained in power for 13 years. Up until that time, the Australian Labour Party had not been the dominant party of government. This lack of hegemonic presence and the existence of a more pluralist policy making environment provided women activists with little incentive to pursue their demands solely in terms of class. While women were active in trade unions, they were also organising their interests outside of the labour movement. By the 1970s a visible women's movement had developed which often applied explicitly feminist discourses in its interaction and demands on the state. This heightened feminist consciousness, combined with the increases in women's labour force participation had an influence on women's organising in trade unions, leading them to openly challenge the masculine character of union structures and policy agendas.

In this sense, creating separate spaces for the representation of women's interests, whether or not it is within an entrenched corporatist framework, has not been a fixed strategy. The disappearance and reappearance of gender-specific strategies by women unionists in Sweden and the creation of women's spaces in Australian unions over the last two decades suggests that, in terms of responsiveness and quality of representation, trade unions have often been perceived by women
unionists as remiss in addressing the interests of women workers. While accountability is an important facet of representative democracy within trade unions, as in other political institutions, this does not appear sufficient if particular needs of a group of workers, in this case women's, are being consistently ignored.

Another important set of measures available to women unionists in their quest for gendered representation are those which focus on the advancement of individual women to positions of power within trade union hierarchies, such as affirmative action, proportional representation and reserved seats. These strategies have received a mixed response from women trade unionists. Within Sweden, the tradition of class before gender has permeated any discussion of special representation of women by women, with such strategies viewed as feminist and divisive to class solidarity, although recently this perspective has begun to change. Similarly, in Austria, despite the existence of a reserved seat on the executive, the issue of quotas and affirmative action measures remains contested, with women unionists instead actively seeking to recruit more women as negotiators and shop stewards.

In contrast, in Israel, a reserved seat exists for the head of Na'amat and quotas for increasing women's representation have also been accepted by the Labour Party, which has in the past dominated the confederation leadership. However, implementation of the quota targets has been limited, with success only at the level of work council. It is in Australia that affirmative action strategies have been most actively embraced as necessary in increasing women's representation within trade unions. In 1991, the ACTU set a target of 50 per cent female representation by the turn of the century and as a first step established three affirmative action places on its executive. This, combined with the recent election of a woman president and women leaders representing several female-dominated unions, has led to a substantial increase over the last ten years in the number of women present at executive level.

Indeed, of the four countries examined here, the ACTU has the highest level of female representation, 29 per cent, compared to the female unionisation rate of 33 per cent. In contrast in Sweden, Austria and Israel women's representation at confederation level in 1993 was less than 20 per cent (in the case of Austria, there is only one woman out of 14 and only two out of 15 on the LO executive in Sweden). In all three cases, women's presence is hardly a critical mass and is a long way from being proportional to women's membership levels. It would seem, then, that at least in the short term, affirmative action strategies are necessary if
the representation of women is to become more than token and if women are to have more influence on the agenda-setting process within trade unions. However, as an explicitly feminist strategy, affirmative action remains difficult to accept in Sweden and Austria where class discourse dominates. With specific respect to Austria, a conservative attitude to women's labour force participation, has largely precluded such feminist challenges to date.

Nevertheless, the under-representation of women in the higher echelons of the trade union movement takes on an added significance in the four countries looked at here in that trade unions have played and continue to play (except in the case of Australia) a crucial role in the public policy-making arena. Within these corporatist environments, the patterns of representation are fixed which, has reinforced the systematic exclusion of women from these elites (Hernes, 1987; Lovenduski, 1986; Bergqvist, 1991). Schmitter (1981) suggests that the interests articulated are formulated within the corporatist decision-making environment itself, independent of the expressed concerns of trade union membership. If this is indeed the case, then without women's presence within corporatist elites, women's interests may continue to be ignored when defining and constructing public policy.

Women trade unionists in all four countries under examination acknowledged that the presence of women in the upper echelons of trade unions does not guarantee the representation of all interests important to all women workers. Nor has the strategy of gendered representation come with the assumption that there exists an overarching and fixed common interest between women workers. Rather, there is an explicit acceptance that women's class and gender interests are also intersected by interests stemming from ethnicity, 'colour of collar', sector, number of hours worked and numerous other factors. Nevertheless, having women in decision-making positions has been considered by most women unionists as necessary to provide some element of a gender perspective to interest representation by trade unions. Furthermore, as will become apparent, the claims formulated and strategies designed within such spaces have not remained constant or fixed.

**Women's Wages**

The previous chapters indicate that in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden, similarities exist with respect to early union resistance to accepting women as equal participants in the paid labour force. Indeed, the role of women as mothers took precedent for many years over their role as workers. Women, at best, were
regarded as secondary participants in the labour force. Trade unions were not forthcoming in actively seeking equal pay for women. The socialist leanings of early trade unionism in Sweden, Austria and Israel encouraged rhetorical support for equal pay but no implementation measures emerged. Rather the opposite occurred, with trade unions in these three countries supporting the existence of separate wage scales and agreements for women workers. In Australia, the establishment of a family wage in 1907 provided a basic wage for a male worker, his wife and three children. This ruling reinforced the notion that women should work only if they were single and that married women should be provided for by their husbands salary. Therefore, equal pay was not required. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that women workers in these four countries were able to force trade unions to explicitly acknowledge the issue of the gender-wage differential.

Despite these cross-national similarities in the trade union responses to women's labour force participation and claims for equal pay, variations exist in the mix of class and gender-specific strategies pursued by women trade unionists in Australia, Israel, Sweden and Austria. To account for these similarities and differences, emphasis must be given to the different wage bargaining structures and wage policy objectives evident in each country and to the extent to which class-based initiatives have been considered effective in ameliorating the specifically gendered features of the labour force such as occupational segregation, skill acquisition and the valuation of women's work.

Although Australia, Israel, Sweden and Austria all have centralised trade union organisations, not all have centralised wage bargaining or exhibit a commitment to wage solidarity. Yet it is the existence of centralised wage bargaining which can be demonstrated to have a considerable impact on reducing the gender-wage differential (Whitehouse, 1992).

Of the four countries examined here, Sweden exhibits the smallest gap in the female/male pay ratio, with women earning around 90 per cent of a man's wage in the private sector and 84 per cent in the government sector. A 15 per cent reduction in the gender-wage differential occurred between 1959 and 1972 as a direct result of the solidaristic wage policy adopted by the LO and implemented through the centralised wage bargaining framework established in the late 1930s. The strategies pursued by women trade unionists during the same period were marked by a strong commitment to wage solidarity and, from the early 1960s, by a gender neutral discourse of equality which sat well with the LOs focus on class before sex. While the outcome was not an explicit labour movement objective,
women workers benefited substantially from the goal of wage compression, because they were the majority of low paid workers. Women trade unionists within LO continued to support a gender-neutral approach to wage equality until the early 1990s.

However, the Swedish example confirms that centralised wage bargaining alone is insufficient in reducing the gender-wage differential. The TCO in Sweden, although participating in centralised bargaining rounds with their employer counterpart, have never displayed the same commitment to wage solidarity as LO, but have argued that wage differentials are a necessary return for skill. As a result, women in white-collar work have not benefited from an encompassing class politics with women unionists in TCO-affiliated unions focusing instead on gender-specific strategies of job evaluation and upgrading women’s skill base.

Similarly in Australia, centralised wage bargaining did not in itself reduce the gender-wage differential. There existed no formal commitment by the labour movement to wage solidarity, although national wage cases did deliver regular and uniform wage increases across the market and the existence of comparative wage justice curbed excesses in wage disparities. In addition, the regulation of minimum wages through awards has benefited women as low paid workers. However, for many years the differences in earnings between women and men were formalised by the arbitration system through the under valuation of women’s work and the establishment of the family wage, with the latter regularly used to deny equal pay (Macintyre, 1985: 43). It was women’s upfront demand for wage equality and the resulting equal pay decisions handed down by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 1969 and 1972, which made a significant contribution to closing the wage gap. By 1991, women were earning around 84 per cent of their male counterparts.

Although wage equality was not an explicit objective of the wage fixing system in Australia, the centralised framework was an effective mechanism in the implementation of the equal pay provisions. While trade unions were required to present a case on behalf of workers covered by each award, this was more encompassing than an individual complaints system. Furthermore, the principles were integrated into the wage fixing system and were applied across industries thereby extending its coverage (Whitehouse, 1995: 256). In this way, women unionists were able to use the traditional class-oriented strategy of centralised wage fixing to pursue a gender-specific outcome.
The cases of the TCO in Sweden and Australia prior to the equal pay decisions reinforce Therborn’s argument that similar sorts of labour market institutions can have significantly different outcomes depending upon the objectives to which they are wedded and whether or not these objectives are then institutionalised (Therborn, 1992: 39). Women unionists in Sweden and Australia have been aware of the utility of the centralised wage bargaining system when it is directed toward the objective of wage solidarity or pay equity and, for this reason, their employment of legislative strategies has been limited. While in Sweden an Equal Treatment Act has existed since 1980, this was introduced by a bourgeois government without the support of trade unions. In Australia, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Affirmative Action Act were passed in 1984 and 1986 respectively, but they have not yet been used in the context of equal pay.

In contrast to Sweden and Australia, the trade union movements in Austria and Israel have not embraced a centralised wage bargaining system. Although wage policy targets are set at the central level, the majority of bargaining in both countries takes place at sub-national level. Without centralised wage bargaining, women trade unionists in Austria and Israel have been limited in their ability to rely on class-based strategies in undermining the gender-wage differential, since in neither country has the notion of a unified working class interest led to a commitment to wage solidarity. Within Austria, labour’s coalition with the conservatives led to the sanctioning of status-oriented wage benefits and, in an effort to maintain full employment and appease capital, wage increases were based on productivity and economic growth. In Austria, wage disparities are comparatively high and this is reflected in the pay gap of 70 per cent, with women represented disproportionately amongst workers earning less than the minimum wage.

Similarly in Israel, women earn approximately 71 per cent of their male counterparts. Considerable wage disparities have been created with the negotiation of a variety of fringe benefits at sub-national and sometimes local or individual levels. In addition, wage disparities have been tolerated by the Histadrut in an effort to preserve a unified and encompassing Jewish trade union confederation, with little explicit concern with wage solidarity or pay equity. Women workers in both Austria and Israel have been disproportionately harmed by this combination of decentralised wage bargaining and the lack of commitment to wage compression.
As a result, women trade unionists in Austria and Israel have focused their attention on legislative strategies. In Austria, the 1979 Equal Treatment Act prohibited wage discrimination in collective agreements, while in Israel the 1964 Equal Pay Law required that women and men be paid the same wages for the same work. However, occupational segregation has meant that few women actually undertake the same work as men and, in both Austria and Israel, women are often issued lower job rankings or gendered job titles. Furthermore, implementation is dependent on individual grievance procedures rather than class action and trade union support for such action is not guaranteed. In an effort to combat the inaction by trade unions on the issue of discrimination in collective agreements and job descriptions, women trade unionists in Austria have supported legislative amendments which have resulted in an Equal Treatment Officer being appointed and an office which provides legal advice for individual women. A similar service is provided by Na'amat in Israel. Women unionists in Israel are also attempting to have the arbitrary allocation of fringe benefits addressed through legislation. Thus it appears that when the wage bargaining system is decentralised and the trade union movement lacks an encompassing solidaristic wage policy, women unionists construct solidarities around legislative strategies that are more gender-specific in focus.

The existence of decentralised wage bargaining environments has also stimulated strategies which focus on the need for gendered representation. Active recruitment of women negotiators in Austria and the implementation of quotas for women on the work councils in Israel indicate that women unionists do not view class solidarities as sufficient in accounting for the interests of women workers in wage negotiations. The connection between decentralisation and gendering representation is also attested to by the increased attention being given by women unionists in Sweden and Australia to strategies which provide women with an explicit voice in wage negotiations. In both these countries, shifts to a more decentralised wage bargaining system has been interpreted by women unionists as having the potential to undermine the push for gender-wage equality. In this sense, the utility of class strategies and solidarities is undermined when the objective of wage equity is either threatened or does not exist.

In Sweden, class strategies have been pursued most often by women in blue-collar unions. Recent workplace reform initiatives have been seen as having the potential to improve women's wages by providing women with an increase in skills and experience through job rotation and increased training, thereby undermining, albeit indirectly, occupational segregation. Women unionists in
blue-collar industries in Australia have also supported similar reforms. However, when comparing all four countries, support for class-based strategies is not limited to women in blue-collar unions. Both blue-collar and white-collar women in Australia have attempted, through the process of award reclassification, to formally revalue women's skills and rectify the institutionalised gender bias in the categorisation of skill. In Israel, nurses, teachers and public service workers have all undertaken militant industrial action in an effort to gain wage increases, as have bank and municipal workers in Sweden, and nurses in Australia.

By contrast, while gender-specific strategies were traditionally employed by white-collar women in Sweden, there has been a recent acknowledgment by LO women that class strategies were a necessary, but not sufficient, means of addressing the gender-wage differential. As a result, both white and blue-collar women unionists have sought extra wage increases specifically targeted for women. Such a radical strategy is unique to Sweden. However, in general it has been acknowledged by women unionists in the four countries that the gendered structure of the labour market limits the potential of class strategies to further undermine the occupational segregation, skill valuation and access to training, which continue to thwart the attainment of equal pay for women. As a result, similar gender-specific strategies have been harnessed by women unionists cross-nationally, including job evaluation, comparative worth, professionalisation and increased access to training.

Cross-national analyses indicate that corporatist institutional arrangements, such as those exhibited in the countries examined here, have been useful in their control over market forces, providing benefits to workers through increased employment and economic growth. With these analyses comes an assumption that such outcomes are equally beneficial to all workers. However, in seeking to explain the similarities and differences between women's choices of strategies, it has become apparent that in terms of wage outcomes, corporatist arrangements do not necessarily benefit women workers. Unless wage bargaining is centralised and wage policy objectives incorporate a notion of wage equality, class-based solidarities are limited in terms of reducing the gender-wage differential. Even with centralised wage bargaining mechanisms, women's solidarities are contingent in that the gendered character of the labour market necessarily demands the construction and reconstruction of gender-specific strategies at various times to supplement or replace class strategies which cannot account for the intersectional identities of workers.
Women's Working Conditions

The previous sections in this chapter indicate that women unionists in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden agree that the representation of women and wage equality are issues which continue to be of concern to women workers. However, with respect to women's working conditions there are some striking contrasts in the claims being made on behalf of women. Here I seek to account for these differences in focus as well as the similarities and differences in strategies employed by women unionists. My argument is that the crucial factor influencing the focus of women's fight for better working conditions is the variation in how women's inclusion in the labour market has been defined and supported by the state and trade unions. Also relevant to the selection of strategies is the breadth of the trade union agenda and the extent to which trade unions involve themselves in action beyond traditional notions of wages and working conditions. What trade unions perceive as constituting the vital parameters of working conditions for women is thus influenced by attitudes to women's labour force participation and the existence of political unionism.

Perhaps the most pressing concern for most women workers in Australia, Austria and Israel is combining paid work with family responsibilities. In Austria and Israel, maternity leave provisions are relatively generous in both payment and duration of leave. However, in neither country has this been supplemented with adequate state funded child care. While Na'amat provides a day care service, this is not always available or affordable. In Austria, most child care centres exist in Vienna and the number of places is considered by women unionists to be insufficient. In addition, in both countries, primary school children attend school for only half a day.

In this sense, in Austria and Israel, a traditional sexual division of labour is reflected in public policy concerns, with a strong emphasis on women as mothers. In Austria, the participation of married women in the labour market has not been actively encouraged, with little increase in part-time employment or public sector employment over the last three decades. In Israel, while women's labour force participation has increased, the exemption of married women from military service has reinforced traditional notions of women's role as mothers. This sexual division of labour has also been largely accepted by the trade union movement in both countries, with women trade unionists unable to push for child care or school reform through trade union channels, focusing instead on lobbying government ministers for change. Yet in Austria, increases to the duration of maternity leave
received support from the labour movement, while many women unionists refused to support such reform. These women argued that such reforms were detrimental to women's careers and wage equality, thereby offering a challenge to the traditional view of women as transient participants in the labour force.

In Australia, maternity leave and child care have also been issues of concern to women workers. However, because welfare state benefits were based on need and wives were provided for in the family wage, maternity leave conditions have been less generous compared with Austria and Israel. Nevertheless, women unionists in Australia have recently been able to use corporatist channels to negotiate extensions to maternity leave provisions and increased funding for child care. It appears then that there is now an acceptance by the Australian labour movement of women as permanent residents in the labour market. This acceptance was cemented with Accord policies helped along by the demands of women. In addition to these gender-specific outcomes, women unionists have been able to place an increasing emphasis on workers as parents, using the traditional test case mechanism to entitle parents with sick children to take leave.

Part-time work is a common means by which women have sought to combine paid work and family responsibilities. However, the conditions of these workers continue to be of concern to women unionists in both Australia and Israel. Many women who work part-time have less access to training and promotion and therefore lower wages. Although part-time workers are often entitled to pro rata benefits, many are not unionised and work in small workplaces or at home, making it difficult for unions to monitor their conditions. In this regard, trade unions in both countries have been slow in adapting to the changing profile of the labour market. In Austria, however, trade unions have refused to support the increase in part-time work. Using traditional arguments about the threat part-time work poses to the existence of full-time work, this strategy has also served to hinder the growth in women's labour force participation. Interestingly, women unionists have supported the conventional trade union stance, arguing that part-time work would not benefit women, aligning themselves instead with the general class position of demanding an overall decrease in the working week.

In all three countries, women workers have at various times been granted protection from particular kinds of work which, in many cases, were argued for by women themselves. However, more recently, campaigns for equal employment opportunity (EEO) have sought to override these protections. In Israel, EEO has been pursued through legislative channels and, as with equal pay,
has been dependent on individual grievances for implementation. In contrast, women unionists in Australia have again chosen to use the wage bargaining framework, with EEO requirements being written into awards. Maintaining these conditions in the new decentralised environment of enterprise bargaining is considered to require diligence on the part of negotiators. As a result there has been an increased emphasis on including more women on bargaining teams and educating male officials as to the value of EEO.

Again Austria differs from both Israel and Australia in that protection of women workers continued to exist up until very recently, with women denied access to most night work and required to retire five years earlier than men. Due to the conservative attitudes towards women's labour force participation, it took entry into the European Union to overturn the former and a Constitutional Court ruling to overrule the latter. Trade union women are now arguing for better night work conditions in gender neutral terms in a tactical effort to gain the support of their male colleagues.

Engels argued that the liberation of both workers and women required drawing women into the labour market and involving them in the struggle for socialism, while advocates of social democracy maintain that the goal of full employment is crucial to equality. Yet trade union support for including women as equal participants in the labour force has, and continues to, vary across countries. Moreover, the definition of women's inclusion, whether it be considered as transitional or permanent, has in turn affected the extent to which trade unions view the concerns of women workers as industrial. The definition of what does and does not constitute a legitimate industrial issue necessarily has an impact on the usefulness of class strategies and solidarities formulated by women trade unionists in the pursuit of child care, equal employment opportunity and parental leave.

Another factor relevant to whether class strategies can be utilised to pursue gender-specific claims is the breadth of the bargaining agenda itself. Trade unions in Israel, Austria and Australia (up until the early 1980s), have defined industrial issues in a very narrow sense, while maintaining a separation between what is dealt with through collective bargaining and what is dealt with at a political level. In Israel and Austria, women's working conditions have been primarily defined as social issues and therefore relegated to the political domain. Furthermore, in Israel, the Histadrut's ambivalence to trade unionism generally, despite it being the major trade union confederation, has not encouraged women
workers to view the Histadrut as a vehicle for pursuing gender-specific claims. In Australia, the definition of women's issues as social changed with the adoption of the Accord. The linking of wage restraint to social wage outcomes meant that the line between industrial and political outcomes merged to some degree. This enabled women trade unionists to lobby for women's conditions using both political and industrial channels.

By contrast to the other three countries, the labour force participation of women in Sweden has been explicitly encouraged by the labour movement, first in the 1930s and more significantly in the 1960s. Although instrumentalist in their motives, trade unions and the Social Democratic government facilitated the inclusion of women through tax reform, universal maternity and later parental leave benefits, state-funded child care and the unionisation of part-time workers. Because the goal of full employment included women, class-based strategies which sought to fulfil this goal also included women. As a result, from the 1960s until the 1990s, women unionists in Sweden were able to utilise a universal class politics to provide for women workers.

The Swedish case is also a model of political unionism in that its major union confederation, LO, accepts that its role is not just to defend workers rights but to "change working life from the bottom up,.....to democratize society and the economy and make work itself valuable and meaningful" (LO cited in Higgins, 1985: 349). This broadening of what constitutes class conflict has allowed for claims around child care provision, welfare benefits and equal employment opportunity to be defined as within the boundaries of capital/labour nexus. Although, with the exception of the equal employment opportunity, implementation has largely been the domain of the party branch of the labour movement, support by the trade union movement for these claims has been unequivocal.

Yet, despite espousing a universal basis to its claims, the trade union movement in Sweden has been unable to produce full equality for women. However, the major gains made by women have provided women workers with the incentive to demand total equality. Women unionists have thus begun to question the utility of a gender-neutral class approach in a labour market which has remains gendered in structure. A renewed focus has been placed instead on highlighting the particularity of the universal, with new strategies constructed to reveal the male bias at both work and within trade unions.
Perhaps the issue which most challenges the utility of class strategies is sexual harassment. By seeking to degender the labour market, as was the case in Sweden, problems have arisen in terms of politicising issues, such as sexual harassment, which are relevant to women with sex specific bodies (cf Sullivan, 1990). While it is not always women who are subject to sexual harassment, women trade unionists in all four countries view it as a concern of women workers. To deal with sexual harassment, then, women unionists in Sweden have had to re-gender the politics of the workplace and reintroduce gender-specific strategies accordingly. However, this continues to be a slow process.

Sexual harassment is also an issue in Austria and Israel, with women unionists working to highlight its relevance as an industrial issue. But perhaps the greatest contrast to Sweden is the case of Australia, where sexual harassment has received considerable attention by trade unions. Numerous courses have been offered, publications produced and comprehensive policy positions adopted. Trade union officials are now expected to bargain with employers for policies on combating sexual harassment. The acceptance of sexual harassment as an industrial issue by both trade unions and employers in Australia is largely a result of women within and outside the labour movement actively employing gender-specific strategies and often explicitly feminist arguments to politicise such issues.

Cook, Lorwin and Daniels argue that

Efforts to improve the conditions affecting women's work ... are by implication struggles for equality in the workplace (Cook et al, 1992: 255)

and should, therefore, by definition be issues for trade union representation. However, the process of defining what is an issue for trade union representation is not simple. It is socially constructed and continually subject to change. The use of gender-specific or class strategies by women trade unionists vary with each claim and with the context in which each claim is formulated. Because class politics and the notions of equality that go with this have not always secured the desired equality in outcomes for women workers, union women have often struggled for recognition by appealing to their identity as women, providing a focal point for collective action.
Concluding with Contingent Solidarities

This examination of the variety of similarities and differences in the choice of strategies made by women in unions cross-nationally offers a challenge to the notion that interests are fixed or unified around either gender or class (or national) identities. Yet corporatist practice implies that a unified class interest can, and for the success of the corporatist policy-making process must, be provided by trade union confederations. This position has had an impact on the representation of women's interests as workers in several ways.

First, the fixed patterns of representation applied by corporatist partners continue to exclude women, who are seldom elected as heads of trade union confederations. Theoretically this should not be a problem if, as is assumed in the literature, the internal workings of trade unions allow for adequate representation of the variety of workers' interests and if the redefinition of these into a single unified interest occurs in a democratic manner. Second, there is an assumption that outcomes which result from corporatist representation benefit all workers.

However, evidence presented in the previous chapters indicates that representation by women is seen by women trade unionists to be crucial at particular times and around particular claims. Arguments for an increase in representation by women within union hierarchies and in the negotiation process and invoking the identity of women in formulating claims suggests that the existing process of interest redefinition has not been sufficiently inclusive of women's concerns. While a universal class politics, as best displayed by the labour movement in Sweden, has provided women with tangible outcomes in terms of wages and welfare benefits, women trade unionists have highlighted the particularity of this universal in their pursuit of gender-specific strategies for representation and closure of the wage gap. It is also apparent that in Australia, Austria and Israel a unified working class interest was seldom sought, with the working class interest represented as masculine, conservative or Jewish respectively.

The identity and interests of workers are not only influenced by class and gender. They are also affected by the numerous ways in which workers are situated: as blue-collar or white-collar workers, in the public or private sector, in full-time or part-time employment, with or without family responsibilities. As a result, no one strategy or solidarity, whether it be based on class or gender, is ever able to include the interests of all workers. While equal employment opportunity may be pursued through gender-specific claims by some women unionists,
simultaneously, other women may be more interested in employing class strategies which focus instead on increasing minimum wages and conditions. The relevance of each strategy is also affected by the particular historical and discursive context within which the claim is formulated. In Austria, the utility of separate, explicitly feminist demands is constrained by the corporatist dynamics, as is strike activity. However, dialogue within corporatist channels is extremely useful. In contrast, in Australia, overt feminist claims both within and outside of the corporatist environment are an acceptable and often effective mode of interest representation. Thus, the formation of solidarities around class or gender is best seen as dynamic and fluid, with the changing boundaries of those included and excluded in the interest forming process creating new claims and new solidarities: contingent solidarities.

So what implications do such collective actions have for trade union policy-making, the democratic nature of trade unions, and for union strength in general? The second chapter of this thesis outlined the increase in women's trade union membership that has occurred over the last thirty years. Despite this increase, in three of the four countries examined here, women continue to make up a large proportion of potential union members. Having trade unions appear more 'women friendly', through better representation of the interests of working women and of women themselves, if necessary through affirmative action strategies, could be seen as a means by which these potential members become actual members and thereby increase union strength.

It is evident that corporatist institutional arrangements will survive the increasing encroachment of neo-liberal perspectives on the role of the state, the relevance of unionism and the dominance of the market. Thus, it may be that trade union confederations will need to attract different coalitions of support to maintain their presence in the policy making arena. This may in turn require a more real presence for women (amongst others) in decision-making elites, especially as women's labour force participation continues to increase. Indeed, accepting, acknowledging and providing voice for different groups of workers within trade unions becomes increasingly necessary if unions are to continue to be viewed by governments and employers as representing 'the working class' in public policy making arenas.

Trade unionism is predicated on a collective identity formed around the commonality of working life. Trade union confederations, particularly those within corporatist environments, also seek to represent a unified working class
interest. The findings of this thesis challenge the usefulness of assuming a unified working class interest can include all workers. Organisation around gender (and other experiences) fractures the insistence by trade unions on the commonality of work experience. It also has the potential to challenge the male, full-time worker 'norm' embedded in unionism (Ellem, 1992: 364). This does not mean that workers of both sexes do not share common work experiences. Rather, challenging this 'norm' may encourage trade union movements to reconceptualise workers as having diverse interests which are not fixed but fluid. Such a reconceptualisation might then encourage trade unions to become more representative of their membership.
Appendix One

Interview Sources

Interview material was gathered in Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden between August 1994 and April 1995. While women trade union officials working within the trade union confederations and in the head offices of national trade unions were my primary contacts, information was also obtained from officials from parties of the left and government officials. Academics and professionals who were concerned with the interests of working women and/or trade unions were also consulted and those cited are listed below by name. The other interview participants are referred to by an abbreviation of the industry, occupation or organisation they represent. Unless otherwise noted, all union officials interviewed were women.

Australia

ACT Nurses: Official, Australian Nurses Federation, Australian Capital Territory Branch.
ACT TLC: EEO Officer, Trades and Labour Council, Australian Capital Territory.
ACTU: President, Australian Council of Trade Unions.
Bank: Official, Finance Sector Union of Australia.
Cleaners: Official, Miscellaneous Workers Division of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union.
Clerical: Official, Victorian Clerical and Administrative Branch of the Australian Services Union.
Construction: Shop Steward, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.
Metal: Official, Automotive, Food, Metals and Engineering Union.
Municipal: Official, Australian Services Union.
Nurses: Official, Australian Nursing Federation.
Public Service: Official, Community and Public Sector Union, Sydney.
Retail: Official, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association.
Storepersons: Official, National Union of Workers.
Teachers: Official, Australian Education Union.
Textile: Official, Victorian Branch, Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia.

Transport: Official, Transport Workers Union of Australia.


Austria

Bank: Official, Banking Sector, Union of Salaried Employees in Private Employment.

Chamber: Official, Austrian Chamber of Labour, Vienna.

Equality Ombuds: Equal Treatment Officer, Equality Commission.

Hotel: Official, Union of Hotel, Restaurant and Personal Services Workers.

Industry: (Male) Official, Industry Sector, Union of Salaried Employees in Private Employment.

Kreisky: Eva Kreisky, Professor, University of Vienna.

Metal: Official, Union of Metal, Mining and Power Supply Workers.


MWA: Official, Ministry of Women's Affairs.

ÖGB: Official, Women's Division, Austrian Confederation of Trade Unions


Private Sector 2: Official, Women's Division, Union of Salaried Employees in Private Employment.

Public Service: Official, Union of Employees in Public Services.

Textile: Official, Union of Textile, Clothing and Leather Workers.

Israel

Arab Section: (Male) Representative from the Arab Workers Section of the Histadrut.

Clerical: Head of Clerical Workers Committee within Metal Industry.

DSW: Head of Department of Salaried Women, Histadrut.

Efroni: Linda Efroni, Industrial Relations Consultant, Tel Aviv.

Izraeli: Dafna Izraeli, Academic, Bar Elan University, Tel Aviv.
IWN: Spokesperson for Israel Women's Network, Jerusalem.
Labour: Head of Women's Section, Israeli Labour Party.
Mapam: Female Member of Knesset from Mapam Party.
Metal: (Male) General Secretary of National Union of Workers in the Metal, Electrical, Electronics and Plastics Industries.
Na'amat 1: Assistant to Head of Na'amat.
Na'amat 2: Official, Overseas Department.
Na'amat 3: Legal Adviser.
Nurses: Official, National Association of Nurses.
Pharmacy: General Secretary of the National Union of Pharmacists.
Public Service: Official, National Union of Clerical, Administrative and Public Service Employees.
Textile: ex-official, National Union of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers
Youth: Head of the Youth Section of the Histadrut.

Sweden

Bank: Official, Swedish Bank Employees' Union.
Clerical: Official, Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees.
Factory: Official, Swedish Factory Workers' Union.
LO: Official, Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions
Medical: Official, Swedish Medical Association.
Metal: (Male and Female) Officials, Swedish Metal Workers' Union.
Municipal: Official, Swedish Municipal Workers' Union.
Nielsson: Bengt Nielssson, Academic, University of Uppsala.
Police: (Male and Female) Officials, Union of Swedish Policemen.
Public Service: Officials, Federation of Civil Servants.
SACO: Official, Swedish Confederation of Academics.
TCO: Official, Central Organisation of Salaried Employees.
Appendix Two

Interview Questionnaire

Questions asked of trade unionists

What is your role in this section?
Is this a full-time position?
How does this section fit in with the rest of the organisation?
Who do you service?
What do you see as your main tasks?
How many people work in this section?
What are your resources like? Do you have your own budget?
Over the last five years or so, what gains have been made for your women members which you think are significant?
What difficulties have there been?
How were you and/or your section involved in the gains made?
Are there areas where you feel women would have missed out had you / your section not been involved?
What are the major issues that you are working on at the moment?
How do you define what issues are important to your women members?
What strategies have you found useful in having these issues addressed?
Why do you think that such strategies were useful / successful?
How do you get your policy ideas to be taken up by the executive of your union?
How supportive are your male colleagues to issues of concern to women workers?
How many women are there on the executive of your union/confederation?
How relevant is the issue of women as representatives of women in having women's issues addressed?
Are there any programs in place to encourage more women to become active in the union and/or to seek election to official positions?
What barriers exist for further representation by women?
Do you feel there is anything I have missed, or anything else you would like to add?
Appendix Three

Data Sources for Chapter Two

This appendix defines the data used in Chapter Two and details the sources from which the data were drawn.

Female and Male Trade Union Density

Trade union density refers to actual union members as a percentage of potential union members. When looking at union density data, a number of difficulties arise. Union membership figures can be both overstated due to the inclusion of retired members and the unemployed and understated since small non-aligned unions may be excluded (Wallerstein, 1989: 497). The time periods referred to with respect to union reporting of membership varies between the average in a calendar year, the average in a financial year and on a specific day within that year. Furthermore, sometimes data is gathered from union records, while at other times labour force or household surveys provide the information (Bain and Price, 1980: 3-4).

However, Bain and Price (1980), Visser (1989) and Ebbinghaus and Visser (forthcoming, 1997) have tried to account for these problems and present trade union membership figures in the most consistent manner possible. Union density data for the twelve countries examined in Chapter Two (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States) for the years 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1989 were taken from the DUES data set and additional data kindly supplied to me by Jelle Visser and Bernhard Ebbinghaus. The absolute numbers of female trade union members detailed in Table 2.3 were also taken from the above data set and supplemented with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Catalogue Number 6323.0 (1992) for 1990 Australian figures.
Female Labour Force Participation

This refers to the female labour force as a percentage of the female population aged between 15 and 64 years in 1989 (see correlation coefficients in Table 2.4). Data for Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States were taken from OECD Employment Outlook (1992).

Government Employment

This variable refers to government employment as a percentage of total employment in 1989 (see correlation coefficients in Table 2.4). Data for Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States were drawn from OECD Employment Outlook (1992).

Service Employment

This variable refers to service sector employment as a percentage of civilian employment in 1989 (see correlation coefficients in Table 2.4). Data for Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States were drawn from OECD Employment Outlook (1992).
Appendix Four

Calculations for Chapter Two

Below are the notes and calculations relating to the decomposition of the change in the female-male trade union density ratio 1960-89, as noted in Table 2.3.

Let

- \( f_{60} \) = female union density in 1960
- \( f_{89} \) = female union density in 1989
- \( m_{60} \) = male union density in 1960
- \( m_{89} \) = male union density in 1989

The change in the union density gender ratio for the period 1960-1989 is as follows:

\[
\frac{f_{89}}{m_{89}} - \frac{f_{60}}{m_{60}}.
\]

The proportion of the change which can be attributed to changes in the female component while holding male union density constant is given by:

\[
\frac{(f_{89}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{89})}{f_{89}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{60}}.
\]

In a similar manner, that part of the change which can be attributed to changes in the male component while holding female union density constant is given by:

\[
\frac{(f_{60}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{60})}{f_{89}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{60}}.
\]

Thus it can be shown that the total change in the gender ratio may be decomposed into two components - one attributable to female union density and the other to male union density.

\[
f_{89}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{60} = (f_{89}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{89}) + (f_{60}/m_{89} - f_{60}/m_{60}).
\]
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