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Building Movement Bridges: The Coalition of Labor Union Women

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worrying about how to pay for them. In this case, personal account pensions cannot be the cause of the problem, and in fact some believe they may even be part of the cure. This is because old-system public pension liabilities already exist and must be dealt with, whether countries adopt individual accounts or not. The real issue is that unfunded pension promises have traditionally not been recognized in fiscal accounts, a sad fact that has allowed politicians to offer benefits without financing them. Hence, while it might seem that adopting a funded accounts plan "creates" new costs, in fact those costs were there all along, but not recognized. To illustrate using the U.S. case, for instance, the Social Security system currently is cash-flow solvent but it has an unfunded—and not widely appreciated—liability of around $10 trillion (and Medicare has a burden of more than $30 trillion). Individual accounts could be established without changing this unfunded liability one whit, as the recent Social Security Commission showed. In fact, these accounts can even be used as a means to reduce unfunded liabilities, as happened in several Latin countries, rather than expanding them.

In sum, I concur with the author that the past two decades have wrought great changes in the global pension arena, but I disagree that funded accounts are as bad as he argues. In my view, the evidence very much contradicts his claim that there is a general "absence of support for [the desirability of] pension privatization among the industrialized countries" (p. 239). The large scale and durability of pension privatization in some of those countries is strong presumptive evidence that it is viewed as an improvement over the old system. The funded pension program Australia adopted over a decade ago, for example, appears to be going strong still, and more recently Sweden, Germany, and Japan have included funded individual accounts as a valuable and integrated component of their national retirement systems. In the United States, more people now have 401(k) and related plans than any other sort of pension. While the new pension order is not perfect, even more worrisome are the problems we face in managing the burdensome and expensive legacy of nontransparent pension systems inherited from the past.

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Building Movement Bridges: The Coalition of Labor Union Women. By Silke Roth. Westport, Conn.: Praeger (Greenwood), 2003. 224 pp. ISBN 0-313-31632-5, $64.95 (cloth).

> *Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations.... In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all the others.*
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835

When de Tocqueville made that famous remark, he could not have foreseen the role this "mother of all forms of knowledge" would play in the twentieth century. America cannot be understood without understanding her social movements. Silke Roth's new book, *Building Movement Bridges: The Coalition of Labor Union Women,* focuses on an association described as a *bridge* between two of America's most important social movements: labor and the women's movement.

The Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) was founded in 1974 by female trade unionists struggling to bridge their own political identities as simultaneous participants in these movements. CLUW is one of six organizations representing constituencies affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Others are the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and Pride At Work. The AFL-CIO identifies these as "bridges to diverse communities, creating and strengthening partnerships to enhance the standard of living for all workers and their families . . . promot[ing] the full participation of women and minorities in the union movement, and ensur[ing] unions hear and respond to the concerns of the communities they represent."

In 1974 the labor movement paid scant attention to women's issues. Union women, particularly those of color, had little room to maneuver for influence, and the women's movement seemed tone deaf to their needs. Labor leaders were largely dismissive of the potential power of millions of working women, both union and non-union, facing discrimination and lack of opportunity every day on their jobs. Public stereotypes made alliance seem unlikely: by reputation, unions were dominated by conservative white male leaders and agendas, while

women's movement activists were seen as middle-class educated white women insensitive to women of color and working women. Roth's book focuses on the early CLUW activists who bravely created a bridge and worked tirelessly to pull these movements together onto it.

However, if CLUW is part of a bridge, then the size of that bridge, its current condition, and the amount of traffic it carries are a story that remains to be told. Even today, organizations and programs linking issues of working women with the women's movement are rare. The U.S. women's movement falls into two relatively distinct parts: the middle-class, mostly white women's formations identified with NOW (The National Organization of Women) and its allied groups; and the feminist movement, made up of many small activist organizations focused on issues like domestic violence, women's health, and gay and lesbian rights. With CLUW as a significant exception, neither part intersects easily or often with the labor movement.

Roth situates her analysis in social movement theory and political socialization theory, and her methodology combines ethnographic interviews with survey research. A major weakness of the book is that the dissertation research on which it is based ends in 1995, which is the year John Sweeney and his New Voice administration were elected to lead the AFL-CIO, and Vice President Linda Chavez Thompson became the first woman and the first Latina to hold executive office at the federation. Shortly after this, the Working Women's Department was founded. Major changes have occurred in the U.S labor movement since then, and the book suffers from not being more up-to-date.

Using interviews with 68 of CLUW's early activists, Roth creates a 4-part typology of activists based on their pathways to CLUW: *founding mothers* (already prominent union leaders whose primary identity was with labor), *rebellious daughters* (strongly influenced by feminism and by such 1960s movements as the student, civil rights, and anti-war movements), *political animals* (already active in local or union politics without the experience of radicalism that influenced the rebellious daughters), and *fighting victims* (attracted to CLUW because of direct experience with discrimination).

Roth's early chapters discuss the historical neglect of women's issues by U.S. unions, briefly sketch the early U.S. feminist movement, and provide a narrative of the founding of CLUW. Following chapters profile the founders of CLUW, whose statements, excerpted from the interviews, are interpreted in light of Roth's typology. Chapter 4 discusses CLUW's success in involving women of color and building a truly diverse organization.

Later chapters analyze the tensions endemic to a bridging organization: was CLUW a labor organization with a feminist agenda, or a women's organization trying to get women to join unions? Identifying the early debate over CLUW's structure as a debate over identity and allegiance, Roth describes how the founding mothers resisted efforts by the rebellious daughters to include unorganized women as members and to develop more democratic rather than bureaucratic decision-making structures. Founding mothers won that debate, resulting in CLUW's identity as an *insider organization* within the labor movement, with a bureaucratic structure similar to that of the AFL-CIO and its constituent unions, very little turnover of top leadership, and little role for unorganized women.

Roth discusses CLUW's ongoing commitment to a range of feminist issues, and how it has successfully broadened the agenda of the labor movement to include issues like pay equity, childcare, and reproductive rights. Roth argues that CLUW has helped change the larger public discourse by elevating sexual harassment and other predominantly women's concerns from the status of workplace issues to union issues, moving them toward, if not onto, labor's agenda.

Roth's discussion of CLUW's culture is intriguing, though incomplete. She describes CLUW's supportive "emotion culture," characteristic of feminist organizations, as co-existing within a static, bureaucratic structure very common in unions. How did this evolve? The founding mothers were activist women in the 1970s who had entered their unions in the 1940s and 1950s and succeeded by quietly working their way up through the troubled McCarthy period and the anti-communist purges. CLUW's founding brought these women together with the rebellious daughters, activists from the student, anti-war, black power, and feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, whose experiences from those years taught them to distrust bureaucracy and male authority. The culture of the women's movement, with its diverse voices and issues, its tendency to focus on process as much as goals, and its lack of central structure, survives today. Unions are structured hierarchically, with little turnover at the top and a culture that rewards loyalty. To use Roth's terms, "bureaucratic structure" was forging an alliance with "the tyranny of structurelessness," resulting in CLUW's peculiar hybrid culture.

When the founding mothers won the early struggle against the rebellious daughters to make CLUW a loyal "insider organization," their victory put CLUW on a path of incremental change rather than radical challenge. Even some of the rebellious daughters who are no longer active because they now hold significant leadership positions in their own unions credit CLUW with pulling and pushing male union leaders to address issues like pay equity and plant-wide seniority. In retrospect, perhaps the founding mothers were right: CLUW could never have played the role it did from outside the labor movement, though it perhaps would have played another role, formed a different kind of bridge. The triumph of CLUW is that it navigated that contradiction and survived.

But the attempt to reconcile two very different organizational cultures and structures may explain CLUW's limitations. Roth argues that the lack of top leadership turnover, the divide between local chapters and the national leadership, the lack of a path for local members to achieve top leadership positions, and CLUW's hesitation to play an aggressive role in organizing unorganized women have been weaknesses. Because she chose to interview top leaders, past and present, her focus is on the costs paid in activism and vitality to a structure that values stability, loyalty, and incumbency. If she had chosen to focus on local CLUW chapters around the country, run by rank-and-file activists, Roth might have gotten a much livelier picture of the successful bridging function of an organization like CLUW.

Female unionists have made significant gains since CLUW's founding. In 1974 the chances of a Latina becoming one of the three top officers of the AFL-CIO seemed remote. The participation and leadership in CLUW of women of color is a success story for labor. But tremendous challenges remain. CLUW seems to operate mainly as a support network for *current* female leaders who head CLUW. Roth's research indicates that most local CLUW members feel the organization should play a more activist role. Given the crisis in the labor movement, the need for CLUW to expand past the support network role and into a more activist agenda is critical, but is made harder by the organization's static, top-down structure and insider status.

Readers interested in the relationship between the women's movement and the labor movement will appreciate this book, provided they can tolerate its numerous flaws in copy editing, citation, and proofreading (blemishes that should be laid at Praeger's door). For students of social movement theory, labor history, and women's history, *Building Movement Bridges* raises crucial questions about the costs of "insider status" by focusing on issues of organizational development, change management, and advocacy politics. The book is especially helpful for younger readers and scholars who did not live through these movements. It is an interesting treatment of two movements at the center of America's current public discourse on social justice, women's rights, and democracy.

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Triangle: The Fire That Changed America. By David Von Drehle. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003. 340 pp. ISBN 0-87113-874-3, $25.00 (cloth).

The fire that took the lives of 146 workers on March 25, 1911 in Manhattan's Washington Square neighborhood may well be the best known tragedy in U.S. labor history. It appears in every history of garment workers in early twentieth-century New York; it figures significantly in all studies of political and social reform in Progressive era New York; it was highlighted in a documentary film produced by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union; a website created at Cornell's Kheel Center includes graphic illustrations of the fire and its victims as well as numerous documents; a network television company produced a three-hour docu-drama about the event; and Leon Stein, the long-time editor and publicist for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), wrote his own book-length study of the fire (published originally in 1962, and republished only three years ago by Cornell University Press with a new introduction by William Greider). What motivated David Von Drehle to write a new history of the fire, and for whom did he write his book?

The first part of that question is by far easier to answer. Von Drehle, a journalist by trade, clearly knows a good story when he sees it. The site of the tragedy, the identity of the victims (most of whom were young immigrant female workers), the employers, who