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**RE-SHAPING TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY:
DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION FOR
WOMEN IN UNISON**

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In memory of Keith Foster

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SUMMARY

The under-representation of women and over-representation of men in trade unions raises questions as to why it occurs, its consequences for women and how it can be overcome. This thesis engages with these questions. It indicates the dominant ideologies and institutions which underpin the dominant male model of trade unions and discusses strategies designed to change the 'rules of the game'. The creation of UNISON on 1st July 1993 provides a research site in which to study the extent to which trade union democracy can be deliberately re-shaped so as to reflect the interests of women.

UNISON represents 1.3 million workers within the public service sector, two-thirds of whom are women. It has been the express intention of UNISON to achieve gender democracy through empowering its women members to participate in its representative structures. In particular, the adoption of three key principles in the rule book: proportionality for women, fair representation at all levels and self-organisation for four disadvantaged groups, is intended to have a significant impact on the nature of women's involvement in the union.

This thesis contains extensive case study material collected within UNISON over a two year period, ending November 1995. It reveals the opportunities which the three rule book commitments provide for effective representation by women in UNISON. By excluding men so that women can take the majority of representative positions, proportionality and fair representation change the predominant values and beliefs of trade union democracy. By providing opportunities for women to determine their own agenda, in the absence of men, self-organisation challenges the ideology that union strength is based on unity and common interests. However, the dominant model of trade unionism is not being re-shaped without tension or resistance. This thesis argues that ideologies and institutions remain which prevent women's access to representative structures being translated into the discussion of women's concerns in UNISON's decision making arena.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have been under-represented at all levels of influence within the trade union movement and recent figures show the tenacity of this phenomena (SERTUC 1997). This thesis aims to provide research evidence on the processes which enable trade union democracy to be re-shaped and re-defined in the interests of both men and women. This is a contemporary issue because of the increasing numbers of women in the workforce and the dramatic fall in the number of trade union members in the UK.

Unions have been struggling to adapt to the different labour market of the last two decades which becomes ever more fragmented, transitory and female. One response to this different environment was the creation of UNISON from the existing unions of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE on 1st July 1993. At least two-thirds of UNISON's membership are women who are employed in local government, the NHS and higher education establishments. Being 'member-led' is a fundamental principle in UNISON and active participation and representation by women is seen as the best way to ensure the effective representation of their needs. UNISON has made rule book commitments to proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation in order to facilitate women's greater representation and participation.

This thesis is based on an in-depth case study of UNISON and the implementation of these three rule book commitments. Broken down into its constituent parts, it provides six research sites in which to explore how UNISON is developing effective representation for women. Research material was collected through the non-participant observation of union meetings, semi-structured interviews and union documentation. Although the fieldwork was undertaken in the first three years of UNISON's development, it provides a rich illustration of the different social processes which are shaping democracy and the implications of these processes for

men and women members. The study also enables a number of questions from the literature to be addressed.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the literature on trade union democracy and provide the framework within which the research questions are developed. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of gender democracy and a framework for understanding power, interests and democracy within trade unions. This framework is used to indicate the processes by which unions have pursued the interests of leaders (Michels 1958), of capital (Hyman 1975), of gender-neutral members (e.g. Lipset et al 1956, Fairbrother 1983) and of men (e.g. Cockburn 1981). Although many of these works have concentrated on the representative and participatory processes of democracy, they do provide very useful information about the ideologies and institutions which underpin the dominant model of trade unionism (e.g. Batstone et al 1977). Chapter 3 conceptualises women's interests in terms of their need to access decision making arena and their need to discuss issues of pertinence to themselves (Jonasdottir 1988, Cockburn 1995). The chapter then identifies member-based strategies for enabling both of these needs to be addressed by trade unions. The chapter focuses on two distinct strategies identified by Cockburn (1995) and discusses how the strategies could promote a change in the 'rules of the game' and facilitate the realisation of women's interest in access and the discussion of their concerns. It concludes that changing the rules of the game requires a significant change in the dominant values of both men and women.

Chapter 4 examines the issues which a change in the dominant (male) model of trade unions raises. It describes how the study of UNISON can enable some of these questions to be addressed and discusses the extent to which rule book commitments to proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation could be expected to change the dominant ideologies and institutions of trade union organisation. Research questions are addressed in relation to three key areas: (i) women's access to the decision making arena; (ii) the determination of women's concerns in women-only spaces; and (iii); the pursuance of women's concerns in mainstream

decision making arena. The chapter describes the selection of research sites and methods of data collection in relation to these three research areas.

Chapters 5 to 10 are based on the material from the case study research. Chapter 5 examines the implementation of proportionality and fair representation in five mainstream committees. The chapter argues that proportionality creates a legitimate space for women and enables democracy to be attained through the exclusion of men in proportion to their membership. However, whilst it is possible to change the rules of the game, the chapter identifies a number of social processes which interact to determine the final outcome. In particular, the chapter illustrates how the different interests and identities of women interact to produce a number of tensions and contradictions which impact on overall changes.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe how women in two different geographical regions create a separate space in which to define their own interests. The two research sites provide very different interpretations, objectives and structures for women-only organisation in UNISON. One structure appears to challenge the male model of trade unionism and the other adapts it to the perceived needs of women. In the context of the wider union, the different structures raise questions about how the 'real' interests of women are best identified and served.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 focus on the content and practice of the union's mainstream decision making arena and enable us to see how women's access to decision making arena can be translated into the discussion of their concerns. Chapter 8 illustrates that whilst women are gaining access to regional committees, not all women speak and few women speak to a women's agenda. This finding is seen again in the national Local Government committee which is discussed in chapter 9. It is also seen at the National Delegate Conference which is discussed in chapter 10. Each of these three chapters identifies the ideologies and institutions which prevent women talking and which inhibit women from talking for women. The three chapters reiterate the looseness of the relationship between women's access and the discussion of women's concerns in mainstream decision making arena.

Chapter 11 brings the themes of the thesis together in the context of earlier debates. It argues that proportionality supports the systematic inclusion of women in representative structures and the achievement of gender democracy. Furthermore, in unions with a majority of women members, it suggests that democracy can only be achieved through the exclusion of men in proportion to their membership. However, the study raises questions about why, despite women's access to representative structures within UNISON, much time is spent discussing gender-neutral issues and little time is spent discussing, for example, the gendered segregation of work. This chapter identifies a number of ideologies and institutions which weaken the relationship between women's access and the discussion of women's concerns. In particular, the chapter argues that these ideologies and institutions support a 'parallelism' between women involved in the mainstream structures and women involved in women-only structures. The chapter conceptualises the linkage between women's access and the discussion of women's concerns and re-defines the purpose of women-only groups in mixed trade unions.

CHAPTER 2:

TRADE UNIONS: IN WHOSE INTERESTS ?

INTRODUCTION

The trade union democracy literature suggests that trade unions operate in the interests of various groups: leaders, activists, rank and file members and men. There is little literature to suggest that trade unions operate in the interests of women. This chapter begins by establishing the potential for a divergence of interests and the exclusion of women. The analytical framework for understanding power, interests and democracy within trade unions is then introduced. It is used to review the trade union democracy literature and explain how unions have not, hitherto, been associated with the pursuit of women's interests.

THE POTENTIAL FOR A DIVERGENCE OF INTERESTS

Most debates about democracy derive from the separation of decision makers from the rest of society and the implications of this division for the people. These debates have their roots in the move away from direct democracy, where most people had the opportunity to articulate their individual interests and participate in the making of decisions. John Stuart Mill (1875) acknowledged that the admission of all to the decision making would be 'ultimately desirable'. However, he argued that,

'since all cannot, in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in any but some very minor portions of the public business, it follows that the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative' (Mill, 1875:29).

Although representative government has the potential to exclude the majority of people from direct participation in decision making, Mill's definition of representative government attempted to ensure that:-

'the whole people, or some numerous portion of them, exercise through deputies periodically elected by themselves, the ultimate controlling power, which, in every constitution, must reside somewhere. They must be masters, whenever they please, of all the operations of government' (Mill, 1875:34/5).

Inclusion in the democratic process through periodic election of representatives became known as representative democracy, but opinions differ as to the role of 'the people' in these processes. From the perspective of utilitarian democratic theory, individuals are recognised as knowing their own interests and being in the best position to govern themselves. Thus representatives are merely 'vehicles' through which the people make political decisions. In this theory, the representative is not autonomous and acts merely as a delegate, voting as told by the people, and being 'informed' of their 'interests' through regular elections. This concept requires the participation of the people, which has become known as participatory democracy. Pateman (1970) tells us that Rousseau and Mill argued that participation in the making of decisions was a way of educating the citizen, and ensuring 'good government'.

The expectations of representatives from conventional democratic theory are quite different. From this perspective, individuals are not credited with knowing what is in their interests. Indeed, their decisions are often regarded as 'opinions' rather than expressed interests (Holden 1993:71). Representatives are considered wiser than their subjects and are presumed to have an ability to appreciate wider national issues over individual community issues. Thus, in conventional democratic theory, the representative has autonomy to make decisions on behalf of the people. Although representatives are always subject to election, the autonomy of representatives operating from this perspective provides the potential for representative governments to come 'under the influence of interests not identical with the general welfare of the community' (Mill, 1875:p44).

Despite Mill's desire that the whole people be masters of government, at the time of writing, women were not included in his conception of democracy. Indeed, as Pateman argues (1988)

women were excluded from democracy at a very early stage. So, not only is there potential for a divergence of interests between decision makers and members of society, there is potential for a divergence of interests between men and women.

THE EARLY EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

Pateman (1988) uses the concept of the 'sexual contract' to argue that the subjection of women was a founding principle of the new civil society. She argues that the much used concept of a 'social contract' to explain the authority of the state, and civil law, is mis-named, and mis-represented, since 'the original contract is a 'sexual-social pact':

'Standard accounts of social contract theory do not discuss the whole story and contemporary contract theorists give no indication that half of the agreement is missing. The story of the sexual contract is also about the genesis of political right, and explains why exercise of the right is legitimate - but this story is about political right as *patriarchal right* or sex right, the power that men exercise over women. The missing half of the story tells how a specifically modern form of patriarchy is established. The new civil society created through the original contract is a patriarchal social order' (1988:1)(original emphasis)

Thus, from Pateman's perspective, democracy cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the origin of the sexual contract and its role in modern society. Pateman's analysis challenges the idea that individuals in a political system are gender-neutral. This has implications for women's role in representative and participatory democracy. Both theories assume that men and women have equal opportunities to engage in the democratic process of being a representative, or participating in meetings. Reflecting on her earlier theorisation of participatory democracy, Pateman (1983) argues that her 1970 work was written from within 'conventional male supremacist assumptions of political theory' (p107) and discussed class structure, but not patriarchal structures of state and institutions. She criticised her basic assumption that 'democracy' is 'compatible with the subjection of women and their exclusion from, or confinement to the periphery of, public life' (1983:p113). She notes that her earlier argument assumes that matters of democracy can be discussed in abstraction from the private sphere of domestic life. It assumes that all individuals have the same rights and that

an individual can be a man or a woman and that the concept still applies. Phillips (1991) pursues this argument, noting that so long as political systems make distinctions between public and private spheres, women's political subordination will be maintained (p157). In this regard, Phillips (1991) argues that 'a gendered approach to democracy therefore stresses domestic equalities as part of what balances out each person's political weight and includes this in its measure of what a democracy has achieved' (p158). This reiterates Pateman's argument that if women are to be equal, and full citizens, then radical changes are required at home, advocating that men and women need to share equally the responsibilities of domestic life (1983). From the perspective of both writers, domestic inequalities exclude large numbers of women from engaging with representative and participatory democracy. Furthermore, women's gained access to representative structures and participatory democracy does not guarantee their inclusion in decision making.

Representative and participatory democracy assume that all members are equal, but the sexual contract argues that men have more power relative to women. This has implications for women's discourse with men in democratic structures. Phillips argues that, 'decision-making based on meetings is almost invariably weighted towards those with the confidence to articulate their position' (1991:p128). Phillips follows through by arguing that decisions based on meetings monopolised by those 'already favoured with wealth, education and power' may then 'be less democratic than the ballot, where each counts only as one' (p128). Phillips argues that whilst such weighting and decision making might be justified where someone has thought 'more deeply and clearly about issues' (p133), it is less defensible where it

'derives simply from a facility in argument or a confidence in public speaking; or where the acquiescence of the silent majority stems from the fear of appearing foolish or the fear of giving offence' (p133).

Spender reports Elizabeth Aries' findings that when women talk to men, they experience a reduction in their overall talking time and a restriction in the range of topics they can talk about (1985:126). Spender's own evidence leads her to believe that if women do not speak in terms

that are acceptable to men, they do not get a proper hearing. She noted that in taped mixed-sex conversations, women were queried and interrupted and their opinions were discounted and contributions devalued. In response, she believes that women have traditionally reacted by retreating into silence, thereby ensuring male dominance within conversation (1985:87). She argues that where 'women have become victims it has been because they have interpreted their failure to meet male standards as their own personal inadequacy, rather than questioning the inadequacy of the standards themselves' (1985:p92). Spender argues that, 'reality is constructed and sustained primarily through talk. Those who control talk are also able to control reality' (1985:p119). If society is male dominated then it could be argued that reality is constructed by men. The construction of reality from men's experience has been conceptualised as the 'male standard' (Briskin and McDermott 1993:11) or the 'male is norm'. Briskin and McDermott identify two assumptions in the male standard. The first is that 'the experience of men is generic to both women and men' (p11). The second is that men's reality establishes a 'norm' against which women are measured (p12). Briskin and McDermott argue that removing the male standard requires the recognition of the 'multiplicity and variety of workers with often contradictory interests arising out of the intersecting realities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, language and region' (p13). One way to understand how these different realities interact within society and organisations is to use the work of Dahl (1961), Bachrach and Baratz (1970), and Lukes (1974). These theorists provide a language with which to explain how women have been excluded from democratic processes. Furthermore, they have been used most effectively to analyse the determination of realities and interests amongst different groups in trade unions (see Hemingway 1978, Batstone et al 1979, Kelly and Heery 1994).

POWER, INTERESTS AND DEMOCRACY

Lukes (1974) identifies three different views of power which provide an understanding of how interests are determined and in whose interests decisions are made. The first is identified with the work of Dahl (1961) who argues that power is articulated through conflict. Lukes criticised

the assumption that power is wholly observable through the decision making process and called this view 'the one-dimensional view' of power (1974:11). The second, two-dimensional (Lukes 1974:16), view derives from the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1970). They argue that power is articulated through decisions which are not made, and issues which are not brought to the attention of decision makers. In particular they pursue Schattschneider's earlier argument that 'some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out' (Schattschneider 1960 in Lukes 1974:16). Bachrach and Baratz's conceptualisation of the 'mobilisation of bias' is of:

'a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures ('rules of the game') that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. Those who benefit are placed in a preferred position to defend and promote their vested interests' (p43-4)

Of particular importance to this study is Lukes' development of his own 'three-dimensional view of power'. This includes the observations of Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz, but adds concepts of 'latent conflict', and 'real interests' (1974:25). Lukes criticised the above writers for not acknowledging that 'the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place' (p23). Lukes also criticised the work of Bachrach and Baratz for adopting 'too methodologically individualist a view of power' (p22). He argued that although it was individuals whose behaviour and decision-making were being observed, the 'power to control the agenda of politics and exclude potential issues cannot be adequately analysed unless it is seen as a function of collective forces and social arrangements' (p22). Lukes identified the potential for a third (unseen) dimension of power which was articulated through the suppression of 'real interests' by those exercising power. He argued that the suppression of real interests would lead to 'latent conflict' (p25) adding that:

'this conflict is latent in the sense that it is assumed that there *would be* a conflict of wants or preferences between those exercising power and those subject to it, were the latter to become aware of their interests' (p25)(original emphasis).

Lukes argued that it might be possible to observe real interests from how people behave in 'abnormal times', or, in 'normal times' examining people's reactions to the possibility of escaping from 'subordinate positions in hierarchical systems' (1974:48). He acknowledged the challenge of knowing where to draw the line between structural determinism and an exercise of power, and suggested that it lie in the complex relationship between power and responsibility. He used the argument of Mills (1959) to attribute power to those in strategic positions, and hold men of power 'responsible for specific courses of events' (Mills in Lukes 1974:56).

Notwithstanding the difficulty of dealing with a theory which is difficult to operationalise, Lukes' work is extremely useful to this study. His three-dimensional view of power provides a framework for discussing the outcomes of democracy as well as the processes. By conceptualising latent conflict and real interests, Lukes provides a framework for understanding how the interests of groups and individuals can be suppressed. The next section uses Lukes' three-dimensional view of power to discuss the determination of interests in trade unions.

IN THE INTERESTS OF LEADERS

Based on research conducted in the German socialist movement in the early 20th century, Michels confirmed Mill's fears of a divergence of interests between representatives and those that they represent (1958). Using what could be called a two-dimensional view of power, Michels theorises an 'iron law of oligarchy' which separates leaders from the led in trade unions. Leadership, Michels argues, brings importance, expertise, indispensability and a different lifestyle, which the leader seeks to protect by:

'employing digressions, peri-phrases, and terminological subtleties, by means of which they surround the simplest matter with a maze of obscurity to which they alone have the clue. In this way, whether acting in good faith or in bad, they render it impossible for the masses, whose 'theoretical interpreters' they should be, to follow them, and to understand them, and they thus elude all possibility of technical control. They are masters of the situation.' (1958:p91).

Michels' argument is that leaders acquire, and retain, a relative influence within the political processes which is then used against the interests of the membership. Michels argues that leadership is created and perpetuated through the interaction of technical and administrative causes, psychological factors and intellectual factors (1958).

Hyman (1975) proffers another explanation for the 'iron law of oligarchy'. Hyman uses a Marxist analysis of industrial relations which posits that:

'A trade union is, first and foremost, an agency and a medium of power. Its central purpose is to permit workers to exert, collectively, the control over their conditions of employment which they cannot hope to possess as individuals; and to do so largely by compelling the employer to take account, in policy- and decision-making, of interests and priorities contrary to his own.' (1975:p64)

Hyman argues that the issue of trade union democracy is not really an organisational one, concerning efficient administration versus membership control, as the empirical studies had implied, but that it derives from the political and economic objectives of the union (1975). In particular, he argues that a trade union can only 'wield effective job control', 'if, and to the extent that, it can mobilise disciplined collective action on the part of its members' (p65). Disciplined collective action infers control, and Hyman argues that 'it is only through the power over its members which is vested in the trade union that it is able to exert power *for* them'. (original emphasis). Thus, for Hyman, the union democracy question is:

'if workers create collective organisations in which they invest an area of control over their own actions, how can they ensure that this control is used in their own collective interests - rather than to serve the ends of those in charge of the union organisation, or even some external interest?' (p65).

Hyman argues that looking at internal government is not enough to explain the nature of internal trade union relations, and that 'broader structural determinants' are a necessary feature of any such study. Hyman argues that trade union democracy relates very closely to the relationship between capital and labour, thus explaining the dialectic nature of trade union

- employer relationship. Whilst the mobilisation of collective action is a necessary feature of trade unions to exert pressure over the employer, an official is concerned:

‘more with stabilising the detail of the relationship between labour and capital than with conducting a struggle against the domination of capital. Such control may thus involve the suppression of irregular and disruptive activities by the rank and file which challenge managerial control. In this way, union control and workers’ control may face in opposite directions, and the element of power over the members inherent in union organisation be turned against them’ (pp91,92).

Thus Hyman is arguing that although the outcome of this dialectic may mirror the iron law of oligarchy, it will not be for the ‘psychological and sociological’ reasons which Michels refers to, but it will happen by virtue of labour’s relationship to capital. It could be argued that Hyman is using a three-dimensional view of power in his analysis. He is acknowledging the ability of a group to mobilise bias against the interests of other, but he is also acknowledging the ability of a group to suppress the ‘real interests’ of members. For this reason, Hyman argues that it is always ‘necessary to raise the questions’:

‘whose power and interests are advanced by a particular measure of job control; who initiates the trade union’s involvement in job control; and who is the prime beneficiary?’ (p68)(original emphasis)

Michels argues that leaders ‘render it impossible’ for the masses to understand them (1958:91) which implies that members are relatively powerless to mobilise bias in their favour. However, a number of writers have engaged with the concepts of representative and participatory democracy to explain how checks on oligarchy work in practice. This has had the effect of turning the focus of attention from the interests of the excluded (the membership) to the interests of the included (a subset of the membership).

IN THE INTERESTS OF MEMBERS

Lipset et al (1956), Edelstein (1967) and Martin (1968) engage with the concept of representative democracy and argue that formal structures and regular elections contested by

groups and factions provide countervailing forces against oligarchy. Another set of writers engage with the concept of participatory democracy and argue that informal processes of membership organisation at a local level provide a countervailing 'iron law of democracy' (Gouldner 1955, Hyman 1971a, 1971b, Lane 1974, Fairbrother 1983). In particular, Hyman (1971b) and Lane (1974) argue that trade union democracy cannot be understood without an understanding of the shop steward and the potential for 'primitive democratic structure' at shop floor level. Lane (1974) notes that the shop steward operates on occasion in opposition to the representative elected to higher levels of union structure. However, these early debates treat members as gender-neutral and writers do not acknowledge that women's involvement in representative and participatory democracy is constrained by domestic inequalities or men's relative power. Phillips argues that it is not possible for men to represent women as there is too much of a conflict of interests between the two sexes (1991:62). From her perspective, an under-representation of women means that representative democracy is not functioning in an effective manner. If the participation of rank and file women members is constrained by their domestic responsibilities and oppressed position within society, can it be said that an 'iron law of democracy' still operates? Cockburn (1995:1) uses the phrase 'gender democracy' to signify that women need to be included in the political process too.

In his later work Hyman (1984) refers to the hierarchy of activism within trade unions which is dominated by white, male, relatively skilled and higher paid workers (1984:182). Hyman attributes this hierarchy to a set of social relations, denoted 'bureaucracy', which derives from the separation of representation from mobilisation, a hierarchy of control and activism, and the detachment of decision making from members' experiences (1984:181-182). Hardman uses the concept of bureaucracy to explain how male shop stewards mobilise bias against female members in their quest for equal pay (1984). She argues that workers' success depends on operating outside formal institutions. Shop stewards are 'incorporated' if they are seen as troublemakers, and since men are 'troublemakers' they are incorporated within the formal union structure. As women have no pressure on the formal structure, they were not successful in persuading the formal side of the union to fight against 'the desire of the

employer for cheap labour' and fight for equal pay. This is an example of power over the members being used *for* only some of the members. Hardman argues that:

'the maintenance of unequal distribution through supposedly "special bargaining" structures generates a *continuous* process of 'undemocracy' and ultimately bureaucratic control, within this (or we would argue any other) form of organisation' (p772). (my emphasis)

Hardman appears to be arguing that the nature of the bargaining structure itself perpetuates the inequality, but the three-dimensional view of power reminds us to hold men of power 'responsible for specific courses of events' (Lukes 1974:p56). The concept of bureaucracy does not explain why it is the men, and not the women, who are seen as 'troublemakers' and thus incorporated. Batstone et al (1977) study of two shop steward organisations provides more useful information about how particular patterns of behaviour are created and maintained through the actions of individuals and groups. Their observations lead them to categorise stewards according to their pursuit of trade union principles, and the emphasis they place on being a representative or delegate (1977:p34). This enables them to classify four types of individual stewards in their study. Using the frameworks of Lukes (1974) and Bachrach and Baratz (1970), Batstone et al describe the 'rules of the game' used by these four steward types and bring us closer to understanding how power for members is exercised. Using a similar framework, Kelly and Heery (1994) studied the role, behaviour and values of paid-officers in trade unions. They argue that the most important factor in the behaviour of paid-officers is the set of values which each officer has (p192). Kelly and Heery conceptualise these values along two dimensions. The first is 'general political orientations assessed in left-right terms' and the second is 'more specific industrial relations orientations' (p192). However, whilst these latter two studies provide information about how members (and officers) organise themselves in order to ensure that power is used in members' interests, they do not provide us with sufficient information about how male members and officers mobilise bias against women's interests. For this information, it is necessary to look to feminist studies of trade union democracy.

IN THE INTERESTS OF MEN

Although Forrest (1993) does not engage with Hyman's 1975 work, her text could be read as a direct response to Hyman's question about 'who is the prime beneficiary' of particular job controls. Forrest argues that

'There is nothing natural or inevitable about the sexual division of labour. In the past and in the present, 'women's' work has been characterized by low pay and rapid labour turnover, not because women refuse to invest in training or because women are not committed to their jobs, but because this form of work organization is profitable for employers and advantageous to male workers' (p335)

In her critique of the treatment of women and unions in industrial relations, Forrest (1993) argues that academics have 'barely acknowledged, let alone analysed', that gains by unions, 'have been won by denying an equivalent measure of economic security to women and others who have been systematically excluded' (1993: p331/2). Reference has already been made to women's exclusion from democratic processes due to their domestic responsibilities. Pateman asks how workers of secondary status, who do two shifts, can take their place as equal participants and full members of democratic workplaces (1983:117). A number of studies illustrate the difficulty of participation for women (Stageman 1980, Beale 1982, Campbell 1987). Studies also reveal the means by which men and officers mobilise bias against women's interests, even suppressing their interests at times. In particular, Cockburn (1991) identifies three elements of unionism which work against women's participation. These are committee structures, the rule book and traditional practices.

Colling and Dickens' (1989) study of sex discrimination in collective bargaining provides a vivid example of the 'silencing' of women. They describe how a woman steward in an engineering company encouraged women in her section to pursue pay regrading claims with the result that she received a large number of claims and won many appeals for regrading. However, this disturbed the remainder of the shop stewards committee (all men) who accused

her of sectionalism and forced her to surrender her stewardship. As a result the stewards committee became all male and the young man who took over the position reported little pressure from his women members to act on equality issues (1989:p60-81). In this example power is articulated in three different ways. It is articulated through observable conflict between the woman shop steward and the committee. It is articulated through the value attached to unity, as opposed to sectionalism. Lastly, it is articulated through organising women's pay regrading claims off the agenda. As noted earlier, Lukes suggested that it might be possible to observe 'real interests' by examining people's reactions to the possibility of escaping from 'subordinate positions in hierarchical systems' (1974:p48). It could be argued that the large number of pay regrading claims were women's real interests which in 'normal times' were suppressed.

This framework of analysis might also explain why a discussion amongst female workers started with the women believing that men in the factory deserved higher wages, and ended with the women seriously questioning the basis of their original feelings (Coote & Kellner 1980:p21). In Lukes' terminology, this change of opinion could be due to women's real interests being constructed in 'abnormal times', i.e. without the presence of men. It could also explain how radical feminism has raised the consciousness of women officers and led to male and female paid officers having different bargaining and organising priorities (Heery and Kelly 1988:p504). However, whilst this framework enables us to understand how men mobilise bias against women, it does not explain why it happens. Hyman (1975) argues that oligarchy derives from the relationship between capital and labour which implies an immutability in the dynamic. Do the relations between men and women in trade unions derive from a similar 'iron law'?

AN IRON LAW OF PATRIARCHY?

There has been much debate about the material basis of women's subordination within society and at the workplace. Hartmann (1979) argues that it derives from relations between

men and women at the home. She argues that patriarchy pre-dates capitalism and has been preserved through the industrial age because capitalists have used it to their advantage (1979:229). Capitalists found women and children more vulnerable because of familial relations and sought to use their labour at the cheapest possible price (Hartmann 1979:214). By organising themselves effectively, men were able to enforce job segregation which excluded women from their work and reduced the threat of women labourers being used to undercut men's wages. Hartmann argues that male workers play a crucial role in maintaining the present sexual division of labour which enforces lower wages and subordinates women (19979:208). Moreover, Hartmann argues that men have perpetuated this phenomenon, because men benefit from controlling women's labour power. Through marriage, women perform domestic duties for men, and men benefit from the ability to take uninterrupted full-time work.

In her study of the material base of male power, Cockburn gives more importance to the changing experience of women and notes that these days women are 'relatively detached from conjugal or paternal relationships', many being 'single, childless, widowed, living independently, collectively without husbands, free from fathers' (1981:54). For this reason, Cockburn believes that the construction of gender difference and hierarchy is created at work as well as at home and uses the story of compositors in the printing trade to illustrate this point. Cockburn charts the attempts of the compositors to exclude women from their trade and argues that there is more to male power than patriarchal relations (p41). Although bodily differences between men and women are largely socially produced, Cockburn believes that we cannot fully understand women's oppression without a politics of physical power and argues that,

'the appropriation of muscle, capability, tools and machinery by men is an important source of women's subordination, indeed it is part of the process by which females are constituted as women' (1981:44)

Walby defines patriarchy as a 'system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1990:20). Walby conceptualises patriarchy as being composed of six main patriarchal structures which operate at home and within society (p20-24). However, whilst Walby's multi-structured system does accommodate many processes of women's oppression arguably it only describes how patriarchy occurs. The system does not provide an explanatory base for why patriarchy occurs. Whilst we can explain why capital would seek to segregate labour, why historically women stayed at home and men joined the labour market and how male employers and male trade unionists have colluded to exclude women, it is difficult to explain why this continues. Pollert (1996) argues that whilst 'male dominance feeds on itself in terms of vested interests defending the status quo', it does not contain 'a mutually defining economic relationship in the same way as the relations of capitalism to wage labour' (p654). Her analysis of the concept of 'patriarchy' leads her to argue that,

'Attempts to elevate 'patriarchy' to a mode of production, thus giving it equal historical and explanatory weight to capitalism, are economic as well as ahistorical and biologically reductionist. Rather, gender relations are constructed and reconstructed at both a material and ideological level and are a constitutive part of class relations. The task for sociological analysis of class and gender relations is to explore how these dynamics enmesh in practice' (1996:654)

The analysis of Hyman (1975) helps us understand the dynamics of trade union democracy in terms of class. However, whilst Hyman has been able to capture the dialectic nature of the trade union - employer relationship, it has been less easy to capture the dynamic underpinning the male - female relationship. Indeed whilst Hyman has acknowledged the gender distinction between activists, he cannot be more specific about how this is perpetuated in a gendered way. Whilst we might theorise an iron law of oligarchy, it has not been possible to theorise an 'iron law of patriarchy'. For the moment, perhaps the best we can do is repeat Forrest's - albeit inadequate - conclusion that 'men exercise power because they are men' (1993:p338), and be content to use terms such as 'patriarchal' and 'gendered' to describe the relations by

which women are suppressed by men. From this framework, we can re-phrase Hyman's union democracy question:

if women join collective organisations in which they invest an area of control over their actions, how can they ensure that this control is used in the collective interests of both men and women - rather than serve the ends of those in charge of the union organisation (usually men), or even some external interest (capitalist, male or both)? (adapted from Hyman 1975:p65)

This chapter has noted that members of trade unions need to fully engage with representative and participatory democracy if power is to be used *for* them. Members need to be representatives and to be represented, they need to participate in elections and to articulate their views to their representatives. They also need to be aware of the manner in which issues can be organised off the agenda and how interests can be suppressed through the use of ideology. Moreover, they need to be 'free' of dominant ideologies in order to determine their own interests. Whilst these elements of democracy apply to all members, this chapter has argued that women need to engage with another set of processes in order to fully engage in the democratic processes. Domestic equality would enable women to more easily gain access to decision making arena and once there, they need to counteract the mobilisation of bias organised against them. From a three-dimensional view of power, they need to be able to determine their own interests. The possibility of addressing these issues is discussed in the next chapter which looks at union strategies to develop women's effective participation and representation.

CHAPTER 3:

CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years trade unions have been pursuing a variety of initiatives to increase women's representation and participation within trade unions and a review of these advances can be seen in Ledwith and Colgan (1966:156-162) and SERTUC (1997). These initiatives attempt to change the 'predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures' (Bachrach and Barataz 1970) which hitherto have provided more benefits for men rather than women. They do this primarily through recognising women as a distinct category of member with particular needs and interests. This chapter begins by conceptualising women's interests and identifying member-based union strategies intended to enable those interests to be pursued. The chapter focuses on two distinct strategies identified by Cockburn (1995). The first identifies women as individuals in a sex category and the second identifies women as individuals in an oppressed social group. The chapter discusses how the strategies could promote a change in the rules of the game and facilitate the realisation of women's interests and women's concerns.

CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S INTERESTS

Literature reviewed in the last chapter suggested that men and women have different interests, with those of men being determined in relation to capital and those of women being determined in relation to capital and their relative power within the home. However, if such a difference exists, it does not imply that women share common interests. Phillips argues that 'sexual inequality might be a universal phenomenon, but that does not mean women are universally the same' (1991:p72). She argues that it is not possible to presume any common interests amongst women, other than perhaps improved access to every sphere.

Jonasdottir's consideration of 'women's interests' (1988), leads her to identify two aspects of interest. The first aspect is '*form*' (original emphasis) which relates to women's demand to participate in political decision making. The second aspect is '*content or result aspect*' (original emphasis), which relates to the needs, wishes and demands of various groups of women (1988:p40). Cockburn (1995:66-69) develops the work of both writers and makes a distinction between the terms 'women's interests' and 'women's concerns'. She defines 'women's interests' in terms of women's access to decision making. She defines 'women's concerns' in terms of the issues which bear on women more than men. These terms will be used throughout the remainder of this thesis. Sometimes women's interests will be shortened to 'access', and sometimes 'women's concerns' will be shortened to 'content'.

As to the nature of the link between the two, perhaps this can be conceptualised using Cockburn's (1989) concept of the 'short and long agenda' of equal opportunities. At its shortest, the agenda attempts to minimise bias in recruitment and promotion (1989:218). At its longest,

'It acknowledges the need of disadvantaged groups for access to power: the 'fair distribution of rewards' of the radical approach to EO. But it also looks for change in the nature of power, in the control ordinary people of diverse kinds have over institutions, a melting away of the white male monoculture. It is not just a numbers game but about quality' (1989:p218)

Whilst the short agenda might enable the attainment of women's interests, it is the long agenda which will enable the discussion of women's concerns and this will require a change in the nature of power. In a similar vein, Briskin and McDermott argue that a feminist agenda 'offers a point of reference for a re-visioning of the labour movement which goes far beyond 'letting women in' (1993:p6). They highlight four changes that are necessary for union transformation and these provide further detail about the possible link between access and content. From their analysis, women's access to decision making requires a change in the 'patriarchal, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and often fundamentally anti-democratic union structures and practices which marginalize women inside unions.' (1993:p7). It also requires

an end to 'union complicity in the gendered segmentation of the labour market; union support for traditionalist ideologies about women's work, breadwinners and male-headed families; union resistance to broader-based bargaining' (1993:p7). From this analysis, it would appear that women's access to decision making requires many rules of the game to be changed. One 'rule' being challenged in unions relates to women's inequality in the home, another relates to the identification of women as a specific category of member. Both are discussed in detail below.

Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of domestic equality in ensuring trade union democracy. A recognition of the practical and institutional obstacles to women's representation and participation has resulted in initiatives such as the job-sharing of lay officer positions, the provision of crèche facilities and childcare allowances for attendance at meetings. However, whilst these strategies can facilitate the participation of women, they do not address the gendered power relations within the home. In a study of women trade unionists by Holt, over 80% of respondents indicated that 'women members' husbands played a major part in hindering their participation' (1993:p19). By providing alternative care arrangements but not challenging the division of labour within the home, trade unions are arguably supporting the domestic inequality and maintaining the status quo. Traditionally trade unions in the UK have organised around workplace issues determined by paid employees. For this reason perhaps it should not be surprising that Holt found that the two unions she was studying were doing very little to address the interference of husbands. However, action can be taken as the following two examples indicate. In her study Holt noted that one officer talked to a member's husband to convince him of the benefits of his wife's activism, organised training material for home use, arranged attendance on women-only courses and accompanied women on courses (1983:p20). Another example, discussed at the 1995 TUC Women's Conference, consisted of a number of advertisements used by trade unions in the Netherlands to challenge women's domestic inequality. These examples suggest the potential of raising men's consciousness about domestic equality and its impact on democracy at work, and within society.

Phillips (1991) argues that so long as individuals are assumed to be gender-neutral, political systems will be protecting the status-quo, and perpetuating the myth that the 'male is norm'. Her argument is that democracy must deal with women not just as individuals but as groups (1991:149). Trade unions have taken steps to identify members as women in order to increase the number of women representatives and increase women's participation in union activities. Cockburn usefully distinguishes between these member-based strategies as those identifying women as 'individuals in a sex-category' and those identifying women as 'individuals in an oppressed social group' (Cockburn, 1995:76-79). Cockburn notes that women are treated as individuals in a sex category, when it is their biological status which distinguishes them from other members. The reservation of seats for women on union lay structures is one example. Cockburn notes that women are treated as individuals of an oppressed social group when their status within society distinguishes them from others. This strategy leads to the establishment of women-only committees and conferences in which women consider and promote issues of specific concern to women members. This framework is used below to discuss the theory and practice of supporting women's access to decision making arena.

IDENTIFYING WOMEN AS INDIVIDUALS IN A SEX CATEGORY

Seats can be reserved for women in specific, absolute numbers (sometimes called quotas), or in proportion to the number of women in the constituent unions, or union sub-groups. In her review of trade union strategies to 'foster women's emergence as trade union leaders' (1991:p409), Trebilcock notes that when reserved seats have been linked to other supportive measures, they have had a positive effect on increasing the number of women in mainstream committees (1991:p421). She uses the experience of NUPE to illustrate the 'positive snowball effect', noting that within nine years of using reserved seats, the number of women on the national executive committee had increased from none to ten. Five of these women had been chosen under the quota system, and five had been elected in their own right (p421).

Trebilcock identifies two conditions in which reserving seats will be successful. First, the numerical goals must be realistic and flexible, and 'must be instituted vertically and horizontally at all levels of the union hierarchy' (1991:p422). This confirms work by Labour Research which leads them to argue that 'reserved seats are of little use unless women are involved throughout the union structure' (1992). In addition, Trebilcock argues that the quotas need to be backed up by supervisory mechanisms, and overall support for an equality policy within the organisation. Related to this point, Nightingale notes in her review of women's representation in Australian trade unions, that adequate union records are vital for monitoring the representation and participation of women (1991:p13).

However, despite the usefulness of such strategies to increase the numbers of women representatives, these changes do not necessarily go beyond 'letting women in'. Using the framework of 'women's interests' and 'women's concerns', whilst these strategies might increase women's access to decision making arena, they may not ensure that policies which bear on women are discussed at all, let alone by women. Although this outcome is contrary to earlier expectations it exists because there is no inherent link between access and content. Whilst Phillips argues for women to be treated as a group (1991:149), she also notes that the legitimacy of women derives from their election, not their nature, and that one can only expect women to act as women when their parties have specifically stated that this is their intention. Cockburn notes that women elected as members of a sex-category have a constituency of men and women and therefore have no obligation to speak for their sex (1995). Radical democratic theory also provides an explanation for the lack of linkage between women's access and women's concerns. If a representative is deemed a delegate, and has been mandated to vote in a certain way, it may be that being a woman does not affect the ultimate voting decisions of the delegation.

Cunnison and Stageman argue that a strategy which only seeks to increase the number of women in representative positions 'still leaves the pervasive hold of male culture, the underpinning of formal and informal male power' (1993:pp167-8). In other words, changing

the sex of the players does not guarantee a change in the rules of the game. Indeed, they argue that since women put 'a high value on the role of personal and subjective experience in the construction of knowledge', a strategy which:

'guarantees women space to develop their collective ideas and a platform from which to make themselves heard, is the most promising for improving women's representation' (Cunnison and Stageman 1993:167-8).

This belief is echoed by Cockburn whose research led her to argue that 'so long as democracy had meant no more than formal and indirect representative democracy, it had failed to empower women despite their numerical domination in the union' (1991:p133). This means that women need to be able to achieve access *and* content. This leads us to the second strategy identified by Cockburn, that which identifies women as an oppressed social group. For many, this strategy is seen to provide a link between women's interests and women's concerns.

IDENTIFYING WOMEN AS INDIVIDUALS IN AN OPPRESSED SOCIAL GROUP

A number of union structures now include women-only structures (SERTUC 1997). In her review of structures which support women's leadership in trade unions, Trebilcock notes that to be effective, women's committees

'need adequate financial support, which they do not always receive ... and strong links to the traditional decision-making structures in the union' (1991:p415).

This is illustrated by noting the linkage of women's conferences to general union conferences, and the manner in which 'seeds sown at women's conference' have been 'harvested at general conferences' (1991:p415). Trebilcock notes also the potential for women's conferences immediately prior to general conference to increase the percentage of women delegates attending regular conferences, since 'rather than pay for two separate trips, a union

body may choose to send the same person to both meetings' (1991:p415). However, yet again we see a difference between form and content. Whilst the strategy highlighted by Trebilcock might lead to an increase in the number of women at the mainstream conference, it cannot be assumed that these women will pursue the same matters which they pursued in the women-only conference. For, whilst a union body may send the same (female) person to both meetings, the constituency which is represented is different. Added to which, as noted earlier, if a member has been mandated to vote in a particular way, regardless of their sex, they are obliged to vote accordingly.

A more dynamic analysis of women-only organising can be found in Cobble's (1990) historical study of the separate female structures in the American union, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees. Cobble argues that separate organising played a critical role in stimulating leadership among waitresses. In particular, she credits the greatest participation of waitresses in the 1920s to the greatest number of waitresses belonging to separate-sex locals, and the decrease in waitress activity to the decline of female locals (1990:p521). Briskin and McDermott refer to the ability of women in separate organisations to challenge the male standard (1993:11). This ability is clearly illustrated by contemporary studies of women's organisation in NUPE Northern Ireland reported in Cockburn (1991) and Cunnison and Stageman (1993). In their study, Cunnison and Stageman note that during wage claims,

'NUPE Northern Ireland held branch meetings where members examined their wage slips to see the precise effects the current claim would have on them personally. In one such exercise, part-timers found that virtually every woman in the room who was working less than 18 - 20 hours had in fact lost pay every time she had had a pay rise. This had come about either through a cut in hours or through moving into a poverty trap' (1993:p227)

As well as illustrating the way in which pay rises can be gendered, this also illustrates the way in which women can be oblivious of their 'real interests' until they have the opportunity to stand back and reflect. Lukes argues that it might be possible to determine the suppression of 'real interests' by observing 'how people behave in abnormal times', or in 'normal times' examine people's reactions to the possibility of escaping from 'subordinate positions in hierarchical

systems' (1974:p48). Research in 'normal times' would seem to indicate that once women have conceptualised their own view of the union through self-organisation, they become active, committed and enthusiastic participants in a range of union and community-wide projects (Coote and Kellner 1980; McBride 1989; Briskin and McDermott 1993). Higgins (1996) provides another example of women challenging the male standard in his study of the Swedish blue collar trade union Kommunal. Following increased activism by women in the union, Kommunal have developed a three-pronged, gender specific approach in wage negotiations which involves,

'earmarked supplements to women's wages (*kvinnoportioner*) instead of reliance on traditional mechanisms aimed at low wage categories in general; a concentration on women's job enrichment based on upgraded skills, on-the-job training and increased responsibility; and work evaluation to challenge the implicit male norm in gendered wage differentials' (1996:p189)

This an excellent outcome for women in Kommunal and suggests that women's activism provides the link between women's access to decision making and the discussion of women's concerns. However, the literature alerts us to the difficulties associated with identifying women as members of a social group for the purposes of organisation. These difficulties derive from women's differences as individuals and the interaction of radical and liberal democratic philosophies and structures.

Reference has already been made to the differences which exist between women. In recognition of the diversity of opinion on matters which concern them as women, Cockburn argues that a 'woman's position' or 'woman's policy' can only be 'identified *after* women's experience and apparent needs have been publicly debated and consensus constructed' (Cockburn 1995:69) (original emphasis). However, the literature warns us that consensus construction, even in the absence of men, is likely to be problematic. Feminists have criticised representative and participative democracy for assuming that all individuals are equal but an absence of men does not mean an absence of relative power amongst women. Reflecting on the experience of the contemporary women's movement, Phillips notes that the small,

informal, face-to-face meetings which give women the confidence to speak, can also impose a false unity amongst participants which leads to concealed conflict, or exaggerated, hostility (1991:131). She also suggests that the desire to move away from formal hierarchies and structures of decision making in the women's movement sometimes led to a lack of accountability, and denied the use, and potential abuse, of power outside traditional structures (p134). Phillips argues that this absence of formal procedures for membership, delegation or representation also meant that 'the movement could never say for whom or for how many it spoke' (p127).

To counter concerns that the women's movement was dominated by middle-class, white women, the movement fragmented into different sub-groups to reflect the different identities of the women. However, this brought its own challenges which are graphically illustrated in Leidner's study of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in the US (1991). Leidner describes how the NWSA attempted to balance the representation and participation of individuals and groups within the same organisation. In addition to belonging to a geographical region, each member has the opportunity to join one or more of the official interest and identity groups (referred to as caucuses). At the time of writing, there were 12 caucus groups within the organisation. In keeping with the feminist critique that traditional frameworks of democracy are blind to the relative power of individuals, a number of groups demanded representation in the organisation in excess of their proportion of the membership. However, Leidner notes that equal power did not lead to equal satisfaction and members of one caucus left the organisation altogether. This response could be explained by Phillips analysis that 'the intensity of identity politics is less amenable to a politics of accommodation or compromise, and is far more likely to encourage fragmentation or mutual hostility' (1993:17). Phillips argues that conventional pluralism lends itself to groups organising around interests and that such groups 'more happily reach accommodation with alternative concerns'. These groups are contrasted with those from a radical pluralist perspective which 'are defined by a common experience of exclusion or oppression, thus on identities that are often secured in direct opposition to some 'other'' (1993:17).

The National Women's Studies Association was a radical organisation trying to develop some radical structures. The literature suggests that the development of radical structures within a liberal democratic organisation is just as likely to prove difficult. To begin with, not all women agree with the use of women-only groups and structures. From their work with women from SOGAT '82, UNISON and GPMU, Colgan and Ledwith (1996) developed a typology which identifies different responses to women's organisation associated with different types of women. The typology reflects women's consciousness ranging from 'traditionalism to feminism', whereby the traditionalist women view women-only structures as undermining unity, and the feminist women see them as a necessary means to empower women (1996:171). From their work, Colgan and Ledwith conclude that women's support for separate organisation is conditional on 'its being perceived as good both for women *and* the trade union movement as a whole' (1996:p184) (original emphasis). This confirms the distinction Briskin makes between separate organising as a means to an end, or an end in itself (1993). Colgan and Ledwith's research illustrates that women are generally supportive of the former, and dismissive of the latter. Briskin and McDermott argue that separate organising and building alliances and coalitions are 'complementary strategies for moving forward to a transformed labour movement' (1990:10). However Briskin also argues that,

'the success of women's separate organizing depends upon maintaining a balance between the degree of autonomy from the structures and practices of the labour movement, on the one hand, and the degree of integration into those structures on the other. Too little integration and the separate organizing is marginalized; too much integration and radical edge is necessarily softened.' (1993:p102)

Cobble (1990) confirms this in her study. Whilst separate women organising did have a positive effect within the union, Cobble notes that,

'without the autonomy, power and institutional legitimacy enjoyed by the separate female locals, the impact of women's committees was episodic and ephemeral. Without a majority vote within the local or a separate institutional base of power, women could neither change the priorities of the male leadership, nor could they act independently. Moreover, the basic legitimacy of women's committees was always in question' (1990:p534).

These comments alert us to the tensions which arise from developing radical strategies within a conventional pluralist framework. When the dominant structures treat all members as gender-neutral, and equal, it is difficult for that same structure to support the 'preferential treatment' of anyone outside of that structure. Whilst radical structures may raise women's awareness, women still need to gain access to mainstream committees in order to pursue their concerns within the union. This raises another question. If a union identifies women as individuals in a sex category at the same time as it identifies women as individuals in an oppressed social group, what is the nature of the relationship between the two? Cockburn (1995) notes that the two groups of women identified by these union strategies are not mutually exclusive and yet they are conceptually differentiated. Whilst some women see women-only structures as good for trade unions, some see them as divisive (Colgan and Ledwith 1996). Does this mean that the strategies would be complementary or contradictory?

Work by Cole (1920) gives us some insight into potential tensions of this dual identification and structure. He argues that the difference between individuals and associations is that individuals associate together in order to execute a common purpose (p49). Cole argues that although the function of the association relates to its common purpose, this function can be perverted through opposition or confusion (p57-58). The function of an association can be perverted through 'opposition' if the purpose of an association conflicts with the purposes of another association. This concept of 'opposition' helps to explain why women-only structures are only tolerated if they are not deemed divisive. However, the function of an association is in 'confusion' when two associations attempt to fulfill the same purpose, so it is important that the two structures are not in conflict but are not similar. The two concepts are not isolated and Cole notes that when they are mingled they provide a double perversion of function.

In their study of union strategies to promote women officers, Ledwith et al note that

'constitutions do not on their own cause democratic behaviour, or, as concerns us here, equality between women and men. Constitutions have to be realised through the social processes which are going on all the time' (1992:124)

It is likely that the relationship between the two means of identifying women are likely to be shaped by the social processes operating within the trade union in which they were adopted. Key elements in these social processes would be any resistance and accommodation which accompanies the implementation of these strategies.

RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

Reference has been made to the manner in which men can resist attempts by women to gain an equal distribution of power. Colgan and Ledwith note that women aiming to transform the union, rather than acting as another vested interest group, are likely to pose the greatest challenge to traditional trade unionism (1996:p163) and the literature illustrates the validity of this claim (Cockburn 1984, 1991). However, as we have also seen within Kommunal, it is possible for men and women to share the same interests. Indeed, as Higgins notes, it is in the interests of capital that men and women are divided, and such divisions obscure management's own role in job segregation (1996:p170). This brings us back to Hyman's analysis of trade unions, and his question 'in whose interests are job controls?'. If job segregation is seen to be in the interests of managers *and* men, then introducing women's interests into the mainstream has implications for changing men's (and possibly women's) consciousness of their 'real interests'. This is recognised by Cockburn at the end of her study of men's domination in the printing industry:

'women have analysed the needs, sketched some visions and created a few alternatives. Further change depends greatly upon men generating their own movement for a reconstitution of masculinity in the interests of a fairer and gentler world' (Cockburn 1983:252)

The need for members to build alliances and coalitions both within, and outside, the union is recognised by a number of writers (Hyman 1989; Briskin & McDermott 1993; Bradley 1994; Colgan and Ledwith 1996). A few studies have shown the potential for women to 'take men

with them'. In her study of women's organisation, Cockburn (1993) noted that women forged alliances with men who might 'otherwise feel angered, alienated or rejected by the union'. Women in the study argued that it was in men's interests that women's interests were protected because increasing the value of someone else 'increases the value they have themselves' (1993:133). This confirms the conclusion which Leidner reached in her study of the NWSA that 'full satisfaction would apparently require that those in the majority wholly identify the interests of the minorities as their own' (1991:228). Changing the rules of the game requires a significant change in the dominant values of both men and women. The next chapter focuses on three research themes which emanate from a synthesis of the foregoing material.

CHAPTER 4:

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 discussed the processes through which interests pursued by trade unions are determined. It noted how interests are mediated through the predominant values, beliefs and institutions of members and officers. In particular, it noted that despite women's membership of unions they often exclude women's interests and women's concerns. Chapter 3 examined the strategies for changing the predominant ideologies and institutions, or rules of the game, so that women's interests and women's concerns are included. This chapter examines the issues which a change in the dominant (male) model of trade unions raises. It discusses the selection of UNISON as a research site and details the empirical research which enables some of these issues to be addressed. It concludes with details about how the findings will be reported to the reader.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Women's Interests: A number of questions arise from the identification of women as a sex category in order to overcome a mobilisation of bias against their election. How does it change the 'values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures' that have previously been used to mobilise bias against women? How does it change the politics of power, committee structures, rule book and traditional practices which work against women's participation in unions (Cockburn 1991). In essence how does it change the rules of the game? Do the strategies operate together to mobilise bias for the election of women? Who will get involved in which strategy? Will the strategies be complementary or contradictory? Will 'traditionalist women' (Colgan and Ledwith 1996) actively resist women-only structures group and form alliances with men against this strategy? How will women in the women-only structures relate

to women in the mainstream structures? Is there a danger of closure? What will be the sources of resistance and accommodation to women's access to decision making? Will men resist women's participation or will they see women's increased participation in their long term interests? Will men and women combine to put more pressure on lay and paid-officers to ensure equality of treatment? Will paid-officers wish to maintain the status quo and resist women's increased participation, or will they be the vehicle through which the change occurs?

Women's Concerns: We need to understand the link between women's interests and women's concerns and learn more about the interaction of men and women in mainstream committees. It will be interesting to learn how women identify themselves in decision making arena. How does the identification of women as a group operate when it is individuals who are elected? Do women in mainstream committees speak for women? On what issues do they speak for women? Is there more that divides than unites women on mainstream committees? We already know that the identification of women as an oppressed social group provides space for the development of collective ideas amongst women, and provides an 'abnormal time' (Lukes 1974) in which women can overcome the suppression of their 'real interests'. Will these concerns be conveyed to the mainstream committees? How does the identification of women in two different groups operate? How do the two strategies relate to each other? Does it provide a link between women's interests and women's concerns. Within the mainstream committees we want to know the impact of having more women representatives in decision making arena. What ideologies and institutions are challenged and changed by women's greater representation? Does it bring decision making closer to members' experiences? In essence, how do these strategies lead to an articulation of women's concerns within the union?

SELECTION OF UNISON

An opportunity to explore these questions was provided by the creation of UNISON in July 1993. UNISON is an amalgamation of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE. At its creation UNISON

consisted of 1.4 million members, two-thirds of whom were women. It is not the intention of this chapter to detail the histories and structure of the former partner unions. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to know that COHSE primarily organised nurses and ancillary staff in the NHS. NALGO could be described as a white-collar public service union, predominantly organising clerical and professional officers in local government and the NHS. NUPE organised nurses and ancillary staff in the NHS, and manual workers in local government and details of this union. For those seeking further knowledge of these unions, a history of COHSE can be found in Carpenter (1988), a history of NALGO can be found in Spoor (1967), Newman (1982) and Miller (1996) and a history of NUPE can be found in Dix and Williams (1987), Fryer et al (1974 and 1978).

Whilst the former partner unions originated from entirely different roots and membership needs, when merging they shared a desire to encourage the active participation and representation of women in the new union. This desire which had been evident to some extent in the former partner unions, was converted into rule book commitments to the principles of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation. Appendix 1 contains a chart of UNISON's organisation and structure to which readers may wish to refer whilst reading this chapter.

The identification of women as a distinct category of member for the purposes of elections was indicated as 'proportionality' within the merger discussions and UNISON rule book. Proportionality is defined as 'the representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members comprising the electorate'. At the time of merger, women made up 80% of COHSE, 74% of NUPE and 51% of NALGO but were under-represented in many representative positions. The introduction of proportionality in UNISON is a clear example of women being identified as individuals in a sex-category in order to overcome the historical deficit of women representatives.

In contrast to proportionality, the principle of self-organisation is a clear example of UNISON identifying women as an oppressed social group and attempting to address women's disadvantage in society. UNISON rules provide for self-organisation of four disadvantaged groups within the union. This means that black members, lesbian and gay members, members with disabilities and women members should have opportunities for meeting together to share concerns and aspirations; establish their own priorities; elect their own representatives; and generally work within a sufficiently flexible structure in order to build confidence and participation amongst members. Trebilock (1991) highlights the need for women-only structures to have financial backing and the UNISON rule book allows for adequate and agreed funding and other resources, including education and training, access, publicity and communications. The rule book notes that self-organised groups should be able to operate at branch, regional, and national levels and in some cases may obtain access to mainstream decision-making forum through direct representation. Reference was made in Chapter 3 to Cockburn's argument that women's position on issues requires public debate and consensus construction (1995:69). The rule book commitments to provide space for these women-only debates, together with points of access to decision-making forum in mainstream committees, are shown in Appendix 1.

A third rule book principle intended to encourage the participation and representation of all members is 'fair representation'. The rule book defines fair representation as 'the broad balance and representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as the balance between part-time and full-time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, qualifications, responsibilities, race, sexuality and disability'. The importance of electing representatives who reflect the balance of membership can be illustrated by an extract from Nicholson, Ursell & Blyton's study of the introduction of the shop steward system into the Sheffield's NALGO branch (1981). They note the under-representation of lower status employees amongst trade union activists and comment on the reluctance of the 'ordinary member' to approach stewards with managerial functions (1981:218). If such concerns existed within NALGO, a white-collar union, then there are likely

to be more concerns with the creation of UNISON. The merger of the three unions brought together a much wider cross-section of workers working in the same organisation. Fair representation applies to all members, so at first sight does not appear to fall within Cockburn's framework for analysing union strategies. However, given the depth of gender segregation within health and local government (see Rees 1992) and the fact that two-thirds of UNISON are women, it is likely that this principle will apply to large numbers of black women, lesbians, part-time women, manual and non-manual women workers, and women with disabilities. However, it is important to note that fair representation is different from proportionality in at least four respects:

(i) whereas proportionality distinguishes between the biological status of members, fair representation does not, referring instead to socially constructed differences between members.

(ii) proportionality highlights the balance to be achieved between two mutually exclusive categories of members. Fair representation seeks to achieve a balance between *nine* categories, which are not mutually exclusive, and which are not placed in any hierarchy.

(iii) no figures were released to indicate what numbers of which members would enable a 'broad balance and representation of members of the electorate' to be achieved.

(iv) no target date has been set for the achievement of fair representation within UNISON.

Fair representation is a strategy which identifies different social groups for the purposes of increasing their representation. However, since members will be elected from a mixed constituency of all members, like women elected through proportionality, there is no obligation on them to speak for their group. For example, according to research published in Labour Research (1993), part-timers represented 42.9% of UNISON members (although no definition was provided of 'part-timers'). Whilst the principle of fair representation might support the

election of part-time members, these members will be elected by all members, not just part-time workers. This exposes a tension between the manner in which the members have been identified and the manner in which they may be expected to act. If they are expected to act on behalf of, for example, part-time workers, do they need a separate constituency from which to make those representations? Is it enough that part-time workers are present in meetings? This tension reflects that which also exists between identifying women for the purposes of representation whilst expecting them to represent mixed constituencies.

CHANGING THE RULES ?

Building women's representation and participation into the heart of the union through the inclusion of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation in the rule book, does provide an impressive, and innovative, framework from which to support women's access to decision making. Proportionality takes account of women's identification as a group, whilst fair representation has the potential for ensuring that the 'group' of women elected, derives from the mix of ancillary, administrative and clerical, professional women workers in the union. Furthermore, self-organisation for women provides a vehicle for women to determine their own concerns and their own position on issues in isolation of men. However, whilst these principles support women's participation in representative structures, it must be remembered that they remain divorced from the private sphere. They assume that women will be able to 'make time' for union activity. They do not acknowledge the domestic inequality which often limits women's participation in union activity. They do not engage with the findings of Rees (1992) that the only women in her survey of NALGO members who felt able to take on union duties were those 'relatively free from family commitments, including a partner'.

The former partner unions provided facilities for members attending committee meetings, or education courses. As noted in chapter 3, this supports rather than challenges domestic inequality and the merger did not prompt the union to move forward from this supportive role. One concession to a different way of organising was establishing the job share of Branch

positions in the rule book. This rule is given more weight in the Code of Good Branch Practice which notes that 'branches are required to give serious consideration' to making use of the job share facility. However, even this is defined in gender-neutral terms and deemed 'an effective means of sharing the workload and involving more members in the work of the branch' (UNISON undated 3:section 9). It does not identify this as a means of facilitating women's increased participation. Furthermore, the structures have been developed in abstraction from women's different experience of work. Fryer et al (1978) identified the different facilities which were available to women members in NUPE. Lawrence (1994) noted that union facility agreements in a NALGO branch worked better for male shop stewards. Lawrence argues that this is because the men have greater flexibility in their work and attributes women's lack of participation to the characteristics of women's jobs, rather than to the women themselves. This gendered analysis, however, does not appear to have entered the merger negotiations.

Terry (1996) provides a useful insight into the negotiations which created the governing structures of UNISON. In particular, it exposes the extent to which concerns about the possible exclusion of members were related to lay members in general, rather than women in particular. Terry's article (1996) highlights the manner in which the 'dominant 'union democracy' debates of the previous decades' were much in existence at the negotiating table (p100). Although, the need to develop an effective approach to the representation of women was accepted by the three unions at the start of the merger negotiations, Terry notes that it was some time before the issue was addressed centrally (1996:101).

A telling illustration of the tendency to analyse the union in gender-neutral terms is contained in a report by an anthropologist conducted prior to the merger (Ouroussoff 1993). Despite being the result of a five month study of the 'cultures of NUPE, NALGO and COHSE', women as a distinct category of individuals only enter the picture on the penultimate page (p15) and then only in relation to a discussion of women officers, not women members. The study of cultures focuses on the differing definitions of democracy within the partner unions. Perhaps these definitions came from the members and officers themselves, but it is interesting to note

that despite women comprising a significant proportion of the membership, the study is lacking in any gendered analysis. Even when facility time is mentioned, it is discussed in relation to a gender-neutral membership, and does not reflect the gendered facilities found by Fryer et al (1978) and Lawrence (1994).

The gendered analysis by Kealey (1990) of the lay - paid officer relationship provides a different dimension to the concerns raised in the merger negotiations. As part of her study, Kealey interviewed 18 women activists from COHSE, NALGO and NUPE. Fourteen of the women had found, or continued to find, male attitudes within their unions 'a major problem' (1990:41). Of these fourteen women, Kealey notes that twelve 'perceived male full-time officials as a hindrance to their work as trade unionists' (p41). A number of women also expressed concern at the overwhelmingly male culture that sprang up around groups of male paid-officers (p42). These findings suggest that a number of values and beliefs are likely to be challenged by the desire to change the predominant (male) model of trade unionism within UNISON. The following sections describe the methods of researching these issues.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

This empirical research has been conducted through case study analysis. Yin (1993) notes that 'the case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context' (p3). The case study is an appropriate research method for this work for three reasons. The first reason relates to the three-dimensional view of power which informs us that whilst individuals, and groups, may behave in an observable manner, they may also be the perpetrators, or objects of, the mobilisation of bias, or the subjection of their 'real' interests (Lukes 1970:25). Women do not engage in union activity in a vacuum and in order to make sense of their participation, it is necessary to study the context in which they are participating in representative structures.

A second reason derives from my earlier review of the trade union democracy debates, which provide sufficient evidence to suggest that representative structures are not context-free. Hyman (1975) warns the reader that 'to approach trade union government and administration as a self-contained area of analysis, and that to treat unions as 'formal organisations' wrenched from their social context, is to ignore the impact of the envioning institutions of power with which trade union constantly interact' (p69). Whilst taking heed of this warning, perhaps a more immediate and pertinent influence on the participation of women in UNISON, is the evolutionary nature of the union. Whilst there are a number of similarities between the three former partner unions, the differences between them are likely to have considerable significance in the evolution of UNISON as an identifiably different union. In particular, proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation are not being implemented within UNISON in a vacuum. Whilst their intended purpose is to facilitate the participation of women in representative structures, the literature suggests that these principles are likely to be implemented in ways which will benefit other groups within the union. The third reason derives from the limitations of treating men and women as mutually exclusive homogeneous groups. Putting women's participation in the context of members' behaviour enables the researcher to understand women's participation in groups, or factions, as well as women's behaviour as individuals.

The case study has been conducted within mainstream and women-only structures at two levels within the union - national and regional. Although the principles of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation applied from the creation of the union in July 1993, in effect they were only enacted through the creation of substantive UNISON committees (as opposed to interim committees consisting of members elected from the former partner unions). Substantive UNISON regional and national committees (excluding the National Executive Council) were created well in advance of UNISON branches which were still in the process of merging during the period of this study and in many cases remained COHSE, NALGO and NUPE branches.

Five mainstream committees and three women-only structures were selected for particular study. They were selected for the following reasons. The National Delegate Conference (NDC) was selected because it is the sovereign decision making body in the union. In between Conferences, the general management and control of the union is vested in the National Executive Council. The NEC is also the only committee whose make-up is detailed in the rule book. The National Women's Conference and National Women's Committee were selected for their parallel status within the women-only structures in UNISON. Whereas the previously mentioned arena bring members together from all service groups, the next committees are specific to particular membership groups. The Local Government and Health Care Service Group Executive Committees were selected for study because they are the national committees of the largest service groups in UNISON. Women make up 65% of the membership in the Local Government Group and 80% of the membership in the Health Care Group. The Local Government Service Group Executive was selected for further in-depth analysis because it attained proportionality for directly elected members in its first election.

Two mainstream Regional Committees and two women-only regional structures were selected for the study. Apart from the National Delegate Conference, regions are the only forum in which members from across all service groups can meet together. Whilst sharing the same rule book and relative similar distribution of service group members, the autonomy of regions within UNISON is such that each region is likely to be unique in its philosophy and structure. Thus there was no intention to select regions in order to replicate conditions or study a representative sample. Taking these considerations into account, along with resource constraints, it was decided to select two regions which would provide a source of information for all the research issues. These two regions were chosen in a pragmatic manner, having regard to time and travel considerations and available contacts. The regions are identified in the text as Regions 1 and 2. The Regional Committee in Region 2 was selected for further in-depth analysis because it achieved proportionality for directly elected members in its first election.

The schedule contained in Table 4.1 provides more detailed information about research themes, sites and data collection methods used in this thesis. I would like to add a few comments to this detail. Batstone et al (1979) used observation as their primary research tool in their in-depth analysis of shop steward organisation because they believed it was a vital aid to understanding the dynamics of organisational behaviour. I too made much use of non-participant observation as I needed to understand how individuals and groups interacted to create, maintain and change predominant ideologies and institutions. The three-dimensional view of power indicates that there are different ways in which power can be articulated (Lukes 1975). I was interested in the behaviour and priorities of everyone within UNISON, be they men, women, low paid women, officers or rank and file members. I was particularly interested to know how women were responding to the rule book commitments, what women were saying, whether they were working together on committees and whether they were developing relationships with women in other structures. I also paid attention to members who were not attending meetings, members who were not speaking and issues which were not discussed. These observations have provided a rich source of material for this thesis. I have reproduced a number of these observations in this text, together with relevant extracts of speeches and interviews because they effectively illuminate a number of the social processes within UNISON. When frequent reference is made to particular members I have found it useful to use names but in each case this is not the person's real name.

The last point I wish to make is that whilst my study has provided me with insights into the behaviour of paid-officers, it has not been specifically focused on their activity. The rule book commitments to proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation apply to the members of the union, not the employed officers. Being a member-led union is a fundamental principle in UNISON and active participation and representation by women is seen as the best way to ensure the effective representation of their needs. Whilst paid-officers play a vital role in this development, the focus of this thesis is primarily on the activity of the membership.

Table 4.1: Schedule of Research Themes and Data Collection

RESEARCH THEME	Women gaining access through proportionality and fair representation	Creating a separate space for women through self-organisation	Impact of three principles on content of decision making arena
RESEARCH SITES	National Executive Council (NEC) Local Government Service Group Executive (LGSGE) Health Care Service Group Executive (HCSGE) Regional Committee (Region 1) (RC1) Regional Committee (Region 2) (RC2)	National Women's Committee (NWC) National Women's Conference Women-only structures (Region 1) Women-only structures (Region 2)	Regional Committee (Region 2) Local Government Service Group Executive National Delegate Conference (NDC)
DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH METHODS	In relation to all of above arena: Committee structures Election addresses Election results Minutes and Agenda 1- 2 hour semi-structured interviews with candidates standing for elections and paid officers servicing the committees: 7 candidates NEC 4 " LGSGE 1 paid-officer LGSGE 2 candidates HCSGE 1 paid-officer HCSGE 4 candidates RC1 2 paid-officers RC1 7 candidates RC2 2 paid officers RC2	In relation to all of above arena: Committee structures Election addresses Election results Minutes and Agenda of relevant Committees and Conferences 1-2 hour semi-structured interviews with members of above committees and paid-officers servicing the committees: 5 members NWC 2 national paid-officers 6 members Region 1 1 paid-officer Region 1 2 members Region 2 1 paid-officer Region 2	In relation to all of above arena: Minutes and Agenda of Committees and relevant Conferences 1994, 1995 UNISON Annual Reports 1-2 hours semi-structured interviews with members of above committees and paid-officers servicing the committees: 10 members RC2 2 paid-officers RC2 4 members LGSGE 10 members of Local Government Service Group active at branch or regional level 3 national paid-officers 1 regional paid-officer

	<p>Non-participant observation of following meetings when structure and elections discussed:-</p> <p>3 meetings of HCSGE (one day each) 1 HCSG Conference (2 day)</p> <p>2 meetings in RC2 (one day each)</p>	<p>Non-participant observation of meetings of above committees:</p> <p>5 meetings NWC (1-2 days each) 1995 National Women's Conference (2days) 1 meeting of National Standing Committee for 1995 Women's Conference (2 days) 1995 Women's TUC Conference with informal discussions with UNISON delegation over 2 days</p> <p>5 meetings Region 1 (half day each) 1994 and 1995 Women's Forum (Region 1) (one day each)</p> <p>4 meetings Region 2 (half day each)</p> <p>Participant observation of :</p> <p>1 day seminar for Regional Women's Officers</p> <p>two 2-day educational activities organised by Women-only structure (Region 2)</p> <p>Questionnaire completed by:</p> <p>17 participants at 1994 Women's Forum 24 participants at 1995 Women's Forum (Region 1)</p>	<p>Non-participant observation of meetings of above committees:</p> <p>4 Regional Committee (one day each) 4 Regional Council (one day each)</p> <p>5 LGSGE (1-2 days each) 1 2-day LGSG Conference 3 Regional Local Government Committee (Region 1) (half day each)</p> <p>1994 and 1995 National Delegate Conference (3 days each)</p>
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In total I interviewed 38 people in my research. 25 of these were members, and 13 were paid-officers. The higher number of interviews recorded above (77) reflects two factors: (i) 14 interviewees provided information for themes 1 and 2 and have been 'double-counted', (ii) a

number of UNISON members operate simultaneously at different levels within the union. For example, some women are involved in the regional women's structures and the national mainstream structures. Since I was looking at women's responses to the implementation of proportionality, fair representation and women-only structures, I deliberately interviewed female rather than male UNISON members. Of the 25 members I interviewed, 22 were women. Of the 13 officers I interviewed, 9 were women. I attended a total of 56 meetings during my research. This table does not include eight (half day) meetings I attended in Region 1 at the beginning of my research.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

This chapter has endeavoured to portray the manner in which I have conducted theoretically informed empirical research. As Hyman notes, the 'relationship between abstract and concrete is interactive and dialectical, not linear and hierarchical' (1994:172). It is in this context of interlinking issues that I have tried to isolate aspects of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation which support on the one hand, women's interests, and on the other, women's concerns. Chapter 5 discusses how women gain access to decision making arena through proportionality and fair representation. Chapters 6 and 7 examine how self-organisation enables women to create a separate space for the determination of their own interests. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 examine the interaction of the three principles in practice and discuss how they support, or otherwise, the discussion of women's concerns in mainstream committees. Chapter 8 recounts the experience of a Regional Committee, chapter 9 examines the experience of the Local Government Service Group Executive and chapter 10 discusses the experience of the National Delegate Conference. Finally, chapter 11 revisits earlier themes and discusses the extent to which UNISON's rule book commitments have been able to change the predominant ideologies and institutions of trade unionism.

CHAPTER 5:

GETTING THERE: GAINING ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

The commitments to proportionality and fair representation in UNISON's rule book are an acceptance that all members are not equal and that women and low paid women need to be identified in order to increase their opportunities to be elected as representatives. A small part of this chapter discusses the institutional elements of that identification. However, the greater part of the chapter engages with the observation of Ledwith et al (1992) that constitutions are realised through social processes. This chapter examines the different values and beliefs which shape the constitutions and election results of five mainstream committees. It illustrates the tension between women being identified as members of a group and women acting as individuals. It shows that whilst proportionality and fair representation change the predominant model of representative democracy a number of ideologies and institutions remain intact.

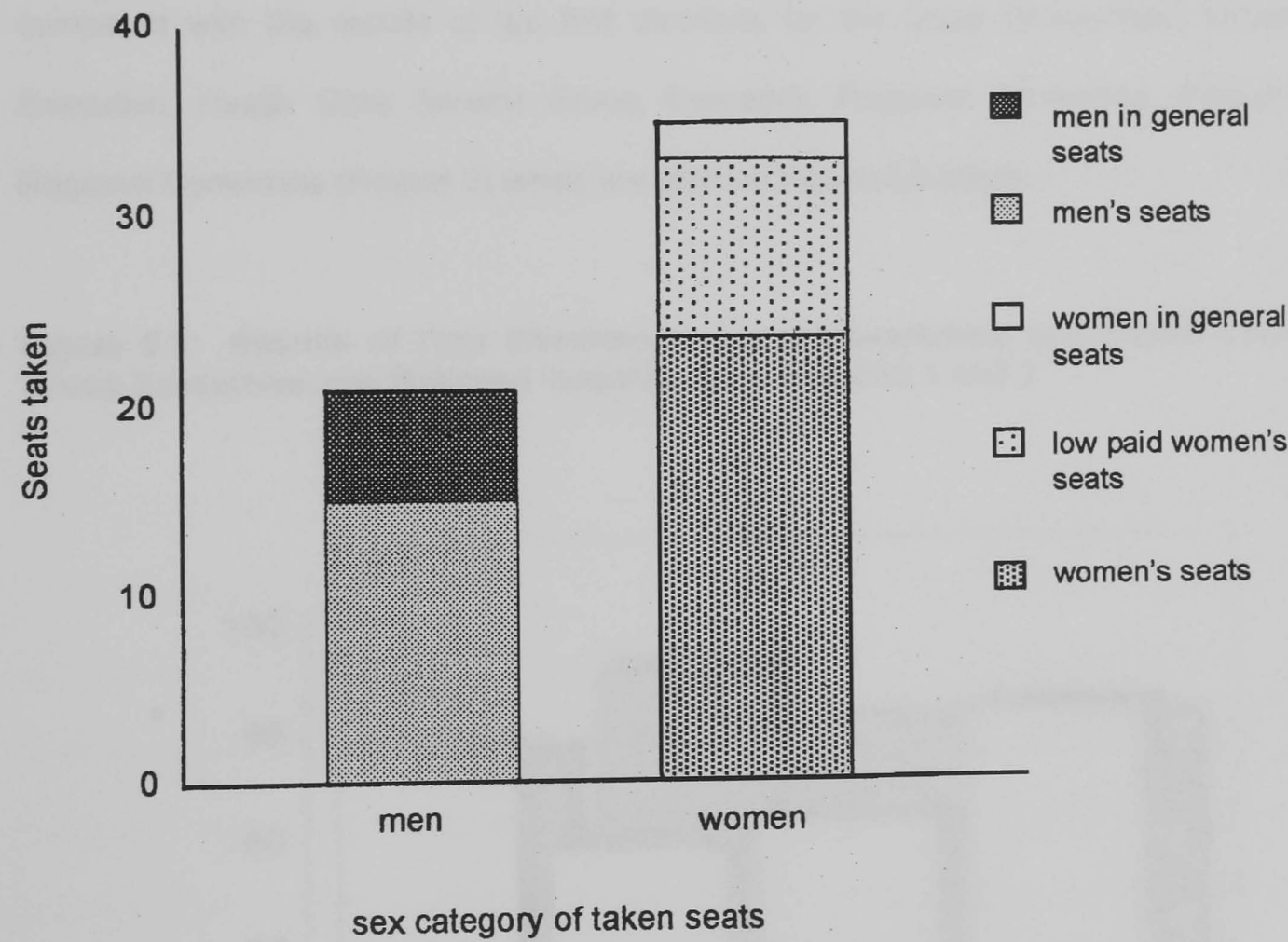
INCREASING REPRESENTATION BY IDENTIFYING WOMEN'S SEATS

In accordance with the principle of proportionality, women's seats were established on the NEC in proportion to the numbers of women in the union. These seats include 13 seats reserved for lower paid women. At the time of the first NEC election, the candidacy for these seats was restricted by rule to 'female members earning less than the maximum of the lowest subscription band set out in Schedule A' (£5000). The NEC is the only committee whose make-up is detailed in the rule book and it provides a useful 'template' for identifying the different elements of proportionality and fair representation.

In UNISON, every member belongs to one of 7 Service Groups, and one of 13 regions. The NEC consists of representatives from all 7 Service Groups and all 13 Regions. Thus there are

a total of 20 constituencies electing members to the NEC. An important aspect of these constituencies is that they are all multi-representative constituencies: i.e. more than one representative is elected from each constituency. As noted by Cockburn (1995:77) multi-representative constituencies allow for at least one, or more, of the representatives to be women, thus facilitating the achievement of proportionality. The sex-categorisation of seats within multi-representative constituencies is a framework which is capable of producing proportional representation of women, through the inclusion of women and exclusion of men in proportion to their membership. This is illustrated by the election results for the NEC contained in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Results of First NEC Election

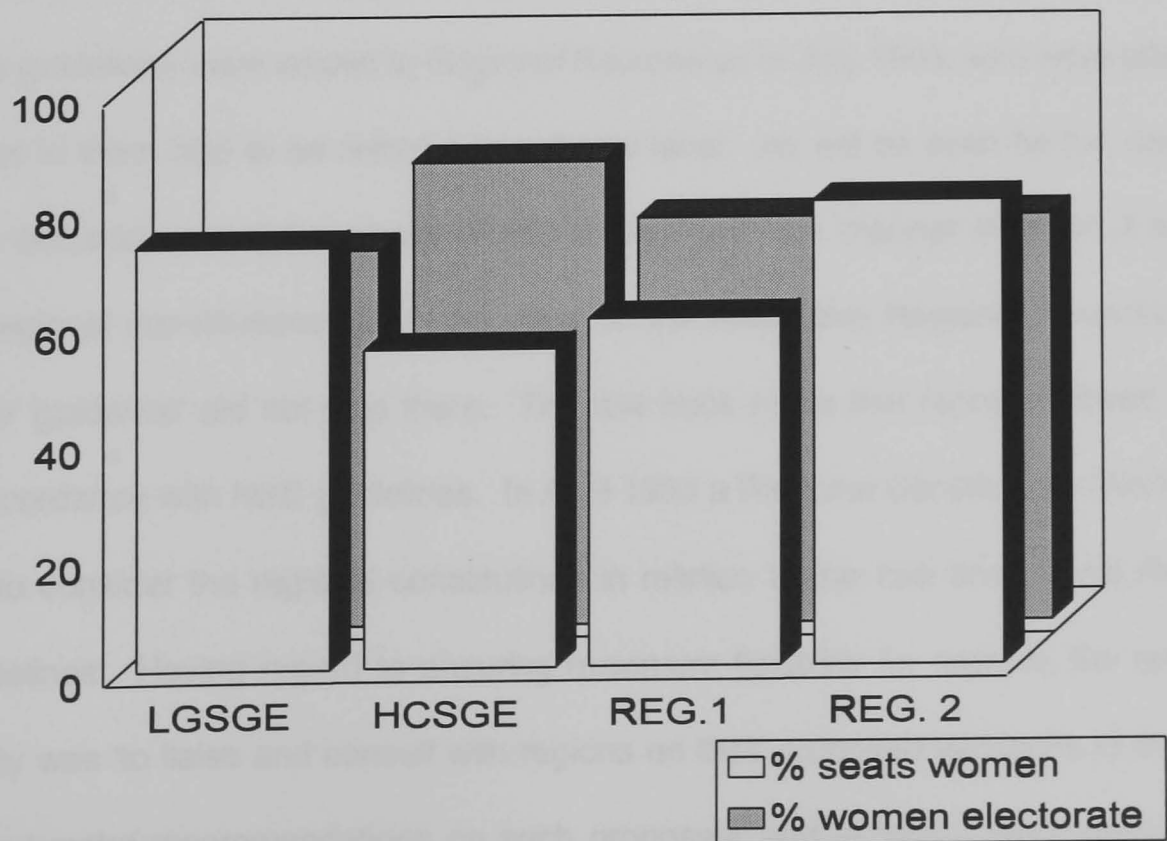


Note: This chart represents all taken seats only, i.e. 56 seats out of a possible 61

In total, 35 out of 56 seats were taken by women (62.5%). This equates to the minimum number of seats designated for women (62%). Its distance from the maximum representation of women (75%) reflects the number of women's seats left vacant, and the low number of women contesting general seats - features which will be discussed in further detail below. With regard to the low paid seats, 9 of 13 seats were filled. These four vacant seats lower the proportion of low paid women on the NEC, at the same time as lowering the proportion of women per se on the NEC.

The framework of direct election; multi-representative constituencies; sex-categorisation of seats; and lower paid women's seats has facilitated the achievement of proportionality and fair representation (for manual and part-time women workers) on the NEC. These results can be compared with the results of the first elections for the Local Government Service Group Executive; Health Care Service Group Executive; Regional Committee (Region 1); and Regional Committee (Region 2) which are given in Figure 6.2 below.

Figure 5.2: Results of First Elections in Local Government and Health Care Service Group Executives and Regional Committees in Regions 1 and 2



In relation to the Local Government SGE, the election of women to 27 out of 37 seats (73%) compares favourably with a 65% female membership. Indeed, this represents a dramatic increase in the number of women, from 9 on the interim committee to 31 on the substantive committee. However, this representation is not reflected in the Health Care SGE. In total 16 seats out of 30 (55%) were taken by women. This is much lower than the percentage of women in the service group (80%). With regard to the Regional Committee elections, more women have been elected to the Regional Committee in Region 2, than Region 1. Indeed, proportionality is only achieved in Region 2. Although all four committees sought to achieve proportionality and fair representation, detailed study of each committee revealed the flexible framework in which each structure has developed.

In the case of the service groups, it was the Interim Service Group Committees which were charged with developing the permanent national structures within the requirements of the rule book. Like the national service groups, interim committees at regional level were responsible for developing permanent constitutions within the requirements of the rule book. However, regions appear to have had more 'guidance' than service groups. A pre-merger Regional Working Group developed a set of advice to aid the establishment of UNISON structures at regional level. These guidelines were issued to Regional Secretaries in July 1993, who were advised that any variations to them had to be referred to national level. As will be seen below, each region took its own decisions about the status of this 'advice' and the manner in which it was to be followed. Regional constitutions were presented to the respective Regional Councils in 1994. However, the 'guidance' did not stop there. The rule book notes that representatives are to be elected in accordance with NEC guidelines. In April 1994 a Regional Constitutions Working Party was set up to consider the regional constitutions in relation to the rule book, Final Report and national guidelines. Having regard to ensuring maximum flexibility for regions, the remit of the Working Party was 'to liaise and consult with regions on their proposed variations to the national guidelines and make recommendations on such proposals' and to 'make recommendations on

updating guidelines in the light of experience of the arrangements in UNISON's first year'. Where appropriate, the following pages contain reference to the work of both regional working parties.

Whilst attempting to achieve a balance between the universal adoption of union policy, and lay structure autonomy, these flexibilities have provided opportunities to increase or lessen the impact of proportionality and fair representation. In particular, whilst the identification of women has been the key means of facilitating women's access to these committees, this identification has been subject to different interpretations within the committees. These factors are discussed in detail below.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF WOMEN

Separate Seats and Single Ballots: The pre-merger regional guidelines indicated that the Regional Committee should consist of 20 regional seats which should be split into 8 general seats, 8 women's seats and 4 low paid women's seats. These are supplemented by service group seats and seats for representatives of self-organised groups. One of the regions studied (Region 1) introduced this structure without change. Excluding the low paid women's seats which stayed the same, the other region (Region 2), made a definite decision not to categorise seats in this way. Evidence suggests that the initiative came from former NALGO women lay members who 'did not want to create women's seats', but wanted a system which allowed for more women representatives. An interview with a senior activist in Region 2 revealed that she was 'not a great fan of proportionality'. She believes that proportionality deals with one area of under-representation, and believes that reserved seats produce their own discrimination. In this respect she noted that the male manual workers were being 'squeezed out by proportionality, since fair representation is not given as much prominence'. This member disagrees with the presumption that women raise women's issues, and hates the idea that there is a difference between trade union issues, and women's issues. She did, however, believe that the reservation of seats for low paid women was a good thing.

The decision was made to use a single ballot paper for the regional elections with the intention that candidates did not compete for seats which are denoted as 'general' or 'women's', but that all candidates compete on a single ballot in which, 'at least 50% of elected members will be women'. Those candidates attaining the 8 highest votes take up the general seats, and the women nominees with the next 8 highest votes take up the women's seats. Thus the sentiment of the national guidelines are upheld. Table 5.1 below illustrates the difference between the two regions.

Table 5.1: Allocation of Regional Seats on Regional Committees in Regions 1 and 2

REGION 1	REGION 2
8 GENERAL SEATS 8 WOMEN'S SEATS 4 LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS MIN: 60% WOMEN 20% LOW PAID WOMEN	16 SEATS ON SINGLE BALLOT OF WHICH AT LEAST 50% WILL BE HELD BY WOMEN 4 LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS MIN:- 60% WOMEN 20% LOW PAID WOMEN (voting by Single Transferable Vote (STV))

Excluding the low paid women's seats, women candidates in Region 2 are not standing explicitly for either a general or women's seat. In 1994 and 1995, the single ballot voting system produced a majority of women in the regional seats. In the 1994 election, four women won general seats, and in the 1995 election, two women won general seats, thus producing 80% and 70% women in the regional seats respectively. This compares with no women being elected to general seats in Region 1. In the 1994 Region 1 election, 42 candidates contested 8 general seats, and from information available, at least six of these candidates were women. In contrast, by the second election, the general seats only attracted 16 candidates, none of whom were women. A key activist in Region 2 argued that their electoral system enabled more women to get elected than

a system involving separate lists for general and women's seats. This is difficult to prove however, and it is to be noted that fewer women were elected to general seats in the second election. The interviewee noted that this was probably due to tactical voting in the election. She believed that members were more organised in the second election and that the STV system could be manipulated against women obtaining general seats, if all the men were given the first preference votes.

This process eliminates the need for women to make a choice between standing for a general or women's seat, and could counteract the negative impact of designating seats to sex-categories. Originally elections to the health service group was to be through a single ballot too, in which at least 50% of seats would be taken by women. At least one other Service Group (Higher Education) also proposed a single ballot for its SGE elections. However, the use of single ballot paper was not to be. The administration of the Service Group elections was organised centrally within the union, and interviewees suggest there was a strong push from officers that all elections would be administered in the same way. It was argued, by officers, that a single ballot would need more explanation, and would be difficult and off-putting for voters. The use of separate lists of candidates for general and women's seats was the preferred option of the officers. After much discussion, the Admin. Panel - a lay committee of the interim NEC - made the decision that all national service group elections would be through the use of separate ballots for women's and general seats. The fact that the two systems might produce different nominations, and thus results, was apparently not addressed. Members commenting on the process referred to the 'bureaucratic' approach taken by (mostly male) officers. The Service Groups were not consulted about what was seen as essentially an administrative matter and neither were the women's structure, the NEC Organisational Development Panel, or the NEC Equal Opportunities Panel. Effectively, work on the administration of elections 'happened elsewhere'. A proponent of single ballot papers noted that, in her opinion, this decision had 'put back the union 20 years'.

Although 5 of 13 Health Care general seats had been contested by women, no women were elected into general seats. Although results of the first SGE election would suggest that a single ballot might not have made any difference to the number of women representatives elected to the SGE, it is not possible to know the extent to which a single ballot might have made a difference to the original nominations. Women's responses to the identification of women's seats and general seats is discussed later.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF LOW PAID WOMEN

Service Groups: As noted above, fair representation is facilitated on the NEC by the provision of seats for low paid women. Low paid women's seats were used in both service groups, but with different interpretations, and thus results. The proposed Local Government SGE structure provided for one low paid women's seat for each region consisting of more than 50,001 Local Government Service Group members. 8 of the 13 regions met this criterion and in common with the NEC, the candidacy of the seats was restricted to members earning less than £5000. As noted above, this level is likely to facilitate representation by women who work in part-time or manual jobs. In a slight change from the NEC, these seats were called low paid women's seats, as opposed to lower paid women's seats. The proposed structure - which included 8 low paid women's seats - was put to the first Local Government Service Group Conference in 1994. A branch motion was also put to Conference to increase the number of low paid women's seats to one per region (i.e. 13 seats). The motion was submitted by an APT&C branch and it condemned the original decision of the SGE, arguing that 'this decision will disenfranchise a large number of low paid members in both manual/craft and APT&C groups'. The support for this motion was overwhelming, and the original proposal was amended to allow for one low paid women's seat per region.

However, whilst the argument for increasing the number of low paid women's seats could be viewed as an victory for women's representation, as noted above, increasing the number of

seats in a constituency can simultaneously increase the representation of other groups. In this case, increasing the number of low paid women's seats automatically increased representation for 5 regions (one of which originally had been entitled to only one representative). The amendment was also likely to increase the representation of manual members; part-time members; former NUPE members; and members within particular political factions. Perhaps it is no wonder that the support for this motion was overwhelming.

The development of low paid women's seats within the Health Care Service Group provides a strong contrast with that of the Local Government Service Group. The interim Health Care SGE proposed that four low paid women's seats be provided in the structure. Unlike the low paid women's seats on the LG SGE, which were allocated according to regional size, these were allocated to 4 constituencies of geographically grouped regions. These seats were reserved for women earning less than £5000. The Service Group structure was formally moved at the first Health Care conference. The argument was voiced that 4 low paid women's seats were not enough for the Executive. However, unlike the Local Government Service Group Conference, there were no formal motions to change the structure at this point. Since this time, there has been considerable debate about the number of low paid women's seats on the Health Care SGE which provides a useful insight into the perceived nature of representation through low paid women's seats.

The agenda of the 2nd Health Care Service Group Conference contained a motion which recognised the invaluable role played by low paid women members and instructing each region to elect one low paid woman representative to the SGE. This motion therefore sought to increase the representation of low paid women from 4 to 13. The motion added that the decision was to be effective from the elections to the SGE currently in progress. The policy of the interim SGE was to oppose this motion. A woman moved the motion, and a male National Officer spoke against the motion on behalf of the interim SGE. The Officer argued that if Conference passed this motion, then voting would be void on the current SGE elections. This was guaranteed to be off-putting, since voting for the first substantive committee was currently

underway. Reference was also made to the cost of creating the extra seats on the Executive (it would involve 9 more seats). The motion went to a card vote and was defeated by 60% of Conference. The decision not to increase the representation of low paid women's seats provides a stark contrast to the decision taken by the Local Government Group. In the LG Group, increasing low paid women's seats was also seen as increasing the representation of regions, manual members, part-time members, former NUPE members and members within political factions. Voters within the Health Care Group do not appear to have viewed this as an opportunity for increasing lay representation. Instead the decision could be regarded as a vote to minimise representation by low paid women (and thereby women), regions, part-time and manual women workers or former NUPE members.

One month after the 2nd Health Care Group Conference a low paid member of the SGE asked if low paid women could be mandated. This question had arisen from the member being told that she should have voted in a particular way on a crucial vote about industrial action. Since the member represented 3 regions, she asked on a subsequent occasion, whether she should have a vote for each region (i.e. 3 votes). This question prompted a noticeable intake of breath around the room. At this point, the lead Officer of the Group said that providing low paid women's seats on a multi-regional basis was a way of getting numbers of low paid women on the committee, and enabling their voice to be heard, and that it had never been intended that these women would be seen as representing those grouped regions.

The debate continued over a period of time to a position whereby the SGE decided to allocate one low paid woman's seat per region. However, on this being put to the SGE for approval, a male Executive member put forward an amendment to the effect that the allocation of one low paid women's seat per region should be accompanied by the re-designation of general seats to men's seats. The member argued that this re-designation would be 'in the interests of proportionality', since each region would then have 2 women's seats, and one men's seat. He argued that this proposal would be in keeping with the use of men's seats on the NEC. This proposal prompted a lengthy debate about the issue. During the debate it is to be noted that

women were generally in agreement with the statements made by the mover of the amendment, and only one woman lay member, and one woman official, explicitly objected to this change.

The low paid member who had originally raised the question, noted that the issue was not about proportionality, and that it had come about because she, as a low paid women representative, was not able to be mandated by each region she represented. After considerable debate it was resolved to clarify the constitutional position. The Health Care Group sought advice from the National Women's Officer who advised that if the structure were amended to provide two women's seats to one men's seat per region, this would be contrary to the principle of proportionality, since women comprise 80% of the Health Care Group membership, not 66% as suggested by the mover of the amendment. The debate was resumed in a subsequent meeting - during which some men noted that an absence of men's seats could mean that 'there might not be any men left on this committee'. This suggests that these particular men were seeing the exercise as one in which women's increased access to the committee were being made at their expense. At the end of the debate the Committee voted to allocate one low paid women's seat per region, and leave the general seat unchanged. The SGE put this motion to the next Service Group Conference, and this was passed by the delegates. Under the amended structure, 26 out of 39 directly elected seats (66%) are designated for women - of which 13 are designated as low paid women's seats.

Unlike the NEC or LG SGE, the allocation of low paid women's seats in the Health Care Group bore no relationship to regional size. When the allocation of low paid women's seats to grouped regions proved impractical, it was noted that it was never intended that these women would be representing the grouped regions - it was just to ensure that 'their voice was heard'. This response suggests that the Health Care Group was not interpreting the role of low paid women's seats in the same way as the other two national Committees. That is, they were not seen as regional representatives, but as representatives of the low paid. This also illustrates the different interpretations within the same group. The low paid member who raised the

original debate, wanted to increase fair representation from the regions, whereas some men on the SGE saw this as a desire to increase the proportion of women per se on the SGE. This discussion also illustrates the confusion surrounding the implementation of fair representation through low paid women's seats. The constituency for low paid women's seats consists of men and women. Therefore, occupiers of these seats are not obligated to speak on behalf of their sex. However, the candidacy of these seats is restricted to women earning less than £5000 which arguably identifies them as individuals in an oppressed social group and, as noted above, within certain quarters of the Health Care Group this was their perceived role.

Table 5.2: Allocation of Directly Elected Seats on Local Government and Health Care Service Group Executives

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	HEALTHCARE
<p><u>WOMEN'S MEMBERSHIP:</u></p> <p>65%</p> <p><u>PROPOSED STRUCTURE:-</u></p> <p>14 GENERAL SEATS 12 WOMEN'S SEATS 8 LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS</p> <p>Minimum filled seats:</p> <p>59% WOMEN inclusive of 23% LOW PAID WOMEN</p> <p><u>AMENDED AT CONFERENCE</u></p> <p>14 GENERAL SEATS 12 WOMEN'S SEATS 13 LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS</p> <p>MIN: 64% WOMEN inclusive of LOW PAID WOMEN</p>	<p><u>WOMEN'S MEMBERSHIP:</u></p> <p>80%</p> <p><u>PROPOSED STRUCTURE:-</u></p> <p>13 GENERAL SEATS 13 WOMEN'S SEATS 4 LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS</p> <p>Minimum filled seats:</p> <p>56% WOMEN inclusive of 13% LOW PAID WOMEN</p> <p><u>ACCEPTED AT CONFERENCE</u></p> <p>60% OF CONFERENCE VOTED AGAINST MOTION TO INCREASE LOW PAID WOMEN'S SEATS</p> <p>MIN: 56% WOMEN inclusive of LOW PAID WOMEN</p>

DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF WOMEN'S SEATS

The work of Ledwith et al (1992) reminds us that whilst the rule book has been used to implement proportionality, constitutions also need to be realised through social processes. The responses of women and voters to the identification of women's seats had an impact on the results. This can be seen most clearly through the choices which women made about which seats to stand for. The sex-categorisation of seats within multi-representative constituencies meant that women often had a choice as to whether to stand for a general seat, women's seat, or a low paid women's seat, if earning under £5000 per annum. Only 2 of the 7 general service group seats were contested by women.

A male interviewee told me how one woman's insistence on standing for a general seat, rather than a women's seat, had meant that the union lost a very good person from the NEC when the woman, rather than a man, won the general seat. It was obviously felt to be unfair by the interviewee and some of his colleagues, that this woman - who had the choice of three seats (two women's seats, 1 general seat) - chose the process which would potentially block one of the man's only two opportunities (i.e. 1 man's seat and 1 general seat). The male interviewee noted that this decision had enabled two women from the 'S and S brigade' to be elected. 'S and S' stands for 'shopping and shagging', a derogatory term which implies that the women were attending union meetings for their own personal gratification, rather than to represent the interests of their members. It was clearly the belief of the interviewee that the woman should have stood for the women's seat so that the election of at least one of them might have been blocked.

In Region 1, an active member of the women's self-organised group noted that she had not stood for a general seat, because it did not seem 'fair' to do so when women's seats existed. Thus, for this member, the general seats were implicitly 'men's seats'. However, this member did note that she was thinking of standing for a general seat in the next regional committee

elections. The use of the following figure of speech underlines the point that general seats were the preserve of men in Region 1: a number of voting papers were being circulated at the Annual General Meeting, which had great potential to create confusion amongst the delegates. To ease this confusion, the (female) Regional Convenor distinguished the voting papers for the general seats, by saying 'blue for the boys'.

A member who stood for a women's seat on the NEC noted that she had always been opposed to reserved seats, but it was her perception that there was less competition for women's seats. In her opinion therefore it seemed logical to stand for a women's seat, where she believed she would stand a better chance of getting elected. Seemingly nothing would have prompted her to stand for a general seat as she felt this seat would provide the least chance of being elected. In the event, this interviewee did not win the women's seat. The general seat was contested by 3 men. Despite being in a contest of 6 women, the woman receiving the highest number of votes for the women's seat polled higher than the man winning the general seat. Thus, the chance of a woman winning the general seat, might not have been so remote as the interviewee had originally thought. The interviewee's opposition to reserved seats is not unknown within the union. This, coupled with her high profile as a key activist, has raised expectations amongst some women that such a person should only stand for a general seat. This member also stood for a women's seat on her national service group committee - again, thinking it offered her the best chance of getting elected. In this election, the member was successful and won the women's seat.

Such motivations do not go unnoticed by some women members. In another region, a member argued that the winner of the women's seat only nominated herself for that seat because 'she knew she would not win the general seat'. The interviewee noted that although the women's seat was a contested seat, this particular nominee was most likely to win because her name is well known across the region. This perceived action aggrieved the interviewee because she felt that the holder of the women's seat did not believe in self-organisation for women, and had never pursued women's issues in her lengthy experience at regional and

national level. The interviewee felt that a lot of men would represent women's issues better than the holder of the women's seat. In the event, the holder of the women's seat attracted the highest poll in the region, and could conceivably have stood for the general seat and won. Five out of 14 general seats were contested by women in the LG SGE elections and women were elected into 4 of these general seats. In three regions, all the regional representatives were women.

Whilst the choice of a women's seat was determined in some of the above cases by the desire to win, a paid officer in one region argued that women were not going for general seats on the Health Care SGE because there was no 'slate' amongst them. (A slate is the term used to indicate that a number of individuals are standing for election on a common agenda). The officer noted that there were a number of strong activist women in the region but that none of them knew each other, and consequently had stood against each other for the women's seat. The officer believed that a winner of the women's seat should have stood for the general seat, leaving the women's seat for the runner up. The officer noted that 'slate' is seen as a dirty word, whereas 'networking' is seen as more acceptable. He believes that following the outcome of the first SGE elections, the women will be networking in the future. However, this had not arisen because of women coming through women's self-organisation, but rather through women's perception of their relative ability. A Health Care SGE member who stood in a women's seat justified her decision by noting that there had only been one other member in the region who had indicated an intention to be nominated in the election. Since this other member was a man, it had seemed sensible for him to stand unopposed for the general seat, and for her to stand unopposed for the women's seat. She intimated that her actions might have been different had there been more nominations forthcoming.

Another member noted how she had been asked to be on 'everyone's slate, as everyone has a hole for a low paid woman'. She noted that these propositions were the first time she had heard of a 'slate' and she felt like asking the requesters 'what is a slate?'. She had been told that 'we don't want any mavericks', of which she also wanted to know the meaning. She was

annoyed that members were standing on 'slates' - as she did not feel that this was a good way forward - particularly if it were along former union lines. She agreed that women's seats were being seen as useful in the battle for power, but not only between former partner unions, but between 'right and left' too. She noted that originally she had been 'feted' by all quarters because of people's perceptions of her politics - of which she commented 'they may be left, but not all the time on all issues'. She had made a verbal attack on the actions of the region, after which 'the left' had thought she was wonderful and had wanted her to join up with them.

Several members chose to describe the use of proportional seats in terms of mixing politics and proportionality: whereby the primary desire was to gain a maximum number of seats for a particular political faction. One interviewee noted that before the NEC election she and others would discuss the general and women's seats to see which was the best way of getting a seat on the NEC. That this woman was a former NALGO member would seem to confirm the earlier identification of NALGO's NEC as 'political' (Kealey 1990). In the event, there was only one general regional seat, so with the exception of the North West region, all women standing for a regional NEC seat had to stand for a women's seat. This lack of choice amongst the regional seats has caused some concern amongst women for different reasons. Some women had never stood for a women's seat before, did not wish to be elected in this manner, and allegedly withdrew from the election process on this basis. It would appear that some women were reluctant to stand in a women's seat because they wanted to be elected 'in their own right', not because they were women. Some of the women reluctantly standing in women's seats were known not to be into 'women's issues', or were keen to let this be known, deliberately declining to get involved in women's self-organisation. These latter reactions obviously dismayed a number of women within the women's structure, because they felt that such women should not be putting themselves forward for women's seats, and that such actions were making a mockery of proportionality. These debates reveal a confusion about the intention of women's seats. Cockburn noted that women elected in reserved seats have a constituency of men and women and are therefore not obligated to speak for their sex (1991).

However, the above comments illustrate the expectations of many women that women representatives are elected to speak on their behalf.

Women who perceived elections in a political manner declared that the political activity of the individual gaining access was the most important feature of a candidate, not their biological status. This response can be characterised by the Branch Secretary who said 'the union wants people with ideas, people who are going to fight'. This woman noted that her ideas might have been prejudiced by the actions of Brenda Dean (past General Secretary of SOGAT) who, she believes, 'sold out her members'. The interviewee noted that 'that is the last time I will vote for a member because she is a woman, rather than what the member stands for'. For such 'non-believers' (male and female), proportionality was seen as a bureaucratic exercise to marginalise politically active members of the union. So for example, another Branch Secretary argued that:

'officers are using proportionality and fair representation as a weapon to get their own way and imposing their policies'

'the reason proportionality was adopted wholeheartedly is that people saw it as a way of controlling the NEC. Women were assumed to be less articulate, and I'm pleased to see that this has proved to be wrong'

My interviews revealed that it was not only paid-officers whose motives for supporting women in elections were questioned. One interviewee noted that when the Housing Department Convenor was looking to stand down, the 'men controlling the Branch were looking for a woman to fulfill their needs for proportionality'. Tina described how the men had approached her. After speaking at a Housing Department members meeting which had been 'well received', the Branch Secretary and Chair told her that they thought she would be good as Convenor, and asked her what she thought about being nominated. Tina said that it seemed daunting, and she suspects she was nominated because she was inexperienced. Tina noted that at first when 'they' thought she was easy to manipulate, she got a lot of support - 'the 'come to the pub with us' thing'. But since she has developed her own support, she is not getting the same treatment. Tina noted that initially she relied on 'them' too much and asked

them before she did anything. She does not do this now, and there is more respect between all parties now. Tina thinks the male activists fear losing control as Housing is one of the biggest Departments in the Council and is politically active. Tina noted that there are two very capable men in control, but they have been there for far too long, at least 5-10 years, and people bow to their judgement.

Proportionality was also associated with gaining power for former partner unions. One interviewee described how the women's seat could be pivotal to gaining such power. This member argued that general or men's seats were virtually guaranteed to go to a former NALGO man, and the low paid women's seat virtually guaranteed to go to a former NUPE woman, thus creating a balance between seats held by former NALGO and NUPE members. However, it was perceived that the women's seat could be won by a woman of any partner union, the member winning the seat would automatically create a majority of 2:1 for their former partner union - thus ensuring that the holder of the women's seat holds the balance of power within the union.

Others talked about proportionality and its impact on the election of manual workers. Reservations about increasing the number of women per se on committees were raised by a number of manual women members. Women APT&C and Manual and Craft members were now competing for either general, or women's seats on a regional basis. In the Local Government SGE elections, two former members of the Manual & Craft national Sector Committee lost to women on APT&C terms and conditions. In the same vein, these elections also saw the loss of 3 former male members of the Manual & Craft national sector committee to 2 men and one woman on APT&C terms and conditions. Two low paid members noted their dislike of proportionality, noting their preference for occupation, rather than gender, to determine the fair representation of members. Examples were given of proportionality being used to limit the representation of manual workers. This opinion was repeated by manual women members at a local level who argued that there was a lack of protection for traditional full-time (male) manual workers. Approximately one third of the national Service Group

Executive are members on Manual and Craft terms, but only one is a man (indirectly elected from the Sector Committee). This is a considerable change from previous committees, and emphasises the manner in which fair representation is being pursued through women's seats. Since women have the greater share of the seats, this is understandable, but has implications for the future of the union: if similar diversity is not attained amongst male activists, one could envisage a union whose activists consist of a diversity of women, and a group of white, non-manual men.

These concerns about fair representation within UNISON were raised in a very explicit composite motion at the 1994 Conference. The motion welcomed UNISON's commitment to proportionality and fair representation but noted that,

'manual workers, health workers and part-time workers are badly under-represented and that UNISON will fail to deliver, if it is perceived to be and becomes a union dominated by white collar members from local government'

As noted in chapter 4, fair representation is the broad balance and representation of members of the electorate, taking account of nine overlapping, non-hierarchical, socially constructed differences between members. By restricting the candidacy of these seats to women earning less than £5000, it was likely that these seats would be taken by women working part-time, or in manual jobs, thereby fulfilling two of the fair representation criteria. It would also enable the representation of members with 'different occupations, skills, qualifications, responsibilities', thus fulfilling another four of the criteria. However, it should be noted there has been no attempt to facilitate the fair representation of members according to 'race, sexuality and disability'. In part this can be attributed to legislative requirements and omissions. The Trade Union Act 1984 requires members of national executive committees to be directly elected by a postal ballot of all members. This means that all members have to be elected to the committee, they cannot be co-opted onto the committee. Furthermore, whilst it is permissible under Section 49 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to reserve seats for women's representation, this is not necessarily the case for other groups. In addition to these different

groups, the integration of the three former partner unions' members was not specifically provided for in the UNISON rule book. Such was the strength of feeling from members that former partner unions were not being fairly represented, the Working Group responsible for addressing fair representation recommended that former union partner status should be monitored for the next two years.

POST ELECTION: RESISTANCE TO FILLING VACANT SEATS

Eight seats were un-contested in the first round of national elections, and these were all women's seats. The debate as to whether new elections could be held for vacant seats illustrates the mobilisation of bias by members and officers against filling the seats. Prior to the debate in the Health Care Service Group, the National Officer noted that not filling the vacant seats would mean one less low paid woman on the Health Care Service Group Executive, but that holding a health election over three or four regions for the low paid seat would incur a cost. A number of different views were expressed before the (female) Chair of the Executive proposed that they left the seat vacant. She noted that 'as a member of the Administration and Finance Panel on the NEC' she believed they should not be filled because of cost, as on some service groups there were up to 6 seats to be filled. This woman noted that they did not get nominations the first time, so the money should not be spent on seeking new nominations. A couple of members noted that the Group was not acknowledging the difficulty for low paid women. A motion to fill the seat was put to the vote, and was carried by 12 votes to 9. The debate took place at the end of the day and at the end of the meeting only one low paid woman was present at this vote. The remaining 12 men were split 50:50 on the motion and the remaining 9 women vote were split 2:1 in favour of filling the seat. Thus the vote was won because 50% of the men were for filling the low paid women's seat. Following this decision, nominations were sought for the low paid women's seat, and following the receipt of only one nomination, a woman was elected unopposed to this seat (thus incurring no additional cost).

Reference has been made to the effect of vacant seats on proportionality, so perhaps the above comments could be construed as resistance to proportionality. It is interesting that the issue of cost was brought into the discussion, because this was the original argument against increasing the number of low paid women's seats on the Health Care SGE. I interviewed a (male) member of the Admin. and Finance Panel of the NEC. He indicated that a number of people were less than interested in the reasons for vacant seats, and were 'not keen on proportionality anyway'. He said,

'arguments were made that it gave women a second opportunity to get elected. This showed a lack of understanding of proportionality. It shows an insensitivity which comes from insecurity and lack of understanding of formalities, the reality of why there are vacant seats and the imbalance of opportunity for women'

This chapter has discussed the way in which paid-offices and lay members, men and women, have shaped the implementation of proportionality and fair representation. So far emphasis has been focused on the identification of seats in accordance with sex categories. Two other structural elements are worth discussing because of their importance to the achievement of proportionality and fair representation: (i) direct elections and (ii) multi-representative constituencies.

IMPORTANCE OF DIRECT ELECTION

Service Groups: Whilst it is legislation which determines that election to the NEC is through direct election, it is an aspect which arguably facilitates the achievement of proportionality. Whilst service groups and regions had a certain amount of autonomy in developing their constitutions, decisions about voting constituencies were made before the merger. In particular, the rule book determined that the majority of service group executive members would be directly elected, and that representatives on regional committees would be indirectly elected at the Annual Meeting of the Regional Council. The response of members to these rules is noted below.

Whilst the majority of seats on the Local Government and Health Care SGEs are obtained through direct election, a number of seats (6 and 8 respectively) are filled through the indirect election of representatives from Sector Committees. In addition to electing representatives to the SGE, the Sector Committees provide an opportunity for indirectly elected representatives to play a major part in the service group's decision making. The development of Sector Committees has its roots in the manner in which SGE members were elected in former partner unions. Although reference has been made to the potential discriminatory nature of indirect elections, some members believe that indirect elections allow for choice based on ability. A former NALGO member noted that the union:-

'could not afford to have airheads negotiating with employers. Those sent indirect from the region were known to have ability; to be reasonably articulate; have experience; and a few years at regional level - i.e. they would have served their time'.

Another former NALGO member noted that direct elections 'knocked off experienced activists', as members were not necessarily getting elected by people who knew about union activity and activists. Both members noted, however, that the indirect system tended to filter out all groups which face disadvantage within society and, in particular, produce a disproportionate number of men. It was estimated that most NALGO service groups probably consisted of 75% men.

The difference in opinion between direct and indirect elections for the SGEs was reconciled through the establishment of Sector Group Committees. The Local Government framework ensures that 'indirectly elected' members of Sector Committees are involved in collective bargaining, and 'directly elected' members of the SGEs are not directly involved in negotiations. This framework reflects the philosophy on directly elected seats of former NALGO members, who held the majority of seats on the Interim SGE. This contrasts with the responsibilities of the SGE in the Health Care service group which ensures that although the group has sector groups, it is the directly elected SGE which is the highest authority within the Group. This reflects the philosophy of former COHSE members (who held the majority of seats on the interim SGE).

The proportionality of sector committees is particularly important, given their status within the service group. In Local Government, each Sector Committee developed a formula which, through the use of multi-representative constituencies and sex-categorisation of seats (women's seats, general seats and low paid women's seats) provided that at least 44% of women would be on each committee. The Health Care Service Group Executive has eight sector committees and the interim committee decided that each sector group should comprise one representative from each region. In recognition of the fact that single-representative constituencies do not facilitate proportionality and fair representation, it was agreed that any Sector Committee should be entitled to co-opt up to five additional members. However, although these co-opted members would be entitled to speak, they would have no right to vote on the Committee. When the structure of the Sector Committees was discussed at Conference, it was argued that two representatives should be elected from each region to facilitate proportionality in the sector committees. This argument was lost. Therefore, unlike the Sector Committees in the Local Government Service Group, there is no mechanism to ensure that women are elected to a minimum number of voting seats.

Regions: Elections for regional seats on the Regional Committee are held at the Regional Council, so the make-up of the Regional Council is of relevance to the electoral process. Thus, whilst a minimum level of representation by women has been built into regional committees, the gender breakdown of the Regional Council is still of importance to the process of election. Guidelines from the pre-merger regional constitutional working party stated:

'it has been agreed that each branch will be entitled to have one delegate per 1000 members or part thereof. Where branches are entitled to have more than one delegate at least 50% (original emphasis) of their delegation must be women.'

Region 1 implemented this guideline, but its use precipitated considerable debate within the region. A Water Service Group branch applied for a waiving of the 50/50 ruling, arguing that the branch had far fewer women members. However, two appeals against the rule were

refused, which was seen as quite an milestone in UNISON's development, and a success for women. Region 2 deviated in its interpretation of the national guidelines. Instead of suggesting that at least 50% of delegations should be women, it asked that 'delegations should reflect proportionality in the branch'. A key figure in developing the constitution noted that a definite decision was made not to use a 50/50 rule as it could be used as a means of discriminating against men, and therefore fall into disrepute. In addition, this region felt that their definition was more in keeping with the original rule book definition of proportionality. Therefore, had the Water Branch been in this region and not sent any women delegates, they would not necessarily have been challenged. However, what is not stated in the constitution of Region 2, is the figure at which women (or men) in the minority become entitled to a seat - is it once they reach 50% of the membership? If this were the case, most health and some local government branches, could legitimately send only women delegates, and gas, transport and water could legitimately send only men delegates, even though a substantial minority of their membership might be men or women respectively.

Election of the Regional Committee by delegates attending the AGM of the Regional Council is prescribed by the rule book, and became part of the constitutions in the two regions. However, in Region 2, it was subject to criticism by the Regional Health Committee who wished members of the Regional Committee to be directly elected. As noted before, indirect elections are likely to perpetuate any bias in the committee taking part in the election. In this case, the Health Committee wished to overcome a bias against workers in the health service who, it was argued, were not able to come to the Council to vote.

Delegates supporting the proposed amendment argued for fairness, a widening of democracy, and an appreciation that 'health workers work seven days a week', and 'don't have time off for trade union activities'. Delegates opposing the amendment argued that postal ballots 'don't improve democracy' and that it was more important 'to address how we can get people to meetings', since attendance at Regional Council was the important factor in democracy. The vote to move to a postal ballot was lost. Approximately one third were for the motion, and two-

thirds were against, which probably equated to a health - local government split. Although the vast majority of health care workers are women, at no time was the participation of women per se, raised an issue. Occupation was seen as a key determinant of whether delegates could attend.

IMPORTANCE OF MULTI-REPRESENTATIVE CONSTITUENCIES

The discussion about the sector committees illustrated that multi-representative constituencies are an essential element of proportionality. Its importance is reiterated in the example of the National Standing Orders Committee of the National Delegate Conference (NDC) and a Branch Executive Committee.

National Standing Orders Committee (for NDC): The National Standing Orders Committee is responsible for determining the order in which the business of the National Delegate Conference should be conducted. This responsibility includes deciding whether motions have been submitted to the NDC in accordance with the rule book. Any motions which do not comply are rejected. Since the NDC is the sovereign decision making body in the union, this committee plays an extremely important role in the union. The rule book states that the Standing Orders Committee should consist of a single representative from each of the thirteen regions and three members of the National Executive Council. Although the rule book provided a framework to ensure that the first Standing Orders Committee consisted of representatives from all three former partner unions, nothing was mentioned about ensuring proportionality or fair representation. The Regional Council elect their representatives in isolation of each other and only four regions elected women to the 1994 Committee. To redress the balance, two of the three NEC members of the committee were women. This meant that women comprised 38% of the committee. By the third NDC, five of the thirteen regional posts were filled by women, and two of the three NEC seats were filled by women. This meant that 44% of the committee were women. Thus a small improvement has been

achieved, but women were still under-represented on one of the most important committees in the union.

The union has tried to address this issue (which also applies to the standing orders committees of national service groups). However, regions are reluctant to give up their autonomy in choosing their own representative. But, so long as there is only one post available from each region, proportionality cannot be assured. Making this a multi-representative post would help, as would making it a mandatory job-share post, or arranging the rotation of the post between men and women over a period of time.

Branch Executive Committee: The Branch provides a different set of challenges for those wishing to make positive attempts at building proportionality and fair representation. Whereas all seats on service group and regional committees hold the same responsibilities, the posts on the Branch Executive Committee all have discrete roles (e.g. Secretary, Chair, Treasurer, Welfare Officer, Equality Officer) and members have preferences, and different abilities to do certain things. Furthermore, these are all single-representative constituencies. There is only one of each post. Whilst this has implications for proportionality, in the context of merger between former partner union branches, it has particular implications for fair representation. A UNISON local government Branch will consist of at least two former partner union branches (NALGO and NUPE) and very often it will consist of more. Indeed one City based local government branch required the merger of eight former branches.

During the course of my research I learnt about one local government Branch which attempted to meet these challenges. The Branch constitution endeavoured to take account of the gender proportions (approximately 50:50), the proportion of white and black members (approximately 50:50) and manual and non-manual members. The constitution came under strain in the conduct of the elections. After the Branch Secretary and Chair had been elected, and members had been elected in unopposed elections, a number of the fair representative requirements of the constitution had been met (e.g. the requisite number of non-manual staff

had been elected). In order to keep to the constitution, members of these sufficiently represented groups were 'selected out' of the remaining elections. The justification being that had they been elected the result would have been against proportionality or fair representation. The elected committee consisted of:

two white women) four of whom
three black women) were manual and
five white men) six were non-manual

Whilst this may appear to be a committee which has achieved proportionality and fair representation, it does not include any black men. Few black men stood for election, but one who did was 'selected out' because the quota of manual to non-manual members had been reached and his election would have resulted in a disproportionate number of non-manual members on the committee.

The Black Workers Group in this branch was very unhappy with this result and made an official complaint to the Regional Committee alleging that the elections were discriminatory and demanding an investigation and re-election. These discussions raised two inter-related issues: (i) the tension of implementing both proportionality and fair representation on a small committee with single representative constituencies and (ii) the need for high levels of participation at a local level.

Reference was made above to the manner in which fair representation is being pursued through women's seats, and this can be illustrated using this Branch. Proportionality was achieved in the first election, but the representation of black members and manual and non-manual members was not distributed across both men and women. Of the five women elected to the committee, three women were black and two were white. Within the Branch it seems that the absence of black men on the committee was blamed on proportionality. The Branch Secretary asked whether 'gender outweighed skin colour, and whether 'white women

or black men should take precedence'. These are interesting comments given that none of the men on the committee were black. For fair representation to become a reality on small committees, both women and men need to be as diverse as possible in their identities. This requirement leads us to the next issue - that of increased participation. A diverse candidature across all committee seats requires levels of participation from considerable numbers of members. The greater the diversity of members standing for election, the more chance there is of achieving diversity in representation. Reference has already been made to Branch activists 'looking for women', and 'everyone having a hole for a low paid women on their slate'. Whilst some commentators might dislike what they see as a bureaucratic way of increasing representation from different groups, the rule book commitments do seem to provide a legitimate route through which members can push themselves, or be pulled, into representative positions. Whilst this attempt to implement proportionality and fair representation created much bad feeling in the Branch, it did encourage a lot of black members to become shop stewards and become actively involved in the union. Most of these black members were young women, however, so this does not necessarily alleviate tensions surrounding the absence of black men on the committee (unless they are content for women to represent them as a group). The Branch Secretary also noted how a white male manual worker had encouraged a black female manual worker so that they could stand on a job-share ticket for the post of Branch Secretary. Whilst this was an innovative way forward, the Branch Secretary echoed comments made earlier and noted the dangers of patronage turning into manipulation in the absence of experience and ability.

Whilst this particular example confirms the importance of multi-representative constituencies to proportionality and fair representation, it says just as much about the importance of participation - particularly at a local level. It provides a vivid illustration of the need to encourage considerable numbers of local activists before proportionality and fair representation become a reality. In the meantime, however, the Branch Secretary notes that they are pleased 'if there are *any* local activists'.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter has shown that proportionality can visibly address women's interests. The identification of women as a distinct group of members has enabled women's systematic inclusion within UNISON and some dramatic increases in women's access to decision making arena. Systematic inclusion has replaced the systematic exclusion of women which was discussed in the literature. By creating a legitimate space for women, proportionality encourages a 'push and pull' effect on women's participation in representative structures. In a union in which women are the majority, proportionality means the exclusion of men in proportion to their size of membership. In the past, without this restriction, the greater propensity of men to put themselves forward for representative positions led to more men being elected to lay positions. With men's activity being restricted, members are looking for women in order that proportionality can be achieved. This could be referred to as the 'push' effect, and mirrors men being chosen for representative positions, to the exclusion of women, in earlier studies. This chapter has also included examples of women being pulled into the union by putting themselves forward for representative positions for the first time. Again, the restriction on men's activity and the creation of legitimate spaces for women has created an environment which is more likely to encourage women to consider such activity. In these ways, it can be said that the 'rules of the game' have been changed.

It is of interest that the rules of the game have been changed using the original rules and institutions. Cockburn (1991) argued that committee structures and rule books were used against women's participation in unions. In this study, women's participation has been facilitated by the same structures. The implementation of proportionality has been facilitated by clear commitments to its implementation in the rule book. The importance of the unequivocal commitment in the rule book can be seen when contrasting the implementation of proportionality with fair representation. Proportionality contains some uncompromising commitments to women. Fair representation is a much wider almost unfocused commitment

which is difficult to implement. Whilst fair representation makes commitments to a number of principles, this chapter has shown that its intention and definition is so wide that it can be more easily overlooked and dismissed as 'unworkable'. Furthermore, whilst its worthy attempt to catch all the dimensions of its membership provides scope for different parties to use it as justification for their greater representation, its lack of clarity provides space for its resistance from a number of sources. Thus fair representation is more likely to benefit those that have the most power to fight for its implementation. In contrast, the definition of proportionality provides women, as one identified membership group, immediate and unequivocal access to decision making arena. The rule book and committee structures have been used to organise women into the union rather than out of the union. In this way it could be argued that elements of the original institutions remain but are used in a different way to reverse the mobilisation of bias against the election of women.

The expectations of proportionality and fair representation can be realised but this chapter has shown the multitude of social processes which determine the final outcome. These social processes have operated in two time periods. First, the constitutions themselves have been informed by the values and beliefs of members and officers, men and women. Secondly, they have been realised through the responses of members and officers, some of whom have worked together in groups, some of whom respond as individuals. In particular this chapter has illustrated the manner in which the interests and identities of women interact and produce a number of tensions and contradictions. Some women are keen for more women to be elected, but do not expect elected women to speak on women's concerns. Some women believe in increasing women's representation but only stand for women's seats. Some women do not believe that women should be identified for the purposes of representation, but are willing to use the system to get elected. Proportionality identifies women as members of a group and yet, as this chapter has shown, women act as individuals and as members of sub-groups which cut across gender. This in itself should not be a surprise but raises questions about the nature of the relationship between women's interests and women's concerns. It also focuses attention on the potential for links between women in mainstream committees

and those in women-only groups. The next two chapters focus on the manner in which women have created a separate space for themselves within UNISON and the extent to which this supports women's access to decision making arena.

CHAPTER 6:

CREATING A SEPARATE SPACE IN REGION 1: CHALLENGING THE MALE STANDARD

INTRODUCTION

The literature suggests that the structure and practice of women's self-organisation enables women to discuss their concerns and determine their own position on issues which bear on them. However, relatively little is known about the operation of women-only structures in trade unions in which women are systematically included into representative democracy. Whilst Cockburn makes a distinction between strategies which identify women as members of a sex category and those that identify them as members of an oppressed social group, she argues they are not alternative strategies but 'should be pursued in tandem' (1995:105). However, whilst these strategies could be complementary and provide the link between women's interests and women's concerns, it is just as likely that they could be contradictory. Why should the two strategies necessarily be linked? Reference has already been made to the manner in which interests and identities cut across each other in mainstream committees, perhaps these tensions will emerge in self-organised groups or between mainstream and women-only structures? These issues were explored through the study of two women-only structures at regional level. Both provided a very different picture of the linkages between mainstream and women-only structures. Region 1 created structures which emphasised its difference and separateness. Region 2 created structures which emphasised its desire for close links with mainstream committees. The findings of each study are contained in a separate chapter. This chapter discusses the women-only structure in Region 1. It illustrates how women's self-organisation challenges the male model of trade union democracy but does so from sidelines.

AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF SELF-ORGANISED GROUPS

Whilst only brief reference is given to the make-up of regional and national self-organised groups in the rule book, the rule book does note that the NEC is to provide guidelines for the operation of self-organised groups. This suggests a degree of 'top-down' prescription, rather than the organic 'bottom-up' approach associated with self-organisation, and questions the extent to which self-organised groups have the opportunity to create an effective separate space for women. The guidelines were developed by the Equal Opportunities Panel of the NEC through consultation with the self-organised groups. A preliminary draft of the guidelines was very detailed and contained a number of caveats to ensure that the guidelines were appropriate to individual branches. Although there is an appreciation that the development of guidelines goes against the theory of self-organisation, the Women's Officer noted that their intention was to set out the rights and responsibilities of the parties involved. For example, the rule book notes that self-organised groups should have 'access to adequate and agreed funding and other resources' and it was intended that the guidelines would try to identify 'adequate' funding through the specification of a minimum number of meetings to be resourced. However, whilst this guideline might be seen as an advantage for self-organised groups, it could be argued that another guideline, the requirement for each self-organised group to appoint a secretary and a chair, conflicts with the sentiment of another rule which states that members should be able to:

'work within a flexible structure to build confidence and encourage participation and provide opportunities for the fuller involvement of disadvantaged members'.

This desire to dictate structures for self-organised groups is a reflection of the tension between the desire for non-hierarchical structures, and a need for accountability (Phillips 1991:p134). This tension arguably underlines another guideline for self-organised groups: that members attending self-organised conferences have to be 'from a branch self-organised group'. Whilst this might appear reasonable to those thinking in traditional terms of union accountability, this is seen as unreasonable by many involved in women's self-organisation. First, this clause

does not take account of the relatively few self-organised groups operating at branch level and therefore could preclude the attendance of a number of women. Secondly, this guideline determines the activity of a member wishing to become involved in self-organisation. It prescribes the member's prior involvement in their branch, and again arguably conflicts with the notion of self-organisation. So, for example, it might constrain a member who (for whatever reason) prefers to become involved in self-organisation at a regional level, rather than at branch level. Indeed, the expectations of self-organised members at branch level is a recurrent theme within these next three chapters.

Although they were called 'guidelines', a member of the National Women's Committee expressed her fear that the extent to which they should be followed would be open to different interpretations, and that their existence may be taken to infer that any organisation contradicting them might be unconstitutional. This member felt strongly that there was no flexibility in the guidelines and that the language in which they were written was 'incomprehensible'. Such sentiments had been voiced by a number of women and, at the time of my research, the guidelines had been returned to the NEC Panel to be re-written.

Notwithstanding the existence of the above guidelines, self-organised groups do have more autonomy to develop their own constitutions within UNISON. At a national level, whilst the numerical make-up of the National Women's Committee is set down in the rule book, the manner in which women are elected to this body is not prescribed by the rule book. This has meant that each region has determined its own way of electing women to these national seats. This distinguishes it from the NEC, and national service groups, which have fixed rules about the election of members. Likewise, whilst the rule book prescribes that each regional self-organised group should consist of 'representatives of each relevant group at branch level', and women members of the Regional Committee, it does not prescribe the size of the group and the manner in which women are to be elected. This contrasts with the prescriptions for the mainstream Regional Committee, which determine the number of seats, and voting constituency. Thus, in theory, regional self-organised groups have a certain amount of

autonomy to create a separate space, and develop their own constitutions. The manner in which this exists in Region 1 is discussed below.

CREATING A SEPARATE SPACE IN REGION 1

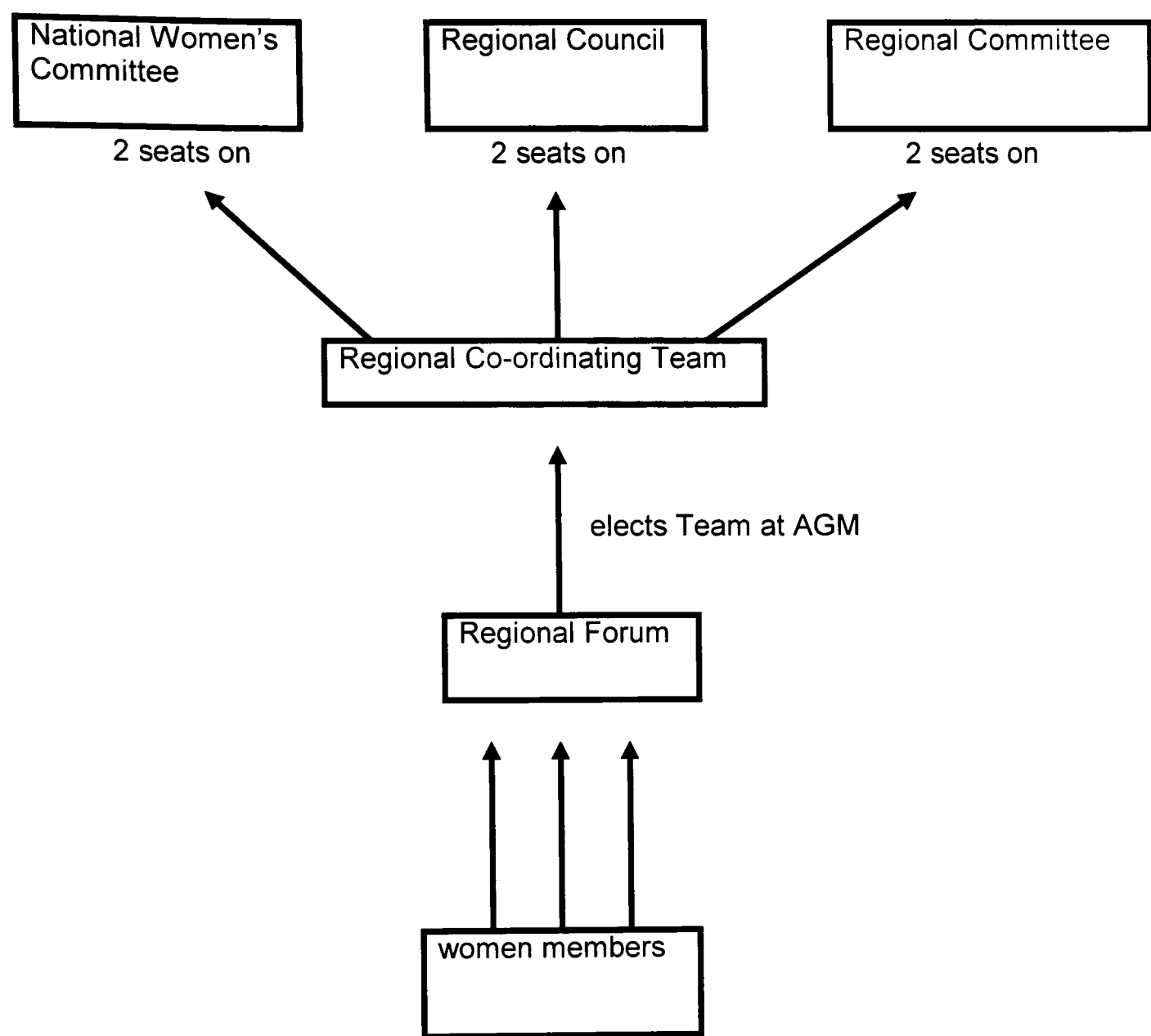
The first point to make is that the interim mainstream Regional Committee developed guidelines for all self-organised groups to work within. This committee established a working group on self-organised groups and developed a Charter for self-organised groups in the region. These guidelines reiterated some of the rule book principles on self-organisation, and in this respect did not impose anything new on self-organised groups. Neither did the charter set out any expectations of the constitutions of the self-organised structures. However, the guidelines did contain expectations which the Regional Committee had of self-organised groups in relation to organisational and operational issues. Examples are the requirement for groups to set clear aims and objectives and establish a programme of meetings and events. The justification for such a centralised approach to self-organisation in the region was the need to 'achieve self-organisation within UNISON', as opposed to the 'continuation of self-organisation within the former partner unions'. This was seen as a danger, given that self-organisation in the former partner unions was at different stages of development. As we will see later, the different experiences of self-organisation within the former partner unions was seen as an important factor in its development within UNISON. However, despite these justifications, it is interesting to see how the mainstream committee sought to determine the operations of self-organised groups, and this involvement reappears later, in a different form, in the development of self-organisation in Region 2.

The next point to highlight relates to the endeavours to include women across the region in the development of the constitution. Initial proposals for women's self-organisation were developed by an interim Regional Women's group, which consisted of four women from each former partner union. These proposals were circulated to women across the region, for comment, through the Women's Newsletter. This Newsletter is to be discussed in more detail later in this

chapter, but for now, it is worth noting that it is distributed by direct mail to women contacts across the region, as well as being distributed in bulk to all branches for their women members. The proposals were amended in accordance with feedback from members and discussed at the 1994 Women's Regional Forum, where a number of further amendments were proposed and discussed. It is to be noted that the constitution evolved over time and more amendments were proposed, and agreed, at the 1995 Women's Regional Forum.

The purpose of self-organisation in Region 1 is widely focused and it is useful to analyse the aims and objectives using Cockburn's framework of form and content. The first point to make is that the aims relate to the mainstream, as well as to the women's-only space. In terms of access to women's-only organisation, the aim is to encourage *all* women to come forward and participate in regional women's events and education. In relation to the content, it is the express intention that the work of self-organisation should be focused on the concerns and needs of women. In determining the relationship between women's self-organisation and the mainstream, the objectives highlight the desire for women's self-organisation to influence the work of various mainstream Regional Committees and to 'get issues of concern to women onto the agenda at regional level'. The women's structure in this region is based on two elements: a Regional Women's Forum, and Regional Women's Co-ordinating Team (see Figure 6.1). The next section examines the structures which enable all women in the region to gain access to women's self-organisation, either through the Forum, Co-ordinating Team, or Newsletter.

Figure 6.1: Women-only Structures and Links to Mainstream in Region 1



INCLUSIVITY OF THE FORUM AND CO-ORDINATING TEAM

The Regional Women's Forum is intended to be a large body of members (approximately 150 women) who determine priorities and policies for the region, and in this respect it is similar to the mainstream Regional Council. However, one fundamental difference occurs which reflects the desire to support the inclusivity of women's organisation. The Forum is open to any women: women may attend because they wish to, or because they have been nominated by their branch to attend. This is different to the Regional Council to which, it may be remembered, attendance is only achievable through branch nomination.

A profile of attendance was developed at the first Forum in 1994. The Forum attracted a lot of interest and 97 women registered to attend the Forum in 1994. Of the 60 who attended on the day, 55% completed an audit form. In the main, they indicate that a relatively wide range of women attended the Forum: although of those responding, only one could be defined as 'low paid' according to UNISON's criteria, and a large proportion of women are from Local Government. In view of the decision to encourage all women to attend regardless of their activity within the union, it is interesting to note that 20% said they were inactive in the branch.

In terms of the representativeness of the women organising the Forum and speaking from the 'platform', early in the proceedings, the interim Women's group was asked why there were no black women 'on the panel', and the union was accused of not representing black people fairly. As we shall see later, the issue of the visibility of black women in the organisation of women-only events and education is an important one for black women members.

Like the Regional Council, the Regional Women's Forum is responsible for indirectly electing members to a 'management committee' (i.e. the Women's Co-ordinating Team) at its AGM. However, in contrast to candidates for the Regional Committee who can only stand for election if they are nominated by a branch, the constitution for the Women's Co-ordinating Team allows for candidates to volunteer themselves for the posts without nomination. This practice reiterates their expressed intention that members should be able to determine their own activity within self-organised groups. Notwithstanding this element of disconnection from branches, there was a need to comply with the rule book prescription that the regional group should 'consist of 'representatives of each relevant group at branch level'. The proposal was that this would be achieved through the establishment of service group seats, and seats for members of other self-organised groups. However, discussions at the 1994 Forum raised the tension between operating a radical strategy based on volunteering for positions and the desire for accountability, and representation. The Forum was told that women would not be

representatives of the service groups, but rather would be 'representative women'. In fact the interim Regional Women's Group wanted the relationship between representative and represented to be even more flexible - not to avoid accountability, but to widen the 'net which women came from'. The interim Women's Group saw the requirement to nominate from branches as providing a potential block to women's participation where there was a lack of communication within the branch. They proposed that volunteers should be invited to attend, as well as branch nominees.

Juxtaposed against this discussion of Co-ordinating Team members being 'representative women' with no formal connections with branches, was the question of whether representatives of the Co-ordinating Team could be co-opted onto the regional service groups. Being nominated by one's branch gives members a formal link with the branch membership. Whilst this is not a link of absolute accountability, as will be seen in later chapters, members nominated from branches are perceived in a totally different way to those who volunteer and are without branch nomination. However, despite this different perspective on inclusivity and accountability, the constitution was accepted with no amendment.

WOMEN'S NEWSLETTER

The Women's Newsletter provides another opportunity for women to 'access' women's self-organisation in Region 1. The Newsletter is produced 4 times a year and, at the time of my research, 7500 were being printed. Copies are bulk mailed to branches, with a sizeable number (approximately 500) also being direct mailed to individual women. The newsletter is seen as one way of getting information about women's events and women's concerns past 'gatekeepers' at branch level. It provides a unique way of including women in debates, and allows direct advertisement of such events as the National Women's Conference, and Regional Women's meetings, which women might not otherwise receive. In this way, it could be argued that it provides another source of 'participation' for women.

The response to the distribution of the Newsletter within the region is interesting to note, and led the Chair of the Team to reflect that the women had [almost] become victims of their own success. Originally monies for the Newsletter came from the publicity budget, but a decision was made that the Newsletter had to be resourced from the women's budget. In addition, some people were having thoughts about having a regional newsletter (distribution 3 times each year), with a 1-4 page insert for women. The Co-ordinating Team felt they should fight for the continuation of a separate newsletter, and a member of the Team put this point forward at the Region in their capacity as a member of the Publicity Sub-committee. When the matter was raised at Regional Committee, women were able to organise around the issue and the decision about the expenses for the Newsletter was resolved in the women's favour. The importance of having a separate Women's Newsletter gets to the key rationale for having a separate space for women in the first place. The newsletter represents a different way of communicating with members and specifically highlights women's issues. Women's Officers contrasted such newsletters with general material being distributed within the union to members which was called 'dry' and 'inaccessible'. They argued that the material should be more feminist and should 'make women angry'. The Women's Officer in Region 1 wanted her article on women and Compulsory Competitive Tendering to make women in white collar jobs realise that 'it could be them next'. If this Newsletter had become a supplement in the general regional newsletter which was being proposed, the women might have lost the control they had over distribution; and just as important, they may have lost the ability to write copy that made women angry.

INCLUSIVITY OF PARTICIPATION: FORUM

Like the Regional Council, the Regional Women's Forum plans to meet four times a year, but in contrast, whilst all Council meetings are to the same format, it is proposed that one forum be a motion-based meeting and the others be a mixture of styles (including workshop based meetings). In an effort to move the venue around the region, the 1994 and 1995 Forum were

in different geographical locations. The constitution notes that the Forum should include opportunities to:-

- 'share and exchange information
- develop skills
- set the agenda for women's self-organisation
- influence the work of service conditions and other regional committees
- influence the work of the National Women's Committee
- to enable women to network and integrate experienced and new members
- **and** should include a social or fun element. It is possible to enjoy trade union activity!' (original emphasis)

Perhaps it is not surprising that the latter objective has not yet entered the standing orders of the Regional Council.

One of the stated aims of the group was to 'create an open and supportive environment, without discrimination or intimidation, that is a comfortable atmosphere in which women can develop and learn'. A letter sent to delegates attending the first Forum illustrates the intention to provide a different meeting style to that at the Regional Council:

'Please read through it [proposals for women's organisation] and if you have any suggestions for changes and/or questions about them then please let me know what they are by Friday, 10th September. There will be an opportunity to ask questions at the event but some women may feel nervous about doing so in front of a large group and would rather have someone put questions on their behalf. I have provided a form on which you can write your questions or put your point, proposal'

This provision certainly goes against the norm of earning the right to say something through standing up in front of people and this facility was used by one member who formally proposed a motion to which she chose not to speak. I investigated women's views of the Forum and their feelings about the discussion of the proposals for self-organisation which was intended to be relaxed and open. None of the 16 women who responded to my questionnaire found the atmosphere discouraged them from taking part in the debate. 13 of the women

found it interesting and 8 agreed that it had helped them understand more about self-organisation, and more about the way unions debate issues. Only one respondent found it confusing, but she also noted that she found it interesting and that it helped her understand how union debate matters. A number of questionnaire respondents made these additional comments:-

'although I didn't stand up and speak I would have liked to take a more active part - NERVES!'

'It made me feel like getting up to speak (maybe next time I'll have the courage)'

'the atmosphere was very comfortable and people were approachable'

'everyone was friendly, when talking to others they listen to what you have to say'

'given me confidence being amongst women who had also suffered male oppression during their lives'

In a later conversation the Chair of the Forum noted that, in her opinion, the meeting had gone 'much better' after Betty had come to the microphone to declare that:

'other nominees [for the Regional Co-ordinating Team] have lots of experience. Experience discriminates and I feel that I could not compete. I would therefore like to withdraw my nomination'

I interviewed Betty on a subsequent occasion, and her experience illustrated the inclusivity of women's organisation in this region. Betty's interest in the Forum had arisen from her contact with the Women's Officer on a women-only course (Women in the Union), and had been underpinned by references in the Women's Newsletter. It had not derived from any activity at her own branch. She was under the impression that there was nothing to do at her own workplace due to the existence of a shop steward within her department. Indeed, she noted that she only gets involved in the Branch when the shop steward is ill.

After Betty had offered to withdraw her nomination for the Co-ordinating Team, there were many expressions of support from Forum attendees, and members of the interim Women's group. A number of them asked her not to stand down, saying that it was important for non-

experienced women to come forward. After the candidate's expression of her perceived lack of experience, a number of women went to the microphone to discuss their personal feelings about being at the Forum. They said that this was the 'first time that they had spoken from a microphone', that 'they were nervous, but that they were glad they had come', and were 'excited about the experience'.

However, the overall outcome illustrates the tension between providing an environment which is friendly and relaxed, and enabling policy to be developed in a formal manner. Whilst a number of women felt able to speak for the first time, it is also to be noted that from this point, despite the proposals for self-organisation being the main issue under debate, they were not discussed again. And, whilst a different method was used for collecting proposals at the Forum and encouraging questions and facilitating discussions, it was only the pre-prepared motions which had any chance of making any formal impact on the women's constitution. So, whilst someone might ask a question, they would not have been able to move forward with their views, unless they were able to develop a motion on the spot. Thus, although women had the opportunity to discuss and vote on the constitution at the Forum, the Forum did not offer them the opportunity to change the constitution beyond what had already been formally proposed.

This tension was articulated at the 1995 Women's Forum, when it was possible to see the reality of Phillips' third paradox of participation. This paradox relates to the possibility that a move away from formal hierarchies and structures of decision making can lead to a lack of accountability, and denies the use, and potential abuse, of power outside traditional structures. Towards the end of the 1995 Forum, the Treasurer of the Women's Co-ordinating Team proposed that the Team spend some of their surplus money on a lesbian helpline in the region. After a short discussion about the helpline, a vote was taken and the proposal was agreed by the Forum. After the motion had been carried, a member noted that they had been told at the black women members' caucus meeting earlier in the day, that the budget for the regional Black Members Group was £2000. Given that the £500 which had just been donated

to the helpline represented a quarter of that budget, the member asked whether there were any other monies which the black members group could access. This question provoked a lively debate between a number of participants and the organisers of the event. A black woman summed up the debate by noting that there are,

'a lot of us here for the first time, and I want to back my colleague. We've just discovered something here. I did feel a little intimidated and did wonder whether we had missed something about why we're all here'.

These responses echo the indefensible position alluded to by Phillips, 'where the acquiescence of the silent majority stems from the fear of appearing foolish or the fear of giving offence' (p133). The Chair of the Forum confirmed that it was okay for such questions to be raised at the Forum, noting that the Forum was a learning process for everybody - not just the newly active. She noted that it was the first time that they had had a formal structure, and that just listening was a learning process in itself. She asked for people not to be afraid to ask questions. After the Forum had ended, the member who had proposed that money be given to the lesbian helpline walked over to the black women who had been raising the questions. This suggests that the debate, which had at times felt uncomfortable, may have led to new alliances amongst the women. It also illustrated that whilst newly active women were reluctant to voice their opinions at an early stage (i.e. at the time that the motion was discussed), they did at least feel able to voice their concerns at some stage during the proceedings, which led to an open, inclusive and honest debate.

INCLUSIVITY OF PARTICIPATION: CO-ORDINATING TEAM

Comments were made earlier about the desire to make the Co-ordinating Team as accessible as possible, and certainly the location of the meetings was rotated in order to give members an opportunity to attend as many of the Forum as possible. However, despite this, during the period of my research, attendance at the Co-ordinating Team was limited. The low levels of attendance raised two related issues of internal democracy: the authority of decision-making by the very small number of members attending the Team; and the contribution of the Women's Officer. The

absence of a consistent and stable attendance meant that much of the work of the women's organisation fell to the Women's Officer in this Region. For example, during the period of my research, the Women's Officer had been producing much of the Newsletter, and whilst it was the intention that an Editorial Team will take over this responsibility in time, the first meeting of the substantive Co-ordinating Team did not produce any nominations or volunteers for the Editorial Team. One member of the Co-ordinating Team was particularly concerned about the manner in which the Team was relying on the Women's Officer, and argued that,

'the Women's Officer has been given too much power, but if she didn't things just wouldn't get done'

Although the Team meetings were geographically rotated to enable more women to attend, women still found it difficult to attend because of work, and sometimes other union commitments. This last reason is worth considering for a moment, and provides a context within which we will discuss the integration of a newly active union member into the Team. A number of the women on the Team were active members of branch, regional or national committees. Whilst this was obviously useful at times for networking across different committees, my belief is that this was not ultimately useful to the organisation of women across the region, since the women were often occupied with other union activity.

Another comment to make about the inclusivity of participation within the Co-ordinating Team relates to Betty, who originally wished to discontinue her nomination to the Team, because of her lack of experience. At the time of our interview, Betty had attended one meeting. She noted that she was the only newcomer to the Team and that everyone else has been previously active. She said there were no other new faces on the Team and she felt that no-one else felt as isolated as her. She discussed her first meeting and noted that one item in particular had been totally confusing for her. She noted that when she said she did not understand, no-one volunteered to go back and explain the issue. In particular, Betty noted that it was difficult to understand the purpose of the Regional Council and Regional Committees and she was, therefore, effectively disenfranchised from electing any members of the Women's Committee to these other

committees. A few minutes after Betty had raised her query, the member representing the Disabled Self-organised Group reminded the Team that Betty's confusion had not been resolved. It was noted at this junction that it was 'important that new members needed to bring experienced members down to earth'. The Women's Officer noted that she could give Betty that support, for example, by taking women as observers to Council meetings and Committees - and organising skills based training. In her interview, Betty anticipated that issues would become clearer. She found one or two women intimidating because they 'know so much', but she will not ask them to clarify matters as she feels they should tell her without asking.

At a local level, Betty has not spoken about her involvement in the women's Team but she has received encouragement from her shop steward. At the time of our interview, she said she had not told her work colleagues about the Team because she did not feel that she knew what its role was. Notwithstanding these early views, a year later Betty stood for one of the seats on the National Women's Committee at the second Regional Women's Forum (1995). Her personal text is particularly interesting and reads as follows:-

'I am Betty. I am a 35 year old black woman. I have been on the Regional Women's Co-ordinating Team for about a year. At first I was very reluctant, but with the help and support from the other members, I now feel very confident. With the knowledge I have gained I would like to be given a chance to take some of what I have learned to the National Women's Committee'

Seven candidates stood for two seats on the National Women's Committee, and Betty won one of these. Thus, within one year, Betty had developed from being a reluctant member of the Team to being elected to the National Women's Committee. So, in this respect, the women's structures did create a comfortable atmosphere 'in which women can develop and learn'.

RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

Research in this region provided evidence of both resistance and accommodation with regard to self-organisation. One of the workshops at the 1994 Forum enabled women to talk about the difficulties they encountered in setting up women's groups at branch level. In one Branch it took 18 months to arrange the budget for a women's self-organised group. One Branch Secretary was reported to have said 'he would organise a women's group if it were necessary'. Action in another branch was negated by men on the Branch Committee, who were held responsible for the manner in which 'information trickles down to women, making it fail. This is deliberate and it puts women off.' A number of women noted that men kept raising the question 'when are we having a men's group?'

The Women's Officer wanted to focus the work of the Co-ordinating Team on branch activity, noting that 'branch based women are key to effective women's organisation'. In practice, the encouragement of women's activity at branch level appeared to rely heavily on the efforts of the Women's Officer and work by members of the Team in their own branches. The Women's Officer noted the tensions involved in personally encouraging the setting up of self-organised groups at a branch level. In one instance, an interested group of women had asked her to talk to them about setting up their own self-organised group. However, both the employed officer who covered the Branch, and the Branch Secretary, were offended by this approach because they felt that it was interference in their 'patch'. The Branch Secretary contacted the Head Office to complain that the original approach to the Women's Officer, and her subsequent action, should have been directed through the 'official channels'. The Women's Officer felt that the reaction of the Officer and Branch Secretary was primarily a gender issue, and that had either been a woman, they would not have felt so 'precious' about their areas of responsibility.

One member of the Co-ordinating Team had organised several women's self-organised groups at her Branch during work time which had been well attended. Approximately 20 and

30 members had attended each meeting, which amounted to one hour per month. However, managers in the organisation were not happy with this arrangement and asked the Senior Manager to stop the meetings being held during work time. The woman organising the meetings noted that the Senior Manager had been 'all for the meetings', but complied with the request. When the meetings were organised outside of worktime, few women were interested in attending. The need to fulfill domestic commitments at lunchhour; and at the end of the day provided a rationale for some reluctance, as did the difficulty of attendance for those on different shift patterns and part-time workers. This member was obviously disappointed by the action which had been taken to curtail the use of work time and noted that the managers who had raised the queries were all members of the same UNISON branch.

However, these instances are counter-balanced with the accommodation and active support of self-organisation. The (female) Head of Local Government in Region 1 involved the Women's Officer in a number of issues. She had given her an open invitation to the Officers' meetings within the Local Government service group, and had asked her to run seminars for women on Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value, and Women and CCT. The Women's Officer commented that her close involvement with this service group would facilitate the inclusion of Branch Equality Officers in the seminars in CCT. The importance of their inclusion relates to the fact that key negotiators were always invited to such seminars, but Equality Officers were not, and their attendance might provide women wider access to CCT discussions than might otherwise have been the case. The Women's Officer had sent a memo to the Regional Management Team regarding the definition of her role, following which the Regional Secretary had written to all Heads of Service Groups noting that they should involve her in their business. The Women's Officer compared the response she had received from the (female) Head of the Regional Local Government Group with the lack of interest shown by the (male) Head of the Regional Health Care Group.

The Women's Officer told me of a number of ways in which she had become involved in branch activity. In a County Council, she had pursued the possibility of a partnership between

the employer (a Direct Service Organisation) and UNISON, whereby the employer would provide money for tutors and paid leave for the UNISON Return to Learn course. In another County Council, the Women's Officer had been involved in developing an action plan for fair representation and proportionality. On at least two occasions, she had become involved when members of the union had been harassed at work. Following one of the cases in a District Council, she had assisted in the development of a harassment policy and the proposed appointment of harassment advisors. In another Local Authority, a number of women had been traumatised by the activities of a manager who had been bullying and harassing them. Working with a member of the Co-ordinating Team, the Women's Officer had developed a Personal Development course and used it to re-build the women's confidence. The initiative had been jointly funded by the branch and employer and the member of the Co-ordinating Team concerned noted that it was 'ground-breaking stuff'. However, whilst this had obviously provided much needed support for the women, it had not been a means of increasing the number of women activists within the Branch. The member involved noted that they were struggling to get self-organisation going in the Branch and that it was only the same few women who attended the meetings. She, herself, had started a few initiatives with the Equal Opportunities officers, such as subscribing to Everywoman, and investigating the purchase of personal alarms for all members, but what she really wanted to see was a working committee.

Another member of the Co-ordinating Team told me how she had gone through all the procedures to get her branch women's group up and running, but that the group folded when she had left the post of Branch Women's Officer. She noted that it often meant that too much work was falling on too few people. They did have an action plan but the lack of time-off facilities, and difficulty of arranging anything in the evening meant that even she was reluctant to attend any additional meetings. However, she did indicate that a successful meeting that had been organised in the lunch-time about pensions which had been attended by 22 members, 2 of whom were men.

These experiences illustrate the difficulty of finding time and motivating women to develop self-organised groups at Branch level. In the words of one member, 'there is a lot of effort for little outcome'. The question of time was deemed to be very important and a member noted that there is a lot of pressure on women in the workplace *not* to take any more time off from the employer. It would seem that in the absence of facility time, the need for a more equitable division of labour within the home becomes even more important for facilitating women's increased participation and representation within UNISON.

It was also difficult to encourage women's activity at the National Women's Conference and a number of women attributed this to a lack of commitment within the union to women's self-organisation. In the opening address of the first National Women's Conference (1994), the Conference was described as,

'a planning conference - an opportunity to develop proposals for permanent structures which could build on the best from the three partner unions and which would enable and encourage maximum participation by women in the union'
(Address to Conference by Chair of National Women's Committee)

Each region was limited to sending 30 delegates to the Conference. A number of motions condemned both the limitation on the number of delegates and the use of workshops, and it is understood that these debates took up a considerable amount of Conference time. The general feeling was that the Women's Conference should be branch based and that the opposition to this was raised in terms of cost considerations, and questions as to where the money was coming from to pay for a larger conference. One delegate attracted a great deal of support when she noted that the £1million figure which had been mentioned as being too much, represented '£1 per women member'. After considerable debate, the 1994 National Women's Conference agreed that a future conference would be,

- branch delegated
- branch representation to be at least 50% of the branch's entitlement of delegates to Annual Conference; and at least one delegate per merged or unmerged branch

- motion-based and a policy making body

The outcome of all of these debates within UNISON was advice from the NEC that,

'because of National Delegate Conference decisions on budgets and subscription rates, the size and funding for the conference would be restricted' (National Women's Committee Annual Report 1994:p6)

In response, the National Women's Committee asked the NEC to at least agree to a grouping of branches, in line with arrangements for National Delegate Conference. It was estimated that this would provide a delegation of approximately 1000 women members. This was rejected by the NEC who argued that the funding could not exceed the sum allocated for the 1994 Conference, and therefore limited the delegation to the 1995 National Women's Conference to 500 women. The General Secretary sent out a letter to all Branch Secretaries advising them of the arrangements for the National Women's Conference. Branches were advised that each region was entitled to send one woman per 2000 women members in the region. Each branch with 2000 women members was entitled to one direct delegate. The number of branches meeting this criteria was then deducted from the total number of women entitled to go from the region to give the number of women who could attend as indirect delegates. Branches with less than 2000 women members were asked to nominate women for these indirect seats and 'if more nominations are received than there are seats, these branches will elect the delegates'. Whilst direct delegates were accountable to their branch, indirect delegates were accountable to the groups of branches in their region. To enable regions to calculate these figures, branches were asked to provide regions with the numbers of women, and low paid women in their branches. The reason for giving so much detail of this four page letter is to illustrate the challenge that this process posed for organisers trying to encourage women to participate in the Conference. Reference has already been made to Branch Secretaries who were suspected of being 'gatekeepers' of information about women's events. It is all too easy to imagine that the requirement to comply with the contents of this letter was an added incentive not to circulate the information about the National Women's

Conference. In sum, the formula proved to be most impractical, and after the Women's Officer had brought this to the attention of the Regional Committee, the Regional Convenor was instructed to write to the National Women's Committee to complain about the process. The letter expressed the concern of the Regional Committee about the 'over complicated and unworkable' formula and noted,

'the danger of proceeding along these lines would be that some women will end up feeling alienated and disillusioned by the process'

Trying to operate the formula took a lot of time at regional level, and arguably resulted in a lower numbers of regional delegates attending the Conference. I would argue that it also distracted an already over-burdened group of women at regional level from developing an agenda at national level. Another factor which constrained women's involvement in the National Women's Conference was that of childcare expenses. Although a crèche was provided at the National Women's Conference, a number of women noted that this precluded a number of women from claiming childcare expenses for children left at home. They argued that some women do not want to 'drag their children up to conference', and some schools do not approve of such action either because it means that the child is missing school. Because it was not possible to claim childcare expenses for attendance, one delegate from the region had been unable to attend the Conference. Another women said that she had left her children with a friend, noting that a single mother does not have a partner to look after them at night. It was apparent at a number of meetings I attended that considerable numbers of women felt 'let down' by the manner in which the union handled the whole issue of childcare needs. In response the women-only activists in Region 1 raised the issue of childcare needs at the mainstream Regional Committee and a letter expressing concern was sent from the Regional Committee to the national Finance Office.

Much of this chapter has dealt with the manner in which women in this region have been able to create their own space. Whilst perhaps this is inevitable given that the union was in its early years of development, it is necessary to look at outcomes as well as processes of

democracy. The literature suggests that women are more likely to identify their 'real' interests without the dominance of men. The next section looks at the concerns raised by women in women-only arena within Region 1 and how they were vocalised in the mainstream.

VOCALISING WOMEN'S CONCERNS IN THE MAINSTREAM

In addition to informing the agenda of self-organisation, it was intended that the Forum would 'influence the work of service conditions and other regional committees'. The Regional Women's Forum was described as a 'women only event organised by women for women' and provided opportunities for women to participate in a number of workshops. Topics at the 1994 and 1995 Forum were Pensions, Domestic Violence, Self-organisation, Sexual Harassment, Tackling work related stress, Personal Development, Women's Health at Work, Selling yourself at Interview, and Discrimination at Work. Participants indicated that the workshops were the most useful aspect of the day and noted that these topics were not regularly discussed in their own branches. A few examples are given below of the concerns raised by women in these workshops and how they were taken forward into the union.

Domestic Violence Workshop: Women attending this workshop felt very strongly that Domestic Violence should be a trade union issue:

'If trade unions are serious about women's issues they must assist women at work by having guidelines put in place which are adhered to'

'shop stewards should be given practical help as members should feel they can come to them for help as a problem at home can affect work'

'Policies such as redundancy policies often use points for sick leave, attitude to work, length of service etc. as criteria for selection and this could mean a woman who is suffering because of domestic violence could be selected for redundancy. We need to make sure such policies do not discriminate against women'

'people only seen as units of production - should make management aware of domestic violence'

The women in the workshop made a number of recommendations which showed their desire to make connections between the private and public spheres. During my research, a

Women's Committee in another UNISON Region produced a 12 page A5 booklet entitled 'Violence in the Home'. The Co-ordinating Team purchased 700 copies for distribution within Region 1. Although I was not aware during my research that this issue was discussed within mainstream committees at regional level, it was raised at the 1995 National Delegate Conference and this debate is discussed in Chapter 10.

Pensions Workshop: This workshop was available at both the 1994 and 1995 Forum, and the facilitator noted that the main concern amongst women taking part was lack of understandable information, both for their own personal needs and for dissemination to the members who approached them with queries. Four major issues were highlighted as important to women within UNISON:-

- discrimination in pension schemes
- equalisation of state pension age
- privatisation and pensions
- legal protection of pensions

As will be seen in the case study of women's organisation in region 2, pensions are of great concern to women, and the manner in which this issue is pursued within mainstream arena is discussed in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Discrimination at Work: This workshop enabled the particular concerns of black women to be raised. The women discussed different forms of discrimination and talked about how the union could help more. Suggestions from the attendees included:-

- highlighting incidents of discrimination
- taking people more seriously when they complain
- ongoing education and awareness of discrimination for activists and officers
- the union needing to be seen as trustworthy and confidential

- more black representatives, otherwise there is a feeling of isolation

This workshop was attended at the very end of the research period, so I am not aware of how it was taken forward, if at all, within this Region.

The Forum was a key feature of the women's activity within this Region, and the case study has illustrated how at least three of the Forum's objectives have been met (sharing and exchanging information; developing skills; enabling women to network and integrate experienced and new members). However, my attendance at the Women's Co-ordinating Team and a number of Regional Committee and Council meetings led me to suspect that few issues raised by the women were being aired in mainstream committees (bar those issues concerning self-organisation and childcare expenses). Towards the end of my research Tina, a key activist, spoke about her expectations, and experience, of being a member of the Women's Co-ordinating Team:

'I thought they would develop a women's agenda within the region that they would pursue within the trade union structures, and take on things in support of women. I don't personally think we have been very successful. ... I feel that no women's agenda has been developed.'

Tina noted that the members of the Team had been on a learning curve and needed time to develop and it is necessary to remember that at the time of my research the union was in the first throes of its new existence. However, I gained the impression from observations of the Team, regional committees, and a number of interviews, that the encouragement of new women within the region would not result in women's concerns being addressed in the mainstream, unless linkages were forged with women who were already active in the region.

Tina said she did not believe there was any feeling of women's unity at regional level.

'Women operate as individuals. Quite a lot of women involved at high levels don't see the relevance of women's organisation or women's solidarity. These women follow a gender-blind agenda - the gender aspect being of secondary importance'

Tina felt that women in the women-only structures had spent too long at Conference 'berating' themselves and discussing their irritation with UNISON head office. She thought there was a vital role for self-organisation but that it would disappear if it did not undertake that role, because there were plenty of critics who would feel justified in 'getting rid of it'. Tina did not think the critics were an identifiable group,

'They are spread throughout the union, although I do think they are predominantly men who feel threatened by empowered women. Active women don't see the need for self-organisation. Strong women who are involved in the trade union and say 'I have got on, I am okay', and don't recognise that not everyone has the same support'

For Tina, the important role of self-organisation was to provide a forum for educating women, and informing members (men and women) of women's needs,

'I don't see an alternative forum to educate and develop women. It rests on individuals. There are no recognised structures for achieving education or development for any group, apart from self-organised groups. The danger is that they are not doing enough and that members use self-organisation to protect themselves from the ravages of the masses instead of projecting themselves'

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The above comment may seem a pessimistic note on which to end what has been essentially a very optimistic commentary on women's self-organisation. The women's structure in this Region is challenging the 'male standard'. Mainstream structures are based on branch activism, but the women's structures encourage women to get involved in the union without stipulating that this involvement has to be at branch level. Mainstream structures require activists to be nominated by branches, but the women's structure has encouraged women to put themselves forward for activity, and has enabled them to bypass any potentially inhibiting procedures. The emphasis has been on attracting newly-active women into participating within the union, and this has been achieved through the Regional Forum, and Women's Newsletter. Through these forum, women have been able to identify their own interests and discuss issues that concern them as women and as women workers. In this respect self-

organisation is entirely compatible with a strategy which identifies women so as to facilitate their access to mainstream committees.

Looking at the forms and practice of women's collective organisation, we get a very positive impression of the extent to which self-organisation at regional level is re-shaping trade union democracy. However, if we looked at the outcome of women's regional organisation, we would get a different view of the extent to which democracy is being 're-shaped'. During the period of my research, few issues raised within the women's structures were being aired in mainstream committees. Furthermore, the relative weakness of the links between women in mainstream and women's structures (despite the participation of some women in both structures) suggests a difficulty in moving forward from supportive processes, to positive outcomes. Briskin makes a distinction between separate organising as a means to an end, and separate organising as an end in itself (1993). Colgan and Ledwith's (1996) research illustrates that women are generally dismissive of separate organising as an end in itself. Whilst self-organisation seems caught up with 'means' rather than 'ends', the danger is that it will be seen in a negative light by women in mainstream committees with whom relationships need to be made. Whilst self-organisation is perceived as 'protection rather than projection', the only long-term beneficiaries are likely to be members who are already active within mainstream committees. That is, whilst self-organisation in this region may be challenging the male standard, it is not challenging the status quo.

The work of Michels (1958), Bachrach and Baratz (1970), and Lukes (1975) illustrates the different ways in which power is used by individuals, and groups, to suppress the interests of others. Given that self-organisation in this region is not challenging the status-quo, it is worth thinking through why this might be. Using a two-dimensional view of power (Lukes 1974:19), it is possible to note a number of occasions when there has been overt resistance and obstruction to the development of women's structures within UNISON. At branch level, women noted the lack of support for their endeavours to set up women-only groups. At regional level, the issue of resourcing and circulating the Women's Newsletter was questioned

by members and paid-officers within the mainstream regional structures. At a national level, arrangements for the National Women's Conference were deemed women-unfriendly, and arguably diverted women's attention away from ends to means.

However, notwithstanding these obstacles, in general, there was not an abundance of overt resistance to women's structures in Region 1. That women are not challenging the status quo within Region 1 cannot easily be attributed to a mobilisation of bias against self-organisation. However, Luke's criticism of the two-dimensional view of power is that it ignores 'the crucial point that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place' (1974:p23). Are women in women's structures not challenging the status quo, because - despite self-organisation - they are still unaware of their 'real interests'? And if this applies to women from women's structures, does it also apply to women operating in mainstream structures? Why are women in mainstream committees *not* seeking links with the women-only structures? Is this inaction inherent to the use of both strategies within the same organisation? The next chapter, which contains a case study of women's organisation in Region 2, indicates a number of contrasts between the two regions and provides some insight into these issues.

CHAPTER 7:

CREATING A SEPARATE SPACE IN REGION 2: ADAPTING THE MALE STANDARD

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a second case study of women's organisation within UNISON. This case illustrates fundamental differences between women's structures in the two regions. Region 1 uses structures which emphasise participation whereas Region 2 uses structures which emphasise representation and accountability. Where Region 1 could be construed as challenging the male model of union organisation, Region 2 could be deemed to be adapting the male model. A considerable part of this Chapter is devoted to examining the constitution developed in Region 2 and the response it attracts from the mainstream regional committee. The latter part of the chapter studies the work of the Women's Committee.

CREATING A SEPARATE SPACE IN REGION 2

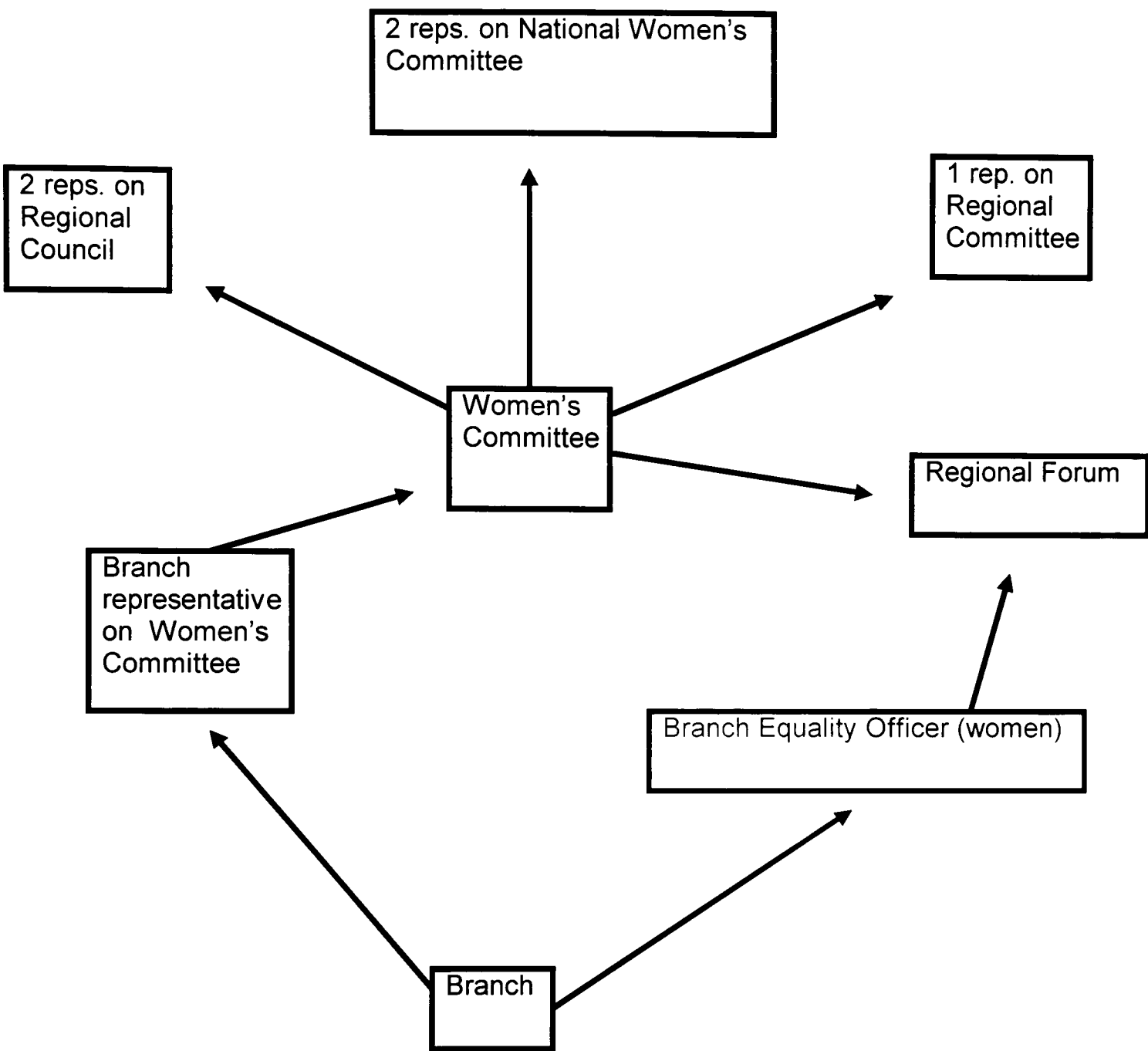
Reference was made above to Region 1's charter for self-organised groups. No such guidelines existed in Region 2, but the constitution was subject to considerable debate at Regional Committee. Two years before merger the equal opportunities committees, or women's committees, of the former partner unions began working together and all identified women's organisation as the key issue. Documents were submitted to a forum which discussed the proposed structure of women's organisation, and the interim regional women's committee took the proposals forward. Minutes indicate that the Regional Convenor was involved in the submission of proposals to the committee. This contrasts with Region 1, where although the Regional Convenor was a woman, she was not involved in discussing the proposals for the women's organisation.

The aims and objectives of women's organisation in Region 2 differ from those of Region 1 particularly in relation to self-organisation and accountability. Region 2 do not mention the words 'self-organisation' in any part of their constitution, in stark contrast to the constitution of Region 1, which indicates that self-organisation is inherent to its aims and objectives. The omission of 'self-organisation' from the aims and objectives in Region 2 is a deliberate strategy, as explained by the Women's Officer:

'The philosophy is different in this region. The Regional Women's Committee does not see self-organisation as useful. How helpful was self-organisation in NALGO? In this region, we don't use the terminology of self-organisation. We use the words of women's structure, women's committee, proportionality and fair representation. Too many women fall into the trap of self-organisation ... women's self-organisation has no power, its principles are not addressed in practice ... the other self-organised groups are different, but the rule book treats them the same. I have always argued that women's structure is different, the others are minorities, but since the majority of members are women, women are not the minority. Assertive women don't want to be seen as oppressed or as 'victims'. Women have the rules for proportionality, the other groups don't. Women have priority, women are different, but this is not clear at national level'

Region 2 has the word 'accountable' in its objectives. As will be seen later, it is this objective, as much as any other, which provides a rationale for the consequent structure which is based around the branch. Whilst both regions refer to linkages with mainstream committees and influencing the work of those committees, Region 2 is more explicit about its form, and outcome. For example, the women-only structure in Region 2 aims to be 'firmly integrated into the UNISON organisation structure at all levels' and to ensure that the union acts to 'effectively represent its women members'. The women's structure in this region is based on four elements: Branch Equality Officers (Women); Branch Women's Committees; Regional Women's Committee and Regional Women's Forum (see Figure 7.1). The next section examines the structures which provide access to women's structure for women who are already active in the union.

Figure 7.1: Women-only Structures and Links to Mainstream in Region 2



‘MAKING IT HAPPEN’ AT BRANCH LEVEL

Region 1 did not want to prescribe women’s involvement at the branch level, and members of the Regional Forum, and Regional Co-ordinating Team, did not have to be nominated by their branch. In contrast, the focus of organisation in Region 2 is the branch. The Interim Women’s Committee in Region 2 took advantage of the rule by which each Branch Committee is to include Equality Officer(s). Their proposed constitution invited branches to elect a Branch Equality Officer

for Women (BEOW) under this rule. Whilst the tasks of this officer are defined in the Code of Good Branch Practice, it is the intention that the officer is also a functional link between branches and the Regional Women's Committee. The BEOW was also to be the convenor of the Branch Women's Committee. The proposed constitution of the Branch Women's Committee also represents a significant difference to perceptions of women's self-organisation in Region 1. Whereas branches in Region 1 were encouraged to hold meetings for all women, Region 2 proposed that a Branch Women's Committee be established in each branch, which would be composed of women shop stewards, and would work to the following objectives:

- to support women activists
- to build women's organisation - including assisting in the recruitment and support of new stewards
- to monitor proportionality and fair representation
- to contribute to the development of policy with regard to issues of particular concern to women

The rule book allows for women's self-organised groups at Branch level, and the Code of Good Branch Practice notes that 'each self-organised group must be accessible and open to all members'. Since the Women's Branch Committee is to consist only of women shop stewards, it could be argued that this does not constitute a self-organised group. An interview with the Women's Officer revealed the philosophy underpinning this alternative structure. The Officer argued that, in her experience, manual and part-time women members do not attend women's committees, at which point self-organised groups becomes very unrepresentative. It was clear from the interview, that the Women's Officer believed that self-organised groups at branch level were not necessarily supportive or constructive for women's representation, and whilst they might raise feminist awareness, participants were not necessary representative of women in work groups/ branches, because of high non-attendance. The Women's Officer talked about her belief in an alternative strategy which encouraged women shop stewards to represent women members interests, to organise where necessary to support each other, and to organise campaigns. The Women's Officer argued that if they put into place a structure where women were allocated

positions and responsibility, this would become a 'working forum'. This opinion was apparently shared by the Regional Convenor, who believed that the women's structure should be a working structure 'delivering service to the membership'. The Women's Officer acknowledged that there would be 'a fight on with some branches who will want to fight for the old structure, which although it sounds democratic, could be the cause of not being democratic'. In the Women's Officer's opinion, democracy was ensured through representation and accountability. She noted that,

'the majority of regions are encouraging women who have nothing to do with their branch. Some people think the more the merrier, but someone pays - who pays? ... women have to run the union, so we need to teach and enable women to run it - making it possible for them to intervene. If there is no membership base, and women are not shop stewards, then we might be parachuting women members in at high levels. Whose interests do they represent?'

The first sentence of this quotation refers to regions such as Region 1, which purposefully did not prescribe women's activity within the union. Because the region encouraged all women, the Forum and Co-ordinating Team were described as being inclusive. However, whilst it might seem at first sight that a representative structure is exclusive, a closer examination of the structures provides a different interpretation.

EXCLUSIVITY OR INCLUSIVITY OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES?

At a regional level, the constitution allows for a Regional Women's Forum to be held at least once a year, with specific objectives:

- to identify key areas of work for the Regional Women's Committee
- to develop the role of Branch Equality Officers
- to identify key areas of concern for women members in the Region
- to develop work on women's organisation, representation and campaigns within branches

In the words of the proposed constitution, the Forum is to be 'educational, informative and organisational'. There was no mention of 'fun' in the constitution of this Forum. The constitution also noted that the Forum 'will be discussion and training based', with no hint of policy being made at the meeting. In stark contrast to the inclusive Forum established in Region 1, the Forum is to consist of members of the Regional Women's Committee and Branch Equality Officers for Women. It is *not* open to any women within the region, and there is only a guarantee of 'up to one' being held each year in contrast with the four proposed in Region 1. That the Forum in Region 1 is open to all women who are interested in attending, was seen as a measure of its inclusivity. Therefore, at first sight, it could be argued that the Forum in Region 2 is an exclusive one. However, in other ways, it could be seen as being more inclusive. If all branches have a Branch Equality Officer for Women, and all such Officers are directly and specifically invited to the Forum, then this offers the opportunity for branches from all service groups to be represented at the Forum. It could therefore be construed as being a more inclusive Forum in that it promotes the inclusion of members in a more systematic manner than through open invitation. If effective, it could facilitate the participation of women from different occupations, different geographical locations and different former partner unions, although it does require women to take a representative role at branch level.

Women can volunteer to sit on the Co-ordinating Team in Region 1 and do not require to be nominated by their branches. Any contested elections are held at the Women's Forum. The constitution of the Women's Committee in Region 2 is different. First, in Region 2, women require the nomination of a branch, or regional service group. Secondly, candidates are elected through direct postal election of all women members in the Region. Thirdly, in the case of the Local Government and Health Care Service Groups, each pair of branches is entitled to a seat on the committee, which provides a direct link to branches.

The Women's Officer talked about the work of the Women's Committee:

'the priority of the Women's Committee is to organise and develop skills through education and training programmes. Most of the work is about organising shop

stewards training for women who are shop stewards or interested in becoming stewards. We want change, we're not converting them into men. ... we're organising women locally to be confident in the union. For example, delivering basic shop steward training courses where we can give a different view to the myth of what shop stewards are. ... Its about giving them the confidence to do what they do instinctively, but to give them the support that is needed. Its about raising issues for women through educational trade union structure: women and pensions, women and state benefits, and representing women's issues at work - changing the agenda, for example, CCT - rights of part-time workers, women and pensions, equal part-time rights - not things men see as agenda. The view of the committee is that the agenda is from the top at the moment - but that it will come through.'

'Self-organisation' has obviously been interpreted in different ways in Regions 1 and 2, with the most obvious difference being the omission of 'self-organisation' in the constitution of Region 2. Another is the manner in which women need to be shop stewards or branch nominees before becoming active in any part of the structure. A third difference is that the constitution of Region 2 explicitly provides a number of opportunities for the Women's Committee to be consulted and to consult, the Regional Committee, appropriate sub-committees, all Regional Service Groups, and branches. Reference was made in chapter 4 to the experience of self-organisation in the former partner unions, and the manner in which self-organisation had been more widely developed in NALGO than the other two unions. Despite a longer history within NALGO, self-organised groups were not integrated into the (mainstream) union committees in the manner envisaged in Region 2. Evidence from these studies suggests that the philosophy and structure of women's self-organisation in Region 1 most reflects that of self-organisation in former NALGO. The women's organisation in Region 2, however, represents a radical departure from the women's self-organisation of NALGO, and arguably that contained in the rule book, and Code of Good Branch Practice.

In contrast to Region 1 where the proposed constitution was accepted by the Regional Committee without amendment, the proposals for women's organisation in Region 2 were the subject of considerable debate at the Regional Committee in December 1994. The Women's Officer had predicted that there would be some resistance to the new structure and certainly the number of questions, depth and type of question raised in the debate, confirms this prediction.

However, as will be seen from key elements of this debate, members perceive themselves to be defending more than the 'old structure'.

FIGHTING FOR A NEW STRUCTURE

This part of the discussion indicates the manner in which the women's group and members of the mainstream committee both used the rule book to support or undermine changes. The Chair of the interim Women's Committee reiterated the rule in the Code of Good Branch Practice regarding Branch Equality Officers. One member noted that the Regional Committee could not dictate responsibilities to branch equality officers, although the responsibilities outlined in the constitution of the women's structure could be encouraged. Another member argued that, constitutionally, the region could not introduce such a Committee within the branch, only the national conference could. The member added that by accepting the proposals, the Region would be setting a dangerous precedent, and that whilst she had an appreciation of needs of the Women's Committee, the region did not have the power to enact them.

The Regional Forum was to be workshop based and accompanied with training sessions, as opposed to a motion-based conference, to give women confidence, knowledge and skills to participate in the mainstream union structures. The Chair of the Women's Committee justified this by noting the difficulty of getting fair representation at conferences, since they tended to eliminate shift workers, part-timers and women, who are predominantly carers. One member noted that in his opinion:

'it is dangerous not to have significant part of the regional conference as motion based, since the women would only be discussing issues, they would not be able to make policy. There is a danger that it would turn into a non-policy body'

In responding, the Chair of the Women's Committee referred to past conferences where 60 women had registered, and only 45 had attended. She referred to feedback which indicated that women who were most adept at speaking ran motion based conferences. She argued that some women feel more confident talking in a smaller workshop situation, than in a motion based

situation. The criticism of this aspect probably sums up the tension surrounding this new structure. Structures which were deemed too similar to mainstream structures were criticised for disregarding the intentions of self-organisation, whilst structures such as the Forum which were probably closest to the original expectations of self-organisation were criticised for being too dissimilar to mainstream structures.

Debating Environment: After the chair of the Women's Committee had responded to a number of questions, the Regional Convenor noted that the Women's Committee was 'getting a grilling'. She noted that they were still going through a consultative process, and that it was hard to shift from one process to another, which might mean a significant shift for some. The Regional Convenor suggested that the questions be posed back to the women's committee, and noted that some points needed clarification. At this point the Regional Secretary spoke to the meeting to note that whilst each self-organised group was consulting the Regional Committee over its proposals, and potential existed for the Regional Committee to sanction proposals, it might be a little bit difficult if the messages sent back were on anything other than constitutional matters. He argued that it would be invidious for the Regional Committee to say that 'there should be a model approach', which would defeat the principle of self-organised groups. In conclusion, he noted that the committee needed to be careful in expressing views that had not been expressed in relation to the other self-organised groups. Notwithstanding these comments, more questions were still raised, to which the chair of the Women's Committee responded. The Regional Convenor eventually brought the debate to a close.

The responses to the constitution provide a contrast to the expressed intentions of the women's structure in Region 2. They might be more understandable in Region 1, where women are not necessarily active within the union. A senior woman activist in Region 2 believes that the women's constitution was criticised because they got it wrong.

'They developed women's organisation, and not self-organisation. The organisation is set up to control women lay members, rather than building up from principles of self-organisation. This constitution is seen as a watering down of self-organisation by paid officers to something more acceptable.'

Self-organisation for this member was deemed an important concept: 'it lets women meet in a less threatening environment'. She did however have reservations about relating self-organisation to such a large group (i.e. women), and felt there was a difference between women's self-organisation, and self-organisation for the other three groups, believing that they all had a different role and operated differently. Ironically, despite expressing reservations about the constitution in Region 2 which had arguably endeavoured to ensure that women were accountable, she noted that self-organisation was open to abuse:

'on grounds of accountability, and take-over by factions, because the 'oppressed' are not open to challenge'

This illustrates a paradox. On the one hand self-organisation is valued for being about freedom, and self-expression, whilst on the other hand, it raises concerns (in the same people) about accountability (which arguably derive from that freedom). Ironically, by calling into question the accountability of self-organisation, it could be argued that this member is herself unconsciously attempting to 'control lay members'. These tensions between different sets of expectations are illustrated by this extract of an interview with another senior woman activist in this region:

'Self-organisation is a channel for people to raise problems that specifically affect their group, and a mechanism for getting people involved and confident. ... I do worry that self-organisation encourages self-selection and is therefore not democratic. ... Many members of self-organised groups do not put themselves forward for the same types of [mainstream] elections. Mainstream elections are open to everyone, not just those from a particular group. Self-organised groups are not part of the formal democratic mechanism of the union. If there are no women at a local level, where is the accountability of women to the branch.'

However, despite these misgivings, in the same part of the interview, the activist noted that,

'Self-organisation should not be formalised too much. It enables people to participate who would not normally participate. I am in favour of it being informal and accepting what they say.'

Another member of the Regional Committee who was a member of the interim Women's Committee, felt that the Chair of the interim Women's Committee had been 'set up and pointed in

the right direction'. She noted that activists think that low paid women are being used to facilitate full-time officer control and noted that the handling of the debate regarding the women's structure was taken by members as confirmation of this argument.

Discussions with the Chair of the Women's Committee reveal that she is aware of these views. She finds these views offensive, because they raise questions about her ability to think things through for herself, and make her own decisions. A number of conversations with the Chair revealed how distressed she had been by the debate at Regional Committee. She said that she felt that all the interests of the women in the Region rested on her ability to express herself properly. An interview with this woman in September 1995 revealed more of her feelings about the meeting:

'I found it the most intimidating meeting I had ever been to, but thought that a lot of good came out of it. People were sympathetic. I made a conscious effort to field those questions which I felt most confident about answering. I had gone through the constitution very thoroughly for the two weeks previous to the meeting. When Sarah [an NEC member] gave me a vote of thanks at the Regional Women's Committee, I felt I had done quite well.'

Invited to comment on the differences in the two constitutions of Region 1 and 2, and the first step of women's involvement in Region 2, the Chair of the Women's Committee responded as follows.

'our constitution is based on the need for responsibility and accountability. ... everything should start at the branch. You need involvement at the branch, education and training, and sympathetic environment. ... the Branch Equality Officer only forum has to be in the structure, otherwise if it were a meeting for any women, it could get taken over by the 'conference cat'. A woman's first step would be all-women's education. Weekend women's school are for any women, especially new women. Such weekends enable women to find out more. They stimulate interest. I would like to have an all-women forum to which any woman could come but we would have to make sure that it was not rail roaded by those women who are more articulate than the others. We don't want to replace one domination by another. We want a mix of ages and abilities - all trade unionists without any ulterior motives. I suspect those who self-select for self-organisation as being there for the wrong reasons.'

PARADOXES OF PARTICIPATION ?

The key feature in the constitution of the regional women's group at branch level were the Branch Equality Officers (Women). As noted above, this is a new post which can only be recommended to branches. At the time of my study, relatively few women had taken these positions. Given that the Forum was specifically for Branch Equality Officers (Women), one initial consequence of the lack of these officers at Branch level was that no Forum was held in 1995. Thus, for the first 2 years of UNISON, there was no Women's Forum within this region. Although this is not a rule book requirement, it does give weight to the views expressed at the earlier Regional Committee that there was insufficient space in the constitution for membership participation.

The author attended two meetings of the interim committee, and two meetings of the new substantive committee. These two committees were substantially different in size and make-up, and it was possible to discern a difference between them in terms of their operation. The interim committee had been established for approximately two years. The two interim committee meetings observed by the author were attended by 7 and 9 members respectively - the majority of whom were either former NUPE, or COHSE members. The size of the room supported a friendly and informal, environment in which all women spoke as they progressed through the Agenda. The Women's Committee was ostensibly chaired in a formal manner, but no-one sought to move any motions. Any decisions were reached through consensus - indeed, there were no issues on which members appeared to disagree. At the end of the first meeting, the Chair asked me what I thought of 'her ladies'.

The substantive committee was much larger, having the potential to consist of up to 40 members, the majority of whom were likely to be former NALGO members. The two substantive committee meetings observed by the author were attended by 11 and 12 members respectively, but the potential for a larger meeting determined that it was held in a much larger room than before. The author attended the first meeting of the substantive committee (the AGM), which

consisted of 4 members of the previous committee, and 7 new members. A number of lay officer posts were open to nomination. Only one new member was elected (unopposed) to a lay officer position. Perhaps it is not surprising that members of interim committee were elected unopposed to the new substantive committee, but the election proceedings did have an orchestrated air to them and illustrated how women are quite capable of mobilising bias when necessary.

Another illustration of the manner in which women on the Committee attempted to mobilise bias concerned the role of the lay officer posts. The question of monitoring had been raised at the Recruitment and Organisation Committee (ROC) of the Regional Committee, and had been referred to the Women's Committee for discussion. The suggestion was made that this be the subject of a 'committee officers' meeting'. This caused some concern amongst the newly elected members of the committee who appeared concerned that a small sub-group of the committee was making decisions outside of the meeting. However, once a new member queried the identity and role of the committee officers, the Chair asked if anyone else wanted to join the meeting. At this point two new members opted to join what would essentially be an external committee discussion. It should be noted at this stage that the two of the lay officers and the Women's Officer sit on the committee from which this issue had originated. This meant that until the idea of the 'committee officers meeting' was challenged, it was likely that the debate about proportionality and fair representation would have been kept amongst the same group of women who served on both committees. In addition, only one of the lay officers was new to the committee, whereas, the majority of members attending the substantive committee were new to the committee (of 12 members women attending this meeting, 9 were new to the committee). Thus, it could be argued that the 'officers meeting' would not have been representative of the women attending the substantive meeting. This incident had not gone unnoticed by one of the members I interviewed. She believes that,

'the Executive is exclusive and does not really want to include newer members. I have found this aspect difficult and felt I had to be pushy to get to the meeting [noted above]. In the event the meeting was on the 12th October and I received

the letter advising me about it on the 14th October. It made me wonder for a second whether they wanted to keep me out'

At the end of the first substantive meeting, the Chair concluded the meeting saying:

'I want a caring environment, one woman to another. It did work very well last year. If you think it is frivolous - it is an attempt at breaking the ice'.

At both sets of meetings, the environment was still relatively informal, with virtually every woman making a contribution. However, a new member remarking on these meetings, talked of her frustrations,

'whilst it might be ageist to say so, I feel my frustration with the manner in which the committee is being run was shared with the younger members of the committee. ... I was looking forward to meeting women like myself, and thought it would be interesting to meet women from other service groups, who are active in other ways. I thought I would learn a lot. I thought it would help in getting involved. I had expectations of the committee being political. I was expecting something radical, something about change, challenging the union itself from inside, and challenging externally.'

Whilst there appeared to be much agreement amongst members of the interim committee, with decisions being reached through consensus, a number of different views were expressed in the substantive committee. By the second meeting, the existence of differing views found expression in the use of formal motions for the first time during my observations. In effect the debating environment of the committee became very different from that of the previous interim committee. In addition to coping with the emergence of opposing views, where none had existed before, the Chair also had to deal with the expression of views which contradicted the policy of the previous interim committee. At these points of disagreement, the Women's Officer brought the debate to a conclusion - on one occasion, suggesting that the matter be referred to the committee officers. (A debate of particular interest relates to the role and size of National Women's Conference and is discussed in Chapter 10 below). Although Phillips (1991 and 1993) and Leidner (1991) fear the stifling of conflict within small groups of women and we can see how it happens, in most cases, it has been possible for differing views to be articulated within the Committee.

ENCOURAGING BRANCH ACTIVITY AMONGST WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION

As noted above, a major priority highlighted in Region 2 was education. The Committee introduced a planned programme of training for women stewards which would comprise a series of courses launched with a 'women's weekend school'. It was intended that this programme would build up skills and confidence over the period of 12 months, with the ultimate aim to empower and encourage women to become more active in the main trade union structure and to encourage them to participate in the broader regional education programme. During and up to September 1995, the Women's Committee was responsible for organising six courses for women which attracted a total of 99 women members. The courses were:-

- Speaking up and Being Heard
- Negotiating on Women's Issues
- Speaking in Public
- Recruiting and Organising Women Members
- Women's' Weekend School
- Induction Course

I attended two courses, Recruiting and Organising Women Members, and Women's Weekend School. Both of these appeared to achieve the aims indicated by the Women's Officer, namely, 'organising women locally to be confident in the union' and 'delivering basic shop steward training courses where we can give a different view to the myth of what shop stewards are'. A high number of new shop stewards were attracted to the courses. The courses were organised around role playing activities which enabled women to engage with, and articulate, the practicalities of workplace union activity. These activities enabled me to obtain information about women's concerns.

The Concerns of Black Women: One role play involved members trying to persuade non-members to join the union. This activity enabled a black woman to articulate her feelings about the union's support of black members:-

- Black woman: I can't identify with any one on the Committee
- White woman: Come and join the union and change it

- Black woman: A lot of things have to change before it feels more comfortable
- White woman: You can join a self-organised group
- Black woman: I want proportional representation for black people at branch and national level
- White woman: Women can be black
- Black woman: I will not be culturally comfortable. There is no education for black members. Onus shouldn't be on black members, should be on union. There should be proportionality for black members

Whilst this dialogue happened within a role-play exercise, the concern of black women course members about the representation of black members within the union was raised on a number of occasions during the two-day course. Of particular concern to one woman was the response that black women could pursue representative seats through proportionality. That a black woman might identify primarily as a black person, as opposed to a woman, was not appreciated by one of the white women attending the course. Reference was made in Chapter 3 to Leidner's observation (1991) that those in the majority need to 'wholly identify the interests of the minorities as their own' if there is to be full satisfaction. This conclusion seems to have been borne out on this course. The failure of the white woman to appreciate that a black woman might interpret proportionality and fair representation as a means of forcing her to emphasise her identity as a woman, over her identity as a black person, led to dissatisfaction on the part of the black woman, who felt that her own needs had not been properly acknowledged.

Members on another course also raised their concerns about the visibility of black women within the union. On this occasion it related to the staffing of the course. After brief introductions from everyone at the very beginning of the course, a black woman asked why there was a mixed course membership of black and white members, but only white educators. The officers replied that of 33 officers in the region, 10 are women, and 3 officers are black (1 woman, 2 men). The officers noted that they volunteer to do the courses on a rotational basis,

and that this weekend had not been the turn of the black woman officer. The raising of this question was a topic of much conversation amongst the organisers (officers and lay activists). From my own observations, it seemed that the question was deemed too challenging, and was construed by the organisers as creating an 'undercurrent' on the course. Rather than accept the legitimacy of the comment, the organisers seemed to be blaming the questioning on a 'militant' element amongst attendees, and were anxious that 'they' should not disrupt the weekend. (A few of the women came from a branch with a very active black members group). However, the response of the women organisers also needs to be understood in the context of the voluntary nature of their tutoring work (over a weekend). In her study of the National Women's Studies Association in the US, Leidner (1991) noted that women were sometimes subject to 'blanket condemnations' for 'racism, classism, or heterosexism' and the women officers may well have felt personally aggrieved that their voluntary contributions to women's increased activity in the union were dismissed and undermined by these comments. However, whilst the absence of any black educators may be excused through legitimate logistical reasons, both lay activists addressing the evening meeting were white, when arguably there are many black women activists who could have been asked to address the meeting - albeit, not from the NEC, or regional committee. To conclude, the concerns of black women about the (in)visibility of black women have been raised on a number of occasions. I have no doubt that they will continue to be raised, until black women feel that the structures support a change in the status quo.

Women's Concerns: A number of the recruitment activities highlighted the importance of the union addressing the concerns of workers at the workplace, and course members discussed ways in which they could get a higher priority for issues affecting women. When asked to identify women's needs they noted the following:-

- discriminatory impact of some sickness policies (i.e. don't take account of biological differences, such as women's periods)
- maternity/ paternity leave

- childcare facilities; policies to take account of children's' illness
- pension rights and pensionable age
- promotion
- impact of multi-skilling on women

During a Women's Weekend course, small groups gave five minute presentations to the rest of the course and brought many of their collective experiences to bear in their presentations. In contrast to much of the discussion at the weekend which had been about 'members', the 'menu' of topics focused attention on women's concerns. The group looking at Women's Health at Work recommended a breast cancer screening scheme. The group looking at Equality for Women recommended action on job segregation; better care facilities; positive action training; and action on low pay. A third group looked at low pay and made recommendations for job evaluation, and the study of wage differentials. Other groups looked at the NHS Pay Campaign; low Pay; Proportionality and Fair Representation; and Maternity and Paternity Rights, and the experiences of women at work came out very clearly in all of them. For a number of women, this was the first time that they had spoken in front of such a large group (approximately 20), so the exercise provided them with the experience of talking to others, making recommendations, and answering questions. At the end of the weekend, course members were encouraged to identify a few key things to do in the next few months: 'to increase women's involvement in the union and raise issues of importance to women with members, the union and employers'. Of those volunteering to talk about their personal action plans, women identified the following:

- workplace nursery
- proportionality/ fair representation: 30 stewards: 5 are women
- more meetings/ more members
- branch officers support
- discuss contracts of part-time workers with management
- ex-members - encourage to rejoin
- discuss better pay and conditions
- build in proportionality in merged branch
- education
- reinforce image of union

Remembering the positive outcomes of these last two exercises, I am reminded of the concerns of the member of the Co-ordinating Team in Region 1 that, without self-organisation, there will be no alternative forum in which to educate and develop women. The weekend appeared to be extremely successful in educating newly active women in a supportive environment. The residential nature of the course, together with the use of group work, enabled a number of women to 'network' across the region, and although there were some points of tension during the weekend, women obviously felt it was possible to express their views and opinions in an open manner.

However, it is important to note that concentrating on the education of women who are already active within the union is very different to the approach of other women's self-organised groups. Reproduced below is an extract from a letter sent from a Regional Women's Committee, in another region, to their Regional Council.

"A commitment of becoming an "activist" however should not be a condition of attending such a course, and this had never been the intention of the Region.

The X Region's Education Policy and Statement on Women's Education states that:

'Educational activity should help to encourage women to think about progressing from inactive member to active member, to activist, to "leader". However, there should be no assumption that becoming an active member must lead to becoming an activist; or that becoming an activist necessarily involves becoming a leader.'

This meeting therefore urges branches to encourage women's attendance on education courses and to be mindful of the fact that while members may be more inclined to give a commitment to union activities after attending a course, a prior commitment shall not be required by the branch as a condition of the member's attendance on the course'

The difference in approaches between this Region and Region 2 derives from a fundamentally different interpretation of the role of women's organisation. These different interpretations are fully articulated in a debate which took place at the 1995 National Delegate Conference regarding the National Women's Conference. This is discussed in detail in chapter 10. The

next section discusses the approach of Region 2's Committee to the National Women's Conference.

ENCOURAGING ACTIVITY AT NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Reference was made in chapter 6 to the manner in which constitutional arrangements for the National Women's Conference appeared to hinder the participation of women. Women in Region 2 also felt that the confusion about the arrangements meant that women were not enabled to participate. The distinction between indirect and direct delegations caused confusion, consternation and frustration in Region 2. Time and energies were expended thinking through what would happen if there were an over-subscription for the indirect delegate seats. The difficulty which the grouping of branches produced for voting was noted, together with the difficulty of women delegates representing grouped branches. Members were concerned about what would happen if grouped branches did not agree over the actions on motions. One of the members noted that virtually none of the health branches would be entitled to direct delegates, as the branches all had under 2000 women members. Concerns were also raised about the accountability of the indirect delegates. Overall, the Committee felt the tension arising from regionally organising what was essentially a branch-based delegation. This meant that on the one hand, information was being sent direct to branches, which it was argued was not 'women friendly'. On the other hand, the Regional Women's Committee wanted to support members because they knew of the difficulties of women going to a Conference, possibly for the first time, without, for example, knowing about the area (i.e. is it a safe area?, what is it like walking in the dark?). In acknowledgement that delegates were autonomous of the region and accountable to their branches, the Regional Women's Committee did not organise any delegation meetings during the course of the Conference. Instead a social get-together was organised for women travelling from the Region. This meant that attention to accountability arguably went against the support of women. Region 1 held two delegation meetings at the National Women's Conference which a number of women from the Region attended and found much to discuss which did not constrain their voting decisions in any way.

On a related issue, the interim Women's Committee in Region 2 submitted a motion to the 1995 National Women's Conference arguing for an alternative format for the Conference. The philosophy of developing women's skills through education and training programmes underpins the motion put forward by Region 2. The motion recognised the value of a motion based forum for developing UNISON policy, but asked that the Conference recognise too, the 'valuable opportunity to enable women members to develop other forms of expertise and skill as well'. The motion finished:

'Conference therefore agrees that in future the National Women's Conference will be a combination of a motion based conference and activity based workshop in which workshops will be structured to; develop discussion on policy relating to the interests of women members; develop discussion on women members' needs within the organisation; build campaigning around issues relating to our women members' needs and facilitate skills training to meet needs identified by our women members'

As these extracts from different speakers illustrate, power was defined from two different perspectives: liberal democratic, and the feminist/radical critique. From a liberal democratic perspective, influence was seen as being synonymous with a motion based conference (so it was slightly ironic that the motion-based debate was debated in some confusion itself). These comments echo those used in the Regional Committee in Region 2 when Regional Committee members were arguing for a motion-based Regional Women's Forum:

'I'm not a child. I'm not here to be trailed from room to room. Don't want to be sheep. On a learning curve - not in a working group. Must learn to define our rights. Must learn to take our motions to the mainstream'

'The voice of women in UNISON is not heard in workshops - heard at women's conference'

'I want to gain experience on conference floor - conference skills gained in conference'

'I'd rather be thrown into the lion's den at women's conference than at National Delegate Conference'

Where workshops were acknowledged as being valuable, it was argued that they were more appropriately conducted at branch, or regional level. Although 'women's voice' was invoked as a reason for motion based conference, nothing was said about which 'women's voices' would be heard.

The feminist critique noted that the National Women's Conference was just following the men's way of doing things, and that there was a need to break the mould, so that women could compete equally. Delegates were urged to think of those *not* at the Conference. Supporters argued that Conference was 'missing an ideal opportunity for education'. These extracts illustrate a different definition of power, and did question the nature of women's participation, although no-one questioned *what* would be discussed, just how it would be discussed.

'I want to move away from old traditions. Shouldn't be putting women on the rostrum. Do we have to be so formal, bureaucratic? Policy can be formulated in workshops. More women can take part. Its difficult to give training at motion based conference'

'totems - empowerment and enablement - if we are not about thinking of other women - then what are we about? I don't like the attitude "if it's good enough for the boys, it's good enough for us" - well, I don't agree - I want something better. Some women are too busy jumping up and down to help others'

The motion to include activity based workshops in the National Women's Conference was lost, and the decision was greeted with cheers. This response seemed to confirm everything the women had said about the motion based conference being an inappropriate way of moving forward. Arguments had been put for and against the motion, but there had been no opportunity for discussion and finding a middle way. It also illustrated the conundrum of developing potentially radical structures within a liberal democratic organisation.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This Chapter has considered how the rule book commitments have been used to create a separate space for women in Region 2. Although constrained within rule book responsibilities,

like the mainstream committees, the women's structures do have autonomy to develop their own roles, structures and constitutions. The case studies in the last two chapters have illustrated how this autonomy has led to very different interpretations, objectives and structures for women's organisation within two UNISON regions. The extent of this difference can be illustrated by the fact that I am not able to use 'self-organisation' to describe the activities within Region 2. Whilst this might be the effect of developing a 'brownfield' organisation, it has a number of implications for the pursuance of women's interests within UNISON and enables us to address some of the questions raised in chapter 6.

An important difference between the two regions relates to the access each provides for women members. The structures in Region 1 are specifically designed to include all women and do not prescribe women's activity within the union. In contrast, the structures in Region 2 are specifically designed around branch women shop stewards and mirror the representative structures within the mainstream union. In Region 2, separate organising is definitely structured as a means to an end. The ultimate aim of women-only structures in Region 2 is the long term mobilisation of women into mainstream representative structures within the union. From this perspective, the two strategies for identifying women operate in a complementary manner in Region 2. However, whilst this philosophy provides a link between women's interests and women's concerns this is not how it is perceived by the mainstream Regional Committee. Furthermore, it is not the perception of a number of women operating within the mainstream Regional Committee.

I have described the structure in Region 1 as challenging the male model of union activism and yet this has attracted little specific resistance. On the other hand, the structures in Region 2 which could be described as an adaption of the male model of union organisation attracted considerable criticism from members of the mainstream regional committee. Underpinning this criticism were fears that the structure was excluding women members and facilitating officer control of the women's structures. However, whilst a study of the women's committee provides some justification for these fears, this arises through short-term relationships and is not derived from the structure itself. Indeed, given the need for greater participation at a local level (as

illustrated in chapter 6), focusing women's organisation around the branch is likely to lead to a much stronger women-led union.

Given these conclusions we can return to the questions of chapter 6. Whilst the women's structures in Region 1 challenged the male model of trade unionism, at the time of my research, women's self-organisation was not challenging the status quo (or male power). I asked whether this reflected the suppression of women's real interests, both within women's structures and mainstream committees. Whilst the women's structures in Region 2 are an adaption of the male standard, their development from a branch representative base could ensure that they are less susceptible to criticism on the grounds of accountability and thus more likely to challenge the status quo within the union. Indeed training women to 'run the union' is the professed intention of the Women's Officer. For what reason, therefore, do members of the regional mainstream committees simultaneously interpret the structure as a means of controlling lay members, and raise fears of the accountability of the self-selected? Are they misunderstanding the structures? Are they conflating a criticism of the individuals with a criticism of the structure? Or are they resisting the development of women's real interests? For whatever reason, members in the two structures have conceptualised self-organisation in different ways and there is little common ground between the values and beliefs of either group of members as to the links between the two structures. This has implications for the projection of women's concerns into mainstream committees.

A study of the Regional Committee in Region 2 enabled me to explore these issues in greater detail and this is contained in the next chapter. However, this was not the only issue to study in the mainstream structures. I was also interested to explore the relationship between women's interests and women's concerns. I wanted to see what happened when women gained access in the decision making arena. Cockburn (1995) argues that women elected from mixed constituency seats are not obliged to speak for women, but how can this be reconciled with the identification of women as a socially oppressed group? At what point do women speak of women's concerns? Another focus of interest was the link between women's greater

representation on mainstream committees and the processes by which the interests are determined. Would more women mean less conflict between men and women, less mobilisation of bias and less suppression of interests? What processes would enable women to ensure that union power was used for them? The next three chapters look at all of these issues.

CHAPTER 8:

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT REGION?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first of three which look at mainstream activity and this chapter contains a study of the mainstream structures in Region 2. Whilst proportionality enabled women to gain proportional access to the directly elected seats on the Regional Committee, this chapter identifies necessary conditions to gaining access in practice. It illustrates the differences between women operating in mainstream committees and women-only structures and indicates the implication of this separation for the pursuit of women's concerns. It identifies the ideologies and institutions which underpin this separation.

SEPARATION OF INTERESTS ?

According to the rule book, the function of the region is to operate in an intermediary role between branches and national levels of the union, and between different service groups. It also plays a co-ordinating role in relation to campaign strategies, and education and publicity activities. The region is divided into Regional Council and Regional Committee. All branches in the region are entitled to send delegate(s), and motions, to the Regional Council, which 'shall have power to make policy at Regional level and to do such other things as may be reasonably necessary to carry out its functions'. The Regional Committee is essentially the management committee of the Council and 'shall exercise the functions of the Regional Council between its meetings'. According to the union structure outlined by UNISON Education and Training (see Appendix 1), it is the regional level where the union pursues work and community interests that affect members and their families, and 'acts as a pressure group in the workplace and in society at large'.

The constitution of Region 2 adds nothing new to this set of objectives, since the rule book objectives are fairly wide-ranging. An analysis of interview material and election addresses of successful candidates provides more information about individual expectations of the regional role and shows the expectations of the committee being an active party within the region which 'fights' for jobs, and 'defends' job cuts. The desire to make a difference in the lives of working people within the region resonates through the addresses:

'the defence of jobs and services in all industries in which UNISON organises must be top of the Region's agenda' (Regional Committee member, 1995 election address)

'the region must continue to campaign in all sectors, fighting job cuts whether they be in the Gas or the Health Service, giving members the ability to determine their future' (Regional Committee member, 1995 election address)

'I want to see [Region 2] taking a lead within UNISON on fighting cuts and job losses, in defending services and preventing closures ... I am standing for re-election to keep on pushing on the Regional Committee for UNISON to stop pretending it's a legal aid or friendly society and to start acting like a trade union' (Regional Committee member, election address).

Of the 15 nominees who submitted an election address for the mainstream Regional Committee which talked about the need to organise members and fight job cuts, only two distinguished women as a specific category of members who had been 'hit' by the cuts. Perhaps this provides the best illustration of the difference between the mainstream and women's structures, since the constitution of the Women's Committee specifically mentions its role in the 'organisation, participation and representation of women members'. Whilst participants in both structures expect to 'make a difference', it was only the women's structure that is specifically constituted to make a difference for women. This conclusion is hardly surprising given that members appointed to the Regional Committee are elected by a mixed constituency, and those appointed to the Regional Women's Committee are elected by women only. It does, however, provide another illustration of the different obligations which women have to speak on behalf of other women (Cockburn 1995:pp75-82).

WOMEN’S ACCESS TO DECISION MAKING AT REGIONAL COUNCIL

The study of the Regional Council indicated four elements in women’s access to the decision making arena: physically being there, being vocal, the quoracy of the meeting and knowing the ‘rules of the game’. Delegations to the Council in Region 2 are required to represent proportionality in the branch. 40% of attendees at the first AGM were women so more women will need to be sent from branches before proportionality can be achieved at the Regional Council. Another aspect of women’s access to decision making is women’s participation in the proceedings, and I was able to see this at first hand at four Council meetings. The meetings did not appear to me to be member-friendly. They were held in a very large hall, were highly politically charged and felt quite different to the Council meetings attended in Region 1. On the whole, I feel, these meetings would have dissuaded any but the most confident and experienced from taking part. This was despite the efforts of the (female) Regional Convenor to curtail calling out, interruptions from the floor, and circular discussions. Despite this ‘hostile’ debating environment, women contributed to all debates. This observation was similar to that identified by the monitoring of the first AGM by the Recruitment and Organisation sub-committee. Although the following figures refer to each contribution and take no account that several speakers probably spoke more than once during the day, they illustrate the extent to which women participate in the Council. In particular, they indicate that ex-NALGO women and ex-NUPE women spoke proportionately more than their male colleagues in relation to the numbers of men/ women present.

52 ex-NALGO	26 men, 26 women	(60% of speakers: 53% of Council)
24 ex-NUPE	7 men, 17 women	(27% of speakers: 30% of Council)
10 ex-COHSE	8 men, 2 women	(11% of speakers: 15% of Council)

To summarise, women’s proportional access to the Regional Council was prescribed within the constitution, and although absolute proportionality had not yet been reached, women attending the Council were gaining access to all debates. Indeed, attendance of the Regional

Council illustrated that women's access to decision making was likely to be more constrained by non-attenders, than attenders, since non-attendance had a dramatic effect on the functioning of the Council because of quorum requirements.

The author attended four Regional Council meetings in Region 2 over a period of a year. One meeting did not start because it was never quorate, and another two were prematurely closed when they became inquorate after lunch. Since it is the function of the Council to develop Regional policy, the inquoracy of meetings is of crucial importance to the democratic process within the region. Figures from the Region's first AGM reveal the deficit of delegates: out of a possible 425 delegates, 176 delegates registered to attend the AGM. Of these 176, 130 actually attended. The number of members exceeding the quorum was very low at the first meeting I attended and it was possible to see the contribution which non-attendees made to the democratic process. After lunch the meeting needed two counts to ensure that it was still quorate. After the Council had heard a guest speaker and a contentious motion had been discussed (and carried), a number of people left the hall. During the moving of the next motion, someone called the meeting 'inquorate', and on finding that a quorum was not present, the meeting was promptly closed. Given that a number of speakers for and against the motion had invoked calls for democracy within the union, it was quite ironic that by leaving the room after it had been discussed, a number of delegates (exercising their democratic right) were able to immediately disenfranchise the rest of the meeting. One member (also a member of the Women's Committee) argued that members were using 'waffle' to manipulate decisions in several ways:

'democracy is being manipulated [at the Region Council]. Certain groups nit-pick issues at the Council meetings, then people leave and whatever the politicking group want, they push in to get it through. I don't like Friday or Monday Council meetings. Time-off is granted for all day. Some people make a long weekend of it and by Friday afternoon, the meeting may be inquorate. Knowing that the meeting may be inquorate in the afternoon, some parties may waffle on about issues, so that other motions are not discussed' .. Women don't tend to do this as they are up front. I wonder whether they should do, and fight fire with fire, get better organised, and get more women involved'

Notwithstanding the latter comment, it was a woman who had called the meeting inquorate, and had done so for her own reasons. She said that she had called the meeting inquorate:

‘to stop the ‘Trots’ controlling the meeting, and before the Regional Council were asked to back up the motion with money’.

WOMEN’S ACCESS TO DECISION MAKING AT REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Women comprised 80% of directly elected members on the 1994/5 Committee and 70% on the 1995/96 committee. In 1995, the Regional Convenor and Deputy Convenor were both women. In terms of women’s active participation in the committee, women made up between 60 and 70% of all four meetings which the author attended. The author found that on all occasions women contributed at least in proportion to their numbers. On one occasion women made 80% of contributions, whilst comprising 60% of the committee attendees. Reflecting on the Committee, the Chair of the Women’s Committee noted that ‘the Regional Committee is quite fair’, and that women were ‘not being held back at the Committee’. Another member noted that,

‘the level of participation in the Committee is quite good. I feel that most people speak, and that it is a comfortable committee. ... the Regional Committee has moved on and matured politically’ (interview with 1995 committee member)

Asked whether an increase in the number of women at regional level had made any difference, a senior lay activist noted that:

‘some women have had to come to terms with the fact that they are no longer ‘special’, and have had to roll up their sleeves and get on with things. This is a healthy situation. The Regional Committee is quite friendly, but this is due to the mixture of different [union] cultures, not because there are more women on the committee’.

However, a breakdown of the contributions by women revealed that not all women participated. On three occasions, approximately 60 to 70% of women present spoke, which rose to 80% at

the last meeting the author attended. Those women not participating were usually women new to the regional committee, and women elected to low paid women's seats (who were sometimes synonymous). The Regional Convenor noted that,

'a number of local women are continuing to make contributions, but not all women contribute. I would like to see all debates shift - more of other debates - though this is not just true of women. ... we should ask ourselves what do we mean by participation - do we mean that they have to speak. We should find out why [women] are not speaking - how else would you know?'

One surprising finding was that one woman made up to one fifth of all (male and female) contributions at the three meetings she attended. Perhaps more than anything, this illustrates the difference between newly active women, and women who are very experienced at participating within the union.

However, a key (female) activist did not expect that the presence of more women would bring significant changes to the discussion of women's concerns. She noted that,

'Women are breaking former alliances now. They are now freer to make alliances with other women of their own political persuasion, rather than forming alliances with other women, just because they are women. I do not feel the same compulsion to raise 'women's needs', as there are plenty of other women who will raise the issues'.

This confirms Cockburn's argument that women from a mixed constituency are not obliged to speak on behalf of women. The one woman who is obligated to speak on behalf of women occupies the seat reserved for a representative of the Regional Women's Committee. During 1994/5 and 1995/6, this seat was taken by the Chair of the Women's Committee (Diane). Interview material indicates that she is very clear about her obligation to speak on behalf of women:

'to progress wherever possible women's point of view. I feel that the committee's response is sympathetic and supportive - although one or two make me feel intimidated. I believe there is a unity developing amongst women on pensions; part-time low paid workers; and meeting times. I spoke for women at the Regional Committee when I noted the undesirability of evening meetings for women. Men not having been in that position never had

to think about it, but once it was put to them, they related it to their partners. ... my role is 'the voice of the women of the region'.

Despite Diane's clear conviction that her position within the women's structure enabled her to speak for the women of the region, it is possible that the women on the Regional Committee do not share her perspective of the role. I interviewed seven other women who sat on the Regional Committee and six of these women expressed their concerns about the representativeness of women from the women's structures:-

'self-organisation cuts across proportionality - in terms of what self-organised women and women activists want and creates tension and conflict'. ... who do the self-organised women speak for. ... Their democratic accountability is suspect and they are not necessarily mandated'

'There is a danger of self-organisation not representing everyone. It's missing working class women. ... self-organisation is a self-indulgent wank'.

'On balance it is better to have self-organisation for women but how it operates is problematic. It is open to abuse on grounds of accountability and take over by factions because the oppressed are not open to challenge'

Several interviewees made reference to another dimension of experience - that of being 'political'. Whilst one member of the Regional Committee noted that 'you need to be political and need a perspective', the Chair of the Women's Committee noted that some women were 'more interested in political activity rather than UNISON's activity' and she was concerned that women wanting to push ahead were being blocked.

The implication of strong political views for the discussion of women's concerns was identified by two experienced women activists on the Committee:

'I worry about political factionalism. It has the potential to cut out issues of importance and is very hard to do anything about. We need to provide opportunities to meet across factions'

'Women's issues are wide ranging and political groupings are stronger and take precedence, with issues still being analysed from a political perspective'.

I pursued the existence of a political perspective with two (female) members of the Regional Committee. One said there was a 'handful of major committed activists who had longer term activity with the Labour Party; the Communist Party; and the 'Trots''. Asked what different factions operated within the union at regional level, the other member responded:

'alliances across former partner union lines are natural since people know each other. There is quite a strong alliance around 'Fighting for a Democratic Union' which is quite successful. There are also strong ties around service groups - particularly health. But there are different groupings at different times. It is too simplistic to say that the same competing agendas always operate'

Allegiance to political groupings within the Regional Committee echoes the findings in chapter 5 which highlighted women's allegiance to political groupings within the wider union. This is not surprising given that, in some cases, the same women are involved at both a national and regional level. However, women do not only identify with political groupings. This member identified very strongly with her service group, and the structures she had inherited from her former partner-union:

'there is little discussion of health at the regional committee. I feel it is full of ex-NALGO members. Take the Branch Organisers debate: they speak about spreading the workload in some local government branches, when they have eight people on full-time release to look after 3000 members, and they have a Branch Organiser. Bill said he did not know why sign up was such a pain as their Branch Administrator did it. It shows no understanding of how some parts of the union works - its divisive.'

To summarise, a considerable number of women are gaining access to all debates in proportion to their membership of the union. However, the underlying argument of chapters 2 and 3 is that the issues which are discussed, are just as important as women's access to those debates. The next section addresses whether implementation of the three principles makes any difference to the discussion of issues that concern women.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS IN REGION 2

It is the intention that the Regional Women's Forum sets the agenda for women's organisation in this Region. However, during the period of my research, no Forum was held. In the absence of this Forum, I have compiled a list of women's concerns from discussions at the Regional Women's Committee; from the two women's-only educational events I attended; and from interviews with individual women members who belong to this Region. To facilitate the discussion, I have categorised them within Briskin and McDermott's (1993) framework of issues which unions should be addressing. The result is shown in Figure 8.1 below.

Figure 8.1 Issues of Concern to Women in Region 2

WORK OF WOMEN, GENDER SEGMENTATION OF LABOUR MARKET	UNION STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES
<div>National Minimum Wage</div> <div>New Employee Rights for part-time workers</div> <div>Sexual harassment</div> <div>Gender implications of CCT</div> <div>Maternity/Paternity leave</div> <div>Affordable Childcare (ind)</div> <div>Free nursery places for everyone (ind)</div> <div>Difficulties of c/care for shiftworkers</div> <div>Impact of multi-skilling on women</div> <div>Job segregation</div> <div>Low Pay</div> <div>Job Evaluation/ study of wage differentials</div> <div>Equal Pay</div> <div>Promotion</div> <div>Positive Action Training</div> <div>Intercollegiate Halls Boycott</div> <div>Contracts and Hillingdon Hospital</div> <div><u>Circulation of Materials</u></div> <div>LRD Maternity Rights</div> <div>Paternity Leave</div> <div>Not Just 9 to 5 campaign</div> <div>Pack on Childcare allowance</div> <div><u>Affiliations/Donations</u></div> <div>Maternity Alliance</div> <div>Fair Play for Women</div>	<div>Constitution of women's structure</div> <div>National Women's Conference</div> <div>National Delegate Conference (NDC)</div> <div>Childcare expenses at NDC</div> <div>Timings of Meetings</div> <div>Facilities Time (ind)</div> <div>Time off for meetings (health; nightworkers)</div> <div>Proportionality at branch level</div> <div>Women's Education</div> <div>Organisation of Women</div> <div>Fair representation of black women</div> <div>Inaccurate Membership Records</div> <div>Direct mailings of women only courses</div> <div>Childcare room in Congress House (TUC)</div> <div>Updating Mailing Lists System</div> <div>Career Structures in UNISON (ind)</div> <div>Training for local bargaining/ CCT and TUPE</div> <div><u>Circulation of Materials</u></div> <div>Guidelines on proportionality</div>
BROADER BASED NEGOTIATING	OTHER ISSUES
<div>Sickness policies</div> <div>Breast cancer screening scheme</div>	<div>Pensions</div> <div>Nestle Boycott</div> <div>Changes in Divorce Law</div> <div>LP: Governing for Democracy</div> <div>Attendance at demonstrations/rallies</div> <div>Rape Crisis (ind)</div> <div>Domestic violence</div> <div>Contraception</div> <div>Full employment (ind)</div> <div>Welfare State (ind)</div> <div><u>Circulation of Materials:</u></div> <div>UNISON leaflet on pensions</div> <div>Bullying at work guidelines</div> <div><u>Affiliations/Donations</u></div> <div>National Abortion Campaign</div> <div>State Pensions at 60</div> <div>Child Poverty Action Group</div>

(ind) indicates that this concern was raised in an interview with an individual member

Venn diagrams (Figures 8.1 and 8.2), shows the extent to which women's concerns (as expressed by themselves) are discussed at these meetings. In summary, few issues which women have identified as their concerns are discussed at Regional Committee and Regional Council. Likewise, few issues debated at Regional Committee and Regional Council are discussed within the regional women's structures. Two aspects of women's concerns will be discussed in more detail below: (i) the debates concerning work of women, and the gender segmentation of the labour market; and (ii) the debates concerning union structures and practices. There was very little discussion of broader based negotiating on either committee which might be a reflection of the distinction between service group, and regional structures. As noted earlier, the regional structure provides an intermediary and co-ordinating role within the union. It does not deal with specific service group issues, since these are addressed within the regional service groups.

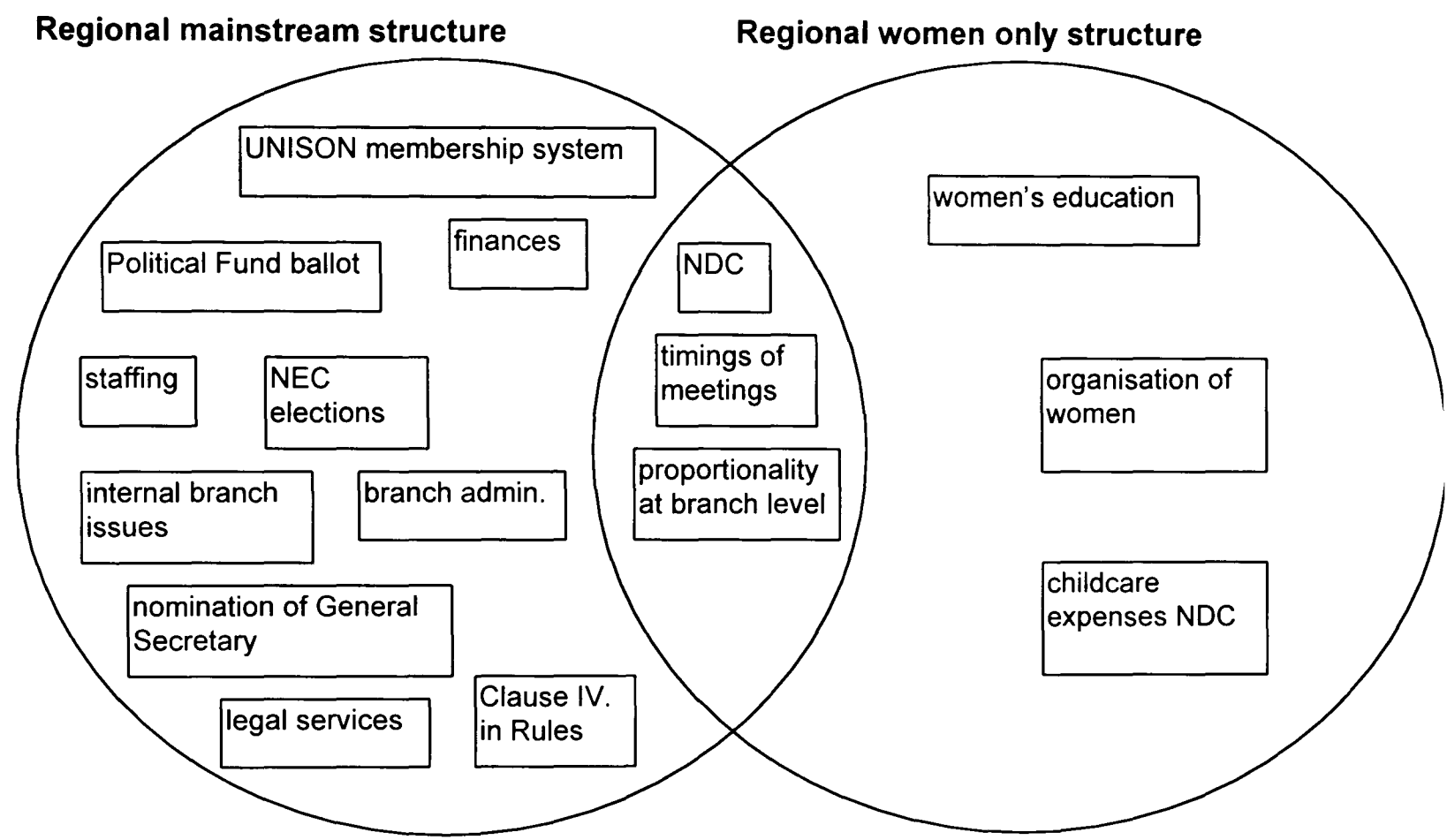


Table 8.1: Internal Issues Raised Within Mainstream and Women-only structures in Region 2

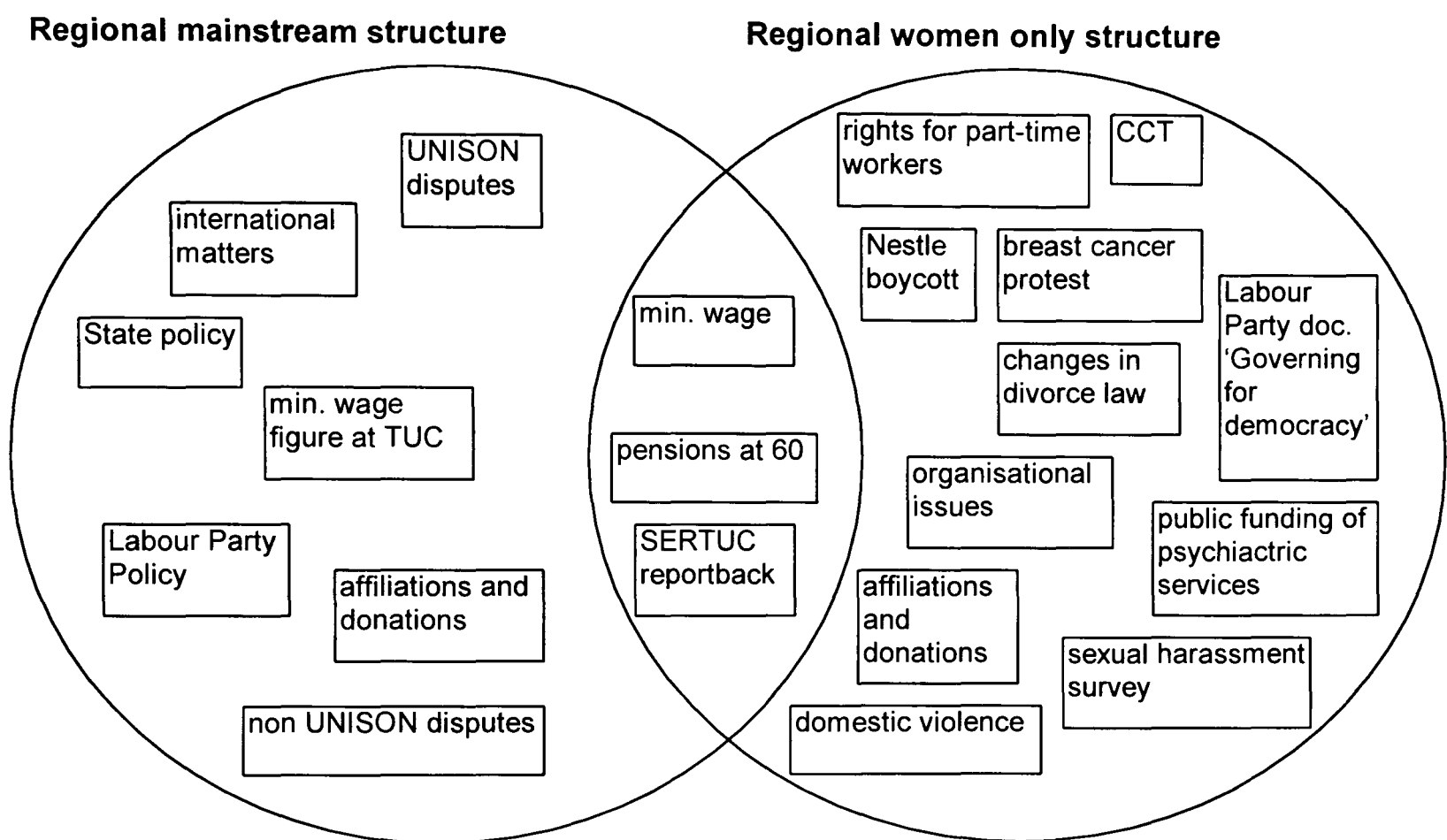


Table 8.2 External Issues Raised Within Mainstream and Women-only Structures in Region 2

THE WORK OF WOMEN AND GENDER SEGMENTATION OF THE LABOUR MARKET

I have categorised the concerns of women in Region 2 to make this discussion more manageable:

- caring responsibilities
- job segregation
- promoting equality

Caring Responsibilities: Although a number women raised these issues in women-only groups, or in individual interviews, during the period of my research I did not hear these issues raised within either the Regional Council, or the Regional Committee. Although reference has already been made to the lack of discussion at these meetings of service group issues, this is not necessarily an adequate defence against the non-discussion of this item, since it could be argued that caring responsibilities go across all service groups. Indeed, caring responsibilities were raised by women from different service groups within the women's structure. Furthermore, it could be argued that the regional structure provides an important means of highlighting this issue at a more localised level. It is branches which need to negotiate childcare facilities for workers, and it is branch representatives who attend the Regional Council and Regional Committee. During the period of my research, one of the other regional women's committees published a substantial booklet on negotiating childcare for workers. There is considerable potential for discussing and circulating such a text through branch representatives attending the mainstream regional committees. At the moment this is not being explored.

Job Segregation: Despite being one of the key factors in women's inequality, this issue was not raised within the mainstream committees. The issue of women's low pay was discussed within the Regional Committee, but only as a justification for a national minimum wage. It was not analysed in terms of the gender segmentation of the labour market. However, when it came to discussing a local dispute which had evolved from the privatisation of public sector cleaning and concerned large numbers of women cleaners, this was discussed to a much greater extent on the mainstream committee, than within the women's committee.

The dispute concerned the sacking of (female) cleaners within Higher Education after the privatisation of a contract within the region. Representatives of the Higher Education (HE) service group pressurised UNISON into boycotting the hiring of inter-collegiate halls within the Region as a way of pressurising the employers into taking remedial action. The dispute concerned 100 low paid women and members noted the tension between encouraging the

participation of low paid women through reserved seats and not supporting their cause. The boycott continued and it was only this aspect of the dispute that was discussed at the Regional Women's Committee when they were discussing the hiring of rooms for future meetings. When the issue was raised again at regional level it was to note the success of the boycott, and the end of the dispute.

For one of the members who had spoken at the Regional Committee, this was one of the few things she felt she had been able to pursue from the workplace to regional committee and see things happen as a consequence of her input. So, for her, she did indeed feel that she 'made a difference'. It has to be noted, however, that she intervened at these meetings as an individual member talking on behalf of members who, like herself, were low paid cleaners. Although she was a member of the Regional Women's Committee, she did not receive any encouragement from this forum for her stand. Indeed, she told me that she had been criticised by the Women's Officer because she had spoken out against the Regional Secretary in relation to this dispute. She was told that it 'wasn't the way things were done'. She felt that everyone had expectations of how she, as a low paid, former-NUPE member, should behave. She felt that being outspoken went against these expectations and told me that the Regional Secretary had allegedly said of her 'I don't believe she's a cleaner'.

However, whilst this dispute illustrates the extent to which Regional Committee members are prepared to 'fight' for the rights of members, and highlights the rights of women members in particular, a more consistent gender analysis of these disputes would look at the process of this inequality, rather than protest at the outcome. Job segregation and its implications for men and women was only discussed once during my research in this Region, and then it was mentioned at one of the women-only educational events. This is not to say, however, that men and women were not concerned about women's terms and conditions, because the next section illustrates that they clearly are. When the Women's Committee discussed the research of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which showed that adverse effect of CCT on women, they talked about their need for more information about the issue, and the need for training.

One member argued that 90% of members who went on the CCT training courses in Local Government were male. Another member noted that training was not widespread and that since one male, in her branch, does all the negotiations, he had 'brushed off' the need for anyone else to be trained. Overall, it appeared that the lay officers who needed to know, e.g. Branch Secretaries and Convenors, were trained in CCT and TUPE, but the women felt that unless rank and file members also had an understanding of CCT and TUPE, they would not be fully equipped to meaningfully engage with any debates on the issue. Whilst it could be argued that job segregation has not been raised at the Regional Committee because it deals with 'wider issues', job segregation does go across all services.

Moving towards Equality: Women within the region highlighted a number of ways in which they wanted to achieve equality at work. One way of achieving equality at work concerns the provision of affordable childcare facilities, which has already been discussed. The other avenues mentioned were: Equal Pay; Job Evaluation; Promotion; Positive Action Training, and the use of a National Minimum Wage. Only the latter was discussed within the mainstream committees, and this highlights another difference in the analysis of the work of women. Whereas women in the women's structures raised specific workplace reasons for why women earned less money, members of the mainstream committees looked at national measures for ameliorating the worst effects of women's low pay. Moreover, whilst the issue of a National Minimum Wage was discussed within the women's structures, it was not given the same emphasis as it was within the mainstream committees.

It is useful to begin the discussion about the region's position on the National Minimum Wage at the 1995 National Delegate Conference. Conference passed a composite motion on full-employment committing UNISON to campaign for a minimum wage of at least half median male earnings (at the time this equated to approximately £4.15). This motion was the basis of the UNISON motion submitted to the 1995 TUC but the UNISON motion did not mention the specific figure of £4.15. When the national minimum wage was debated in the afternoon session of the TUC on 13th September 1995, it was interrupted by a demonstration of women

walking across the Hall in front of the stage wearing white T-shirts with the figure £4.15 clearly printed on them in black. I was watching the debate on television and recognised many of the women as UNISON members whom I had been meeting during the period of my research.

I asked a (female) member of the Regional Committee where the impetus for the TUC £4.15 T-shirt demonstration came from. She said the idea came out of a lunch shared by a number of like-minded women. One of the women then took the idea on through the organisation, Socialist Women on Male Platforms (SWOMP). The preparation for the exercise was carried out in secret and the men complained that they could not join in. There were many UNISON women involved in the protest, but the member insisted that it was independent of the lay delegation in UNISON. She noted that the issue was a political one, not an issue of the official/lay relationship. Because of the politics of being 'tied' to the official policy of the Labour Party, pressing the issue of £4.15 at the TUC was seen as 'rocking the boat'.

The different levels of awareness and interest in the national minimum wage are best illustrated by comparing the Regional Women's Committee meeting of the next day (14th September), and the response of the Regional Committee a week later (25th September). Information (provided by the regional TUC) about the National Minimum Wage was introduced to the new Regional Women's Committee by the Women's Officer who thought the Committee 'might want to think about promoting national minimum wage in the Region'. The TUC debate was widely reported in the press on the day of the Regional Women's Committee, and one member noted the comment printed in the Mirror that UNISON had not been paying their own staff the recommended minimum wage. The Chair of the Women's Committee spoke in defence of UNISON and noted that the workplace was at the seaside, the staff were casual, and reference had to be taken of the geographical location. Another member of the committee noted that these remarks were 'contentious', noting, 'that's the whole point. Its £4.15 across the country'. However, when asked if the committee wanted to do anything about the national minimum wage, the committee decided to table it at the next meeting.

The relatively restrained discussion of the National Minimum Wage contrasts quite strongly with the response of some members of the Regional Committee to the TUC debate. Virtually the first thing to be said by anyone at the meeting was by a (male) member noting his disappointment that UNISON had dropped the figure of £4.15 within one month of it being agreed at National Delegate Conference. The two regional NEC representatives argued that UNISON did not drop the issue, noting the demonstration of approximately 30 women in T-shirts.

Briskin and McDermott argue that unions' complicity in the gendered segmentation of the labour market and union support for traditionalist ideologies about women's work, need to be addressed before unions are transformed beyond 'letting women in' (1993). This section has argued that women have discussed these issues to a certain extent within women-only events, but that very few of these discussions have moved into mainstream discussions. However, it must also be said that the only issues which were discussed in both forums (the national minimum wage; CCT disputes) were the subject of much greater political analysis (by men and women) in the mainstream than the women's structures. In particular, this section illustrates the extent to which all women, not just those in women's structures, need to come together to talk about a number of issues. It also provides us with some insight into the manner in which women's 'real' interests could be determined. Women from the women's structures discuss issues from a gendered perspective which is not often heard in the mainstream committees, whilst women from the mainstream structures discuss issues from a macro-economic perspective which is not often heard in the women's structures. The discussions of chapters 2 and 3 illustrate that neither perspective is sufficient on its own to explain women's inequality at work, and within the wider society. However, there are few occasions in which women with these different perspectives would come together on a regional basis. The Regional Forum is for Branch Equality Officers (Women), and the Regional Women's Committee attracts women who are interested in women's structures.

Indeed one (female) member of the Regional Committee argued that she was not personally involved in self-organised groups 'because there was no time'. I asked her about women's organisation becoming the mainstream, she responded,

'there are not many women who are active at national level, who are also active within women's organisation. They don't cross the divide either. There is no obvious mechanism for transfer across, and this is partly because it is inward looked. The only way forward would be if I were personally involved at regional level. There's no mechanism for networking at national level.'

This section confirms that increasing the number of women who occupy seats on mainstream committees might not necessarily lead to an increase in a discussion of women's concerns. This intensifies the burden on the representative of the Regional Women's Committee to raise the concerns expressed by women in the women's structures. This study also highlights the need for women to come together and start bridging the gap between the different women's perspectives emanating from the mainstream and women's structures. Since this chapter has already noted that the Women's Committee pursues a different role to that of the Regional Committee, it could be argued that there is a structural justification for this lack of overlap between the two committees. However, I would argue that this is only a partial explanation for the limited discussion of women's concerns in the mainstream, and that further explanation can be found in the structures and practices of the union.

FIGHTING FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION

Of those issues discussed in both the mainstream and women's structures, most of them relate to internal issues of union structures and practices. Given the relatively young age of UNISON during my period of research, perhaps it was inevitable that the Regional Committee spent considerable time discussing constitutions and internal issues of democracy. Indeed, considerably more time was spent discussing external issues in the later meetings I attended. However, my observations led me to believe that internal issues are likely to occupy considerable discussion time in the future too. This has several implications. In the short term, it sets the Agenda and could contribute to the exclusion of women's concerns. It could

also lead to the continued frustration of those Committee members (mentioned earlier) who want the Regional Committee to play a more active role in the region. So, why the preoccupation with internal issues, and democracy? I identified two key reasons: membership beliefs, and representative structures and practices. I deal with each below.

Membership Beliefs: A key (woman) activist of the Regional Committee informed me that,

‘the fundamental dynamic within the union (at any level) is protecting lay members’ access and preventing the erosion of key principles by full-time officers - which everybody sees as a threat. Not everybody agrees what is a threat, and all define lay members in different ways. For members of Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU), lay members are the rank and file (i.e. not members of the NEC). Whereas ex-NUPE members may come to the same conclusion, but on a different platform.’

Since two key organisers associated with CFDU were based in Region 2, and the campaigning group attracted considerable interest within UNISON at the time of my research, it is worth looking at the organisation in more detail. The Campaign Group were suitably well organised within UNISON to put forward their own candidate in the election for General Secretary. Amongst other things, the candidate stood for ‘genuine lay member control of Unison, as opposed to domination by non-elected full-time officials’. For the purposes of my research, it provides an interesting example of the different interpretations of democracy, and provides a rationale for the considerable amount of time spent discussing internal democracy within UNISON. It also provides an echo of the debates which Terry referred to in his review of the original merger negotiations (1996).

Considerable time was spent discussing democratic structures and practices within Regional Committee and Regional Council and it could be argued that they were raised to the exclusion of external issues, and women’s concerns. By focusing on the processes of democracy and defining democracy in terms of lay versus officers, it could be argued that members are unable to see the outcome: that less time is spent discussing wider issues, and making policy. Furthermore, the representative structures appeared to support such an outcome.

Representative Structures and Practices: In all meetings of the Regional Committee, the Agenda was essentially a framework for feedback: matters arising from previous Minutes; report back from NEC members, and SERTUC representatives; reportback from sub-committees of the Committee; Regional Secretary's Report; Financial Report. Most meetings, therefore, had a tendency to be reactive, and inward looking, with limited proactive activity. External issues were seldom discussed, and when they were, they were usually the subject of motions to/from Regional Council, or were raised under 'Any Other Business'. Although I have attributed this reactivity to the business of the Agenda, it is obviously drawn up by someone and, as noted in chapter 2 above, agenda are vulnerable to manipulation and bias. However, having sat on a number of different UNISON committees during the period of my research, the Agenda of this Committee seems little different to the Agenda of any of the other Committees - including the Women's Committees. So, in part, feedback-driven Agenda are a symptom of representative structures of democracy. If a Committee has sent a representative to another meeting, or a Conference, it needs to be told what that representative did. Likewise a committee will want to know what a working group has achieved. Thus, of a finite period of time, a considerable amount is taken up by feedback reports. If members wish to protest about an issue which is not on the Agenda, they raise it in Matters Arising (from previous Minutes), or Any Other Business. I attended many meetings during my period of research and never ceased to be amazed at the amount of time that could be spent on Matters Arising (from previous Minutes). However, as more time is spent hearing feedback and discussing internal democracy, the time available to discuss on external, pro-active issues becomes less, and perpetuates the very phenomena that they are fighting against. Matters requiring detailed thought and discussion are left to the next meeting, or the 'management team' (consisting of key lay and paid officers) is left to take matters forward.

Many members realised the important relationship between time and membership control, and often demanded more time in terms of more meetings, or longer meetings. However, these demands ignore the concerns of those having difficulty taking time off for meetings. Often

these members were members in the Health Care Service Group, and invariably women. Reference was made in Chapter 5 to the Regional Health Committee in Region 2 wanting direct elections for the Regional Committee, because insufficient health service members were able to come to the Regional Council to vote. That meeting was reminded that members in health care 'don't have time off'. When the Women's Committee discussed the timing of meetings, they noted the difficulty of getting time-off facilities for nightworkers. The issue of time-off was discussed at a meeting of the Regional Committee which prompted an interesting debate in terms of member participation. Of the 16 recorded comments, only four were made by men, and there was a high degree of consensus amongst the women who were talking. This was one issue where women were in agreement.

On another front, the reactiveness of the Regional Committee seemed to be exacerbated by the relationship it had with Regional Council. Within Region 2, the Regional Council was frequently reminded that it was the decision-maker for the region, thus ensuring that the Regional Committee was in effect only the management committee for the region. Therefore, in addition to receiving feedback from a myriad of other representative structures, the Committee was supposed to carry out the wishes of the Council. However, as noted earlier, the iniquity of the Regional Council meant that, in practice, policy decisions were not made on a frequent basis. In this hierarchical structure, the expectations of members of the Committee could be undermined by the failure of the Council. One member noted how the Council could be manipulated to fail:

'I believe some members and officers are openly hostile to Council and that some officers see it as a waste of time. Some parties are gleeful when it is inquorate. Branches are not encouraged to attend, or change their behaviour and attend. A few would like to see it die a death'.

This analysis contrasts with the observation of a Regional Officer:

'It's difficult to persuade members to attend - they don't feel it is relevant and feel that they have to put up with being talked down if they want to make a point. It is not seen as a priority when they have much lower facilities time'

As noted earlier, the regional structure provides an intermediary and co-ordinating role within the union. It does not deal with specific service group issues, since these are dealt with by regional service group. So, motions concerning the defence of national terms and conditions in a Local Government branch, and the motion from a Regional Health Authority regarding the abolition of RHAs were ruled out of order because they were the remit of the regional service groups. Thus, motions submitted to the Council are from a wider, political perspective, and mostly relate to internal issues; international matters; state policy; Labour Party policy; or national trade union movement issues. Few issues relate specifically to employment issues, because to be ruled in, they need to be relevant to all service groups. Thus the Regional Council appears to be in a Catch 22 situation. A member of the Regional Committee and Women's Committee told me how she had addressed a Regional Council meeting, saying that she was appalled by the discussions and their lack of relevance to her members. At a time when branch officers are grappling with contracting out, and redundancies, is it too much to expect delegates to attend a Council meeting which discusses issues - albeit worthy - which appear tangential to their main concerns? Added to which, if they make the effort to attend and the meeting is inquorate, are they likely to return? A recent survey of attendance had noted that approximately 80 branches were not registering to attend the Council, and only 40% of those that had registered were attending. Branches not attending were mostly small health branches. A key (female) activist noted,

'it is difficult to find out what the problem is - probably because there is no one single answer. It probably relates to relationships to fellow workers, own workload and individuals making decisions not to attend.'

These comments were endorsed by three other women. One who noted that 'as a member in the frontline, she is fighting against her own conscience to attend'. Another agreed that the 'workplace situation makes it difficult', and a third noted that she felt 'uncomfortable with colleagues when going to meetings'. When non-attendance was debated at the Regional Council, one of the women health workers argued that,

'if members could not get time off, then the Full-time Officers should be getting the time for them. The Regional Secretary should be knocking on doors to find out why'

Reference was made in chapter 2 to the differentiated access that women had to resources and facility time at work. If we add to this the difficulty of getting time off in health, and the possibility of needing to make provision for domestic responsibilities during meeting times, then women's access to decision making arena may be seriously undermined. This could be further exacerbated by the needs of a representative structure where key activity and decision-making is the remit of sub-committees and working group. Reference was made in chapter 5 to the power of different sub-committees in national Service Groups, and it seems that similar observations could be made at a regional level. Very often although the Regional Committee was the ultimate arbiter of decisions, it was reacting to the outcome of debates which had already taken place elsewhere. Thus, if one were looking to influence activity and debates in the region, sub-committees of the Regional Committee would appear to be a good place to start. Women on the Regional Women's Committee had obviously appreciated this and had stood for election to the Recruitment and Organisation sub-committee. From here they attempted to ensure that proportionality and fair representation were implemented at branch level, and monitoring was part of the Agenda. However, it is difficult to reconcile the need to sit on a number of committees in order to 'make a difference', and the difficulties which many members have in getting time-off for meetings. Whilst discussions of democracy are centred around the lay-officer relationship, it is unlikely that more innovative discussions about enabling more members to participate will evolve. A key (female) activist of the Regional Committee asked,

'how can you radically reconstruct that which people are actively involved in. Within my own branch, I wanted to get less Branch Executive meetings, and more Department Support Meetings, but I was accused of Stalinism, and a lack of democracy. How do you move forward in such circumstances?'

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The study of mainstream and women-only structures in Region 2 enabled a number of questions to be addressed. Proportionality and fair representation facilitated the election of women to Regional Committee in proportion to their membership within the region. As well as gaining access to the decision making forum, women contributed to all debates, thus ensuring that 'natural justice' was attained in terms of women's participation. However, it did not mean that all women were speaking, or that women's concerns were debated on a regular basis within the mainstream structures.

For women to gain full access to decision making processes within mainstream structures, they needed to be able to attend the meeting and they needed to speak. In relation to the Regional Council, sufficient numbers of their colleagues had to be present for the meeting to be quorate. Lastly, women needed to know the rules of the game and be prepared to use them. Not all women were willing or able to do this. Some members were unable to attend meetings due to work commitments. Newly active women did not tend to speak at meetings and a number of the Regional Council meetings were inquorate.

Although present at the meetings, women were under no obligation to talk for women. The interest of many candidates was to ensure that the union at regional level was a campaigning organisation - to defend jobs and services. Only one woman on the regional committee has a legitimate mandate to speak for 'women in the region', and this is the representative of the Women's Committee. This chapter illustrates that the Women's Committee pursues a different role within UNISON to that of the Regional Committee. Whilst members would like to see the Regional Committee as the co-ordinator of campaigns, the role of the Women's Committee was primarily focused on women's organisation and education. Thus, at the time of the study, the priorities and concerns of the Women's Committee were different to those of the Regional Committee. With one or two exceptions, issues raised in the Regional

Committee were not the subject of debate at the women's committee, and issues raised in the Women's Committee were not the subject of debate at the Regional Committee (or Council). Whilst a representative of the Women's Committee gained access to the Regional Committee, the Committee was not using this access to pursue specific issues on a systematic basis (although it had evidently done so in the past). Nor had it started to nominate other women to the Regional Committee. At the time of writing, therefore, it was neither acting as a pressure group, nor as a conduit for 'like-minded' women to access the Committee. It was, however, working with women shop stewards at a branch level and encouraging women to participate at their workplace. Since the majority of issues discussed at the Regional Committee are raised through branches, and nominations to Regional Council and Regional Committee are from branches, such activity could see the beginning of a changing agenda - but such a strategy will take time to bear fruit.

I would argue, however, that more than time is required before a change of agenda. Whilst this branch based strategy supports the increased involvement of newly active women who are more likely to raise workplace (gendered) concerns, it neglects the fact that a considerable number of experienced women are already involved in the mainstream committees. It is not possible to argue that the 'previously active' women do not identify with women, or do not represent women's concerns. Instead, it would appear that previously active women analyse women's concerns from a political perspective, rather than a gendered perspective. Members in the women's structure are keen to talk about job segregation, but not so keen to talk about the national minimum wage. Women in the mainstream structures are keen to talk about national political solutions, but do not talk about changing women's segregation at a local level. As noted in chapter 2 and 3, both perspectives are needed. Indeed, the work of Higgins (1996) suggests that women's concerns will go unheard whilst unions persist with a gender-neutral perspective. Within UNISON, the danger is that the two perspectives never meet on equal terms, or neutral territory. Both sets of women invest their time in structures which seldom interact. When they meet in the forum of the mainstream regional structures, the agenda has already been set by the needs of a representative

structure and the gender-neutral democratic beliefs of the mainstream membership. That democracy continues to be analysed predominantly in terms of the lay and paid-officer relationship has implications for the effective representation of women, and their concerns. This analysis of democracy does not connect with the feminist analysis of democracy and does not perceive that the 'work' of participation, is different for different peoples. This model of democracy sets the agenda of debate at committee meetings and is in danger of occupying precious debating time to the exclusion of workplace based discussions. Furthermore, by defining democracy through the lay and paid-officer relationship, committee members focus on gender-neutral outcomes for members, they seldom look at democracy in terms of outcomes for women. The next chapter looks at the predominant ideologies and institutions in the local government service group.

CHAPTER 9:

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the operation of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation within the Local Government Service Group. Approximately 800,000 members of UNISON work in local government. One third of these members are manual and craft workers, the remainder administrative, clerical or professional. Approximately 65% of members in this service group are women and proportionality has been achieved in the directly elected seats on this committee. However, this study illustrates a number of processes which inhibit the transformation of women's interests into women's concerns. Chapter 8 indicated a number of necessary conditions for women's full access to decision making. This study confirms those conditions and identifies an additional one in the form of 'expertise'. Women's concerns are also suppressed by the structural separation of the committee and the women-only structures, and an unequal distribution of resources amongst the membership. This suppression of interests can be offset, however, by the contribution of officers.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO NATIONAL SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE

Proportionality and Fair Representation: The proportion of women on the SGE is 66%. This compares favourably with a 65% female membership. It also represents a dramatic increase in the number of women on the SGE. Thirty-one women now sit on the SGE as opposed to nine women who sat on the interim committee. However, since the interim committee consisted of a selection of members from the former partner unions, perhaps a more meaningful comparison is made by looking at the interim sector committees. These were based on the executives of the former unions. The APT&C sector committee (primarily former-

NALGO members) consisted of 25% women, and the Manual & Craft sector committee (primarily former-NUPE members) consisted of 35% women. Thus proportionality had produced a dramatic increase in women's access to decision making at a national level in relation to both former partner unions. Of these women, a number were women who earned less than £5000 per annum, so fair representation as it relates to such factors as part-time workers and manual workers was being achieved. However, during the period of my research, there were no black members represented amongst the membership of the SGE.

Self-organisation: First of all, it is important to remember that it is only at branch level that self-organised groups are organised on a service specific basis, and it is only at this level that the rule book facilitates access to service specific structures. Self-organised groups are organised on a cross-service basis at regional and national level, and there are no constitutional points of access into service group structures at these levels. Thus, whilst providing self-organised groups access to cross-service regional and national structures, the rules did not provide self-organised groups access to service groups. Reference was made in chapter 7 to the Regional Committee which developed guidelines for self-organisation within Region 1. The Working Group deliberately left each service group to decide the representative links with the self-organised groups. At that time a paid Officer within the Group, who also had Local Government Service Group responsibilities, noted that,

‘self-organisation should be cross-service group as opposed to within service groups. We have not actively encouraged self-organisation within Local Government’

This distinction between self-organisation and service group structures at a lay level was underlined by the separation of the two structures at an institutional level. Initially, self-organised groups came within the remit of the Equalities Unit. This Unit was part of the Membership Development Division and was located at the former NUPE head offices in Woolwich. Service group issues came within the remit of the Policy Division which was located at the former NALGO head offices in London. Thus the self-organised groups, and the

Equalities Unit, were initially kept at an institutional, and physical, distance from the bargaining structures of the union. Branded a 'fundamental mistake' by one senior (female) activist, this institutional separation was closed once the first substantive NEC had been elected, and re-organised. With regard to the lay structure relationship, this changed during, and after, my period of my research, and it is worth noting the pressures for change.

Initially, the point of contact between the SGEs and self-organised groups was through a liaison panel consisting of members of the SGE and chairs of the national self-organised groups. 'Standing Orders Committee Guidelines for the Interpretation and Implementation of Standing Orders and Rule Book' dated February 1994 noted that,

'Self-organised Groups may not submit motions or attend as delegates at Service Group Conferences'

Keeping within this guideline, whilst wishing to move forward, the Local Government Service Group Executive submitted a motion to the first LG Service Group Conference which had been written by the National Lesbian and Gay Members self-organised Group. The motion sought representation at the service group conference by two representatives from each self-organised group. The motion was carried and a rule change was agreed at the 1995 National Delegate Conference to ensure that this representation was available at all Service Groups Conferences. However, a motion seeking representation and participation of self-organised groups in service group structures was not discussed. During 1996, the National Lesbian and Gay Conference submitted similar motions to individual service group conferences. The position adopted by the Service Group Executives was to seek remittance of the motions, to oppose them, or in the case of the Local Government SGE, to submit their own amendment. A paper written by the National Lesbian and Gay Committee (NLGC) notes that,

'The key difficulty for SGEs related to the proposals for direct representation. In discussions and correspondence with SGEs, the NLGC acknowledge that there was a need for a wider debate about the principles and basis for such representation and sought firm commitments on the development of links between the SG and SOGs, establishing proper consultation mechanisms, and addressing issues of concern to lesbian and gay members'

The 1996 Local Government Service Group Conference voted to timetable regular consultations with representatives of the self-organised groups; call upon regions to do likewise; continue to consult with groups on current negotiations around equal opportunities, and produce publicity for members in local government which 'provides practical advice and information, outlining issues affecting members from each self-organised group at work and a negotiation pack to improve working conditions'. By voting for the SGE amendment, the Conference rejected calls for,

- a mechanism for representation on the national and regional service group committees from members of each self-organised group; and
- a campaign for increased finance to cover the cost of effective representation on these committees.

This detail has been included for a number of reasons. From a methodological point of view, it posits the relationship which existed at the time of my research between self-organisation and the mainstream Local Government structures, and indicates that a different relationship now exists. The fact that the relationship has changed illustrates the extent to which self-organisation is recognised within UNISON. The source of the motions for change illustrate the manner in which at least one self-organised group is prepared to act as a pressure group. The current position of the relationship also illustrates the difficulty of implementing radical strategies within a liberal democratic framework. It raises the question of how far radical strategies will be allowed to develop within UNISON.

Although I was not present at the 1996 LG Service Group Conference, earlier work has highlighted the tensions of integrating informal structures of self-organisation within formal structures of representation. Fears that self-organisation was not democratic because it encourages self-selection were raised by senior (female) activists in Region 2. It seems that whilst self-organised groups are seen as pressure groups, their comments are accepted by the mainstream. This confirms Colgan and Ledwith's conclusions that women's support for separate

organisation is conditional on it being perceived as good for women and the trade union movement as a whole (1996:p184). Furthermore, it is probably deemed acceptable that pressure groups try to elect their own members to Committees through open (mainstream) elections. However, this legitimacy is called into question as soon as the groups act as identity groups, and seek direct representation outside of these mainstream elections for reasons of their oppressed position within society. Whilst this has implications for the future development of UNISON, it also has implications for the discussion of women's concerns within the union.

Observing the regional structures in Region 2 enabled us to see the difference between women operating in mainstream structures, and women being active within women's structures. Of the women sitting on the Regional Committee, only the representative of the Regional Women's Committee was committed to speaking specifically on women's behalf. Of those issues discussed within the women's structures, only a few were also discussed in the mainstream structures. On the whole, workplace issues were more often discussed within the women's structures, than the mainstream structures. The chapter concluded that whilst proportionality facilitated women's systematic inclusion in the mainstream, it was not necessarily leading to the discussion of more issues of concern to women. Whilst the women's structures in the Region were not yet systematically using the mainstream representative structures to change the agenda, the chapter noted that this was a possibility. By providing for two representatives of each self-organised group to attend service group conferences, and allowing each group to submit two motions each, similar opportunities are being created within the service group structure. However, whilst members are willing for self-organised groups to be represented on cross-service groups, they are less willing to allow them to be represented on service group committees. In this respect, I would argue that they are being interpreted as pressure groups from a liberal democratic perspective, rather than identity groups from a radical perspective.

WOMEN'S PRESENCE ON THE NATIONAL SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE

I attended 5 meetings of the SGE. Approximately 38 lay members were at each meeting, two thirds of whom were women. I took detailed notes of 16 debates which resulted in formal proposals and decision-making. Although women participated in all of these debates, they only spoke equal to, or more than men, in a total of 6 of these debates. This meant that the men, who made up a third of the meeting, were talking for two-thirds of the time. This was very different to the level of contributions made by women in Region 2 and prompted some detailed consideration of any differences between the two committees.

There are 49 members of the SGE, which makes a very large committee meeting when everyone is present. In Region 2 I had noted that newly active women were far less likely to contribute to discussions, and studied the experience of SGE members. I found that half of the members were completely new to local government meetings at national level. Of these 24 completely new members, 22 were women, the vast majority of whom had been elected to low paid women's seats. This leads to a disparity of previous experience amongst men and women. Only a third of the women on the new committee had had previous experience at a national level, compared with almost 90% of the men. Thus, if it is easier for previously active members to know the issues, deal with the paperwork, and speak in ensuing debates, it could be argued there is an inbuilt bias against (newly active) women speaking on the national SGE. In her discussion of the paradoxes of participation, Phillips talked of meetings being monopolised by those 'already favoured with wealth, education and power (1991:128). After observing five SGE meetings, I would certainly add 'previous experience' to the list indicated by Phillips (1991).

Only four of the newly active women were speaking at the meetings I attended, so it could be argued that women's previous experience has important implications for women's access to decision making. However, since Manual & Craft members make up at least half of the newly active women, it could have unfortunate implications for manual workers, and low paid women

too. Since male manual workers were not able to win any of the general seats on the SGE, their only form of representation on the 1995 Committee was through women occupying the low paid women's seats; one general seat; and two representatives from the Manual & Craft Sector committee. During my period of study, 3 of these 15 M&C members were contributing to debates of the national SGE. An interview with Sally gave me an insight into what it is like for a low paid woman who had never stood for a national seat before. Extracts from a semi-structured interview with her graphically illustrate the 'newness' of the role she has undertaken, and the manner in she feels excluded, and intimidated:-

'I felt very isolated at the first weekend of the SGE at Chester. I felt - and still do - that people are not friendly and that they are people who have been on committees for a long time. I only really gelled with one person. Elaine [one of the regional representatives] was not there and David [the other regional representative] provided no support. He asked 'will I write the report?'. I did not know we had to do a report, so I just replied 'yes, go ahead'. I was not given a look at the report until it came up at the regional meeting.'

Sally noted that she had never travelled before in her former partner union (NUPE), and found her first trip to London rather daunting. At the time of our interview, it seemed that she still did not enjoy the journey to London. Since the other regional representatives travel down the previous day, she travels on her own. At the first meeting of the SGE, Elaine met her at the station, but has not repeated this. Sally said 'she must think I know my way now'. Sally described her experience of the national SGE meetings:-

'Elaine and David converse all the time and I feel left out. Elaine told me she would write the report, and that I could do it next time, but I told her 'no I won't', because I did not feel that I would know how to. ... Elaine and David have given me no support at all. It's because they are ex-NALGO members. I think this makes a difference. I don't see the reports [of the SGE meeting] before they go before the regional committee' ... David and I talk but I still feel that he is above me. I feel that Elaine is a 'know-all'

These comments are reminiscent of those of Betty in Chapter 6 who described her feelings of participating for the first time in the Regional Co-ordinating Team in Region 1. One year later Betty successfully stood for a seat on the National Women's Committee. Given that the SGE

meetings I attended were the first meetings of the substantive committee, and a considerable number of women on the committee had limited experience at this level of union structure, it could be that were I to return to these meetings now, men and women's contributions would have altered to reflect the growing experience of the women members. Certainly, the SGE were making efforts to facilitate members' full participation in the proceedings. The Officers developed an induction programme, and introduced an informal mentoring system for new members. Sally went on one of the training courses and noted that it was 'very, very helpful'. With the exception of one man, all 20 participants were women. Sally noted that a number of women attending the course were in the same position as herself which was obviously of some comfort to her. However, whilst it may just be a question of time before the newly active women start contributing in relation to their numbers, I felt that certain structures and practices might underpin the continued marginalisation of women.

STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES WHICH MARGINALISE WOMEN

There are 49 members of the SGE, which makes for a large committee meeting when everyone is present, so the service group has been structured to ensure that much smaller committees get involved in specific issues. Taking CCT as an example, it is possible to illustrate how these smaller committees work. CCT is the remit of the CCT/Privatisation Working Party which consists of 6 members. Informal processes have ensured that women occupy half the seats (two of whom are newly active), and the seats are split 50/50 between Manual & Craft and APT&C members. Membership is via the SGE, or the main Sector Committees, and a motion to increase its membership to include regional representatives was lost. Arguments for smaller groups relate to their efficiency, and their supportive nature. A key activist noted that:

'the mechanisms of work progression are different with the use of working parties which are smaller. More contribute, particularly women. Most business is generated by a small group of people, and the key negotiating body for single status is an example of 'good practice'. Everyone is at a similar level of information, discussions are behind closed doors (the best way of generating ideas is for individuals to talk freely), and it is possible to use 'away days'.

Despite such good intentions, the use of smaller working groups has an unfortunate fall-out for the remainder of the women on the SGE. The first is a perception that the national group is operated by an 'inner cabal'. The second is that since much work is undertaken in smaller working groups, it means that the SGE 'revolves around officers' papers and formal discussions, with a huge agenda generalising across the whole of union business'. The word 'huge' to describe the agenda is not an understatement. Very often in the meetings I attended it was at least 1cm thick, requiring several hours of non-stop reading. One new member noted that,

'the paperwork is difficult to understand, and if I had known what was involved, I would never have volunteered. I am learning too many things in a short time'.

A key activist talked about the problems created by low paid women's seats, noting that NUPE women activists tended to be only active at branch level, and might just be a steward at that level. She noted that the unskilled women had less confidence and feels that that aspect of the structure does not work:-

'[the reservation of low paid seats] sends out the message that UNISON wants low paid women involved but I do not believe they are yet ready. Training and support mechanisms have been provided for low paid women on the committee and I hope the women will stand again and become active at that level.'

Sally did stand again for the low paid women's seat. However, whilst the Chair was concerned that the women were only active at branch level, interviews with two low paid women on the SGE illustrated a different viewpoint.

'in many ways APT&C don't have a clue about what is going on job wise. But they don't think manuals have any 'nous' and always underestimate you. They can be very patronising at all levels: regional, national, local. They treat us as if we have not been in a union before, never sat on regional or local committees.

Such patronisation is articulated in the words of a key activist who noted that,

‘the SGE is only able to go at the speed of the slowest. The reservation of low paid women’s seats is not helping the bodies they are on. Finding ways of making them comfortable - whilst I accept it is a job that you have to do - still means that it is preventing getting on with other things. If you are going to be active at the top, you need to be experienced’

Whilst some of the low paid women would disagree with this assessment, it could be justified by Sally’s experience,

‘voting is sometimes a problem when I don’t know what they are talking about. I don’t understand everything, but know that it is exactly the same for some other women’

That the SGE is only able to go at the ‘speed of the slowest’ conflicts with my own observations, and that of members. From interviews, it would appear that ‘self-censorship’ is one reason for women’s lack of voice. Despite the Chair’s endeavours to be facilitating and ‘waiting for someone to speak from the manual side’, one low paid woman noted that:

‘the APT&C members speak again, and again, and again - going round and round in circles. Manuals won’t speak for the sake of it, or repeat something already said, they do not speak because there is nothing left to say. We’ve all learnt to keep matters short, since members always have to get back to work. If you speak to manuals for 10 minutes, then those members will have to work 10 minutes over.’

Indeed, whilst a workshop discussion at the SGE Policy Seminar noted the low level of involvement by some members,

‘there was also a view that the higher level of involvement by some other members was equally a problem, as it was this that caused the problem of some Service Group Executive members being unwilling or unable to contribute fully’

In addition, by being concerned that women were only active at branch level, the Chair was in danger of devaluing branch-based experiences, and ignoring the very different experiences

that low-paid manual workers have. These differences can be illustrated by interview material from three low paid women members of the SGE.

Sally is the Branch Secretary for 1700 members who work across a number of different sites. Sally is a part-time worker (20 hours) currently on secondment. At the time of the interview she was working from home. Sally noted that working from home is hard work since everything has to be done manually and without recourse to a secretary. The physical fragmentation of the members across the City, with few (if any) central workplaces, means that any consultation with the membership has to be achieved through the post. She noted that,

‘the computer is still in the box; the photocopier is in the small bedroom; the typewriter remains in the box until I need it, and I am learning to type. I do the membership records manually - which is hard work. It is very time consuming. It is easier for me because I have the use of a car. My colleague [who covers half of the area] does not have a car and relies on public transport’

Some days Sally has meetings all day, sometimes she has meetings in the evenings from 6 to 10pm. She noted that working at home is a trap, because there is no escape. She takes telephone calls all day, every day, and may well do about 60 hours a week (three times her part-time hours). She noted that sometimes her telephone bill can be up to 10 pages long. She receives telephone calls on Saturdays, Sundays, Bank Holidays and at Christmas. These are all days on which some of her members may well be working and they justify their calls with ‘I pay my subs every week, I should be able to get some action’.

These comments were echoed by two other low paid women members on the national SGE. Susan works in a school canteen and has few facilities. She feels that this puts her at a disadvantage in relation to her APT&C colleagues. Although she has access to a ‘pay as you go’ School fax, this is not available when the office closes. She has access to a photocopier but this is 7 miles away. Although she uses the facilities of another union at her workplace her home telephone bill includes much UNISON work. She noted that it is easy to forget calls that

have been made on union work, and consequently not claim for them. In addition, it is not convenient to make telephone calls at work, and no-one can contact her if she is in a meeting. Her request for a mobile telephone has not been taken up. Susan would have appreciated this particular facility since she travels quite a lot on union business, often at night-time across country, and feels that a mobile telephone would also give her a sense of security should she ever break down. Janet, another low paid woman member on the SGE, also does her union work from home. Her branch office is 5 miles away to which she travels by public transport. Like Sally, Susan and Janet type their own work and need typing facilities. All three women noted that typing letters and photocopying documents are major parts of the job.

Both Susan and Janet contrasted their lack of facilities to the resources available in former-NALGO offices. Like Sally, they find the circulation of material to members makes a lot of work for them. Even obtaining the postage is a problem. Although there are pre-paid envelopes available for some mail-outs, on most occasions, they need to buy sheets of stamps at a time, which is quite expensive, and is initially paid for by themselves. Another difference relates to time-off facilities for manual members. Susan works from 8am to 1pm, but because no-one extra will be provided to cover any of her absences, or no extra time will be provided, the rest of her canteen will have to double-up to get the work done in the same time period. Susan and Janet believe this is different for APT&C staff who can go 'wherever they like'.

Susan and Janet are both single parents and have to live on a very tight budget. They both felt that certain members and officers did not understand what low pay meant 'even when you say'. They believe that better paid members and officers just 'don't understand how low paid we are'. Since neither Susan nor Janet have a float they have to perform a delicate balancing act with their monies in order to fund their union activities. Although the money will be reimbursed eventually, it obviously gives them some difficulty,

'we use the money we have saved for our holidays, Christmas or the 'lecky' bill, to pay for union needs, and then wait for the money to come back from UNISON'

The implication of organising different groups of members was articulated at one point on the SGE in a discussion of the democratic process for consulting on Single Status. One of the (male) members proposed that members should be consulted at branch level through a branch-based ballot. He argued that this was 'more reliable', and 'more democratic' since there was a lower return for postal ballots. This was opposed by eight members, of which five were women, and three were manual and craft members. One of the manual and craft (male) members noted that 'not everyone has facilities to branch ballot'. Another manual and craft (female) member noted how impractical it was, given that some branches have up to 100 workplaces, and many members do not work at the same time. One woman noted that her membership was spread over 60 miles, and another woman noted that some members have no workplace. However, despite these interventions by a number of women, it is interesting that the democratic process was discussed in terms of numbers, and not gender. At no point, did anyone discuss the fact that if the members most likely to be in fragmented workplaces were women, this would mean that women would be those most likely not to be included in the 'democratic process'.

In the main, when they spoke on the SGE, women confirmed Cockburn's argument that women elected from a mixed constituency do not speak only for women (1995). Regional mandates are adhered to quite strictly by some regions, so when women spoke, they were often representing the views of their region, or the sector group. Whilst this indicates the importance of identity groups having representation on the SGE, it should be noted that women also spoke about issues which were of particular concern to them as workers in education, school meals, or as organisers of members in fragmented workplaces. That is, although the groups of workers they spoke of were not specifically identified as women, it was usually the experiences of women to which they were referring. Notwithstanding the need to adhere to regional mandates, it would appear that identifying women as a sex category can

lead to the discussion of women's concerns - where they are defined by occupation, rather than by gender. Unfortunately, the agenda and committee structure mitigate against these opportunities arising very frequently. The structure of the service group at national level means that women directly elected to the SGE are involved in broader strategic issues, hearing report back and discussing constitutional matters. There are few opportunities to discuss occupation specific matters and only a limited number are involved in the working parties on CCT and single-status. Added to the capacity of some members to speak 'for the sake of it', several low paid members noted that they were often 'dead bored' with issues at the SGE meetings. This is unfortunate because these women have a very different experience of both work and union organisation and could provide a gendered analysis of workplace issues if the opportunity arose. The implications of these opportunities not arising can be illustrated by discussing union activity on Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). The next section discusses the gendered impact of CCT within Local Government.

GENDERED IMPACT OF COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE TENDERING

The Conservative Government made a two-pronged attack on local government during the 1980s and 1990s. Through increased centralisation, central Government forced local government to be a purchaser, rather than a provider of services. It also introduced CCT for manual staffs which later extended to professional services. These two actions led to the fragmentation of employment units at a local level, providing potential for employers to break from national collective bargaining. Since local organisation and decision making forms the basis of participatory democracy, this has led to hopes that it will bring about a renewal of workplace unionism. However, in his review of union responses to contracting (of manual services), Colling (1995) argues that this is unlucky to happen in local government. He notes that CCT places too many demands on local activists who become increasingly caught up with bureaucracy of the contracting process. In his argument, Colling (1995) refers to another restriction on workplace unionism: that of 'extremely uneven and gendered distribution of

bargaining power' which led to women enduring the 'most disruption and the most severe cuts in terms and conditions'.

The detrimental impact of CCT on women is confirmed by the 1995 Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Report (Escott and Whitfield 1995). This highlights the two tier service which is evolving in local government, which divides permanent and casual staff, full-time and part-time staff, and men and women. The authors looked at four (manual) services subject to CCT in local authorities during the period September 1993 and March 1994. Escott and Whitfield (1995) noted the variation between the implementation of CCT in refuse collection (predominantly male workers), building cleaning and education catering (predominantly female workers). Building cleaning has been most affected by CCT and private contractors have won over half the contracts since 1989 (UNISON 1995). This sector has seen a dramatic increase in the number of part-time and temporary staff, fewer overtime opportunities, increased productivity not being financially rewarded and drastic cuts in women's take home pay. This was in contrast to refuse collection, which saw a smaller number of contracts go to private companies, authorities maintaining national rates and improving bonus schemes to take account of productivity and work intensification. There was no increase in part-time or temporary working in refuse collection. Across all four sectors, Escott and Whitfield (1995) report that total female employment fell by 22 per cent and male employment by 12 per cent. In addition, research shows that 'female dominated services accounted for over 90 per cent of the [DSO] surpluses generated by the case study authorities. This led Escott and Whitfield (1995) to argue that 'low paid women workers are effectively subsidising council expenditure and council taxpayers in general' (p23). The extension of CCT to white collar services and the potential for women to lose out, once again, is noted by the EOC report. Escott and Whitfield estimate that approximately 100,000 women in white collar jobs could be affected by CCT, 75% of whom work full-time and 80% of whom work in the lower grades. Given that, men and women are segregated into jobs with differing rates of pay, the authors warn that women's rates could be reduced to match those in the private sector, whereas men's will remain the same, or increase to match those available in the private sector (Escott and Whitfield 1995).

The next section discusses the relationship between increasing women's access to local government and addressing their concerns about CCT.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN RELATION TO CCT?

Women in Region 1 and 2 raised CCT as one of their concerns. A (female) Branch Secretary in a Local Government (manual) branch in Region 1 noted the impact on part-timers, and on membership activity:

'the contract system is immoral. The DSO has to be flexible in social services. Employment is very casual. There has been a massive attack on part-time workers. Contracts were changed to working 5 days over 7, and members have lost their weekend enhancements. They now receive a flat rate. School meals and cleaning have term-time contracts only, so that each term workers leave, and then we have to pick them up again [when they return to work]. ... We have tried to ensure proper protection for term-time workers but only when they become employees again, can they become trade union members.'

A Local Government paid-Officer indicated a number of difference in terms and conditions for part-time workers (e.g. part-timers going on training courses in own time), and noted that,

'the bargaining agenda is male dominated, numerically and culturally. Pay is seen as the issue - but there are other issues equally important - for example, number of hours, that some members want to come to top of table. Concentrating on pay for part-time workers is sometimes inappropriate because more money triggers a benefit trap. But this is difficult for national negotiators because they are not there to only support those in the poverty trap.'

A UNISON membership survey of part-time workers in cleaning and catering services (in Newcastle) indicated three clear priority areas: health and safety; pay and working conditions. Given the predominance of women in cleaning and catering, perhaps these could be described as 'women's concerns'. This survey also highlighted the extent to which part-time workers were the holders of multiple jobs, and therefore working far longer hours than 'part-time' might suggest. Multiple-job holding had a number of implications for the women, and UNISON. The survey revealed that for many women, their UNISON job contributed only part of their income, and therefore UNISON could only marginally affect their working and

economic lives. The survey also showed that the cost of travelling was a disproportionate drain on women's financial resources. For example, for those with two jobs in cleaning, travelling could cost up to £8.86 per week, which represented 9% of the average weekly income. Travelling was also costly in terms of time, and the average time spent travelling by cleaning staff was 3 hours, 9 minutes per week. I asked a paid officer whether these results were likely to be generalisable across UK:

'it might be due to high male unemployment, but nonetheless it is an equality issue. Part-timers possibly prefer buying back hours - would prefer less hours than more money (in their purse). .. There is also an interest in developing people in jobs. .. Facilities for elder care is the biggest issue (more than childcare).'

Another CCT-related issue raised by women was the difficulty it provided for getting time-off for union activities:

'the member takes time off for a meeting, is not replaced, and then the same amount of work needs to be shared by the smaller number of members who remain'

This was confirmed by another Branch Secretary, who discussed its implications for fair representation:

'fair representation can be overcome for manual workers through the use of the general seat for men. But who is elected and who turns up is the key issue. This may be a problem of working commitments. If in a DSO, then absence will be letting down the team. .. Even though there is time-off written into contract for union, you never know how contract will perform in practice. Every one of [branch] officers (except one) is in a DSO, and when one doesn't turn up for work, it creates problems'

This gendered analysis of CCT can be compared to the analysis and activity of UNISON which is arguably non-gendered. The main emphasis has been the provision of information to branches (see UNISON 1994b and 1995) and campaigning against CCT at a national level. This has been supplemented by recourse to remedies through statutory, or negotiating bodies, which have reaped a number of rewards (for example, negotiating enhanced rates of pay for

part-timers for weekend working (equal to full-timers), and persuading the government to change the regulations on Family Credit so that the hours of part-timers would not be averaged out over a year). Since its publication, the EOC report has been the subject of much consideration within the service group. However, a fringe meeting at the LG Service Group Conference involving the writers of the EOC report attracted few members. This was particularly ironic given that only a few moments before in the conference hall, a number of men were evoking the report in their calls for a national strike ballot against CCT. Calls for the mobilisation of members against CCT have almost become a 'set piece' at Conference, which has always rejected such action after much debate.

Whilst negotiations and statutory remedies have brought a number of rewards, it could be construed as 'closing the stable door after the horse has bolted'. Although the national guide to re-tendering in manual CCT admits that women suffered disproportionately from the first round of tendering, it offers little practical advice to reduce this the next time round. It notes that 'pre-tender cuts to wages and conditions should not be accepted', but gives no indication in the in-house bid preparation as to what should be done. It does not spell out, for example, the analysis of one key activist that female members in cleaning and catering suffered more because they are 'not traditionally militant, they work part-time, and they are difficult to organise', or that dustbin workers can 'get what they want because they have more opportunity to withdraw labour'. Nor does it say in 'Lessons learnt in the first round of tendering' what this interviewee said about choices being made in the first round that were detrimental to women:

'when DSO managers were looking at competition, they would inevitably cut those wages which the labour market would accept. The private employer does not have to pay the retainer for the school holiday, so the DSO will try and recoup the cost of providing it through cutting the number of hours worked. In the event, the local authorities were cutting more than they needed to, the competition was not that fierce, or sometimes there was no competition. Local branches were frightened into accepting worse deals. There was bad advice within the union and a number of 'dreadful deals' where too much was sold'

Two women noted the union's emphasis on restraining cuts. One paid-officer noted that,

'decisions have been taken on false premise that men's jobs should be protected. Deals are done for the protection of the greater number of jobs - not out of malice, but false assumptions of value of work.'

However, the paid-officer also confirmed that men's conditions had worsened too, but in a different way. The officer noted that although the hours of ground maintenance staff, and dustbin-collectors had been increased, they had been given annualised hours contracts, which had resulted in a net loss of terms and conditions.

The UNISON guide to white collar CCT discusses union organisation in some detail and notes that 'areas of the workforce that have no steward or have weak organisation are more at risk than well organised groups'. However, at no time do 'members' become distinguished as either men or women. As noted above, Escott and Whitfield reported their fears that women stood to lose more from contracting than men since comparisons with private rates of pay meant savings were possible in their jobs. Although the UNISON guide came out before the EOC report, it is unlikely that this possibility had not been noticed within the union beforehand. It is now possible for authorities to choose how to package their services in the CCT exercise. But the lay activist who noted the potential for services to be 'packaged' on a gendered basis, also noted that no advice had been issued on this matter, and nothing was being said explicitly about protecting women. Another woman noted:

'no-one has followed through what is happening to women employees. Emphasis has been on professional jobs, whereas the women do many of the support jobs. There is no information on what has happened to women. Traditionally, the public sector has been a good employer to women, and these conditions may not be available in the private sector'.

An officer noting that the union did not do enough to raise women's awareness, reflected that 'there is a difficult balance to strike because the question might be asked, why be in the union?'. Reference has already been made to the setting up of educational activities for

women on CCT in both Regions 1 and 2. Regional Women's Officers at a review meeting argued that perhaps a different and more direct more approach was required. An example of this approach appeared in Region 1's newsletter which is direct mailed to 2000 women in the region. Subsequent to the EOC report, this newsletter carried the heading "CCT in Local Government hits women more than men official" (UNISON Region 1 1995). Action against CCT has been at a local level, so perhaps direct mailing women with success stories, such as 40 part-time women workers lobbying a Council in Region 1 to ensure that there was no change in enhancement schemes for care assistants, or low paid women in Sheffield Libraries successfully fighting against the removal of national terms and conditions, might be a necessary complement to the re-tendering guide which is only likely to be read by the new union 'expert' (Colling 1994). Ironically, it is mainly political organisations, such as the Socialist Workers Party who are making the connections explicit, and their message is often overlooked because their ultimate political intentions do not coincide with those of the majority of the membership.

Without a gendered analysis and appropriate action at a local level, the danger is that history will repeat itself and the EOC will reporting on the 'gender impact of white collar CCT in local government' in two years time. Since the national service group had been established for less than a year, and the EOC report was published half-way through the research, it would be too early to pronounce that proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation had failed to put women's concerns at the forefront of the agenda. However, I would argue the observations during the research period suggest that it will be difficult to change in the immediate future. As noted above, there are few opportunities to discuss occupation specific matters, and only a limited number of women (and men) are involved in the working party on CCT. Although CCT was discussed within women's self-organisation, during my research the women's structures had provided little pressure for a gendered analysis of CCT. In any event, at the time of writing, the mainstream structure did not provide for the direct representation of women from women's structures. This was not been helped by an institutional structure which initially kept self-organised groups at a distance from the bargaining structures of the union,

and which continues to distance (literally, 20 miles across London) the Equalities Department. Where workplace issues have been addressed, these have been cross-service such as the Northern Women's Network booklet on negotiating childcare (UNISON Northern 1995), and the North West Regional Women's Committee booklet on violence in the home (UNISON North West 1995). It is to be remembered too that it is only at branch level that women can meet in service specific self-organised groups. Locally, emphasis has been on attracting new activists to the union, and interviewees talked of meetings organised around issues of interest to women in general, rather than workplace issues which affect women.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH SINGLE STATUS?

In the words of a UNISON leaflet, 'single status is about ending the artificial split between 'white collar' (APT&C), 'blue collar' (manual) and craft workers' terms and conditions'. However, whilst a comparison can be made between what women said about CCT and how the union dealt with the issue, this is not so easy in relation to the development of Single Status within Local Government. This could be attributed to the 'newness' of Single Status within the period of my research and the relatively low level of awareness of the issue. However, it was also noticeable that very few women talked about Single Status. Indeed, the only mention of Single Status within the women's structures was a short piece in the Women's Newsletter. The article explained the meaning of Single Status and outlined the implications for women:

'Women, particularly in low paid jobs and/or part time employment, are set to gain most from a move to single status. Watch this space for further information and make sure your voice is heard at the workplace and branch level'

Considering that single status could provide a framework for eliminating past anomalies of terms and conditions which are detrimental to women, this lack of discussion is surprising. Although a briefing document noted that 'equal opportunities will be at the heart of single status' and 'single status is being built on the principle of equal treatment for women, part-time

workers, temporary workers, black workers, disabled workers and lesbians and gay men', there was no debate in SGE meetings of the implications of Single Status for women. This could be explained by the structure of the SGE which, as noted above, ensured that specific issues, such as Single Status, were the remit of specific working groups. However, this is only a partial explanation because the SGE did discuss some aspects of Single Status in considerable detail.

Reference has already been made to the discussion of the consultation process for Single Status. The member starting the debate noted that,

'the future of the union rests on getting this right. Its importance is secondary only to the development of UNISON'

Three amendments were proposed to the document which was printed on one side of A4 paper and the committee took one hour to discuss them fully. This full and lengthy discussion about some aspects of Single Status contrasts with the discussion of other aspects. Prior to the discussion of this paper, a paid-officer introduced a 6-page document which indicated UNISON's possible negotiating position. It included reference to job evaluation. The paid-officer noted that UNISON had engaged a woman from Ruskin College to provide advice on a new job evaluation scheme which would take account of equal pay and low pay. The officer indicated that job evaluation would be fundamental to the agreement, but that it would not be prescriptive. Of five options for job evaluation the Single Status Working Group recommended that there should be a new agreed national job evaluation scheme, based on principles of equality, which should be available to both sides locally. In comparison to the preceding lengthy discussion about consultation procedures, there was little discussion of any of the contents of this document and certainly no discussion about the preferred job evaluation scheme option. A review of the equal opportunities aspects of Single Status by Sue Hastings (1995) notes that,

'it is recognized by both Sides that the current structures are open to challenge on 'equal pay for work of equal value' grounds, and almost certainly on straightforward discrimination grounds also'.

After noting a number of different sources of unequal pay within the local government sector, Hastings notes that 'it is surprising perhaps, that there have not been many more discrimination and equal pay claims in the sector.' The need to re-evaluate the jobs of nursery nurses was not lost on this (female) Branch Secretary:

'the low pay of women [nursery nurses] is a scandal within UNISON. Nursery nurses are on Scale 1 which gives them a very low salary of £8,000. Nationally the scale needs re-negotiating. Some staff [nursery nurses] are better off with local bargaining. I've been able to negotiate £12,000 for the staff, but not any back pay.'

At no point during the period of my research was the issue of job evaluation discussed again. The implications of Single Status for women were not discussed in the women's structures and nor were they raised as a specific issue of concern by any of the women LG members I interviewed. Reference has already been made to the need to eradicate union complicity in the gendered segmentation of the labour market (Briskin and McDermott 1993), before unions go beyond 'letting women in'. On the face of it, this silence over an important issue for women could be seen as confirmation that more women on committees does not necessarily equate with more discussion of women's issues, and that structures and practices still exist which marginalise women. However, it is difficult to reconcile this conclusion with a briefing document circulated to branches and regions after my research had ended. Issues of equality are given considerable space within this document. The document notes that 'joint advice on equalities was the first part of the national agreement to be negotiated' (UNISON 1996 p3). A whole page (p5) is devoted to 'Equal Value'. The document notes that,

'a key issue will be whether the agreed job evaluation scheme should be mandatory, i.e. applied in all authorities or whether it should be available for use locally'

The document notes that national employers want authorities to be free to choose whether to apply any scheme, giving them 'maximum flexibility over how posts are graded'. The next paragraph is particularly interesting, given that it seems to illustrate a move away from the previous recommendations on the job evaluation scheme:

'Views are mixed in UNISON, however the national negotiators are concerned that if applying the job evaluation scheme is optional, it will be very difficult to have a pay structure and to deliver consistency and equal value in grading within and across authorities'

Also printed on the page were four 'key questions' for members to discuss concerning the operation of a job evaluation scheme. The document also raised other issues which addressed the work of women. The document indicated the union's commitment to negotiating a new minimum wage rate (stated as £4.26 per hour (p7)). With regard to 'Working Time, Leave and Premium Pay', it noted the launch of UNISON's 'Equal Hours - Equal Pay' campaign (p8) and the encouragement of members to take equal pay tribunal cases. It noted its intention to use 'existing legal judgements to ensure equality of treatment for part-time workers in any single status agreement', and to negotiate 'improved career and training opportunities, with pay for all hours spent on courses' (p10). It also noted that whilst current bonus earners 'must be protected',

'The manual agreement's code of guiding principles on bonus schemes is outdated and must not be imported into the new agreement' ... The unions are seeking expert advice on the equal value questions and practical implications for direct service organisations' (p11)

Since this document was published after the end of my research I have not determined the source of this gendered analysis in the document, and do not know how this can be reconciled with the absence of such gendered analysis in the SGE meetings. However, some sources are more likely than others to have determined this outcome. An obvious source of pressure would be the women on the SGE, but given the types of discussion, and levels of women's participation during the previous 12 months, this is not a likely source in such a short time

period. Given that women's self-organisation does not have direct representation on the SGE and do not appear to have discussed this issue at a national level, the pressure from women's structures can be discounted. The pressure could have emanated from members of the Single Status and Pay Steering Group, or the Equalities Project Group of the SGE. The work programme of the latter Group included the consideration of 'progress on single status at all stages and advice on the equalities dimension'.

The more likely source of a gendered analysis of Single Status, is a key female officer in Local Government. Heery and Kelly (1988) note that women paid-officers were more likely to raise issues of concern to women, and whilst paid-officers have not been the focus of this study, a number of women have referred to women officers (as opposed to Women's Officers) who have taken a key role in raising women's concerns. I discussed the raising of women's awareness in UNISON with a paid-officer of the Equalities Unit. At the time of my research she believed that there was too much reliance on individual (female) officers in specific service groups raising, and addressing, women's concerns, citing the LG Officer as an example. Given the less than proportionate nature of female employment in UNISON, this leaves a considerable gap for issues to be raised by members through mainstream committees, or women's structures. It also indicates the importance of building relationships between women paid-officers, and members in women's structures. One (female) paid-officer noted the need for partnership between lay members in women's structures and paid-officers. She said that 'when they work against each other it is disastrous and makes it very difficult to move forward on workplace issues'. However, she also felt that there was an 'anti-officer feeling from certain people' on the National Women's Committee. Interviews with two key women involved in the Local Government SGE illustrated their disappointment with initial liaison meetings with representatives from self-organised groups, and a scepticism about the value of women's self-organisation. A (female) paid-officer noted her personal belief that self-organisation, as it was structured, was not appropriate for women in UNISON. This woman had gained the impression that the National Women's Committee were more interested in structural issues, and that they had no interest in bargaining issues. Indeed she felt that the women's structures

did not relate to the needs of the ordinary member, which she found disappointing. However, the interviewee did note that perhaps it was too early to judge and that maybe discussions around structure would evolve to policy and national bargaining issues. A (female) key activist on the SGE noted that 'there is a lot that could be done, but it is not being done'. The activist noted that the way round this was to involve representatives from self-organised groups in negotiations, but that it needed 'a radical challenge to get different people involved'. The use of the word 'radical' is quite interesting because, as discussed earlier, opening up directly-elected committees to non-elected representatives is difficult for the membership to pursue.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSIONS

Theoretically, proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation have the potential to ensure that CCT is not disproportionately detrimental to women and that single status improves women's position in the workplace. Through formal processes of proportionality, women are getting directly elected to the national SGE in numbers which were not attained before, so in terms of 'women's interests', they have achieved access to national decision making. However, this study has shown that access to decision making bodies is not necessarily leading to a gendered agenda, so in terms of 'women's concerns', this would appear much more difficult for women to achieve. There are a number of factors which underpin this gap between women's interests and women's concerns.

The first point to note relates to women's access through proportionality. Women are directly elected to the SGE from a mixed constituency and, as noted by Cockburn (1995), women elected from a mixed constituency are not required to speak, or vote, specifically for women. The legitimacy of this strategy is underpinned by the fact that many SGE members appear to have a regional mandate, and indeed sit and vote in regional groups. Thus, on the SGE, women usually talk from a regional perspective, or when appropriate, a sector or occupational perspective. In this way, 'natural justice' is attained in terms of women's physical access to decision making. However, whilst women on the Regional Committee in Region 2 contributed

in proportion to their presence in numbers, women on the Local Government SGE did not. Indeed, at the time of my research, men who occupied one third of the seats were doing two-thirds of the talking. Thus, as noted in chapter 8, physical presence is only one part of women's access to decision-making. This study indicates, again, that women's full access to decision-making is facilitated by previous experience. Phillips (1991) talks of the characteristics associated with a person's monopolisation of meetings. This study adds 'expertise' to that list.

Whilst it may well only be a question of time before newly active women fully participate in all debates, interviews and observations of the SGE members indicate that a number of ideologies and institutions continue to marginalise them. One ideology relates to what members talk about. When newly active women speak they tend to speak about workplace issues, whereas when previously experienced women speak, they tend to speak about wider, policy-based issues. This could be a very useful combination. However, interviews and observations indicate that workplace based discussions are not seen as a 'good thing' on national committees. Expertise is defined by wide knowledge of general issues. It is defined by writing reports, reading and digesting pages of text. It is not defined in terms of an ability to self-censor the spoken word and make short concise contributions. It is not defined in terms of knowledge of low pay and workplace issues. That it is not defined in terms of workplace issues supports the limited gendered analysis of issues. It is only when workplace issues are raised by women that women's experiences are fully articulated and distinguished from the experience of 'gender-neutral' members. On the whole, the wider, policy-based issues were not discussed from a gendered perspective. This was particularly noticeable in relation to discussions about trade union democracy; work organisation; issues such as CCT and Single Status.

Chapter 8 illustrated the extent to which democracy is defined in terms of the lay and paid-officer relationship and these findings were reiterated on the LG SGE. Pateman (1983) talked about democracy being discussed 'in abstraction from the private sphere of domestic life' and

this can certainly be used to describe the manner in which democracy was perceived by many members of the SGE. No consideration was given to the extent to which women's ability to participate in union consultation exercises might be constrained by their domestic responsibilities. Moreover, democracy was perceived in abstraction from the experiences of manual, often women, members. These were experiences such as limited facilities time; limited administrative services; limited funds. Not only were these discussions of democracy gender-neutral, they took up a considerable amount of time and, as in Region 2, could have prevented a fuller discussion of women's concerns on the SGE.

These findings have a number of implications for women's future organisation within UNISON. In common with the findings in Region 2, the contrast between newly active and previous experienced women illustrates the importance of all women getting together and discussing issues of concern, so that newly active women can gain expertise, and previously active women can be reminded of the implications of women's work. This chapter also illustrates that the strategy which 'identifies women as an oppressed social group' is not, as yet, producing a gendered analysis of union issues. By their very nature self-organised groups are supposed to define their own priorities, and in the first two years of UNISON self-organised groups at national and regional level have been preoccupied with defining a role and obtaining resources for themselves. This has meant that not enough bridges have been built between women 'identified by their sex' and women 'identified as an oppressed group'. Where the women's group has acted as a pressure group, it has been in obtaining more resources for itself, rather than changing the nature of negotiations. This chapter also indicates that bridges need to be built between members of women's structures and women paid-officers.

CHAPTER 10:

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT NATIONAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the operation of proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation at the National Delegate Conference (NDC). The NDC is the sovereign decision making body in the union and therefore represents the most important forum in UNISON. Studying the decision making process at the NDC provides illustrations of the ideologies and institutions which determine the predominant model of democracy within UNISON. The chapter indicates that despite proportionality, women's access to the NDC is reliant on favourable models of democracy operating at a local level. It also illustrates the tension of treating women-only structures as interest groups, rather than identity groups. An analysis of motions submitted to the Conference illustrates that activists are prepared to address some women's concerns, but not all.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE

Proportionality and fair representation apply to attendance at the National Delegate Conference, and the rule book makes the NEC responsible for producing guidelines which will assist in the implementation of these two principles at the Conference. Prior to the June 1994 Conference, the NEC issued guidelines to all branches (October 1993). Given the autonomy of branches within the union, the NEC could only 'request' that branches 'actively seek to implement the guidelines', and give Regional Committees the responsibility for reviewing progress towards proportionality. The guidelines suggested that branches should use branch membership figures to make sure that, 'as far as practicable', their delegations were 'broadly representative of the proportions of men and women in the branch or branches concerned',

and that they reflected ‘the membership composition in the branch and give fair representation to the membership of the branch as a whole’. To support the achievement of proportionality and fair representation, branches were encouraged to consider the election of shared delegates, or establish a ‘rolling rota’ of delegates over a period of years.

I attended the first and second National Delegate Conferences (1994 and 1995). In both years women appeared to be well represented amongst the delegation but it was difficult to check this. Although the NEC intended to monitor the ‘out-turn of progress towards proportionality and fair representation’ at the 1994 NDC, this was not done, and I was unable to find a specific reason for this: other than it seemed to be ‘someone else’s responsibility’. In 1995 a tally had been taken of delegates’ name badges, so it had been possible to record the following:

men	1,021
women:	938
unknown*	73
<hr/>	
TOTAL	2,032

*where it was not possible to distinguish the sex of the person from the name, e.g. Pat, Chris

These figures indicate that women constituted between a minimum of 46% to a maximum of 50% of the delegation. The figures illustrate the danger of leaving monitoring to impressions. As an observer, women appeared to be a significant proportion of the delegation, and since the figures indicate that they constituted 50%, perhaps this was not a wholly unreasonable impression. However, whilst 50% men/women represents parity in wider political constituencies, it does not represent proportionality within UNISON. Based on these 1995 figures, women’s attendance at the National Delegate Conference was a long way short of their proportionate membership within the union. As noted in the literature, and acknowledged by the Women’s Committee in Region 2, the provision of accurate figures is the only way in which progress can be monitored effectively: both in terms of proportionality, and fair

representation. That effective monitoring had not been organised at the National Delegate Conference, and did not appear to be a priority, could be an indication of the lack of commitment towards proportionality and fair representation. However, interviews and research material indicate that it could also be an indication of the ambivalence, and in some cases hostility, towards monitoring within UNISON. The Integration and Participation Working Group found some resistance to its work, 'particularly to the idea of collecting information on membership contributions to and participation in various committees and other bodies' (UNISON undated 4:14). Commenting that motions related to monitoring at the 1994 National Delegate Conference should be 'welcomed and readily supported', a member of the National Women's Committee noted that,

'recalling the debate on this subject at my own Regional Council recently I think their adoption may not be a foregone conclusion - the subject seems to bring out a fear of "Big Brother" which we have to deal with'

Amongst the self-organised groups, attitudes to monitoring was mixed. By July 1996 the Fair Representation Working Party of the Women's Committee had agreed to produce an audit form for use by Regional Women's Committees and National Women's Committee, with a longer term view of looking at the issue of fair representation within Women's Conference. The Black Members' Conference and Committee supported ethnic monitoring too. However, it was not to be taken for granted that the Lesbian and Gay Members group, and the Disabled Members group would approve the monitoring of members' sexual orientation or disability.

Another important point to make about women's access to National Delegate Conference relates to the manner in which delegates are selected for attendance. UNISON conducted a survey of delegates at the first National Delegate Conference, and returns from 619 members indicated their high level of activity within union. In particular, 38% indicated that they were Branch Secretaries; 16% that they were Branch Chair and 10% that they were Branch Treasurer. Thus of those responding, over 60% held positions on the Branch Executive. Given that the National Delegate Conference is the sovereign policy making body of the union,

communication that took place between women' at the 1995 Conference and instructed the National Women's Committee to organise a minimum of three meetings at NDC and organise a daily newsletter.

In addition to the attendance of two representatives, and the potential for women to caucus at the National Delegate Conference, women's self-organisation may submit two motions to the National Delegate Conference. Before we discuss the destiny of the two motions submitted to the 1995 NDC, it is worth putting these two motions into context. Firstly, the rule book provides that motions have to be submitted 15 weeks before the National Delegate Conference. Second, each year over 200 motions are submitted to the Delegate Conference, and the order of business is constructed around priorities received from Regions, the NEC, Self-organised Groups and the Retired Members Organisation. In addition, there is no provision to automatically hear motions from the self-organised groups, so the prioritisation of motions is of paramount importance. This reiterates the importance of achieving proportionality and fair representation on the Standing Orders Committee which determines the order of business. The strict time-tabling also puts demands on the activities of the self-organised groups. No motions were admissible to the 1994 National Delegate Conference from the National Women's Conference due to its late timetabling. In 1996, this rule meant that the National Women's Committee had to make the tough decision whether to hold the National Women's Conference in Ramadan (and potentially exclude Muslim women), hold it at the same time as the Irish TUC (and potentially exclude the delegates from Northern Ireland), or hold it at a later date, which would miss the submission deadline for National Delegate Conference. After much deliberation, the National Women's Committee decided to ensure that the National Women's Conference was as inclusive as possible, and gave up the right to send any motions to the 1996 conference. In practical terms, it also meant that the dates for the Conference were changed twice.

From her study of the NSW, Leidner commented that those in the majority needed to wholly identify the interests of the minorities as their own before equal power meant equal

satisfaction. Using the case of the National Women's Committee, it could be argued that full satisfaction was achieved because the white, non-Irish women who made up the majority of the committee identified with the interests of the minorities. However, the identification of the majority with minority interests was not replicated within the National Women's Conference. Women attending the 1996 National Women's Conference were not impressed with the organisation of the Conference, and passed a motion that in future the Conference should be arranged so that motions were admissible to the National Delegate Conference, and that, once set, the date should not be changed. However, despite these difficulties in 1996, the National Women's Committee came close to falling into the same administrative 'trap' for the 1997 National Women's Conference when the National Black Members Committee expressed concern that the Women's Conference would begin in the festival of Eid.

Such references could be interpreted as confirming Phillips' argument that identity politics is 'less amenable to a politics of accommodation or compromise, and is far more likely to encourage fragmentation or mutual hostility' (1993:p17). However, the question must be asked if such protestations were not made and acted upon, could the women's organisation be defended against allegations of promoting a white, able-bodied, heterosexual female 'norm' or standard? It would seem that until such time as the majority identify with the interests of the minorities *before* policy is made and decisions are taken, minority groups will always appear to be undermining women's organisation. However, that said, if adequate steps have been taken to ensure that the other three self-organised groups have been represented at the times when such decisions are taken, it seems only fair that at some stage the represented need to accept collective decisions made on their behalf. To do otherwise, leaves the women's organisation vulnerable to further fragmentation and diversion.

Of the 282 motions submitted to the 1995 National Delegate Conference, the two motions from the National Women's Conference were both heard, although they achieved very different outcomes. The first motion to be discussed relates to the negotiating agenda for women.

DETERMINING NEGOTIATING PRIORITIES FOR WOMEN

This motion was originally submitted to the 1995 National Women's Conference by the Northern Region Women's Network. It was overwhelmingly voted as the motion to be submitted to the NDC. It began by noting that,

'This Conference is concerned to ensure that with a membership of one million women, UNISON develops negotiating strategies that are relevant and specific to women members. A negotiating agenda that has relevance to women will not only deliver UNISON's constitutional and rule book commitment, but will recruit more women into the union when it can be demonstrated that this commitment is genuine'.

After calling upon UNISON to commit financial resources to (i) support and develop women; (ii) reaffirm the role and function of women's self-organisation in developing a women's agenda by women for women; and (iii) demonstrate that women are at the heart of this union and that the women's agenda is prioritised, the motion asked that the union,

'ensure that the women's agenda includes but is not exclusive to the following negotiating priorities:-

a) equality in pensions

b) equal pay

c) childcare and family friendly policies such as flexible working, carer responsibility and paternity

d) equal access to training for women to allow them to develop in their working lives through the use of National Vocational Qualifications, UNISON's Return to Learn and Women, Work and Society and in career development'.

This motion is important for several reasons. Reference was made in Chapter 3 to Cockburn's argument that women's position can only be identified *after* women's needs have been publicly debated (1995). This motion was publicly debated amongst women at several levels within the union. Initially it was the focus of debate at a Regional Women's Forum, and then it was debated at the 1995 National Women's Conference. It therefore puts down a

definite set of priorities which have been previously agreed by women. Briskin and McDermott (1993:p19) argue that eradicating union resistance to broader-based bargaining is a key factor in union transformation. That this motion identifies a broad set of objectives, and was carried unanimously by 1995 National Delegate Conference could be taken as an indication that UNISON is going beyond 'letting women in' (1993:p6). Within the union, the National Women's Committee used the motion to make the Education and Training Department aware of its training priorities on bargaining for women. By noting that the women's agenda is not exclusive to the issues noted in the motion, the women have also left an opportunity for further priorities to be discussed. However, whilst this motion was adopted by the National Delegate Conference and illustrated the potential for change through the women's structures, their second motion was not so successful.

DETERMINING THE CONSTITUENCY OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

In the first few years of UNISON, much activity amongst self-organised groups related to the development of structures and attainment of adequate resources. In particular, much time and energy was focused on determining the constituency, funding and purpose of the National Women's Conference. However, whilst some women argued that women's participation was being severely curtailed, others feared that separate organising was in danger of becoming an end in itself (Briskin 1993). The motion submitted to the 1995 National Delegate Conference regarding the size of the National Women's Conference provides an illustration of these different views. This is an extract of the composited motion which was passed at the 1995 National Women's Conference,

'This Conference is appalled over the low priority given to this Woman's Conference by the NEC. Conference believes that future Women's Conferences should be representative of women throughout the union. Only direct branch representation can achieve this. Proportionality will not be achieved unless adequate resources are devoted to UNISON's women's organisation. This Conference therefore instructs the NWC to:

- 1) make strong representation on behalf of women members in UNISON, that decisions taken by democratic vote at Women's Conference are adhered to.
- 2) seek to ensure that National Women's Conference are, in future, both democratic and truly branch based.'

Before discussing the Conference debate, it is worth considering several points in this motion. The motion notes that it is making a strong representation 'on behalf of women members' and makes the connection between women's organisation and proportionality. However, whilst the National Women's Conference can make decisions about its own policies, they were arguably naive in insisting that 'decisions taken by democratic vote at Women's Conference are adhered to' within the rest of the union, and this clause provided an immediate vehicle for rejecting the whole motion.

The motion was presented to the National Delegate Conference by a speaker democratically elected from the National Women's Conference. The first speaker spoke against the motion. She noted that exclusion happens at any conference and that self-organisation was not an end in itself. To applause she noted that,

'we won't need self-organisation at the end of the day because this conference will have the right number of women'

The NEC opposed the motion. Opposition from the NEC was on two counts: sovereignty of National Delegate Conference, and the role of the National Women's Conference. To begin with, the NEC speaker reminded Conference (if it needed any reminding) that the NDC was the sovereign decision-making body and that the NEC was not able to give any such assurance that National Women's Conference decisions would be adhered to. The NEC member then argued for the need for,

'2000 women at the National Delegate Conference, *not* at the Women's Conference. Women want *real* power. Vote for women, vote for real power in UNISON, vote against this motion'

The speech by the NEC member was a very powerful one which was delivered with great confidence and conviction. This presentation made a strong contrast with what appeared to be the relative inexperience of the proposer of the motion. Another woman active in women's self-organisation tried to clarify the position:

'we are not asking for a conference as large as the National Delegate Conference but how can 500 women represent 2/3rds of 1.3 million members? This is not democratically based. A promise was given to the National Women's Committee that a branch based committee could be held, but then because of finance, they were told they could not. What message does this send out to women? I urge you to vote for this motion'

After this brief exchange of views, a man asked that the question be put to the vote. Conference voted against the motion, thus rejecting one of the motions from the National Women's Conference.

This debate, and the rejection of the motion, provides an excellent illustration of the different interpretations of women's self-organisation within UNISON. The previous motion had been publicly debated amongst women, 'women's position' had been constructed, and this was accepted by the National Delegate Conference. However, this latter motion was also debated at the National Women's Conference, but it had not been accepted in the same way. Indeed, women actively spoke against it - so which women can be said to represent women? Cockburn noted that women elected from mixed constituency seats have no obligation to speak for their sex, so perhaps we could conclude that women speaking outside the women's structures are speaking for men and women. Indeed, I was informed that the women from the NEC member's region were very angry that she had spoken against the motion from the National Women's Conference. From this perspective, the women's agenda derived from women speaking with women was rejected by the rest of the union. This provides a contrast to the destiny of the other motion and within Briskin and McDermott's framework provides two outcomes. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the union is moving towards transformation by adopting a broader based negotiating agenda. However, on the other hand,

it is possible to argue that by continuing to adopt practices which 'marginalize women inside unions' (Briskin and McDermott 1993:p7), the union is metaphorically staying still.

It also illustrates that women are not necessarily speaking together in sufficient numbers or on sufficient occasions. This possibility has already been discussed in earlier chapters. The debate about the National Women's Conference in Region 2 provides another dimension to the question 'who represents women?' The interim Women's Committee in Region 2 did not want a branch based National Women's Conference.

Unlike many of the Regions, the interim Women's Committee in Region 2 did not seek to enlarge the Conference to include branch-based delegations. The Women's Officer noted that,

'the Conference is not supportive to women. It is a very aggressive culture, ideology. Some women very familiar with constitution and battered [other] women into the ground. .. Some regions are working on old NALGO organisation, they want the right to go to Conference irrespective of what that means. .. The National Women's Conference would be bigger than the sovereign body. ... But women feel that they are not important and this is because the debate has not been explained. They are wasting energy and time fighting for resources. They need to consider working objectives, long term strategy and making proportionality work and creating the means of enabling women to acquire the skills they need when they go into the real vipers nest'

The representative of the Women's Committee in Region 2 told me that she was prepared to speak against the National Women's Conference motion herself if the debate had continued. However, the views of the interim Women's Committee did not necessarily coincide with the feelings of newer members of the substantive UNISON committee and in the visitors gallery at the NDC I heard women from Region 2 complaining that someone from their region should be speaking *for* the motion. It is worth noting the postscript to this issue. Once a larger substantive committee had been elected, women who believed in having a larger National Women's Conference made their feelings known, and the Officer and lay officers of the Women's Committee found themselves reconsidering their policy. In 1996 and 1997, the

Region submitted a motion to the National Women's Conference proposing that it be constituted on the basis of one delegate per branch.

The debate about the National Women's Conference illustrates the different definitions of power within UNISON. It is interesting to note that a representative of the NEC should note that 'real power' is at the NDC. Can we assume therefore that self-organisation has no power within UNISON? Does this mean that the Women's Officer in Region 2 who believes that self-organisation has no power is right? This possibility made me look again at the definition of self-organisation in the rule book. Power is obviously not mentioned in the rule book, but perhaps the indication of intent is shown in its provision that self-organised groups should 'work within the established policies, rules and constitutional provisions of the Union' (rule book:p20). This debate has illustrated that the National Delegate Conference is the supreme decision making body of the union. It can give no guarantees that the decisions of the National Women's Conference will be adhered to. Of the two National Women's Conference motions submitted to the National Delegate Conference one was rejected, and one was accepted. As noted, there are no guarantees that motions from self-organised groups will be prioritised at National Delegate Conference. Indeed, the timing of the Conference meant that in two out of three years, no motions from the National Women's Conference were admissible to the Agenda. All of this does seem to confirm that 'real power' is at the National Delegate Conference. The consequence of this is that 'real power' can only be attained through one's activism at the branch level, since to attend the National Delegate Conference, one needs to be elected from within one's branch. Whilst this analysis seems to confirm that encouraging women's activity at branch level is the most appropriate way forward, it does illustrate the tension between developing radical structures within liberal democratic frameworks. If women are elected from branches, then they are elected from mixed constituencies. Who then speaks for women? Having studied the agenda from four National Women's Conferences (1994-1997), it is possible to see the development of this forum as a means of expressing women's concerns. The agenda include more motions, more branches are involved, and the motions are more radical. Would women in mixed meetings at branch level suggest that the

union campaign to remove VAT on sanitary products; ensure that IVF treatment remains on the NHS; or allow mothers time to breast feed during working hours?

However, this analysis needs to be put alongside the fact that mainstream committees are also bringing concerns identified by women to the NDC. Of 17 non-constitutional motions discussed at 1995 National Women's Conference, 12 were put to National Delegate Conference. In four instances, branches had brought the same motion to the National Delegate Conference as had been brought to the National Women's Conference. In the other eight instances, other branches, or regional groups had brought the motion to the National Delegate Conference. To some extent mixed constituency branches are bringing women's concerns to the National Delegate Conference. Part of Fosh and Heery's critique of the feminist model of union bureaucracy rests on research which shows that men pursue women's concerns (1990). However, since this thesis has argued that it is just as important to look at outcomes as it processes, Briskin and McDermott's framework is used to assess the extent to which the union addressed women's concerns at the 1995 National Delegate Conference, and where appropriate details of the 1996 National Delegate Conference are given.

THE WORK OF WOMEN AND GENDER SEGMENTATION OF THE LABOUR MARKET

A composite motion on equal pay was the first motion of the Conference. The motion called for:

'appropriate training to be available for all negotiators involved in all levels of pay and JES [Job Evaluation Schemes] bargaining in order that they clearly understand the relationship between the bargaining process and pay equity.'

The motion also recognised the extensive increase in the number of women engaged in atypical work and called on the NEC to develop a comprehensive, multi-track approach to addressing the adverse impact of atypical work, and to recruit 'the many thousands of atypical

women workers who are currently non-union'. The motion reflected the sentiments of two motions which had been discussed at the National Women's Conference. Indeed since the branch submitted the same motion to both Conferences, the whole of one of these motions was included in the composite motion. An amendment alleged that claims for Equal Pay for work of Equal Value were only supported if they were considered of strategic importance to UNISON or had the potential to affect a significant number of members. The amendment called for the support of all legitimate claims, and the right of appeal for members who were denied support. The amendment was opposed by the NEC, but was passed, along with the main motion by Conference. The representative of the National Women's Conference spoke in support of the motion, and highlighted the double discrimination felt by black women. With the exception of one man, this was an all woman debate.

Another useful motion which tackled men and women's different experiences of work was passed at the 1996 National Delegate Conference. This motion expressed the need for equal rights for part-time workers. However, whilst motions such as these do appear on the agenda of the National Delegate Conference, motions which tackle the cause of gender segregation of work are rare. The motion of the 1995 National Women's Conference which set out negotiating priorities for women did mention the need for equal access to training and the motion on equal pay did highlight the need for negotiators to understand the link between the bargaining process and pay equity. However, in the context of everything else that is prioritised and discussed, one feels that the union is a long way from the gender specific approach seen in the wage negotiations of Kommunal (Higgins 1996:p189). For instance, a motion to 'Cut the Working Week' related to job creation, and increasing hourly rates, and did not discuss the potential impact on women's participation in society, or in the union. Similarly, the Working Time Directive was discussed without reference to its implications for the gendered segmentation of work. Women attending the 1995 TUC Women's Conference had heard how Dutch unions were publicising the need for men to take more responsibility for domestic tasks, but none of these lessons were taken into the National Delegate Conference

(nor the 1996 National Women's Conference for that matter). Notwithstanding, the union did appear willing to embrace a broader based bargaining agenda.

BROADER BASED BARGAINING

Reference has already been made to the motion setting out the negotiating priorities for women. Another debate which also raised questions about women's 'real interests' concerned the motion related to Violence Against Women. This issue had not been discussed at the National Women's Conference. The motion submitted to the National Delegate Conference instructed the NEC to,

- '1) declare its commitment to ensuring that violence against women in a trade union context will not be tolerated and will be subject to disciplinary action.
- 2) prepare and issue training materials and run training courses for all levels of union activists in dealing with violence against women.
- 3) campaign for employers to recognise and implement procedures for dealing with violence against women in the workplace.
- 4) publicly condemn the negative attitudes of the media and judiciary towards violence against women
- 5) work together with the TUC, Scottish TUC and other organisations such as Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Centres and the Zero Tolerance Campaign which are campaigning against violence against women.'

An amendment required the addition of the Campaign Against Domestic Violence to the list of organisations in section 5. This debate was an all-women debate, with two women noting that they were 'survivors of domestic violence'. The NEC supported the main motion, but not the addition of the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV). (It may be remembered that the 1994 Regional Forum in Region 1 recommended affiliation to this organisation.) The NEC's position was that CADV was an undemocratic organisation, and that Women's Aid - which the speaker noted was 'for women by women' - had asked trade unions not to support the CADV. The amendment calling for the NEC to support the Campaign Against Domestic Violence was lost, but the main motion was carried overwhelmingly. The importance of this

motion is that it puts an issue on the union agenda which was discussed by women in Regions 1 and 2. The motion did not however come from women's self-organisation. Indeed, the issue was back on the agenda, and was heard, at the 1996 National Delegate Conference. A more radical amendment wished to raise issues relating to domestic violence within the union by,

'challenging the culture of male behaviour whereby violence is seen at worst as acceptable and at best is tolerated thus reinforcing its status as 'normal' male behaviour.

giving serious consideration in cases involving members to explicitly include domestic violence as a disciplinary offence within UNISON and proposing appropriate rule changes to effect this'

This part of the motion was rejected by the Conference, but it provides an illustration of how some mixed constituency branches are prepared to address women's concerns, and in a manner which sees no division between the public and private sphere.

MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN THROUGH STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

Childcare Expenses: Reference has also been made to the concerns of women regarding childcare expenses for when they attend union meetings and conferences. These concerns had been raised at regional and national level, and resulted in several motions at the National Women's Conference. However, this was not given priority within the 1995 National Delegate Conference. In analysing the extent to which UNISON is moving away from practices which marginalise women, it is worth outlining the steps which women took to obtain satisfaction in respect to this issue, and the responses of the union.

An emergency motion was submitted to the 1995 National Delegate Conference relating to the lack of choice for members who were attending conferences at which crèche facilities existed. Where crèche facilities exist at conference, branches are to fund childcare payments for those

members who choose not to use the crèche facilities and leave their child at home. The motion noted that the suggested method of claiming expenses was impractical and asked that childcare and carer payments be made available for all conferences and that retrospective payment be made available for the National Delegate Conference. The NEC policy was to request remittance of this motion. The emergency motion was prioritised at 35th position for the last conference session and was not heard during the 1995 Conference. The Finance and Resource Management Committee of the NEC considered the content of the emergency motion, together with the motion submitted by the Local Government Service Group Executive about the level of expenses, and the maximum age of the children to be covered (see Chapter 9). The Committee was advised that the NEC and the Conference had accepted that childcare payments were an 'appropriate charge on branch funds', and were advised to

'affirm that provision of childcare payments from Branches should be either on the basis of the delegates taking their child (children) to conference or on the basis of them being left at home'

In addition, the Committee were informed that branches with a lower rate of retention, or inadequate funds, would be able to make a claim for such costs if they were unable to fund them themselves. The Committee was also recommended to consider an increase in the current rates for childcare in line with the Retail Price Index. Thus, the concerns of women - to date - in relation to childcare expenses had been considered and seemingly resolved. However, discussion at a National Women's Committee a few days later in October 1995 revealed that women were still concerned that the union was not supporting women's participation. Indeed, women's concerns about childcare expenses had moved on to a different aspect. Concern was expressed about branches being responsible for childcare payment expenses, and the comment was made that this was a 'bad decision'. However, although the issue of branch retention had been debated for some considerable time at the 1995 National Delegate Conference, no speaker mentioned the potential for branches to be 'gatekeepers', or referred to the perceived advantage to women of receiving their expenses from a central source. At no point was branch retention discussed in gender specific terms. It

was seen purely as a gender-neutral membership issue, which reiterates the manner in which it was discussed during the merger negotiations. Likewise, whilst the report to the Finance and Resource Management Committee reaffirmed that childcare expenses were legitimate branch expenses, no reference was made to the possibility that branches might not take on that responsibility.

A number of the Regional Women's Committees submitted motions to the 1996 Women's National Conference concerning childcare expenses. One urged the National Women's Committee to 'consider how best to set in place a method of appeal for those members whose branch secretaries are not willing to support their application to attend Union courses and conferences'. In 1997, another Region submitted a more radical motion to the National Women's Conference concerning the reluctance of some branches to fund legitimate expenses. This motion required the National Women's Committee to,

'write to branches to inform them that these payments must be made to women members undertaking legitimate UNISON business as required by rule'

However, this motion was ruled out of order and was not heard at the Conference. It was rejected on two counts: first that the National Women's Committee did not have the authority to write to branches directly on financial issues, and secondly, that the motion also challenged the autonomy of branches. The detail of this issue seems to illustrate that whilst the union is prepared to make adjustments and support women's participation within the union to some extent, it is not able to push these adjustments beyond the sacred autonomy of branches.

NDC Standing Orders Committee: The election of members to the Standing Orders Committee of the National Delegate Conference is another issue on which progress appears to be limited by the boundaries of autonomous bodies. As noted in chapter 5, there is no formula in the rule book for ensuring the proportionality of the Standing Orders Committee. Only one member from each region is elected to the Committee, but given the desire for each

Region to be completely free to elect its own member, it is difficult to guarantee a minimum level of participation on the Committee by women. In 1996, a motion was submitted to the National Delegate Conference, recommending a system of alternating reserved women's seats to ensure a proportional committee for future Conferences. Of 13 members elected to the Committee in 1995, 5 were women. The motion was not heard at the 1996 Conference.

Several other motions which had implications for the participation of women (but not exclusively) were also unheard at the 1996 Conference. One motion related to the timing of National Conference, and echoed the sentiments of a motion submitted to the National Women's Conference earlier in the year. The National Delegate Conference is held in June every year, which the motion argued, restricts many members with children from attending. The motion asked that this issue be taken into consideration when discussing the timing of the 1997 Conference.

Job-Sharing of Lay and Paid Officer Posts: Another motion concerned the use of job sharing within the union, and it is worth looking at the motion in more detail because it puts forward a useful model of branch activity:

'Our experience, as a branch, has shown that the single most effective method of encouraging and enabling women to become more active is to open all union positions to job-share. We have job-share officers (including the branch secretary) and job-share stewards and health and safety representatives (and since the inception of UNISON our conference delegation has always been at least proportional). We actively encourage everyone to consider sharing all their union activities. This has enabled our branch to achieve proportionality (or very close to it) throughout its structure. Within the East Midlands Region we also have all positions and committee memberships open to job-sharing - and this concept is enshrined within the rules. Here we also have encouraged more women to become involved (particularly within the women's committee, where all members automatically job-share). It makes sense to now share this achievement with other branches, regions, and UNISON as a whole. Proportionality will not be achieved 'as if by magic' just because the rule book says so - we have to work at it. Here is something both positive and easy which we can use to achieve our goal.'

After this preamble, the motion instructed the NEC to encourage and facilitate job sharing of all UNISON positions 'from General Secretary down'. However, despite the potential of this

motion to significantly contribute to the debate about increasing members' activity within the union, (particularly amongst women), the motion was not prioritised by sufficient parties, and therefore went unheard at the 1996 National Delegate Conference. In view of comments made in earlier chapters about, on the one hand the need for local participation, and on the other the difficulty of having time to participate, this seems to be a serious omission.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Although this chapter has studied a national body, it has demonstrated the importance of women's participation and representation at a local level. The role and accountability of the branch delegate attending the National Delegate Conference is much clearer than that of the representative sitting on national or regional groups. In general, each branch delegate signals their decision by raising their hand for or against particular motions. If opinion is divided over a motion, branch delegates cast votes for all the members in their branch. Use of the word 'delegate' is a reminder that in many cases, branch representative will have been mandated by their branch to take certain decisions - regardless of their sex. However, whilst this implies that the sex of the branch delegate is irrelevant to voting decisions, it reiterates the importance of women's access to branch meetings when NDC decisions are discussed and decided.

The response to the motion concerning the size of the National Women's Conference illustrates the predominant model of self-organisation within UNISON. The National Women's Conference is perceived as an end in itself, as opposed to a means to an end. The function of the National Women's Conference has been defined in terms of its relationship to the NDC. It has not been perceived as an autonomous policy making body. Given its perceived lack of power within UNISON's decision making processes, it therefore seems logical that its size should be restricted. However, the imposition of this restriction on a group which has been identified as 'socially oppressed' creates a tension for those operating within self-organised groups. How can they reconcile being identified as a group which has relatively less power, whilst being treated as though they have equal power with all other interest groups? I believe

it is this tension which has led to women-only groups identifying themselves in opposition to the mainstream structures. This ambiguity about the identification of women within UNISON is also articulated through the different responses to women's concerns. On some issues, activists were prepared to embrace a broader negotiating agenda for women. Other issues, which were just as important to women, were not perceived as such and not addressed. Whilst these responses may be a reflection of the early days of UNISON's development, they indicate the gap between the fruition of women's access and the pursuance of women's concerns.

CHAPTER 11:

THEMES RE-VISITED: THE RE-SHAPING OF TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY?

INTRODUCTION

Drawing the themes of the thesis together, this chapter argues that UNISON's three-pronged strategy has the potential to be 'transformational' (Cockburn 1989), and goes beyond 'letting women in' (Briskin and McDermott 1993). However, before either can be achieved, more links need to be forged between members operating in mainstream committees (the majority of whom are likely to be women) and women operating in the women's groups. Although proportionality and self-organisation are two separate commitments in the rule book, there is a theoretical and practical expectation that they will be mutually beneficial processes. I argue that ideologies and institutions interlink and interact within the union to support a 'parallelism' amongst women operating within each strategy. Despite a larger proportion of their membership being women, these ideologies and institutions prevent women who are elected in women's seats from talking specifically for women. Furthermore, the function of the women-only group has been perverted so that women-only groups define themselves in opposition to the mainstream structures. They do not define themselves as a new, vibrant constituency of members. I argue that the parallelism between the two structures is a stumbling block to ensuring that power is used *for* women as well as men. This chapter identifies the social processes which support this parallelism within UNISON and indicates the processes which are likely to change it. Finally, the chapter indicates those interlinking ideologies and institutions which require fundamental change if the trade union movement as a whole is to fully address women's concerns.

LINK BETWEEN WOMEN'S INTERESTS AND WOMEN'S CONCERNS

Identification of women as members of a sex category is changing the predominant values and beliefs of trade union democracy. Previous models of democracy have reflected the belief that all members have equal access, whereas proportionality and fair representation recognise that all members do not have equal opportunities for access. The effective use of proportionality in UNISON has wider implications for the re-shaping of trade union democracy. Phillips (1991) argues that democracy cannot exist without the proportional representation of men and women. This argument has been used to question whether an 'iron law of democracy' can exist in unions in which women are under-represented. In the manner that it supports women's systematic inclusion in trade unions, proportionality could be deemed a necessary condition for the effective functioning of the 'iron law of democracy' in unions with a majority of women members. This implies that the 'iron law of democracy' can only operate through the explicit exclusion of men in proportion to their membership. Proportionality forces men to step aside and forces them out of the politics of position which Cockburn (1991) referred to - or at least limits those politics to a few positions.

Identifying women as individuals in a sex category supports the systematic inclusion of women in representative structures. That women should be represented by women rather than men rests on the alleged differences and conflict of interests between the two sex categories (Phillips 1991). However, Cockburn notes that women elected from a mixed constituency are not obliged to speak for their sex (1995). This raises questions about when and why women do speak for women. This thesis has shown that issues which bear on women have been raised within decision making arena (for example, sexual harassment; childcare facilities; breast cancer screening) but it is likely that such issues were already being raised in the former partner unions. Whilst such issues have been 'mainstreamed' in a number of instances (e.g. NDC), they are often not discussed in the places that matter. Although ideologies of male headed families and 'women's work' have been actioned through debates on the national minimum wage, women's domestic inequality has not been discussed. In

addition very little has been raised about the gendered segregation of work. Far more time has been spent discussing gender-neutral issues.

The literature cautions us against universalising the interests of all women and acknowledges the multiplicity of women's interests and concerns. However, although seldom stated explicitly, there is an implicit assumption that this 'multiplicity of interests' reflects the opinions of all women. This thesis has shown that a single woman can often have a 'multiplicity of interests' which they choose to represent at different times. A woman representative might speak simultaneously, or separately, for a geographical region, for an occupational group, for women, and for party political activists. Whilst this phenomenon is not specific to women, it needs to be built into the conceptualisation of women's interests and women's concerns. It is important to realise that whilst women may share some common lived experiences concerning their subordinate position within society, they may choose not to prioritise these concerns all the time, or at any time. The relationship between women's interests and women's concerns is therefore contingent. This thesis has identified three of these contingencies. Women speak explicitly for women when they are the elected representative from a women-only committee. Women speak explicitly for women when they speak about issues arising from the domestic sphere. Women speak implicitly for women when they discuss their experiences at the workplace. The first contingency reiterates the importance of women-only structures and this issue is discussed later in the chapter. Of the latter two contingencies, I wish to focus on the discussion of workplace issues. When women talked about issues which impact on women, it was generally in relation to workplace issues. In part, this confirms the argument of Lawrence (1994) that the 'job model' tells us more about women than the 'gender model'. However, it is also a reflection of the 'newness' of the women members on the committee. Given that the workplace is one source of the material differences between men and women, it is important to consider whether the raising of workplace issues (as they impact on women) will be maintained as the newly active women become more experienced in the democratic processes.

THE BUREAUCRATISATION OF REPRESENTATIVES

Michels (1958) describes how trade union leaders are socialised into operating in a different manner to that of the rank and file members. Later writers (Hyman 1971a 1971b, Lane 1974) argue that representatives who do not derive their power directly from the shopfloor can also be socialised into a bureaucratic way of working. Observing representatives on committees indicates the 'work' of representation and participation, and some of the institutions and ideologies through which interests are determined or excluded. In order for national representatives to have a clear mandate, regional and branch members need to be aware of the issues coming up for discussion. This awareness can easily be thwarted by the mis-timing of meetings at a local level, the late delivery of agenda from the national level, or the non-attendance of national representatives at regional meetings. It is an irony that the very processes which seek to ensure that this administration is effective underpin the bureaucratisation of representatives.

Representatives are subject to conflict, mobilisation of bias and suppression of interests and there is a skill to be learnt in being an effective representative and participating in debates and decisions. Phillips talked of meetings being monopolised by those 'already favoured with wealth, education and power' (1991:128). This thesis shows the need to add 'previously experienced' and 'expertise' to that list. The newly active are less likely to speak and the experienced become the shapers. Phillips noted that over-participation might be justified where someone had thought about the issue, but was not defensible when 'the acquiescence of the silent majority stems from the fear of appearing foolish' (1991: p133). The manner in which experienced members responded to the discussion of workplace issues gave me the impression that specific workplace issues are considered parochial and their discussion is seen as a feature of being 'newly active'. Hyman talks about decision making being detached from members' experiences (1984:pp181-182) and it was possible to see this happening in mainstream regional and national meetings. The definition of what is 'union business' interacts with an ideology of 'expertise' defined by experience and an ability to see the wider

issue. 'Expertise' and experience are defined by the issues which are discussed and the terminology used to discuss them. In this way ideologies developed about the appropriateness of talking about workplace issues at national meetings leads to their exclusion, rather than their inclusion. Earlier studies and debates illustrate that the bureaucratisation of representatives is not a gendered phenomenon, but it does have a gendered outcome. Although the process is the same for everyone, it has adverse implications for women because they are being distanced from discussing the very issues which are the basis of their subordination at work, e.g. job segregation. Bureaucratisation is a double-blow for women because it distances them from the institutions which need to be changed. Whilst newly active women are more likely to discuss workplace issues, the theory of bureaucratisation implies that they too will soon adopt the predominant model of appropriate debate and stop talking about workplace issues. Hyman (1984) argues that unions need to organise in relation to workers' lived experiences but notes that this change has to be membership initiated. Fairbrother and Waddington (1990) discuss the possibility of union 'renewal' at a local level in UK and conclude that 'the tension between bureaucracy and democracy is in a constant state of flux' (p43). Some of the work in this thesis suggests that women-only groups may be a key to resolving that tension in favour of (gender) democracy.

Women have used self-organisation in UNISON to talk about things that are not normally discussed at branch level union meetings. They have discussed pensions; domestic violence; harassment; work related stress; personal development. In common with other studies, women in UNISON have found these women-only events extremely supportive and comfortable and often used this space to participate in union activity for the first time. They have also used these spaces to learn more about the union, and how it operates. Networks of interested women are developing at regional level, and regional women's newsletters are being used to get relevant information to as many other women as possible. The latter is deemed particularly useful for circumventing any branch 'gatekeepers' who are not interested in encouraging women to the same extent.

However, whilst women-only groups have developed alongside mainstream representative structures they have not significantly influenced the mainstream agenda or the debates and decisions of women representatives. Rather than interacting with mainstream structures, women's groups run in parallel. What is discussed within women's structures is seldom discussed in mainstream structures. What is discussed in mainstream structures is generally not discussed within the women's structures. Whilst this limited overlap may be construed as evidence of complementary processes, this distance does have serious implications for the pursuance of women's concerns within the union. Cockburn (1995) argues that women need to publicly debate issues and arrive at a consensus on them before identifying any position as the 'women's position'. With few relationships between women representatives and women-only structures, women's position is more difficult to identify and pursue. If women's concerns are not discussed in mainstream committees, they are unlikely to be pursued by the union. Although this parallelism could be a reflection of the early days of UNISON's development I would argue that it is underpinned by the predominant model of trade unionism.

IDEOLOGIES AND INSTITUTIONS SUPPORTING PARALLELISM

Cockburn (1995) reminds us that women are not obliged to speak for women because they are elected by mixed constituencies. However, I believe this expectation needs to reflect the breakdown of the mixed constituencies. Some women find the notion that they will be speaking 'for women' offensive. It is offensive to assume that it is only women who are expected to speak for women without also expecting men with the same proportion of women constituents to speak for women too. If representatives (male or female) are not obliged to speak for women when they make up 70% of the constituents, who are they obliged to speak for? I believe women's reluctance to speak 'for women' derives from other ideologies too. In part this tension derives from the theoretical conceptualisation of women as members of 'a group' whilst members act as individual women with a multiplicity of interests.

It also derives from a model of representative democracy which makes it useful for members to represent values and interests (such as militancy, socialism, Labour Party, manual workers, nurses) but does not make it useful for members to represent gendered identities. Women noted their interest in being elected in order that the interests of their 'constituency' were represented. These constituencies were not gender based. At the time of my research women were recognised as a socially oppressed group for the purposes of self-organisation, but were not recognised as an active and established constituency. It is interesting that a union of 975,825 women (EOR 1996:35) does not have an identifiable constituency of women. This study indicates a number of ideologies and institutions which underpin this phenomenon. Some derive from outside the women-only groups, some from inside. Cole (1920) refers to the 'double perversion of function' which arises from 'opposition' to groups and 'confusion' amongst them (p58). These concepts are useful in explaining some of the tension between the mainstream and women-only structures and within the women-only structures and the lack of identification of women as an active constituency.

The case studies of the women's groups suggest that there is a preferred model for self-organised groups within UNISON. Members of self-organised groups identify themselves through 'a common experience of exclusion or oppression' (Phillips 1991). The common purpose of these membership groups is to pursue interests defined by that common experience. However, using Cole's terminology, this function becomes perverted when it comes into conflict with the expectations of the mainstream committees. The underlying ideology of mainstream committees is that they come together, in principle, to pursue interests for all members of the union. The common oppression of members in self-organised groups is recognised by mainstream committees inasmuch as self-organised groups are expected to organise themselves in their own way so that they may determine their own interests in isolation from the elements which might oppress them. They are expected to organise in accordance with participatory democracy and be as inclusive as possible. However, when it comes to a consideration of their interests, self-organised groups are deemed to have equal power to any other organised group of members within the union. They do not have the

power of veto over any decisions which might disproportionately affect members of their group. They have no automatic right of access to any service specific decision making arena within the union. The predominant model of self-organisation within UNISON is of a pressure group whose comments are welcome but not necessarily taken into consideration. Members in the mainstream committees feel that this is a legitimate stance given the inclusivity and degree of self-selectiveness of members in the identity groups. It may also reflect the practical implications of giving representative rights to all four of the self-organised groups, rather than solely to the women-only group. Within a liberal democratic organisation, identity groups may have union resources with which to participate but they have little power if they are not involved in the representative structures. This outcome can be contrasted with a well-organised interest group which may have no union resources, but achieves power through the mobilisation of its members through representative structures. Interest groups expertly use the rules to engage fully in the game of representative democracy. Whilst the women-only groups may be discussing women's concerns, they are without power to take them forward unless they have representative links in the mainstream committees.

From a liberal perspective, self-organisation is a complement to the representative structures, it is not a substitute. In this respect it can only be conceptualised as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Colgan and Ledwith (1996) note that self-organisation is conditional on it being the former rather than the latter, but resistance within the union has prompted its operation as an end in itself. Trebilcock (1991) notes that to be effective women's committees need adequate financial support. The self-organised groups argued that their budgets had been disproportionately cut during UNISON's period of financial constraint and restructuring. It is difficult to judge whether the self-organised groups were given adequate financial support since they continued to maintain annual national conferences and national and regional meetings throughout this period. It is probably more important to note the manner in which the rule book commitments to finance proved a double-edged sword for the self-organised groups. Whilst groups were arguing for extra funds, they were not discussing their objectives. In the words of one interviewee, they were 'protecting rather than projecting'. Opposition within

UNISON seems to have perverted the function of the women-only groups so that they end up playing a different game altogether. Phillips raises concerns about identity groups being less amenable to a 'politics of accommodation or compromise' because they are defined in direct opposition to some 'other' (1993:17). The development of identity groups within a liberal democratic framework provides a structural basis for this definition of opposition. Identity groups are defined by their oppression and exclusion at the same time as they are deemed equal to any other group of members. This tension is not recognised in UNISON and identity groups have defined themselves in opposition to the mainstream structures. Members of mainstream structures which insist that self-organised groups abide 'by the rules' are seen as the 'other'. This has the effect of polarising the mainstream and women-only structures and causing divisions between women operating in the two structures.

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

I believe linking proportionality, fair representation and self-organisation is a key issue for UNISON, because many women activists do not see any connection. A vivid example of structural parallelism was provided by the female NEC member who spoke against the motion concerning the size of future National Women's Conferences. The NEC speaker asked that members, 'vote for women, vote for real power in UNISON, vote against this motion'. The statement makes assumptions about the power of a critical mass of women - which unfortunately has not been able to be tested anywhere - since men in all spheres of power, in virtually all countries, remain dominant. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge the developmental role of self-organisation - creating a space for experimentation and experience. It does not acknowledge the importance of women-only arena for developing a gendered analysis of work and society. It does however acknowledge that power lies within mainstream committees. Whilst the union is organised within a liberal democratic principle, this is not likely to change.

This raises the need for women-only organisation, especially in a union which is systematically including women through proportionality and fair representation. I would affirm the need for women-only organisation, but with the caveat that they re-examine their purpose. Whilst women are a socially oppressed group within society, women-only organisation provides a space in which women's real interests can be determined. This does not mean that the women-only groups were discussing anything exceptionally radical at the time of my study. They were not providing a gendered analysis of democracy, job segregation or working time. However, they were discussing the union's responsibilities for certain issues within the private sphere. At a very local level, within women-only educational activities, women were discussing the difficulty they experienced in participating in the workplace and made reference to domestic inequalities. I believe they also have a powerful role in linking participatory and representative democracy. Pateman (1970) argues that participation at a local level provides practice in 'democratic skills and procedures' (p42). The women-only group in Region 2 was specifically training women to 'run the union' through women-only education groups. The benefit of learning such skills in a women-only environment is that 'expertise' and 'democratic skills' can be conceptualised in a manner that is useful, rather than prohibitive, to women. The skills learnt in such groups could provide the means to challenge the bureaucratisation process which occurs within committees. First, however, women-only groups need to be clear about the purpose of their organisations. The study of two women-only groups within UNISON illustrated different opinions about the role of self-organisation. In this respect each women-only group could be considered as a separate entity. It is not possible to assume that they share a common purpose amongst themselves. This explains the conflict which arose between two different sets of women-only groups regarding the format of the National Women's Conference. Arguably, the purpose which is of most importance to women's concerns in UNISON is the development of a 'women's agenda' and it is this function which has become perverted. Reference was made earlier to three contingencies which identified occasions when women spoke for women. One of the contingencies was the presence of a representative of the women-only group. This study has noted that women-only groups do not automatically have rights of access to a number of committees within UNISON. In addition, at

the time of my research, it was rare that the representative from the women-only group had a women's agenda.

RE-SHAPING TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY

A number of writers have illustrated how democracy is mediated through predominant ideologies and institutions. This thesis has illustrated how the identification of women as a specific group of members has challenged and, in some instances, changed some of these ideologies and institutions. It has also indicated the ideologies and institutions which continue to underpin the suppression of women's interests and women's concerns. There is no one model of democracy and the beliefs, values and institutions which underpin the predominant model in current use can be changed. This thesis has illustrated a number of ideologies and institutions which, once changed, would make it more likely that power over members is used *for* both men and women. The need to change these ideologies and institutions is not confined to UNISON, I believe they apply to any union. Two important changes are developed further below. One requires the redefinition of democracy in gendered terms, the other requires the redefinition of identity groups within representative and participatory structures.

Within trade union debates, democracy is often defined in terms of the relationship between members and officers. This is an insufficient articulation of the democratic processes within trade unions. At the very least, democracy needs to be defined in terms of the representation and participation of men and women. (There are also very strong arguments for taking account of the representation and participation of black and white members.) Phillips argues that if women are under-represented, democracy is not functioning. This thesis has shown that it is possible to facilitate proportional representation of women and that it is possible to facilitate proportional participation of women. In view of these possibilities anything less than proportional representation and participation in a union with a majority of women members needs to be questioned. If decisions are made without women, are they still democratic? Such questions are not raised at the moment. Quorums are used to ensure that at least a

minimum level of representatives are present but I would argue that a male/ female quorum is just as important to measuring the representativeness of decision making bodies. The systematic exclusion of men in proportion to their membership has led to the pushing and pulling of women into representative bodies. I would argue that unions cannot be construed as 'democratic' whilst they resist the systematic inclusion of under-represented groups and the systematic exclusion of over-represented groups. Mill (1875) argued that democracy is all about exclusivity and that representatives attracting the majority vote should appreciate that they are in effect the 'minority'. So long as women are under-represented in unions in which they are a majority, they are being governed by a minority of a minority.

Does the above mean that unions with a minority of women can legitimately exclude women to a minimum level of representation and participation? The answer lies within a radical perspective. Liberal democracy assumes that people participate in politics in abstraction from the private sphere and that all people have equal power. Until domestic equality has been achieved and all persons have equal power, there needs to be a process for overcoming the mobilisation of bias against women and minority groups, becoming involved in union activity. Until such time, I would argue that it is not possible for there to be too many women participating in unions and taking representative positions. I appreciate that this could be construed as insisting that 'female is norm' and that the experience of women is generic to both women and men, but this thesis has shown that women do raise issues of concern to both men and women. A historical reading of trade union democracy has not demonstrated that men raise issues of concern to both men and women to the same extent.

That the dominant group within the trade union should be excluded in order for democracy to be achieved has implications for other dominant groups within trade unions. Perhaps any group which is over-represented should think about selecting themselves 'out' of the representatives roles. Though contentious, the exclusion of over-represented groups could be achieved through mentorship, sponsorship and job share. If every member of an over-

represented membership group shared their position with an under-represented member of the union, diversity of representatives could be achieved.

The idea of stepping aside to allow someone else to take a position was discussed in Cockburn (1991) when women in NUPE stood for the NEC women's seats for a limited number of terms. However, this thesis has shown that gaining access to decision making arena involves more than being elected. It requires the systematic inclusion of women in the decision making processes. The most obvious requirement is that women need to be present at the meetings, so time needs to be found in which women can participate. But, more importantly, women need to take an active part in debates. In the words of Batstone et al (1979) they need to 'identify and shape issues for debate'. However, the emphasis should not be solely on women to change and learn the rules. Indeed, if women learn the current rules this only supports the status quo, it does not change the rules. If the systematic inclusion of women representatives has been achieved through the systematic exclusion of men, then the corollary about decision making is that men need to be excluded from over-participating. Whilst this appears anti-democratic this is only what a number of the (mostly newly active) women have been doing. They have been excluding themselves from talking because they have nothing to add to what has been done before, or because the debate is not seen as relevant.

This thesis has demonstrated the tensions involved in developing radical strategies within organisations adhering to liberal democratic principles. Whilst the identification of women as a group of members is a radical strategy, it can be accommodated within the liberal democratic organisation because it still abides with the majority of the rules of the game. However, identifying women as an oppressed social group cannot be so easily accommodated within the liberal democratic organisation. Whilst women-only groups may encourage women to become active within the union, they do not regularly engage with the representative structures where policy decisions are made. Women-only groups need to join the game in order to take part. Self-organisation recognises that members of certain groups require space

to determine their own interests. Self-organisation does not always provide automatic access through which those interests can be pursued. When this access is provided, the liberal democratic principles of the organisation cannot ensure that these interests will be pursued. Integration within the representative and participatory structures can be through two points of access. It can be through participation at a local level whereby interests are forwarded to the representative, just as any other interest group. It can be through being a representative. Being a member of a socially oppressed group does not mean that you need to rely on someone else to be a representative. Proportionality and fair representation opens the door dramatically for women. Self-organisation provides two means of access through that door. First, it could ensure that men and women representatives are aware of women's concerns. Secondly, it could ensure that women walking through the door are fully equipped to mobilise support for women's concerns. Self-organisation by itself, however, does not identify women's concerns and this is one of the first issues which women in women-only groups need to address. I would argue that women-only groups need to identify the purpose and function of their groups in the context of the representative and participatory structures of their unions. Although this sounds overly prescriptive for organisations which are 'free' to determine their own interests, I would argue that anything less is evidence that women's 'real' interests are still being suppressed.

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UNISON Region 1 (1994/5) *Region 1 Women*

ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
APT&C	Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical Staff Group
BEOW	Branch Equality Officer (Women)
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CFDU	Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
DSO	Direct Services Organisation
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
FTO	Full-time Officer
GPMU	Graphical Paper and Media Union
HC	Health Care
HCSG	Health Care Service Group
HE	Higher Education
LG	Local Government
LGSG	Local Government Service Group
LP	Labour Party
LRD	Labour Research Department
M and C	Manual and Craft
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers' Association
NDC	National Delegate Conference
NEC	National Executive Council
NHS	National Health Service
NLGC	National Lesbian and Gay Committee
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NWSA	National Women's Studies Association
RC1	Regional Committee (Region 1)

RC2	Regional Committee (Region 2)
RHA	Regional Health Authority
ROC	Recruitment and Organisation Committee
SERTUC	South Eastern Region TUC
SG	Service Group
SGE	Service Group Executive
SOG	Self-organised Group
SOGAT '82	Society of Graphical and Allied Trades
STV	Single Transferable Vote
SWOMP	Socialist Women on Male Platforms
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981

APPENDIX 1:

UNISON ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

UNISON ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

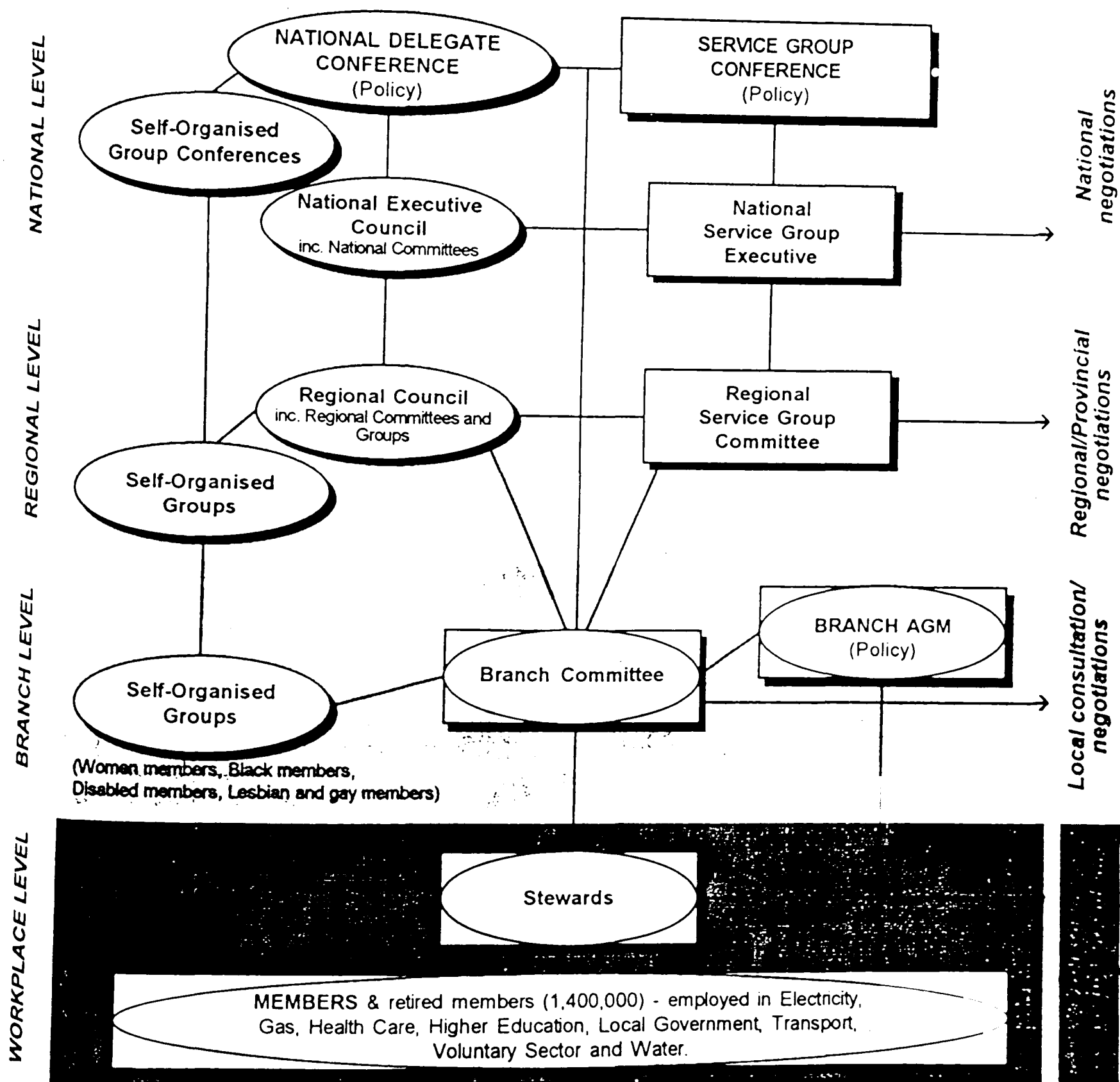
UNISON organises at four levels: Workplace, Branch, Regional and National. It has two main areas of interest

WORK & COMMUNITY (All branches, all services)

For matters affecting UNISON members (and their families) where it acts as a pressure group in the workplace and in society at large
- Rule B1*

SERVICE GROUPS (Branches in the same service group)

For matters affecting the pay and working conditions of employees where UNISON negotiates with a public or private employer
- Rule D3*



* UNISON Rules as at Vesting Day 1993

it is not surprising that those participating in the day-to-day activities of the union at branch level wish to attend. However, such statistics also illustrate the important relationship between women's activity at branch level and their proportional representation at National Delegate Conference. This is a point which will be picked up later in this chapter.

ACCESS THROUGH WOMEN'S SELF-ORGANISATION

The rule book allows for each self-organised group to send two representatives to the National Delegate Conference and in the case of the women's group, these representatives are elected from the National Women's Conference. However, this does not preclude the attendance of a number of women who attend as representatives of their branch but who are also active in self-organisation. Caucuses allow for the discussion of issues of particular interest to the members of the caucus, and provide opportunities for members to persuade colleagues how to vote on particular motions. A survey of participation at the first National Delegate Conference noted that just over 10% of delegate respondents described themselves as being an active member of at least one self-organised group. However, despite this potential attendance, the women's self-organised group appeared to have a relatively low profile at the 1994 and 1995 National Delegate Conferences. It is difficult to quantify what impact this lack of caucusing may have had on the representation of women's concerns at the Conference but a contrast can be drawn with the other self-organised groups who did caucus. Each day of the 1995 NDC, the National Lesbian and Gay Group printed a 4-page newsletter, highlighting particular issues, and urging support or rejection of particular issues. There was no similar caucusing of the Women's self-organised group - even though two motions of the National Women's Conference were to be heard at the Conference. A decision had been made not to publish a newsletter at the 1995 Conference. In addition, the Chair of the National Women's Committee was attending the NDC as her regional delegate, which meant that her first priority was her Region, rather than the National Women's Committee. However, an indication of the evolution of the women-only structures in UNISON is given by the motion submitted to the 1996 National Women's Conference on this issue. This motion deplored the 'lack of