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Lois Spier Gray

Cornell University, lsg7@cornell.edu

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The Route to the Top: Female Union Leaders and Union Policy

Abstract

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Keywords

women, union, member, labor, United States, leadership, glass ceiling, career patterns, recognition

Comments

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The Route to the Top

Female Union Leaders and Union Policy



Lois S. Gray

Although women now constitute about one third of the members of labor unions in the United States, they are still barely visible in top leadership. To what extent are women currently making inroads in union leadership and what types of union responsibilities do they hold? Is there a glass ceiling? How do the career patterns of women unionists compare with those of men? What can unions do to facilitate their recognition? These are the key questions I examine in this article, drawing on past research supplemented by insights from union leaders I interviewed.¹

Much of what has been written about the gender gap in union leadership focuses on what stands in the way—the barriers. This article will also look at the roadblocks to leadership. My emphasis, however, will be on the positive—what can and is being done to overcome these barriers. Lastly, I will assess the possible impact of increased representation of women on union policies and leadership styles.

Where Are the Women in Unions?

Women are not new to labor leadership. Of the countless numbers who played key roles in local labor struggles during the past century, many rose to

¹For a study of union administration, I interviewed sixty-one national union presidents (four of whom were women) about their career patterns, goals, accomplishments, and leadership styles. For this essay, I interviewed twenty-three women who hold leadership positions at various levels—national, regional, and local—and collected data about membership, policies, and practices from all of the national unions in which women constitute 50 percent or more of the membership as well as those which have sponsored women's departments or special activities for women.

national prominence. Agnes Nestor, for example, was elected president of the Glove Workers in 1907, becoming the first female to head a national union, and the following year the American Federation of Labor appointed its first woman to national staff (P. Foner 1980; Wertheimer 1977). Nevertheless, in 1968 Alice Cook observed that women:

are rarely found as officers of the intermediate bodies, the joint boards, and district councils, and almost never appear on major negotiating teams or on national executive boards, national staffs, and among the national officers . . . even when they are in a majority, women play the role, and are assigned to the status, of a minority—moreover, a minority still in that state of political self-consciousness where tokenism suffices to meet its demands (p. 132).

Available statistics confirm Cook's assessment.² The proportion of women in top elected leadership posts was less than 5 percent in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s the numbers increased, reaching 11 percent in 1978³ (Bergquist 1974; Needleman and Tanner 1987).

This proportion remains the same today. According to my calculations, women on executive boards of national and international unions listed in the 1990–91 *BNA Directory* (Gifford 1991) total 11 percent when independents are included and 9 percent if only AFL-CIO affiliates are counted, the same percentages reported in 1978. One in five AFL-CIO unions has at least one woman on its governing board; but women are generally underrepresented in relation to their proportion of the membership. In seven out of eight unions, women constitute less than one-fourth of the executive board membership, including some, but not all, of the unions in which women make up fifty percent or more of the membership.

In 1975, none of the AFL-CIO unions was headed by a woman (*U.S. News & World Report* 1975). In 1992, women are presidents of three national unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO: Lenore Miller, who heads the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU); Dee Maki, Association of Flight Attendants (AFA); and Nedda Cassei, American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). Among national independent unions, the American Nurses' Association (ANA) is also headed by a woman. Five women hold the title of

²Unfortunately, statistics about women in union leadership have been hard to come by. Few unions publish or even collect these figures. The U.S. Department of Labor discontinued this type of data collection in 1978, leaving the Bureau of National Affairs listings for national officers as the sole source.

³After 1970, published statistics included employee associations along with the earlier reported AFL-CIO unions. These independent organizations, representing mainly teachers, nurses, and public employees, have significantly higher percentages of women members and leaders.

secretary-treasurer in national unions, a position usually carrying authority second only to the president.

In 1980, the national AFL-CIO elected the first woman to its executive council. In 1992, two women sit on the council (down from three in 1991), a somewhat lower percentage of governing board representation than the average affiliated union.

All current AFL-CIO federation presidents at the state level are male. Almost all of the state federations, however, have at least one female member on their executive boards. Eighty-seven women served as principal officers of local central labor councils (CLC) and altogether women account for 12 percent of total CLC offices held in 1991 (Gifford 1991).

Although the increase of women as national and regional elected officers has proceeded at a "snail's pace" (Baden 1986), union women have been more successful in achieving leadership recognition through appointment. This phenomenon suggests a growing commitment on the part of the still mostly male leadership. In 1991, approximately half of the national unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO had one or more female department heads in their headquarters staff and women accounted for one out of eight of these supervisory positions, up sharply from earlier years (Le Grande 1978). Overall, women are estimated to hold one-third of all staff positions in national unions, a proportion that doubled in a decade. In a few unions, notably those with strong organizing outreach to women workers, the proportion of females on national staff reached approximately 50 percent, registering a dramatic increase in recent years (Needleman and Tanner 1987). In 1980 the AFL-CIO appointed its first female department head; the number increased to three in 1990 when its first female regional director was also appointed.

The greatest change appears to be at the grassroots level. Among those unions that have actually counted the number of women local leaders, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA) report that approximately one-half of their current local officers are female; the Communications Workers Association (CWA), 35 percent; Service Employees' International Union (SEIU), 40 percent; and International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), 12 percent. In the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) and the NEA, more than 50 percent of local union presidents are female.

Even in unions with predominantly male membership, the percentage of women in key local positions has gone up. For example, one in ten local United Auto Workers (UAW) presidents is female (*UAW Solidarity* 1989) and female local union presidents have recently come to the fore in such

formerly all-male domains as the steelworkers, mineworkers, and machinists (P. Foner 1980: 545–48; Baden 1986). In addition, knowledgeable observers report increasing numbers of women in the local union leadership pipeline. Growing recognition in local office augers well for the future since this is the pool from which future leaders will be drawn.

Gender stereotyping is also beginning to change. Historically, union women disproportionately carried the duties of recording secretaries and served mainly on women's committees. They were rarely elected to negotiating committees or other roles that constitute launching pads for union power and recognition (Gray 1988). More recently, women elected as vice-presidents and union executive board members are being assigned to a broader range of responsibilities, including collective bargaining. In 1991, women directed organizing departments in three unions, including the largest AFL-CIO affiliate, the Teamsters (IBT). Research, which focuses on preparation for collective bargaining; legislation, which deals with key policy issues; and public relations, which involves interpreting the union to the media, are currently the most frequently held responsibilities of females who direct union staff departments. These nontraditional functions reinforce the impression that women are breaking out of the molds of the past.

The discrepancy between women as a proportion of membership and their representation in leadership is roughly similar in unions to other political institutions in our society and shows the same tendency to change at the grass roots (Schwartz and Hoyman 1984:71; R. Foner 1991).

Breaking In and Moving Up

In sharp contrast to other professions, the careers of union leaders are rarely planned. Becoming a leader in a union tends to be an accidental vocational choice that grows out of complex patterns of experiences and relationships in the trade or occupation in which one is employed. Studies of local (Sayles and Strauss 1967) and national union officials report that individuals initially take on leadership responsibilities because of appeals from fellow employees who urged them to speak up to management; because they are motivated by the challenge of learning and using their abilities; and/or because of their commitment to the social egalitarian appeal of unionism (Quaglieri 1988). Few think of seeking office in the union as a step toward a full-time career. The accidental character and political dynamic of the personnel selection process in unions help explain why so few women have emerged as top leaders.

Biographies from the past and interviews with present leaders reveal four routes to the top of the union hierarchy and illustrate the difficulties women

face. Historically, national leaders were founders. Such labor pioneers as Samuel Gompers, Eugene Debs, and Philip Murray are examples. Among today's labor leaders, this path to leadership is increasingly rare. One of the few living labor leaders who organized a new union is Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers of America (UFWA). Another path to top leadership, now rare and perhaps disappearing, is inheritance. Numerous union presidencies have been passed from father to son: the Rafterys in the Painters, the Hutchinsons in the Carpenters; the Foscos in the Laborers, and the Carloughs in the Sheet Metal Workers.

A third union career path, the technical expertise route, is of recent origin but is regarded by some as the wave of the future (Schwartz and Hoyman 1984). The technical expertise route involves entering the union as a specialist and becoming recognized as a leader. Lane Kirkland, president, and Tom Donahue, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, took this route to top leadership positions. Both are college graduates who were initially hired for specialized functions and worked their way to the top through demonstrated administrative ability. Other examples include Jack Sheinkman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), and his predecessor, Murray Finley. Both originally joined the union as attorneys.

The majority of national union presidents and other top officers, however, have followed the elective route up from the rank and file. This is a long and tortuous path that begins with activism in the local union and winds through rising levels of responsibilities to regional and national office. Typically, leaders become active in local union affairs and run for office at an early age. Working their way up "through the chairs," as some describe the process, they eventually reach top positions twenty to thirty years later (Quaglieri 1988). This career path has not changed for decades (Mills 1948) and continues to be the expected route for those aspiring to national leadership.

Women are disadvantaged in relation to all but one of these career patterns. Women have not been the beneficiaries of family connections to the same degree as men. John L. Lewis *did* appoint his daughter to head District 50 of the United Mine Workers, but that was the rare exception. There are women founders who have risen to top leadership—Karen Nussbaum, who organized 9 to 5, a clerical organization that subsequently affiliated with SEIU; Delores Huerta, who helped Cesar Chavez form the UFWA; and current and former presidents of the AFA who were key players in the move to break away from the Airline Pilots Association to found a separate union of flight attendants—but few new unions are currently being founded. Hence, the opportunities for women to use the founders route are slim indeed. Since the mass influx of women into unions is a relatively recent phenomenon, the time investment

required to advance to top-level positions through the elective route is also lacking for most of today's women.

The most readily available avenue to recognition for women is that of technical expertise, which is, in fact, the route many have taken to achieve top-level staff and department head appointments. These top-level appointments have in turn led to election as vice-presidents and executive board members of national unions. The vast majority of unions today staff their pension, public relations, occupational safety and health, research, education, and legal departments with individuals recruited from outside the membership. Many even turn to the outside in their search for organizers and the field staff who service contracts. A recent survey of national union headquarters found that only one in three require previous union membership as a precondition for professional staff employment (Clark and Gray 1992). Women in particular have been able to take advantage of these expanding staff openings in national union headquarters and in some large local unions. Examples of women who made it to top office through technical expertise include Joyce Miller, who was originally employed as education director of the ACTWU and advanced to its vice-presidency; she became the first woman elected to the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO.

A variation on the technical expertise route that is almost exclusively female consists of hiring in as a clerical. Currently only one male president started his union career this way. Jay Mazur worked for a local union pension and welfare fund in a clerical capacity and eventually rose to be national president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). But a great many women have achieved leadership positions through the clerical route. For example, Lenore Miller, the president of Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers, started working for that union as a secretary in the national headquarters, and Mary Crayton, the first woman to become regional director of the AFL-CIO, began her union career as a clerical for a local union.

Many women are currently in the pipeline pursuing the elective path to union leadership, but it remains to be seen how they will fare.

Roadblocks

Regardless of the route to national prominence followed by women leaders, those I interviewed faced roadblocks in every stage of their climb to leadership.

The major roadblocks are societal, work- and union-related, and personal, all influenced by gender stereotyping and discrimination. Women who go to work and join a union are seriously handicapped as a result of their societally proscribed roles as homemakers with responsibilities for child raising and

homemaking. Scholars consistently rate this dual role as the most important barrier to female involvement in union activities (Cook 1968; Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Koziara and Pierson 1980; Needleman and Tanner 1987; Andriappan and Chaison 1989). Reinforcing this point, Roby and Uttal's study of local union stewards in this volume found that family relationships are much more time-consuming for women and that women take special care to keep union responsibilities from impinging on their family time, in contrast to men, who place union responsibilities over family responsibilities. Women's family responsibilities constrain them from attending meetings, volunteering for committees, staying out late after work, and travelling, all of which are essential to union orientation, training, and advancement. Traditional attitudes of husbands who see women's place in the home often add a further barrier; and time out for childbearing results in a late start in catching up on knowledge about the job and the union.

Work- and union-related barriers include sexual stereotyping and male bonding both on the job and in the union. At work, employer notions about the type of work women can perform (unskilled or clerical) succeeds in steering them away from the high-prestige, skilled jobs from which local union leaders are usually drawn (Sayles and Strauss 1967), and prejudice or even harassment from male supervisors discourages union activism (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Andriappan and Chaison 1989). Women are still a minority in the unions and even those unions that are predominantly female in membership have traditionally been led by men. Thus, women tend to be seen or see themselves as "outsiders." They are often not invited to caucus meetings or social gatherings where union issues are discussed. There are few, if any, female role models to inspire emulation. Furthermore, women are not usually given the opportunity to represent their fellow employees in negotiations with employers, the most prestigious of all union leadership responsibilities, in part because the American tradition of adversarial labor relations calls for "tough leaders" and women are considered "too emotional" or too soft to bargain with "tough" employers (Cook 1968). These traditions, which define what is expected both in union-management relations and male and female behavior, get in the way of selecting female spokespersons to bargain with management and relegate those women who are willing to be active to dead-end assignments or to functions that are important but not linked to upward mobility in a union.

Women are also handicapped in access to training and support networks. Informal mentoring is the key to learning the ropes in any organization and male leaders tend to select persons like themselves—that is, other males—as possible successors. According to leaders I interviewed, many women who

have achieved recognition in a male-dominated power structure may also feel less secure and hence do not reach out to mentor other women. Perhaps the most pervasive barrier women union leaders face (all of those interviewed mentioned it) is underestimation. On the job and in the union they are often ignored or overlooked and almost always regarded as less able to achieve than men.

Gender discrimination is pervasive. Women in unions, as in other organizations, report incidents of sexist remarks, sexual harassment, and overt discrimination (Fellner 1990). For example, in 1986 then New York City mayor Ed Koch commented to the press that Sandra Feldman, president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) had "nice legs" and reporters besieged her for pictures. Those few women who are encouraged, mentored, or sponsored by male officials are often falsely accused of sexual involvement, a charge that would not be made against their male colleagues.

Not only are women expected to be smarter, work harder, and achieve more than their male counterparts, but at the same time they are expected to lead exemplary personal lives, a double standard when compared with men.

Personal barriers reinforce these societal and organizational roadblocks. Women tend to lack self-confidence (Cook 1968; Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Koziara and Pierson 1980; and Needleman and Tanner 1987) and internalize negative concepts about their capacity for leadership roles (Kanter 1977), fear failure and generally believe that men can handle these responsibilities better than women (Koziara and Pierson 1980; Wertheimer and Nelson 1975). Other personal limitations cited by observers are tendencies to accept passive roles (Chaison and Andriappan 1982) and lack of knowledge of union procedures (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Needleman 1988). The implication of this research is that women, as a result of societal, job, union and personal barriers, are less likely than men to feel comfortable and involved in union activities and, therefore, do not compete for leadership recognition to the same extent as their male colleagues.

Strategies for Success

For advice on overcoming barriers we look to women who have "made it" to major union leadership roles. The interviews I conducted with twenty-three women leaders reveal a number of common themes or patterns: they work hard, study intensively, make sacrifices, take risks, demonstrate results, build a constituency and/or acquire a sponsor, set goals, and undertake strategic planning.

The Horatio Alger maxim of working hard to get ahead is one of the keys

to success for women in unions as elsewhere. As one put it, "You have to start at the bottom to get to the top." The elective route requires that women as well as men start at the grass roots in the local union and volunteer for all kinds of assignments, including serving on committees, marching in picket lines, and writing for the local union newspaper. Ida Torres, now secretary-treasurer of Local 1, RWDSU in New York City, recounts the innumerable hours she spent as a volunteer counseling workers with problems, telephoning members to remind them to vote, and keeping track of strike benefits. Women following the expertise route also find that volunteering for extra duty—organizing, researching issues, writing position papers—eventually pays off in recognition and promotion.

Personal sacrifice is expected. The higher the position, the greater the demands on the individual. Linda Puchala had to persuade her husband and twin daughters to relocate to Washington, D.C., when she was elected president of the AFA; and Gwen Martin, when appointed as an international representative in the SEIU, found herself commuting hundreds of miles on weekends in order to be with her family.

In-depth knowledge is another essential. Women who aspire to union offices need to know a great deal about industrial relations practices, including the content of their collective bargaining agreements, how the contract has been interpreted in arbitration decisions, and the types of collective bargaining issues that might arise in the future (Koziara and Pierson 1980). In addition, they must master negotiating, speaking, and writing skills in order to represent their members in grievance procedures and at the bargaining table. They have to understand the intricacies of union structure and practices in order to get things done.

The most difficult knowledge to acquire, according to the women I interviewed, is political know-how: how to build coalitions and elicit grassroots support. These skills are acquired through the equivalent of an apprenticeship, a combination of formal education and job experience. The formal education often means enrolling in union- and university-sponsored labor education courses. "Job know-how" requires finding a mentor or hooking up with a knowledgeable person who is willing to share desired inside information. All of the women interviewed acknowledge a debt to mentors, in almost every case male, who took the time and interest to break them into the trade of union leadership.

Becoming visible is another component of the game plan for achieving recognition. Olga Madar, who was the first elected woman vice-president of the UAW, reports that she was initially hired for a nontraditional job in a plant partly because she was an expert softball player; later, the union ap-

pointed her to a full-time job as recreation director. Each of the national leaders cites turning points that occurred as a result of successful and highly visible accomplishments. They report that, in their early roles as local union activists, their first recognition came when they spoke up to management about grievances that were important to their coworkers and when they employed innovative tactics to win them. Some mobilized membership support by focusing attention on issues of specific interest to other women, such as equal pay and child care. Whatever the task, however, interviewees agree that women "have to be better than men."

After graduating from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Vicki Saporta was hired as an organizer for the IBT's Western Conference and gained visibility through repeatedly winning elections. Her impressive record of union wins brought her to the attention of the national union and ultimately resulted in her appointment as the first woman to head the national organizing department. Susan Cowell, vice-president of the ILGWU, was initially hired as an organizer but attained recognition when her knowledge of Asian language and culture (her college major was Asian studies) was urgently needed for the union's drive to organize garment workers in New York City's Chinatown. Dramatic and visible accomplishments are needed to break the stereotype that women are not "tough" enough to meet the demands of leadership.

Whether running for office or serving as appointed staff members, women leaders agree that it is essential to build constituencies whether they be mixed gender or women only. According to successful women leaders, each woman who seeks recognition has to build her own constituencies and networks of support within the unique political structure of her own union. Women in national staff positions talk about having a "fan club," supporters and networks of staff and local leaders to whom they relate. Overt political caucuses, however, are viewed with alarm by incumbent union officials (usually male); thus, female networks, at least for those in appointive positions, must be circumspect—not necessarily covert but neutral in tone.

Strategic planning is important for all potential leaders and essential for women. Strategic planning involves setting goals, assessing the environment and developing a long-term road map for overcoming barriers and reaching desired objectives. Since union leaders normally "fall into" their roles, career planning is rare. Nonetheless, in contrast to male leaders, many of the women interviewed reported that they set out on a deliberate course of action to reach their goals. An outstanding example of achieving success through carefully calculated planning was the ascent to power of Shirley Carr, president of the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), the counterpart to Lane Kirkland,

president of the AFL-CIO in the United States. When she was first elected steward, she “had a process in my own mind” (Larson 1986). After her election to a regional office in the public sector division of Canadian labor, she found her rise to a top position blocked by incumbents and so turned her attention to the broader CCL, persuading her union to back her run for vice-president. From there, she threatened to run against the president of CCL, who, in turn, offered her the interim position of secretary-treasurer, promising to retire after one more term. Shirley Carr kept the pressure on until she triumphed as the first woman to head the two-million-member CCL.⁴

In sum, the experiences of women who have achieved top office in unions demonstrate how barriers can be overcome. In comparison with their male counterparts, they must work harder, make more personal sacrifices, be more goal-oriented, do more planning, and make up for political and organizational inexperience through intensive study. To achieve the same goals, women must excel.

What Unions Can Do

Thus, although a few exceptional women have made it to the top, the path is clearly harder for women than for men. Equal opportunity will not be truly realized unless unions adopt policies to facilitate and support aspiring women leaders.⁵ As Pat Scarcelli, vice-president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, says “Unions must become ‘women friendly.’”

Already, a number of changes are occurring that will tend to move more women into leadership. Increasingly, union organizing drives targeting women workers, as dramatically illustrated at Yale and Harvard universities, give women the necessary experience and visibility to compete for union office while rendering unions more receptive to recognizing their contributions (Kautzer 1985). As noted before, founding a union or at least a piece of one is a tried-and-true path to leadership.

At one time, organizing, which requires travel, long hours, and endurance, was considered a “man’s” job. Now an increasing number of women are being hired as organizers. Half of the first graduating class of the AFL-CIO’s newly formed Organizing Institute, for example, were women. “If you want to

⁴Shirley Carr resigned from this position in 1992.

⁵A 1986 survey of fifteen national unions found only five that were rated as “affirmatively committed” to addressing women’s concerns through convention actions, budget allocations, standing departments, and committees, conferences and training materials, with another five deemed “somewhat committed” to providing resources for their women members (Baden 1986).

organize women, you need to use women," says Richard Bensinger, the institute's director (BNA 1990a). According to the AFL-CIO, women organizers currently have a better track record in number of election wins than their male counterparts (AFL-CIO 1990). The appointment of women as union organizers may be expected to increase in the years ahead, reflecting increased organizational efforts on the part of unions and emphasis on recruiting women in the occupations and industries in which women predominate, as well as the success women have demonstrated as organizers.

Unions that emphasize "women's issues" help to create a climate that encourages their female members to play a more active role. Gender equality in pay and job classification has been the focus of collective bargaining negotiations and grievance enforcement for many unions. The UAW, for example, in 1949 began negotiations to eliminate separate seniority lists that were grouped by gender and to open the skilled trades to women in automobile manufacturing (Kates 1989; *UAW Solidarity* 1989). With the number of women in formerly all-male jobs increasing, the UAW more recently has turned its attention to sexual harassment at work, utilizing collective bargaining clout to protect members' rights, and has sponsored training programs on sexual harassment. As detailed in earlier chapters in this volume, unions have been instrumental in the drive for equal pay for jobs of comparable worth and have provided the troops for political action on family leave and child care benefits, which are being negotiated into many collective bargaining contracts.

Union promotion of women's issues not only encourages female activism but provides opportunities for women to showcase their leadership abilities when they are selected to serve as expert witnesses in hearings and to participate in negotiations, grievance handling, membership education, and political and legal action. In addition, interest in women's issues often leads unions to form alliances with women's organizations, further highlighting the importance of women's contributions to union goals and providing women leaders with increased political leverage.

Many unions allocate resources for special programs for women and create structures for women's activities. Women's departments and committees, while controversial among some feminists who seek a gender-free environment (O'Cleireacain 1986), are considered important by others, who point to their value in providing opportunities for women to "network" and to learn from each other how the union functions. As described by Addie Wyatt, former vice-president of the UFCW, women's committees are the means by which women "find strength in each other and the courage to press these issues in the union" (P. Foner 1980). The UAW constitution requires the establishment of a women's committee in every local union. Such committees have

proliferated on a voluntary basis in many other unions, along with women's departments and special activities for women members. The nationwide Coalition for Labor Union Women (CLUW), when first formed in 1975, appeared threatening to some established male leaders. Its eventual acceptance is indicated by the financial support CLUW now receives from unions and the appointment of its president to the AFL-CIO Executive Council.

The availability of special outreach training has been credited as a major force in the increasing number of women in local union leadership. Training and education programs for women unionists have spread rapidly throughout the United States. Almost half the universities with labor education programs and unions with education departments reported in a recent labor education survey that they offer special programs for women (Gray and Kornbluh 1990). Regional women's summer schools, initiated in 1975 with backing from the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA) and the AFL-CIO, have attracted thousands of participants over the years. The first participants paid for most of their expenses and less than half held union office. Acceptance of the summer programs is demonstrated by the fact that, fifteen years later, almost all participants were supported by their local unions and close to 90 percent held some union office (Needleman 1988).

Like women's departments and committees, however, segregated training experiences are criticized by those who seek the immediate integration of women to leadership. Even supporters have certain reservations. The authors of the CLUW booklet, *Absent from the Agenda*, for example, note the value of special structures for women, but caution that separation may result in isolation from the mainstream of union activities (Glassberg, Baden, and Gerstel 1980; Baden 1986). Others fear that separation, while admittedly building self-confidence and networks for self-help, leads to divisive, counterproductive "antimale attitudes." The AFL-CIO considered and rejected the idea of a women's department, deciding instead to pass a resolution calling for appointment of a coordinator of women's activities in its civil rights department. At the same time, the federation pledged to address the concerns of women in all departments and to initiate an affirmative effort to appoint and promote women staff.

All interviewees agree that affirmative action in union personnel selection, recruitment, and training is essential to achieving the goal of a gender-integrated leadership. Yet relatively few unions have formalized personnel policies with explicit affirmative action policies and procedures (Clark and Gray 1992). Initiating positive steps to recruit and appoint women to staff and/or to groom women for elective positions still depends on the voluntary commitment of incumbent officers who are mostly male.

Although many unions have rejected in principle the concept of "quotas," in fact some of these same unions have set aside certain key positions for female representation. The AFL-CIO, for example, opened its executive council (EC) ranks to the president of CLUW, even though she did not meet the long-standing practice that EC members be presidents of national unions.⁶ In a similar spirit of affirmative action, a number of unions have set aside a spot on their national executive boards for female representation. The SEIU, one of the few unions with a formalized affirmative action policy, recently established and carried out a goal of recruiting qualified women to fill 50 percent of the union's national staff positions.

Lessons from Abroad

The experience of women in the United States is not unique. There is no country in which women are represented in leadership in proportion to their share of the membership. Unions in Western Europe have experimented with various policies to ensure the representation of women. In Denmark, women are organized into a separate union. At the other end of the spectrum, several German unions enacted constitutional provisions establishing quotas for proportionate representation in leadership. Women's departments and women's committees are widespread throughout Sweden, but after many years of experience, Swedish unions abolished these special structures, opting for "simple justice," which is interpreted to mean "spontaneously" choosing women for elected positions. The CCL designates six places for women on its executive board. The National Union of Public Employees in Great Britain established the Working Party on Women's Involvement, which recommended drastic structural changes to correct the gender disparity between membership and leadership, including a "rotating chair" for meetings so as to give women an opportunity to acquire leadership experience and demonstrate their abilities (Till-Retz 1986).

Several international trade secretariats, struggling with the issue of gender equality, are requiring national delegations to set aside places for women. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, while not requiring representation of women, recently sent out a plea to its affiliates that women be included in their delegations and took the affirmative action step of calling a special meeting of women delegates prior to the convention to ensure that they were informed on the issues and encouraged to participate.

Counterparts of these international experiments may be found in the United

⁶There had been only one exception to this practice before the appointment of Joyce Miller.

States in one form or another but have not, to date, been organized into a planned program for women's involvement in leadership.

What Difference Does Female Leadership Make?

There is a running debate in the voluminous literature about women as business executives about whether their leadership styles differ from that of their male counterparts. The traditional view is that women, in order to succeed in a "man's world," have to adopt the "male" approach to leadership, which is described as "tough, self-centered and enormously aggressive" (Rudolph 1990). In contrast, recent studies of successful women executives report a distinctive, more "feminine" style which is described as "caring and helping" (Helgesen 1990) and "encouraging participation" as well as amenable to "sharing power and information." Stylistic differences are attributed to the differing life experiences of men and women in which the former are expected to be competitive and the latter, cooperative. Although there have been no studies of women's leadership styles in the union context, participant-observer comments divide along the lines expressed in the business literature with a minority contending that those who make it to top positions, particularly in the collective bargaining arena, have to adopt the "tough" style of male union leaders. For example, Sandra Feldman, a prominent union leader, was described as having "a spine of steel" by the man who faced her at the bargaining table (Rohter 1986). She, however, described herself as evincing a softer and "more accepting" style as compared with her male predecessor.

According to some, women leaders' evaluation of men may be a generational phenomenon, a characteristic only of those who are first to achieve recognition in their organizations but one that tends to disappear as more women occupy these roles; also less evident among younger women who feel comfortable with their own styles as a result of confidence built by the women's movement and the growing networking among union women. Many of the women I interviewed describe themselves and their female colleagues as generally showing more tenderness and caring, less ego involved, more results oriented, and more democratic with their staff, including clerical workers. Clayola Brown, vice-president of ACTWU and manager of a joint board in New York City, describes herself as "more consultative" than most male managers, a style acquired through her prior experience as the union's education director.

Warren Bennis, a leading writer on leadership theory in business settings, projects a future that will reflect changing demographics and organizational structures, leading to a shift in leadership requirements from an emphasis on "ability to command" to "ability to persuade" (*Working Woman* 1990). Sim-

ilarly, according to Ruth Needleman, if unions must “involve more members” and project an image “less bureaucratic and more democratic” to survive and grow, it is women leaders who will be effective (Needleman 1988). If these projections of future organizational needs are valid and women’s strengths correctly assessed, women may be expected to break through the “glass ceiling” and be sought out for leadership positions in the years ahead.