6

Problems of coalition-building: Women and trade unions in the 1920s

Alice Kessler-Harris

Commentators on women's labor history have repeatedly remarked upon the many tensions between women workers and trade unions. Here, Alice Kessler-Harris ventures beyond description of that problematic relationship, and offers an explanation for it, with particular reference to the 1920s. She explores both the institutional characteristics of unions and the cultural self-conception of wage-earning women, and suggests a structural basis for the tension between the two in the period following World War I. On the basis of the influx of women into the labor movement in the 1910s, and of the suffrage victory, the postwar decade seemed to offer auspicious opportunities for developing a solid relationship between women workers and the unions. Instead, however, as Kessler-Harris shows, male trade union leaders continued to regard women with suspicion, ultimately contributing to the decline of union strength in the 1920s.

The focus here is once again on the case of the garment-workers, but unlike Waldinger, who stresses the shifting structure of the garment industry in his account of the ILGWU's decline in the 1920s, Kessler-Harris's argument rests on an analysis of the internal politics of the labor movement itself. The embattled group mentality of the unions – intensified in the 1920s by the external attacks on labor – led male trade union leaders to a perception of women workers as not only 'different' but also as weak and unreliable allies. In industries like garment manufacture, the labor force was female-dominated, and women had to be admitted to union membership. However, efforts to build woman-centered organizational forms within the existing union structure were viewed with suspicion and actively discouraged, while women were excluded from the inner leadership circles as well. Thus, the promise of fruitful coalition between men and women in the labor movement confronted formidable obstacles in the 1920s and, in the end, the opportunity to build on the gains made in the century's second decade was lost.

How do we, who are feminists and committed to the labor movement, come to terms with the failures of organized labor with regard to women? How do we explain the persistent failure of women to make their way to positions of power inside trade unions? In a path-breaking essay, Ruth Milkman has argued that contemporary feminists who neglect the labor movement (with all its faults) risk perpetual weakness, just as a labor movement that fails to come to terms with wage-earning women risks continuing stagnation.[1] In the end, Milkman laid the absence of common goals at the door of an exclusionary and male-oriented trade union movement, and pleaded with feminists not to turn their backs on it. But her description of organized labor's years of neglect of women and their concerns yields no source for optimism, and her argument offers few hints of any possibility of change. Whether the trade union movement can ever become a vehicle for non-sexist activity on behalf of all its members is still a major question for women. The need to develop a strategy in that direction remains one of the pressing issues of the contemporary period.

This chapter addresses the unresolved tension between trade unions and women from the perspective of the past. Drawing upon a relatively brief moment in their relationship, it attempts to make sense of seemingly paradoxical behavior on both sides. It does so around two central questions. What can we say about the nature of trade unions that will help us to understand how organized labor treats its female members? And what can we say about women's culture (especially the culture of wage-earning women) that will help us to understand women's sense of themselves inside the trade union movement?[2] I want to focus on the quality of relationships between men and women inside trade unions – on the sources of tension and agreement. This approach tends to emphasize the problems or paradoxes in coalition-building at the expense of illustrations of

harmony. But because it juxtaposes women's needs against the purposes of trade unions, it holds the promise of some useful political lessons for the present.

Tensions between women and men in trade unions were not new in the 1920s. A hundred years earlier, organized men had complained that wage-earning women deprived breadwinners of jobs, reduced wages and lowered standards. Repeatedly in the nineteenth century, they debated the efficacy of organizing women as opposed to excluding them from their trades, and they appealed to the state to regulate women's work lest their own efforts to raise standards be hindered.[3] But I have chosen the 1920s as the focus for exploration and illustration for several reasons. It was a decade when issues posed by the spread of waged work, especially for married women, were the subject of national debate.[4] Trade unions not only participated in the debate, but accepted women for the first time as a permanent factor in the labor force. Women had, after all, just won the vote – a circumstance many thought would move them quickly toward economic equality. Moreover, the decade followed a period of rapid and heady organization by women, such that in 1920 nearly 400,000 women (6.6 percent of all non-agricultural wage-earning women, and 18 percent of all women in industry) belonged to trade unions.[5] Although these figures may seem tiny by present standards, they reflect a quintupling of the absolute numbers of women in trade unions over the preceding ten years, and that alone should have laid to rest prevailing skepticism about the possibility of organizing wage-earning women. Indeed, one can argue that by this time most trade unionists involved in female-employing industries had stopped asking whether to organize women and started wondering which women. Given the corporate assault on trade unions in general and an unsympathetic national mood, the possibility for a successful coalition between men and women existed. That this did not occur certainly contributed to (though it by no means explains) declining trade union membership nationwide and the labor movement's relative weakness throughout the decade.

Despite incentives, male trade union leaders failed to create fruitful alliances with the women in their organizations. In an embattled period, one expects little effective organizing activity of men or women, but the record shows a pattern of treatment of women that can be described at best as an uneasy truce. Trade union

leaders paid little attention to the methods needed to organize or service their female members. The labor movement as a whole (the rhetoric of American Federation of Labor presidents Gompers and Green notwithstanding) welcomed women no more than in the period before they had demonstrated their effectiveness. Even in the face of the great garment and textile strikes with their militant demonstrations of female commitment and leadership, women remained on the periphery of trade union structures. They were recruited, sometimes reluctantly, as dues-paying members, tolerated as shop-level leaders, and occasionally advanced to become business agents and local and international officers. But incentives or inducements designed to create a loyal and effective female membership were virtually non-existent.[6]

Instead, we find the opposite. Where it could have fostered harmony, cooperation and a sense of belonging, the trade union movement persistently mistrusted its female members. It created friction, resentment and defensiveness among them, reducing their value and undermining their ability to do good work. Why would a labor movement aware of, and articulate about, the problems posed by female members, consciously perpetuate divisions between these workers and others?

Let us begin with an initial discussion of how women entered the trade union movement in the second decade of this century. In 1920, about 40 percent of unionized women (169,000) were garment-workers in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACW) and the United Garment Workers (UGW). Eighty percent of these women had been recruited since 1910 and, given the high turnover rate in the garment industry, probably less than 5 percent had been union members for ten years. Another 15 percent of the nation's unionized women were textile-workers, close to 90 percent of whom were new recruits. About 30,000 shoe-workers were organized into three unions. Most of the remaining unionized women were railway clerks, food-workers, printers, department-store clerks and school teachers.[7] The weight of numbers makes it necessary to speak primarily of garment-workers, though I think the conclusions are valid generally.

Everything we know about trade union organizing between 1910 and 1920 points to the fervor with which women entered the

process. From the 1909–10 garment strike in which the 'spirit' of the 'girl' strikers captured the heart of the public and formed the backbone of the ILGWU, down to battles against discrimination on the job fought by telephone operators, railway clerks and printers in 1920, women appealed to the community's sense of morality.[8] Observers described them as idealistic, self-sacrificing, willing to suffer, and committed. Bread-and-butter issues were never unimportant, but as James Oppenheimer successfully conveyed in his 1912 poem about the Lawrence strike, they were accompanied by a demand for 'roses' as well. Dignity, honor, right and justice had their place. The strength of these battles lay in the appeal wage-earning women made to the discrepancy between their wages and conditions at work and their ability to be virtuous and pure – potential mothers of the race. From the perspective of wage-earning women themselves, this rhetoric is probably best understood as a demand for time to attend to family and personal needs: to launder, to cook, to help out at home, to go to night school; and for sufficient wages to live decently, without dependence on family or men. In contrast to the perceptions of skilled male workers, dignity involved not so much the practice of one's craft, as the capacity to retain one's sense of place while earning a living. Mary Anderson put it this way in 1911:

> If the women who labor could only realize that the union movement . . . means better wages and shorter hours. Better wages means a home – a real home, and shorter hours mean family life, a life where father, mother and children have time to be with one another and learn together and play together.[9]

Around this set of perceptions, wage-earning women allied with middle-class women prepared to legitimize and give voice to their struggle.

Lacking economic power or political voice, and with meager trade union support, wage-earnng women relied on tactics of moral suasion to achieve their goals. In contrast to the 1930s, the big women's battles of twenty years before were won not so much by denying employers needed services or by exerting economic pressure, as by relying on public support, indignation and protest. Resort to moral suasion created a sense of what anthropologist Victor Turner calls 'communitas.'[10] Women drew together out of a need for companionship, for bonding, in their effort to attain a larger

goal. Without developed leadership or a formal organizational structure, women's shared sense of violation of accepted norms provided the warmth behind cross-class alliances and sustained them. For, as women organizers were fond of pointing out, individual women remained in the labor force only briefly, and when they struggled, they fought for the women who would follow them.[11]

The tactics of struggle reflected the knowledge that moral outrage, not economic pressure, was their trump card. Women repeatedly put themselves in positions where they forced the authorities to violate convention, as when they were beaten up or thrown into jail with prostitutes, or when a pregnant striker at Lawrence, Massachusetts, was shot by city police. By such extreme measures, women dramatized the injustices of their daily treatment in the shop and factory. Addressing a nation committed to the rhetoric of chivalry, motherhood and the ideal of 'the weaker sex,' they demonstrated the brutal treatment which daily violated ideas about womanhood – inside as well as outside the workplace. Their actions called attention to the discrepancy between what society thought women ought to be and what working life made possible for them. They affirmed the reality of women's accusations of shopfloor abuse, lending legitimacy to their demands for decent pay, shorter hours and reasonable sanitation.

Such demonstrations rested squarely on the notion that women were 'different' from men: not that they were unequal, but that their actual or potential motherhood gave them special claims to a woman's sphere. Wage-earning women, like their middle-class allies, accepted and relied upon their special place as the moral basis of their demands for better workplace conditions. As Agnes Nestor, then a lining-maker and organizer for the International Glove Workers' Union, wrote of her trade union struggles in 1902, 'we shall keep our womanly dignity through it all.'[12]

Male trade union leaders, at first skeptical of this mode of organization, soon recognized its advantages, and began admitting women to their organizations as weaker members in need of protection. Thus, John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers, told a garment-workers' convention in 1913 that there was 'no one more anxious that women should be queen of the home than the working man.' He would, he added, 'be happy indeed if our industrial conditions were such that every woman in America could

have the protection of a home.'[13] Since that was not possible, Mitchell conceded that 'chivalry' ought to be carried into the factory, where organized women could be protected by organized men. Expectations became practice. Women entered unions with lower initiation fees and dues that, as economist Theresa Wolfson eloquently pointed out in 1926, justified paying women lower strike, sickness and death benefits, as well as paying less attention to their wage negotiations. 'In many instances,' Wolfson noted, leaders 'naively explained the difference in wages by the fact that women's dues in the union were less than men's.' The lesser commitment represented by the lower dues placed each woman in the continuing 'status of an apprentice.'[14]

After World War I, a series of events undermined assurances about the differences between men and women, and reduced the effect of appeals to women's sphere in the public mind. Unions therefore lost some of their incentive to admit women as a matter of chivalry or protection. Probably most important among these developments in the 1920s was women's new sense of place, including the public perception that many women worked out of choice, not necessity – a perception reinforced by the image of the flapper. The newly acquired vote was thought to offer political options to women, providing them with the same possibilities as men to redress grievances, and opening to them formerly closed paths to labor-force equality. This idea was buttressed by the creation of a Women's Bureau within the Department of Labor – an agency meant to provide a voice for all wage-earning women. As political structures opened to women, middle-class allies who had been drawn by the appeal of community drifted away from providing organizing aid and publicity and moved instead into the battle to maintain protective labor legislation – a battle that would utilize women's new political clout even as it preserved women's traditional place. A startling number of female trade union activists moved into government jobs and paid administrative positions, where they hovered around the edges of legislative action. Mary Anderson, Elizabeth Christman, Emma Steghagen and Rose Schneiderman are among them.

As the political realm altered, so women's relationships to trade unions changed. Women had won the protective arm of organized labor on the grounds that they were different. Primarily out of

self-interested fear of female competition, reinforced by their perception of the male role, trade union leaders had taken advantage of women's need for protection. Now women threatened to take jobs away from organized men. Bitter postwar struggles by women to defend places they had earned during the war effort raised questions about whether women would utilize trade unions to serve their own ends in ways that violated societal norms. In an environment in which political access had reduced the value of moral arguments, leaving economic clout as the only viable weapon to win strikes and improve the position of workers, how were trade unions to treat women? From the male trade union perspective, the demands of women for continued protection as future mothers, on the one hand, and their insistence on equality in the competition for jobs, on the other, seemed irreconcilable. The editor of *Advance*, the official journal of the ACW, put it this way:

> the social inferiority of women . . . is a sequence of tens of thousands of years of recorded history and development. In a world based upon fierce individual competition, . . . there is no escape from the truth that if women want an improvement of their status, *they must fight for the improvement of their status, not appeal to men.*[15]

In the new environment of the 1920s, protection would come from legislation, while trade unions would reduce competition for jobs by organizing those women who competed directly with their male members. Women inside unions would continue to be treated as 'different' but now not because they required protection, but because they lacked economic power.

From the perspective of the female trade unionist, in contrast, membership was an invitation to struggle for equal pay and access to good jobs. Believing that their new political voice could be translated into economic power, women expected to participate fully in union activities. They abandoned the tactics of moral suasion as well as the security of their own 'communitas,' hoping to join trade union structures as full-fledged political participants. Yet the continuing belief in women's special place, coupled with the realities of discrimination, led trade union women to resist attempts to dismantle the hard-won privileges of legislative protection – a solution that yielded divided loyalties. Where wage-earning women were con-

cerned, the trade union was only one avenue for increasing well-being. The other, which was heir to the higher morality of the pre-war period, was protective labor legislation. Their ambiguity about the relationship between equality and difference left women who were inside the trade union movement vulnerable in struggles for power and, because ambiguity provided an alternative means for regulating job competition, encouraged male trade unionists to treat women as 'outsiders.'

Women's own perceptions of the work experience explain how easily that happened. I want here to adopt what some anthropologists have called an emic stance – to ask how the female wage-earner, and especially the female trade union member, saw herself in the period before and after World War I. The work of economist Charles Sabel is helpful. In *Work and Politics*, Sabel suggests that different groups of workers enter the workplace with different worldviews which condition their notions of 'ambition,' 'dignity,' or 'social honor' as well as their ideas about 'which jobs are disgraces and which are accomplishments.'[16] We recognize this phenomenon in American history in the so-called 'bird of passage' – the immigrant who came to the USA to make his fortune, hoping to return home with sufficient funds to buy land and marry. Such a person was willing to work at jobs other workers would not take, under conditions that would have created revolt among his fellows. His 'dignity' or 'honor' were not tied to the job so much as to the potential rewards his sacrifice would provide when he returned to the Old World. Since every worker lives in a family, comes out of a tradition or culture, and is at a particular place in his or her life-cycle, workers have a variety of (sometimes competing) worldviews and act on those that are dominant at a given moment. Herbert Gutman offers a parallel notion when he argues that to understand how immigrants from different racial/ethnic groups and rural/urban traditions approach their jobs, we need to examine their traditional values and customs.[17]

Social scientists have just begun to develop the notion of culture to understand women's special place. Instead of a pattern imposed by a dominant male society, woman's culture is now understood as the way women perceive and impose social order, construct family relationships, act out their own roles, socialize one another, and acknowledge meaning in their lives.[18] In this context, we need to ask

questions about how women approach the world of work: how they create what Charles Sabel calls 'careers at work.' I want to argue that women, as a group, bring to the work experience a socialization, a set of values, roots in home and family – in short, a *culture* – that shares class, ethnic and racial characteristics with their menfolk, but that differs in terms of gender. While workers with similar traditions and roots share many work values, the 'cultural baggage' associated with gender enters into a woman's sense of 'dignity' or 'honor' at work, ordering her perceptions of what she is willing to tolerate, and what violates her sense of dignity. How women acted on that sense of honor or dignity accounts for much of the strength of their organizing campaigns between 1910 and 1920, and the power of moral suasion in that decade. Their failure to pay attention to these aspects of difference accounts for women's relative weakness in the labor movement of the 1920s. For just as allegiance to trade union discipline among men addresses the cultural factors unique to them, so organizing among women and maintaining their loyalty to the trade union require special attention to the cultural factors unique to wage-earning women.

In the period before World War I, wage-earning women supported by an expanding women's movement successfully incorporated their perspective into the labor movement. To organized labor they brought notions of self-sacrifice for the future, a recognition of women's particular needs, and special attention to sanitation and cleanliness as well as traditional demands for higher wages and shorter hours. These perspectives are captured in the unique ways in which women related to their unions in this period: ILGWU officials called it 'spirit,' and women organizers developed it by meeting the social needs of young women through dances, social hours, education and entertainments. Fannia Cohn put it this way: 'I do not see how we can get girls to sacrifice themselves unless we discuss something besides trade matters . . . There must be something more than the economic question, there must be idealism.'[19] Mary Anderson spoke of undertaking the burden of additional preparation and clean-up in order to create a 'homelike atmosphere and a social get-together now and then for shoe workers.'[20] Together, these issues add up to what we earlier called 'communitas' and what some contemporaries referred to as 'soul.' They seem to have been as effective at galvanizing loyalty and discipline among women as

appeals to bread-and-butter issues were among men.

But while such tactics had the advantage of developing unity and strength among women, they carried new risks. To represent a female constituency effectively – to draw on women's own sense of honor – required women to stimulate and lead the kinds of activities that male unionists labeled irrelevant in periods of quiescence and perceived as a challenge to their leadership in periods when they felt threatened. Allegiance to women and their modes of organization could be of itself subversive because it risked creating dual loyalties. And in reducing the strength of a militant organization, it could undermine the trade union itself.

The assertion of a separate culture that served women so well in organizational campaigns of 1910–20 ran foul of the internal politics of the trade union movement in the 1920s, which adopted a more pessimistic outlook and perceived a heightened need for loyalty. Best captured by Robert Michels's notion of an embattled group, loyalty to which transcends its members' original idealistic purposes, the trade union movement had already developed oligarchic characteristics by 1920. Craft-oriented, protective of special interests, concerned more for its membership than for the whole class of workers, by 1920 the AFL (with which 80 percent of all organized workers were affiliated) had developed a primary commitment to job security and bread-and-butter gains. With the dismemberment of the Industrial Workers of the World in World War I, and the intense divisions within the American left that resulted from the Russian Revolution, unions with a social agenda found themselves operating defensively. In 1920, only 20 percent of US workers belonged to trade unions, and that number was declining. Survival of the institution was key. Battling communism, one side, and the 'American System,' on the other, the AFL and its international affiliates drew the wagons into a tight circle.

By 1920, most US trade unionists had become what they have remained since: agents of 'social closure,' to use Frank Parkin's felicitous phrase. Seeing their major task as preserving or extending the socio-economic position of their members, they operated primarily to increase (or usurp) authority and social place from those above them. Any union's capacity to provide increasing benefits depended on the loyalty of its members, and membership loyalty, conversely, rested on the degree to which leadership came through

for them. Leaders had to insure that they could control a job and had the economic resources to sustain lengthy strikes. Weak or potentially weak members were unwelcome, except when leaving such people out might increase labor-market competition and lead to the loss of job control. Then, when closing the doors to membership threatened the possibilities for increased usurpation, trade unions accepted new recruits.[21] Parkin calls this phenomenon 'dual closure.' The trade union's primary gain comes from utilizing the economic power of a strong and united constituency to gain more benefits for its members. A secondary gain derives from keeping out those whose presence would tend to weaken the organization's bargaining power – that is, those who are readily replaceable in the workforce.

Applied to male-dominated trade unions in the 1920s, the concept of dual closure illuminates the persistent tension between the labor movement and wage-earning women. To engage in activities calculated to usurp, the trade union movement required a tight political structure and loyalty on which it could rely. But women as wage-earners were perceived as different – a perception of which women themselves had taken advantage of in the past, and which they were still reluctant to abandon. Could they then be relied upon for the solidarity necessary for successful usurpationary activities? In industries where jobs were largely male-defined, unions preferred simply to exclude them. In other industries, where women competed directly with male members for jobs, unions admitted them to membership and then protected usurpationary struggles by relegating women to special places justified in the same language of difference that women used to protect themselves. To rally women to membership in such female-employing industries as those manufacturing garments, textiles and shoes, unions appealed to shared notions of social justice. In male-dominated industries and crafts, these appeals were unnecessary and unions sought solidarity through exclusion. The conception of woman as outsider served both kinds of unions well. AFL president William Green testified to its continuing value in a 1929 *American Federationist* editorial. 'When there were hand industries in the home,' Green argued, 'women were definitely a part of production undertakings. But when industries left homes to go into factories, men were the first to follow. They made the factory their job before women entered to any appreciable extent.'[22]

If male trade unionists, fearing that women would reduce internal strength or loyalty, could divest themselves of the responsibility of chivalry, they could not so easily shed the burden of a potentially competitive female labor force. The notion of dual closure illuminates some of the discrepancies between the rhetoric of the AFL regarding women and the actions of its constituent members. For while an exclusionary demand relies on the integrity of the group as it already exists, usurpation often involves appeals to some higher authority and morality, such as to the principle of justice or to the right to a living wage.[23] Exclusion calls for internal unity and cohesion against an unwitting Trojan horse; usurpation requires solidarity in the cause of right, and must appear at least to represent all workers. The AFL, representing the labor movement as a whole, could and did take strong moral positions in favor of organizing and integrating women. Not to do so would drive away the support of friendly social reform groups such as the League of Women Voters, the National Consumers' League and the Women's Trade Union League. Introduction and passage of the AFL's well-known resolution and program for organizing women in 1925 must be seen in this light. Cognizant of competition, as well as of the permanent place of women in industry, the AFL asked its affiliates to support an extensive organizing campaign among them. But the campaign foundered, scuttled by local resistance. For, as Theresa Wolfson noted in her classic volume on women workers in the trade unions, the AFL 'has had a far more liberal and far-sighted official attitude than the unions which it depended on for carrying into operation its official attitude.'[24]

The constituent members responsible for carrying out the program had their own protective interests in mind. In their capacity as agents of exclusion, unions in such male-dominated industries as iron-molding continued to refuse to admit women to membership, using legalistic tactics whenever possible and reverting to moral arguments about propriety and a woman's place when it was not. When employers tried to substitute women for male workers, unions too weak to resist the change were forced to confront the issue of solidarity. The Journeymen Barbers' Union provides a good example. Young women began to 'bob' their hair after the war, and barber shops added women to their staff. The union refused to admit

'lady barbers' under a constitutional provision that denied females the right to membership. As shop after shop became 'open' and then moved out of union hands altogether, the union realized it had a problem. Theresa Wolfson records the 1924 convention debate which ranged from questions about whether women's sense of honor from a pecuniary standpoint 'would be as strong as a man's' to whether the presence of several 'ladies in a shop of ten or twelve chairs would be conducive to good discipline.' But the nub of the matter seems to have been whether an attractive woman would 'not have a tendency to create discord among the men, who, up to the time of her admittance to membership, were real working brothers.' Women, in other words, would disrupt the solidarity of male members, interfering with the smooth running of the organization to become, in the end, 'nothing but a blithering liability.'[25] The Brotherhood of Electrical Workers solved this problem by isolating a strong union of female telephone operators into a separate local, where they were relegated to second-class status. Other internationals relied on their ability to control access to the job, or, like the railway clerks and printers, appealed directly to the state to declare their jobs off limits to women.

One notes in passing that such instances of exclusion often relied on state legislatures to do the job that the unions could not themselves undertake.[26] Appeals to the state were rationalized by male trade unionists on the grounds that women's potential motherhood required protection; within the labor movement, recourse to the state was justified by trade unionism's self-perception as an embattled force that would inevitably be weakened by the admission of workers who could not be counted upon. There was enough truth in both perceptions in the 1920s to legitimize them.

More complicated issues arose within female-dominated industries where women were of necessity inside the unions. There, the same sense of women's place that excluded women from other unions blinded labor leaders, eager to close ranks in the service of a militant fighting force, to the desirability of community for women. Indeed, they often insisted that women accede to the prevailing male methods and goals, and interpreted women's attempts to find new paths to loyalty and participation as subversive. The ILGWU leadership offers repeated examples. Its women leaders insisted, and some

of its male vice-presidents recognized, that who organized and the manner of organization had consequences. But the union's General Executive Board (GEB) persisted in attributing failure and success to the character of women, rather than to union policy. So, for example, in 1921, the board decided to suspend 'out of town organization work in the waist and dress industry' because 'to attempt to organize largely gentile girls in the small towns would, under the present conditions, be a waste of money and energy.'[27] This sort of sexism could inhibit a union's growth, for, as one vice-president who successfully organized gentile girls reported, 'Most of them are married which makes them independent and full of fighting spirit. The girls in the little cities, it seems, are the best element.'[28] In 1917, President Benjamin Schlesinger recommended reducing the union's involvement in Toronto because the majority of workers in the industry there were 'women, and largely Gentile, and consequently not an organizable element.'[29] Not everyone agreed with him. When the predictable stagnation happened, the leaders of three Toronto locals chastised the GEB. They asked for an English-speaking woman organizer because 'men organizers appointed by the union failed to achieve satisfactory results . . . and only women organizers can have access to this unorganized element.'[30] Repeatedly, the ILGWU ignored requests such as the one for 'a girl organizer' to go to St Louis; or, in one case, for fifteen unemployed Philadelphia union girls to go to Baltimore where organizer Hortense Powdermaker was sure they could successfully recruit the most difficult American-born women.[31]

ILGWU policies came not out of a failure to understand the need to recruit women for the union's own protection, but rather out of a conviction that women did not constitute a 'fighting force.' Incredibly, this view persisted despite the ILGWU's own history of militant female activity. Seven short years after 'inexperienced' girl strikers successfully rebuilt the union in 1909, a vice-president commented on a hard-fought Chicago strike:

> I must say here that I never expected that the girls, being out for the first time on strike would understand and be so devoted and active and ready to sacrifice and to listen and take orders and do everything and more than we could possibly expect from strikers.[32]

Another vice-president recalled the willingness with which a group of young anarchist women responded to union requests. 'When the union asked them to be on the picket line at 7 o'clock in the morning, they were there . . . Every morning I saw the girls there.' And yet, he insisted that these women were so argumentative and divided that they 'needed the men to keep peace between them.'[33]

Suspicion and doubt about female commitment to unionization undermined women's efforts to make their own demands. It meant that women would spend enormous energies simply convincing men that they belonged in a common struggle. Men resented what Ann Washington Craton called women's 'optimism, and freshness as well as the way they upset traditional routines.'[34] And even their successes required apology. Fannia Cohn, reporting to the ILGWU membership on a victorious strike of women noted that

> they never were willing to accept better conditions unless their brothers who were working with them were also included. Our women members realized long ago, as did the International, that there must be no such thing as sex division in the trade unions.[35]

Being part of, and yet not part of – this was the dilemma of the woman trade unionist of the 1920s. In 1924, at the ILGWU's biennial convention, Cohn introduced a motion instructing the union's delegates to the forthcoming AFL meeting to 'introduce resolutions and work for the adoption [of] . . . a plan of organization of workingwomen that shall include an educational campaign among women directly and through organized men indirectly.' The committee to which the resolution was referred rejected it reprovingly. 'It can be stated without contradiction,' the committee noted, 'that as yet no successful methods of organizing women workers have been found.' And then it went on to argue that the union's delegates 'possess a quite satisfactory acquaintance with the principles, policies and methods of our International Union and can be fully relied upon to carry out such policies during conventions of the AFL without any specific instructions to do so.'[36]

Female rank and filers who failed to support women implicitly acknowledged the real power structure and simultaneously protected their own interests. Women who supported male leadership faced fewer accusations of disloyalty. And since female trade union

officials did not speak for women or to their particular issues, and had minimal voice in the union as whole, women members reasonably felt they deserved better representation than that offered by women. This explains the seeming paradox of Jennie Silverman. An ILGWU business agent, she was rejected by a women's shop as its representative. A manager of the local recalled that the shop refused to be persuaded by the argument that 'you are all women. Jennie is a woman . . . She and you will work together.' The workers simply replied, 'never mind this, we want a man.'[37] Here, workers acknowledged the power of the formal political structure as they did in a similar instance recorded by the New York *World* in 1922. Before women got the vote, a Massachusetts shoe-workers' local had consistently selected a woman to be their manager. Afterward, they repeatedly chose men. A woman stitcher explained why: 'The business man,' she said, 'is getting so he doesn't pay as much attention to the requests of women as he did before we were given the franchise.'[38]

The practical manifestation of this set of dilemmas was the extraordinarily awkward place in which women in the labor movement found themselves. Ann Washington Craton, after she had left her position as organizer with the ACW, despaired of the situation. In an article written for the *Nation* in 1927, she noted that in order to maintain even minor official positions in the trade union movement, women 'have discreetly learned to play the union game as men play it . . . On the theory that a poor union is better than no union, they steadily refused to embarrass labor officials by a vigorous protest at the discriminations and inequalities to which women have been subjected in the unions.' The result, as she correctly observed, was that 'they have been unable to achieve any outstanding leadership among the rank and file of trade-union women.'[39]

Perhaps no single union so successfully illustrates the way a woman's worldview could translate into disloyalty as Local 25, the waist- and dress-makers' local of the ILGWU, in the immediate postwar period. Familiarly known as 'the girls' local,' its size and strength had come from the great organizing strikes of the 1909–12 period. Though it had gone through ups and downs since its organization, by 1919 Local 25 had 30,000 members and was by far the largest single local in the ILGWU, with nearly 25 percent of the international's total membership. Shop chairladies were virtually all

female; local officers, all male. Despite political disputes among the leadership, which ranged from anarchist and socialist to 'American-born gentiles,' the local managed to maintain a loyal and active membership as the result of its unique educational program started in 1915 by Barnard instructor Juliet Stuart Poyntz. With the support of a core of young women, including Cohn, Pauline Newman and Rose Schneiderman, Poyntz initiated a program that touched the spirit of Local 25's members. Classes in history, politics, physical fitness and art, as well as concerts, plays and discussion groups, appealed to the idealism of rank and filers and drew them in huge numbers into borrowed school buildings known as Unity Centers. The local went on to purchase a large country house where members could take vacations together. In 1919, it counted 10,000 members in its various classes and an additional 7,000 in attendance at concerts and plays. Other women's locals in Philadelphia and Chicago followed the example of Local 25. Unorthodox activity produced traditional results. Despite a membership that turned over entirely every three years, members managed to achieve some of the best wage and hour gains among semi-skilled workers. In a lengthy and spirited 1919 strike, the waist- and dress-makers won a forty-four hour week.[40]

By 1919, fired by the idealism the local had nurtured, young women began to agitate for a greater voice in union affairs. The shop-delegate system they proposed threatened the international's GEB, whose sole female member – Fannia Cohn – retreated under the attack. Sometime after 1920, shop delegates organized into leagues which seem to have been taken over by communists, providing added incentive to the male leadership's decision to break them up. This they did, first splitting Local 25 into three constituent locals, under the supervision of a Dress and Waistmakers' Joint Board, and then combining that board with one of male cloakmakers. Simultaneously, the GEB passed a rule denying anyone with less than two years' membership in the union the right to hold office.

The result was as devastating for the ILGWU as for Local 25. In vain, women protested the two-year rule, declaring they would find no one eligible for office. In a period when membership was declining because shops were shifting from urban areas to small towns and from north to south, and the trade was changing in character, female membership dropped disproportionately – falling from 75 percent of

the total in 1920 to 38.7 percent in 1924.[41] Women, as organizer Jennie Matyas recalls, simply 'ran away. If I couldn't go with these idiots and I couldn't fight them, I would just go to school. And a lot of my colleagues who felt as I did went out. Some got married, some went into some or another little business. They couldn't stay in the union and not be on one side.'[42]

Without debating the justice of the international's post-1921 acts, it seems clear that a union that could meet the needs of female members could expect to hold and keep their loyalty to the organization. Moreover, the ILGWU accepted their activity until women, building on their own sense of priorities, began to demand democratic participation, or insider status. At that point, as early as 1919, before any discussion of communist infiltration, and while the local was engaged in what the GEB acknowledged to be an 'energetic campaign' to recruit dress-makers in which 'thousands of new members enrolled,' the ILGWU began to accuse Local 25 of inefficiency and of not paying attention to union business.[43] In 1919, an outsider was hired to take over Local 25's educational program and, in 1920, the international appointed a supervisor for education who would work with the vice-presidents.

Fannia Cohn got caught on the firing line. Having initially supported – indeed, having helped to create – Local 25's activism, she did not quickly abandon the young women when they came under attack. But she moved away, turning back to her primary interest in education and insisting that, under trade union control, education made good unionists. She did not move quickly enough. Her loyalty remained in question, leading Israel Weinzweig to warn Cohn's friend Theresa Wolfson in the spring of 1922 about the strong possibility of Cohn 'being dropped by the administration forces as a candidate for vice president.' She had not, according to Weinzweig, been among the 'deserving followers' who had participated effectively 'in the attack on the left wingers.'[44] With her capacity for creative activity on behalf of women crippled, and lacking the female support that had sustained her spirit as well as theirs, Cohn retained her precarious, sometimes humiliating position until she was removed from the vice-presidency in 1926 and denied even the directorship of the education program she had created.[45]

But neither Cohn nor the ILGWU women who withdrew from the struggle fully understood that in moving from tactics that relied on a

spirit of social unity to develop strength, they had also moved from expressions of solidarity to alter the union in their image. Local 25's representatives to the 1922 convention recorded their goals quite clearly. The movement for a shop-delegate system 'aimed to weld together all workers of an industry into a strongly organized representative unit with many workers participating in the making of decisions rather than leaving it to officers, executive boards and a small group of active members who are responsible to no one but themselves.'[46] Their plea that this process had 'stimulated thought and awakened a healthy progressive interest in our union,' as well as winning 'the support of a number of our local officers' produced an entirely negative reaction. For, in challenging leadership, they subjected themselves to the full fury of an embattled and oligarchic political machine, opposition to which was described by President Schlesinger in a *Justice* editorial as a 'veritable treason.'[47]

While trade union leaders insisted on what the ILGWU male leadership called 'unity, discipline, faithfulness,'[48] the female rank and file searched for community, idealism and spirit. But when spirit brought loyalty into question, it became too costly for the male leadership to risk. Labeling women leftists and communists was not so much an indication of their political position (although some were surely communists) as an acknowledgment of their potential power and a fear that oppositional politics of whatever kind would breed disloyalty in a fighting organization. On the other hand, to toe the line, as Cohn did, was to neglect the needs of women members in the interests of organizational loyalty. Cohn watched helplessly as Local 25 was first split asunder and then shriveled into what one vice-president described 'as a very small local with little influence to do any extensive organizing work and to build up a strong union.'[49] Although she clung, still, to the notion that education would unify members and revive their spirit, she ran into a leadership determined in the 1920s to direct education to its own ends. She never again had charge of education for the ILGWU.

Conflict in organizational and leadership styles also appeared in the ACW – the second-largest concentration of unionized women in the 1920s. There, as in the ILGWU, women raised the issue of how they wanted to participate in their union. In the fall of 1926, the female leaders of a women's local in Chicago challenged the male leadership to acknowledge the separate needs of women. The

Executive Board of Local 275 asked, in a letter to *Advance*,

> What means do our leaders employ to combat the idea that women are not temporarily in industry? What methods do our officials use to promote greater activities among women workers since they have become a permanent factor in industry? What has become of the Women's Bureau for which the women have so long struggled?

The editor responded predictably that it was up to the women to rectify their complaints:

> Leadership in the union is a prize to those who know how to win it. Leaders of unions are not likely to leave their positions of vantage in favor of women, any more than women would in favor of men. The battle for mastery is a human trait, a very human trait too. The nature of this battle remains the same regardless of whether men or women are found on one side of the fence or the other. It is up to women to fight their way to the front.[50]

A member from Rochester replied almost immediately:

> 'No, Mr Editor, it is not leadership or power that we want, but special attention given our women so that they may have an opportunity to develop as intelligent members. You will probably say, 'Why Special Attention . . . why not adopt the same methods as the men?' No thank you, Mr Editor, we will not take your advice. We hope that we'll never learn to adopt the same methods as some of the men use to come to the front.[51]

There followed an exchange of letters over several months, most of them charging the ACW with failure to offer adequate support to its female members. But the editor would not budge. 'Do we,' he asked, 'want to build up a "Solid South" of women or anti-women in the Amalgamated?' Instead of criticizing the union, women, he repeated, should ally with men to organize other women. 'Those who want to climb the stairs which lead to the top must first come down to what is the basis of distinction – strength. They will have to match power with power, and prove that they are stronger.'[52]

The difficulty with following this advice and accepting the ACW's invitation to become like men was that female unionists felt themselves to be different. As one member wrote, 'I'm sure you will agree with me that, historically woman is a product of the kitchen. Though she has been coming out of it in the last twenty-five years, mentally she is still in the kitchen and hopes to remain there.'[53] For the ACW women, this difference was a strength upon which they hoped their union would build. For Cohn, by 1927, it had become a weakness:

> Just as soon as women can reasonably dissociate their personal feelings from the job they must do, just as soon as they can deliberate coolly and decide a case on its merits and not on the prejudices aroused by their excessive emotions, so soon will they find that they have very much in common with men.[54]

If struggling for difference within unions invited defeat, women would have to accept the challenge to become like men. Cohn suggested that women could contribute 'persistence, endurance, devotion and all of the other traits women have developed as the mothers of the race' to the trade union movement. They could add 'their enthusiasm, freshness and vigor' and thus 'exert a great influence on men in the movement and on the movement itself, from the infusion of their qualities into the work.' She did not suggest that these qualities would enable women to become leaders. But they would allow women to function within the trade union movement in ways that provided satisfaction and material gains while they sporadically protested the evident discrimination against them. Women who continued to see themselves as a community would have to be satisfied with only a peripheral relationship to power in the larger organization.

Activities that continued to develop community, such as women's summer schools, women's locals, the Women's Bureau, and the Women's Trade Union League, persisted on the edge of the trade union structure. As a way of channeling women's aims, they worked well. As a way of 'catching up' with men, women's locals seemed to many the ideal alternative. Agnes Nestor put it this way: 'where the women have locals of their own, greater interest is shown because they have full responsibility for their own affairs. In these unions, women leaders have developed because they were forced to assume responsibilities and develop leadership.'[55] Women in one New Jersey local decided to organize separate monthly meetings because 'they felt that the men were further advanced in organization work and

were rather timid about speaking.' The result was a 'friendly spirit, which has drawn the girls together and kept them in touch with one another's working conditions.'[56] A hosiery-worker noted that her 'girls' meetings' had taught '[us to] conduct our own business, get women speakers, and try to solve our own problems.' Like its New Jersey counterpart, this local engaged extensively in social activities – forming a basketball team, sending children to summer camp, and sponsoring parties, picnics, banquets and dances, all of which united members into 'one big family and that's what we want.'[57] Here was community without a threat to power.

Ironically, the struggle against the 1923 Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) – called the 'Blanket Amendment' by trade union women – provides the most successful example of the resuscitation of the spirit of community that prevailed in the pre-war period. The labor movement's unmitigated antagonism to this first ERA illustrates the remaining strength of moral suasion. For here was an amendment that proclaimed the equality of men and women – an equality that trade union women knew had no economic reality but which, if it were asserted, would threaten even their limited organizational position. Eager to affirm their sense that women still required the special protection offered by labor laws, women labor leaders joined with middle-class allies and the Women's Bureau to renew once again the spirit of struggle. Acting now as a community of women seeking not to usurp the prerogatives of men but to acknowledge their own special place, they drew on trade union support to bring the ERA to a standstill. Male trade union leaders, of course, understood protective labor legislation as a way of restraining women's demands for admission into their organization, and opposed the amendment all too willingly.

Self-definition as outsiders and the development of a notion of community without a politics of its own enabled individual women to continue to function within the trade union movement, extracting some benefits from it. Those who became spokespeople won more social and economic mobility for themselves than most working women could hope to achieve. With the Women's Bureau as their vehicle, they were able to bring public attention to many of the problems facing women wage-earners, and they succeeded in gaining the tacit support of the male-dominated trade unions for issues that concerned women. But the trade union movement offered women no

access to the power structure and insisted that women in its ranks accept male assumptions about their role and place. It thus undermined whatever female leadership developed within the movement, leaving women like Rose Pesotta, who rebeled, without support (labeled 'unstable') and those like Cohn, Newman and O'Connor, who conformed, without power.

What then of the power of difference? The material presented here suggests that two intersecting factors have to be acknowledged if we are to understand the past and present relationships of women to trade unions. Between 1910 and 1920, a sense of women's culture was joined with the more open stance of some trade unions to create successful alliances. By the 1920s, the alliance had broken down on two fronts. Some elements of the feminist coalition looked to a new equality with men to transcend women's confined place. And the labor movement, no longer convinced that appeals to women's place worked as well as economic struggle, and itself battling to survive, perceived women as a source of weakness better taken care of by the state. Ambivalent about an equality that seemed illusory, and now without the organized feminist support that had sustained the struggle for difference, trade union women floundered or, as Jennie Matyas put it, 'ran away.'

Failure was not so much a result of bad faith as of conflicting perceptions. For women to come to terms with the changing social values of the 1920s, to integrate their worldview with the decade's new realities, was a difficult task. To do so in the context of a defensive and harassed trade union movement might have been impossible. At the same time, to expect an embattled trade union movement to recognize women's cultural space seems equally difficult. But such were the conflicts of the 1920s.

They give us cause to hope that the dual purposes of feminism and trade unionism are not irreconcilable. In the contemporary period, when socio-economic forces have confronted wage-earning women with profound challenges to their perceptions of themselves as wage-earners, and when trade unions are beginning to recognize the workforce shifts that demand organization of new groups of women workers, the culture of women might yet find a place in the politics of unions.

Notes

1 Ruth Milkman, 'Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor: Historical Perspectives on "Women's Work" and the American Labor Movement,' *Socialist Review*, vol. 10, January–February 1980, pp.95–150.

2 I am here moving away from the question of organizability – partly because I am convinced that how and why trade unions recruit women is a function of some of the other phenomena I will discuss, and partly because recent scholarship has provided a fairly clear sense of the social and industrial factors that inhibit and encourage women's organizing efforts. These include factors such as occupational segregation, the kinds of industries organized, the historically high turnover rates of women, and especially sex-role socialization which often instills in women a sense of deference to men, involves them in time-consuming household commitments, and suggests an alternative set of roles to those offered by waged work. For access to this literature, see Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Wher Are the Organized Women Workers?', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3, fall 1975, pp.92–110; Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex,' in Martha Blaxall and Barbara Regan, eds, *Women and the Workplace: The Implications of Occupational Segregation*, University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp.137–69; as well as Milkman, 'Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor.'

3 Helen Sumner, *History of Women in Industry in the United Sates*, New York, Arno Press, 1974 (first published 1910), is probably still the best summary of the nineteenth-century experience. But see also Barbara Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, New York, Pantheon, 1977, and Philip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I*, New York, Free Press, 1979.

4 It was not the total number of women who worked for wages which was at issue. The proportion of such women expanded only modestly during the decade. But the kinds of women who worked (native-born, married) caused concern, as did the seemingly more permanent nature of their jobs.

5 Leo Wolman, *Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880–1923*, New York, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1924, pp.97–8. By 1924, the number of organized women had dropped to 250,000, and the figure increased only slightly over the rest of the decade. Theresa Wolfson estimated that the number of organized women was only one-thirty-fourth of all women then earning wages. See 'Trade Union Activities of Women,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 143, May 1929, p.120.

6 Incentives mentioned in the 1920s, but only rarely employed, included women organizers, discussion groups and social occasions, women's bureaus within unions, and vacation houses.

7 Wolman, *Growth of American Trade Unions*, pp.98–9, 107, estimates that one-quarter of all organized women in 1920 were in New York State.

8 See the account of the 1919 New England telephone operators' strike in Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1980, pp.218–22.

9 Anderson was thirty-eight years old and single when she wrote this, quoted from Mary Anderson, *Women at Work* as told to Mary N. Winslow, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1973 (first published 1951), p.46.

10 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974, pp.45–7. For a sense of how this worked in practice, see Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1980, chapters 2 and 4.

11 Rose Schneiderman, for example, commented on high turnover rates among women, 'I wish they would realize that joining the union would bring untold benefits during the five years they are in trade, not to mention how it would help the girls who come after them.' Zoe Beckley, 'Finds Hard Job Unionizing Girls Whose Aim is to Wed,' New York, *Telegram and Sun*, June 18, 1924, p.4.

12 Agnes Nestor, 'The Experiences of a Pioneer Woman Trade Unionist,' *American Federationist*, vol. 36, August 1929, p.926.

13 GEB Minutes, May 1, 1913, p.39, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Archives (hereafter: ILGWU Archives). See Kessler-Harris, 'Where Are the Organized Women Workers?' for additional examples.

14 Theresa Wolfson, *The Woman Worker and the Trade Unions*, New York, International Publishers, 1926, pp.81, 86–7.

15 Italics in original. 'Yes, Women Are Discontented, But What of It?', *Advance*, May 6, 1927, p.6.

16 Charles F. Sabel, *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.80.

17 Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-class and Social History*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, chapter 1.

18 See especially Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, chapters 2 and 11. I would here explicitly disagree with those formulations of women's work which measure self-experience in terms of ties to family or community of origin. The prime example is Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978.

19 As quoted in W. Elliot Brownlee and Mary M. Brownlee, eds, *Women in*

the American Economy: A Documentary History, 1675–1929, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, p.223.

20 Mary Anderson, *Women at Work*, p.66. The technique could be used by both sides. Organizer Sarah Shapiro reported to the general strike committee of Local 25 that she had almost won a lengthy strike of Italian girls when 'the bosses finally succeeded in getting them back by giving them an increase in wages, and in some cases shortening the hours, and giving them parties and dances in the shops.' February 21, 1919, Benjamin Schlesinger Collection, Box 3, File 16, ILGWU Archives.

21 Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1979, pp.44–6, 74.

22 *American Federationist*, vol. 36, August 1929, p.914.

23 Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*, p.98.

24 Wolfson, *The Woman Worker*, p.73.

25 *Ibid.*, pp.77–8.

26 This process was successfully used by professional organizations like the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association as well.

27 Baroff report in GEB Minutes, September 26, 1921, p.1,523, ILGWU Archives.

28 Sigman in GEB Minutes, October 17, 1923, p.1,825; and see also Halprin in GEB Minutes, March 26, 1923, p.1,736, ILGWU Archives.

29 GEB Minutes, April 24, 1917, p.641 (see also comments of John Pierce on p.655), ILGWU Archives.

30 ILGWU, *Report and Proceedings of the 15th Biennial Convention*, 1920, p.90; see also GEB Minutes, September 26, 1921, p.1,552, ILGWU Archives.

31 GEB Minutes, June 11, 1923, p.1,800, and September 26, 1921, p.1,552, ILGWU Archives.

32 Report of Vice-President Seidman, in GEB Minutes, April 24, 1917, p.675, ILGWU Archives.

33 Transcript of interview with Israel Breslow conducted by Henoch Mendelsund on March 2, 1982, pp.5, 14, ILGWU Archives.

34 Ann Washington Craton, 'Working the Women Workers,' *Nation*, vol. 124, March 1927, p.312.

35 *Justice*, February 16, 1923, p.4.

36 ILGWU, *Report and Proceedings of the 17th Biennial Convention*, 1924, pp.226–7.

37 Breslow interview, p.25.

38 'Women's Union Decides that Men Must Conduct their Affairs,' *New York World*, January 29, 1922, p.4.

39 Craton, 'Working the Women Workers,' p.312.

40 Some of these activities were summarized in a 1922 pamphlet published by Local 25. See *Report of the Ladies' Waistmakers' Union Local 25 to the 16th Convention of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union*, Cleveland, May 1922, pp.3–5. The pattern was followed by

Philadelphia's Local 15, described in 1920 by the GEB as a 'banner local.' See *Report and Proceedings to the 15th Biennial Convention*, 1920, p.29.

41 Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, New York, B. W. Huebsch, 1924, p.431.

42 Quoted in Brownlee and Brownlee, *Women in the American Economy*, pp.239–40.

43 *Report and Proceedings*, 1920, p.29.

44 I. Weinzweig to Theresa Wolfson, May 9, 1922, in the possession of Peggy Frank. Quoted by permission.

45 A remarkable example of Cohn's humiliation exists in the following GEB comment which is here quoted from the GEB Minutes, June 11, 1923, p.1,796, in its entirety:

> The trip to Europe made last year by Miss Fannia Cohn at the advice of her physician, the financial loss of which she had to bear herself, has made it impossible for her to straighten out her financial situation and she asked therefore to be reimbursed four weeks' pay. It was decided to grant this request and in the future on occasions of that kind, requests are to be made prior to the taking of vacations. While in Europe, Miss Cohn attended the First International Conference on Workers' Education as the delegate of the Workers' Education Bureau.

The effect of such treatment on the morale of female members of the ILGWU is illustrated by Rose Pesotta's outburst in an undated letter to David Dubinsky (David Dubinsky Collection, Box 134, File 2, ILGWU Archives):

> Fannia Cohn's service to our organization is only recognized by those on the outside who can dispasssionately evaluate such unselfish efforts on the part of one person, for the cause of workers' education. But most of the credit is now the heritage of a director who has entered the field after the thorns were weeded out, the marshes dried and all other obstacles removed. She remains a tragic figure amidst her own fellow workers, whom she helped to gain prestige with the outside educational world. Were she a man, it would have been entirely different.

46 *Report of the Ladies' Waistmakers' Union*, p.7. The pamphlet was signed by four delegates to the convention from Local 25. They were Miriam Levine, Lena Goodman, Ida Rothstein and Rose Pasatta (sic). Only Ida Rothstein was an avowed communist. Pesotta was an anarchist and both she and Levine opposed communist attempts to undermine the ILGWU. I have no information on Lena Goodman.

47 *Justice*, October 8, 1920, p.2. Schlesinger continued, 'We hope there are no such spirits in the Waist and Dressmakers Union. But should there appear any, we assure them that the International will know how to combat them.'

48 *Report and Proceedings to the 16th Convention*, 1922, p.114.
49 Abraham Baroff in the GEB Minutes, Ocober 17, 1923, p.1,833, ILGWU Archives.
50 *Advance*, September 3, 1926, p.1.
51 *Ibid.*, October 8, 1926, p.6.
52 *Ibid.*, May 6, 1927, pp.6, 7.
53 *Ibid.*, October 8, 1926, p.6.
54 Fannia M. Cohn, 'Do Sex Quarrels Help?', *Justice*, October 14, 1927, p.186.
55 Nestor, 'Experiences of a Pioneer Woman Trade Unionist,' p.932.
56 Helen Hamilton, 'Women's Locals,' *American Federationist*, vol. 36, September 1929, p.1,061.
57 *Ibid.*, p.1,060; Belle Trouland, 'The Woman's Local,' in *ibid.*, p.970.