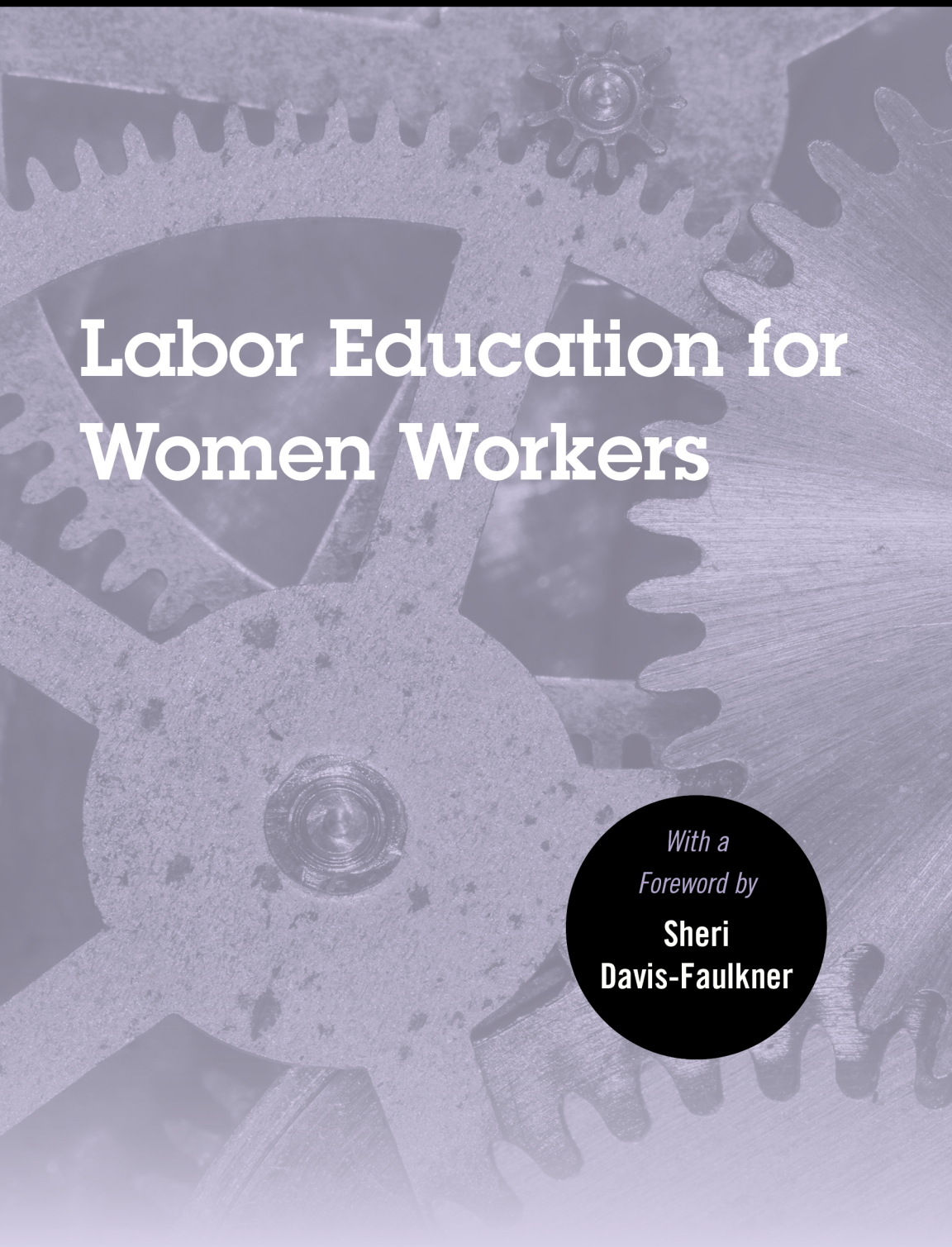
Edited by BARBARA MAYER WERTHEIMER

Labor Education for Women Workers



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CHAPTER 17

Education for Affirmative Action: Two Union Approaches

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Being political organizations, unions must be responsive to their memberships. In heavy industry, where unions remain largely male in composition, many leaders are cautious about seeming to favor one group of members over another. Yet increasingly leadership recognizes that women must be brought into the mainstream of union life. Unions need—and seek—their participation and support. With the law behind them, women are moving into more visible positions on assembly lines and in the skilled trades. In addition, the union is obligated by law to work toward eradicating discrimination. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act makes it equally liable for violations unless it can demonstrate its good faith efforts to comply with the act's requirements.

What can unions do to effect affirmative action within their own ranks? How much dues money should be allocated to train one group—and a minority of members at that—over another? While programs to encourage women's participation and provide them with information and leadership training are necessary to build their self-confidence and increase their effectiveness in a wider union sphere, will a union-sponsored women's program box in the women, keeping them from involvement in the more basic bargaining, grievance, and other committees that often determine union policy and that are the real ladder to union office?

Both the industrial unions whose programs are described here view special efforts to bring women into the mainstream as part of their affirmative action efforts. The International Union of Electrical Workers is 36 percent, and the United Automobile Workers is 10 percent female. These are not the only unions with special departments or divisions devoted to

women's programs and concerns. However, these are two of the most longstanding, predating the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These are unions that must deal daily with the needs and concerns of increasing numbers of women members at the same time that they interpret these concerns to the male majority in the union. Developing new programs that help the unions do this on a local as well as national level, increasing the sensitivity of their predominantly male staffs, provides a continuing challenge for the university as well as the union labor educator.

The International Union of Electrical Workers

Background

The first constitution of the International Union of Electrical Workers, founded in 1949, guaranteed the right of membership to all workers in the industry:

> All persons whose normal operations are in the electrical, radio and machine industry are eligible for membership in the IUE, regardless of skill, age, sex, nationality, color or religious belief.

As early as 1952, convention delegates passed resolutions calling for equal pay for equal work and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Recognizing the importance of the enactment of federal equal pay legislation, the union joined other groups to form the National Committee for Equal Pay, working from the early 1950s until the Equal Pay Act became law in 1963.

Today the International Union of Electrical Workers has 280,000 members in the United States and Canada, 36–38 percent of whom are women. Its stated policies on equality predate the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The union carries on a continuing, accepted, and nationwide education program to implement those policies. This chapter describes the step-by-step development of its program. For the labor and adult educator it is especially interesting to observe how the initial steps to carry out union policy led from national to district to local commitment, from efforts to comply with and implement equal employment law in the plant and on the job to programs designed to increase the involvement of women in the life of the union itself. Using union structures became the most effective tool for affirmative action within the union itself.

First Steps

At first, what women's activities the union sponsored originated in its Research Department. One of the earliest examples was a series of question-

naires on wage-rate comparisons by sex that this department developed, distributed, and summarized.

Perhaps the women's program dates from 1957, when the IUE held its first National Women's Conference. Some two hundred women members gathered to discuss three issues: (1) Equal pay for equal work; (2) promotional opportunities on the job; and (3) increasing participation of women in the union. The conference agreed to present specific recommendations to the international union's Executive Board for action. It urged a continuing fight for legislation, for an adequate child care bill, for increased educational and training opportunities for women, and for the development of a program to encourage more women to become active in the union. In short, it asked for union-based affirmative action.

The 1965 Policy Statement

Following the enactment of the Equal Pay Act and of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (banning discrimination in employment, including for the first time sex discrimination), the union determined that it had a twofold responsibility: to make all members, especially women, aware of the provisions of these new laws, and to find out where discrimination existed so that the union could act to eliminate it.

In 1965 the union issued its Policy Statement on Equal Employment Opportunities, calling on local unions to look at their plant practices and labor-management agreements to determine where and what kinds of discrimination existed.

Women's Program Emerges

The following year, the International Executive Board proposed that a National Women's Conference be convened every second year as a step toward bringing IUE women into contact with each other and ensuring that members in each district had up-to-date information on new laws and rulings affecting women members.

The first conference was held in 1967. Its theme was "the status of the IUE woman, her responsibilities, contributions and goals." Workshop topics denote the seriousness of purpose of those attending; three examples are sex discrimination and Title VII, women members and the union, and women in politics.

The conference highlighted the fact that, as a foundation for affirmative action, those planning women's activities needed to know more about women in the IUE: where they were, their degree of involvement, what union offices they held, and their special interests and concerns. Later

that year, therefore, the union distributed its first questionnaire to retrieve this information, summarizing the results in a publication, "Women in the IUE." The survey indicated that women were underrepresented as local union officers. If they held local office, it tended to be as stewards, local secretaries, or trustees, infrequently as president, treasurer, or secretary-treasurer.

Two years later, the survey was updated to assess the impact of the 1967 National Women's Conference on local unions, and to discover what changes might have resulted from Title VII and the union's efforts to implement it. This second survey revealed women moving into formerly male jobs, an increased number of women serving on union committees that had been all male, and a growing number of women running for union offices. For example, in 1967 there were 890 women in key union positions in their locals; in 1969 the number had risen to 1,467. In the 40 percent of local unions responding, there were 17 women presidents, 76 secretaries, 130 trustees, and 391 executive board members. The survey pointed to some of the obstacles to women's advancement in the plant and in the union. Women needed to know more about their job rights; they needed encouragement to become more involved in the union, to overcome fears of personal failure, and to build their self-confidence.

These were the issues addressed at the second National Women's Conference in 1969. At the same time, districts were urged to sponsor regional women's conferences in order to reach a larger number of IUE women.

Social Action Department Formed

The next step in developing the international's affirmative action was structural and functional. The Department of Civil Rights was renamed the Social Action Department, reflecting the wide range of social programs of major concern to the union. District committees, taking cognizance of the name change, became either Social Action Committees or, in some cases, Human Relations Committees. The jurisdiction of the new department included civil rights, youth, older and retired workers, education, legislation, community services, and women's problems and concerns.

The union underscored the department's focus at its 1970 convention with a policy resolution that stated in part:

> Those of us in the IUE must continue to develop the type of Affirmative Action programs that will insure freedom and equality for all. A necessary step in this direction is the establishment of an effective Local Union committee, which will oversee and make sure the members of the Local understand and appreciate the many issues and problems responsible for the current national

trend. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: (1) That each District and Local Union establish a Social Action Committee patterned after the structure of the International Social Action Department.

These changes elevated women's programs, issues, and concerns to equal status with other union programs, and ensured that they would receive the same attention as other social action concerns. One example of this integration that is particularly relevant to labor educators is a district social action program on national health insurance that investigated the impact of rising health costs on women members. Similarly, programs on legislative issues have incorporated the special concerns of working women, making it possible to increase women's participation on political action and legislative committees, as well as to involve them in planning district-sponsored education programs.

Two additional benefits derived from the structural change. First, since most districts choose to hold their social action programs immediately prior to or in conjunction with their regular district council meetings, more members are present to take part in these sessions, which formerly were heavily male in composition. Second, as more locals become familiar with the social action committee structure through these district programs, they have moved to set up social action committees to operate year-round. Indeed, in 1977 the IUE Constitution was amended to require local unions to have social action chairpersons.

Women's Program of the Social Action Department

The Social Action Department operates through an International Social Action Committee made up of representatives from each district and every conference board and council in the union. Meeting at least three times a year in two-day sessions, it reviews new materials and films, assesses new program resources, and shares information on union policy, national issues, and legal cases in which the union is involved on the affirmative action front. Essential to each meeting is the exchange of program information—what each district is doing and how the local committees are functioning. From these meetings flow specific recommendations to the International Executive Board.

Since 1972, when a Women's Department was set up within the Social Action Department, there has been a special liaison between the women's programs in each district and local, and the national office. The director of the Women's Department meets with district and local representatives, oversees the publication of materials, assists in conference planning, and represents the union at educational and governmental meetings. She works

closely with other departments of the IUE, linking them to the women's programs in a variety of ways useful for their development and support.

A specific instance of this close cooperation is illustrative. In 1973, the International Executive Board made it union policy to review every plant contract and practice to see what instances of discrimination, if any, continued to exist. This went considerably further than the survey undertaken in 1965: this time a check list was developed by the union's Legal and Women's Departments to guide the locals.

Further, a team from these two departments conducted briefings in each IUE district to review the program and provide locals with an update on Title VII and other equal opportunity legislation. It met with field staff charged with implementing the board's policy. The team examined the reports from the locals, following up to be sure they came in, noting how problems reported were being resolved—sometimes through negotiations, sometimes through filing charges—and assisting wherever necessary. As a consequence, numerous gains have resulted for IUE women, in the form of equal pay, back pay, and promotions. (For a summary of anti-discrimination cases initiated by the IUE, write to Gloria T. Johnson, c/o IUE, 1126 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.)

The Women's Department is further integrated into the structure of the union through its close cooperation with the Department of Organization. Many unorganized workers within the union's jurisdiction are women. Through the development of organizing materials and education sessions with the union's organizing staff, the Women's Department helps to increase the effectiveness of union organizing efforts, including the ability of organizing staff to understand and reach potential women members.

New Directions for Affirmative Action

In addition to education programs, the IUE has pioneered using union structures to effect changes that advance its affirmative action goals.

1. In 1972, the membership adopted a constitutional amendment establishing an IUE Women's Council consisting of a representative from each IUE district and IUE Conference Board. The chair of the Women's Council sits on the International Executive Board with voice but no vote, to advise the board and obtain support for women's issues. This has proven an effective means of getting support from districts and local union involvement on such issues as ERA and comparable worth, as well as on other aspects of affirmative action. Recognizing women's increasingly important role in the IUE, this council sponsors a special women's activity or program at each IUE convention, thus increasing women's visibility not only to each other but to the men in the union as well.

2. Early in 1979, the international's Executive Board approved a revised model constitution for all new IUE locals. Two key changes are designed specifically to increase the numbers of women and minorities in decision-making roles on the local level. The local executive board will consist of five persons (formerly ten), president, secretary, treasurer, chair of the Social Action Committee, and chair of the Health and Safety Committee. Since the posts of secretary and chair of the Social Action Committee usually have been held by women, this revision helps to elevate women to central roles. As the number-two officer of the local, the secretary assumes the presidency if that office becomes vacant, and chairs board meetings if the president is absent. Elevating the chair of the Social Action Committee to the board also emphasizes the importance of this function.

3. A questionnaire has been readied to go to all locals to determine how many have instituted women's committees, where these have been set up, and what they are doing or plan to do. The future of the IUE's program for women lies in the local union, and the International plans to give as much help as possible to locals in developing women's committee activities.

4. Six educational bulletins especially designed for these committees will be issued shortly, on the Equal Rights Amendment, pregnancy disability, equal pay for work of comparable worth, setting up effective committees, and resources (books, films, people, etc.).

5. A National IUE Women's Conference was called for January 1980, to focus on issues of central concern to women members and on ways to build women's skills, including those needed to set up and carry on the work of Women's Committees in the local union.

Future Tasks for the Women's Department

Most important to any effort to improve women's status is the union's high-level commitment to those goals. This has been IUE policy from the start.

But the union considers its job has only begun. New methods and techniques are needed to reach members with information about their rights and how the union can ensure that they are obtained. For example, the union has issued guidelines for women in apprenticeships; women must know what these are. The next step is to enlist their support in making sure the regulations are enforced and that women seeking to enter apprenticed jobs know how to apply.

The Women's Department seeks to develop a strong communications network linking all levels of the union and ensuring input from and outreach to rank-and-file women as well as union officers and staff representatives. Through this network, relevant materials and information can be supplied

that reflect the immediate problems and concerns of women members, while applicable programs are developed.

To multiply its effectiveness, the IUE is looking increasingly to university and college labor extension services to meet some of the specific education demands placed on its growing program. Cooperation and communication between union educators and university workers' education specialists is essential in both planning and implementing university services to trade unions. These should emphasize programming for women and involving more women, particularly minority women, as teachers. As unions seek to develop new approaches and incorporate new ideas to make equality a reality, labor educaton and educators will be primary resources.

The United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America

Background

The United Automobile Workers (UAW) is one of the two or three largest unions in the country, with 1,510,390 members in the United States and Canada. Of these, 153,593, or approximately 10 percent, are women. Workers who belong to the UAW make automobiles, auto parts, agricultural implements, planes, and, to a lesser degree, work in related industries. Two special divisions serve skilled trades workers and the technical, office, and professional workers who are UAW members.

The union is divided into eighteen regions, each headed by an elected regional director who also serves on the union's executive board, together with the International's president, secretary-treasurer, and vice presidents.

Women first entered the UAW in substantial numbers during World War II, when blue-collar defense jobs opened to them and "Rosie the Riveter" became a famous symbol. In 1944, a Women's Bureau was established in the union's War Policy Division. When in 1946 delegates to the union's International Convention passed a resolution calling for a Fair Employment Practices Department (FEP), the Women's Bureau became part of the FEP.

As the war came to a close, women's jobs and seniority became an issue. Despite the union's efforts, large numbers of women workers were laid off. But the problem did not die, and in 1955 a resolution calling for Job Security for Women Workers was reported out at the union's fifteenth International Convention. It was debated, sometimes hotly, for two hours, but when the vote was taken the overwhelmingly male delegates voted in favor of the resolution. The resolution called for:

1. Reaffirmation of the principle that all members are guaranteed full protection without discrimination based on sex or marital status.

2. Regional directors to disapprove any contract that discriminates against women workers.

3. Seniority of women workers to be protected fully and equally with the seniority of all other members.

4. Local unions to negotiate "equal pay for equal work" clauses in all contracts where they are not yet carried.

5. Local unions to continue to work toward eliminating discrimination against women in hiring, training, and promotional opportunities.

6. Inclusion of the "model maternity clause" in all contracts.

7. Support of state and federal legislation for equal pay for equal work and improved work standards and equal opportunities for women, in the U.S. and Canada.

8. Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, which "would outlaw hard-won state laws protecting women's special needs as workers and mothers." (The UAW today, however, is a strong advocate of the Equal Rights Amendment. Note that this resolution preceded Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which made point number 8 obsolete.)

9. Government agencies, commissions, and departments charged with enforcing non-discrimination regulations on government work to forbid discrimination because of sex and age as well as race, creed, color, or national origin.

That same year, the union's executive board elevated the Women's Bureau to department status under the office of the president, and a staff for the department was authorized. Its main focus throughout the 1950s remained equal pay for equal work, ending discrimination in hiring, promotion, and training, and full and equal seniority protection. While numerous contracts contained clauses prohibiting discrimination based on sex, these proved difficult to enforce.

The Role of Women in the UAW

Perhaps the first self-study by a union of women's participation was conducted by the UAW in 1962. It found that, of its approximately 150,000 women members, some 800 (or little more than 5 percent) held elective office, although several thousand others were active as elected or appointed committee members. At the local union level today, approximately 981 women, or 16 percent, hold one of the four top offices, while some 4,700 women serve in other offices or as members of standing committees.

Since 1966, there has been a woman member on the union's International Executive Board. The members of the International Executive Board have made a greater effort to have the staff of the UAW more representative of the membership. There is an increase as of 1980 of 58 over the 11 women staff representatives in the union in 1967. Because the union is so heavily male in membership, as well as in staff, it might be of interest to look at the specific jobs the 42 International Representatives hold:

1 Vice President of the International Union
1 Admininstrative Assistant to the International President
1 Director of the Family Education Center
1 Coordinator of the Consumer Affairs Department
1 Assistant Director
37 International Representatives involved in collective bargaining, organizing, benefit plans, education, community action programs, Women's and the Conservation Department, etc. To qualify for the classification of International Representative, you must have been a member of the UAW (in good standing) for one year.

In addition to the 42 International Representatives, there are 15 women on the Job Development Training Staff and a woman member of the Solidarity House Security Staff.

There are an additional 10 women on the technical staff who are not members of the UAW:

6 Technicians
1 Public relations staff member
2 Lawyers
1 Pension staff (actuary)

The total number of women now on the staff is 69.

The Women's Department: Preparing Women for Leadership

At the time of my election as vice president in 1974, my areas of responsibility included the Technical, Office, and Professional Workers Department, Consumer Affairs, Conservation and Natural Resources, and Recreation and Leisure Time. I requested additional collective bargaining responsibilities which, three months later, were assigned to me. I knew that until women could prove their ability at the bargaining table, the offices they held were tokens. In January 1975, when I was assigned, in addition, responsibility for the Women's Department, I made it a priority to convey the importance of a bargaining role for women members to UAW women.

In every union, but particularly in the UAW, where competition for union office on the local level is so keen, women must be prepared and qualified in order to run for an office. This focus, together with my beleif

that women should never forget that collective bargaining is at the heart of all unions, constitute the cornerstones of the education for affirmative action sponsored by the Women's Department.

The Women's Department must prepare UAW women for leadership roles at every level of the union. They need the same skills as men. They should know how the union works, its political structure, and how to operate within that structure to become involved and attain positions of responsibility.

The UAW's main education arm is its magnificent facility near Onaway, Michigan, the Walter and May Reuther Family Education Center. Two percent of union dues money goes to support this $25-million center. Family scholarships are awarded during the summer for two-week periods, but the center is utilized year-round for residential education programs. As part of the union's affirmative action program to train women members, I recommended that one week be set aside each year for a women's institute. The chance to develop leadership skills would provide women with more of an equal opportunity in local union elections and on various local union standing committees.

Article 44 of the UAW Constitution provides that local unions shall have standing committes on

> Constitution and Bylaws, Union Label, Education, Conservation and Recreation, Community Services, Fair Practice and Anti-Discrimination, Citizenship and Legislation, Consumer Affairs, and a Local Union Women's Committee.

These provide a wide range of opportunities for member participation. The majority of UAW regions have established most, if not all, of these committees, including Women's Committees that sponsor Regional Women's Conferences with which the International's Women's Department cooperates.

Women's Committees provide women with the opportunity to learn how committees work and to practice the leadership skills necessary to function effectively within a committee structure. However, some of the other standing committees of the local union tend to bring rank-and-file members more into the union's mainstream. The roles of such committees as Education, Fair Employment, and Bylaws are part of what the week-long women's conference examines.

As many women staff as possible take part in these schools, so that women delegates can see and talk with women in leadership in the union. Since few union representatives are appointed, and the political rough and tumble determines union position, the women's conference stresses how to

run for election—and the important point that losing an election does not mean rejection forever by the membership.

Since these week-long conferences were inaugurated in 1975, more than 1,000 UAW women have attended, or about 250 per year. Morning sessions focus on issues: women's concerns, union policy, and national issues. Afternoon skill workshops offer participants a wide choice, but each workshop focuses on building the ability to function effectively within the local union. Subjects range from collective bargaining and steward training to occupational safety and health, women's rights under the law, parliamentary procedure and public speaking, time study, and the psychology of union leadership, to name a representative sample.

Because of the school's popularity and the demand for the training it provides, a policy of "no repeaters" had to be adopted in 1979 so that as many women as possible could attend. The Women's Department seeks to spark mini-conferences in each region on at least an annual basis to encourage UAW women to participate more fully in the union and to build their skills to do so. As more women move on to assembly line jobs and enter the skilled trades, their voices must be heard as effective leaders. They will be elected by the workers around them, men as well as women, because they are capable, qualified members of the UAW who happen to be women. Education for leadership can help them to do it.

The Role for University Labor Extension

The programs described here deal increasingly with issues central to women in blue-collar jobs: equal pay for work of equal value, opportunities for training and advancement, making jobs safe for all people, child care, and comprehensive national health insurance, for example. These programs, and the information and leadership skill training they provide, often mean the difference between a woman's election or defeat, between her being competent or not, between her having self-confidence and fear to try.

Wherever possible, the IUE and the UAW use their own staffs in their training programs. Women staff serve as role models as they provide instruction rooted in experience. However, there is a growing role for university and college labor educators. Union programs for women members are so popular that, to staff them properly, additional labor education experts are often necessary. This is particularly true where a university extension faculty includes women who have taught unionists and other working women, have assisted at regional summer schools for union women, and are familiar with women's growing role in the labor movement.

Unions sometimes utilize the facilities and physical plants of universities for regional or area-wide schools. Indeed, both the unions reporting here have already done this from time to time. This is another opportunity to develop cooperative links.

University extension faculty can offer the school's resources to union education staff in preparing course and conference materials, especially those that deal with such specialized subjects as lead poisoning, or how to develop effective health and safety committees. They can suggest course designs that break skill subjects into the right number of sessions for the particular conference or time span the union has in mind.

Increasingly, university labor staff are working with local chapters of the Coalition of Labor Union Women in planning and conducting statewide or citywide conferences or short courses for CLUW members. In highly industrial areas, a large proportion of CLUW members will be blue-collar workers, many from unions with heavy majorities of male members. Labor education can provide useful input on a wide range of subjects, from how to plan a campaign and run for office to how to deal with sexual harassment on the job.

Finally, women on university labor staffs can often suggest new course areas for unions to explore, especially courses of interest to women members. These might include an oral history workshop to begin to record the early struggles of women in the union; or courses on working women and money; on women in labor history; or on working women in the coming years. In the area of programming for women, unions need all the help they can get. We have seen that this is not a new idea, that unions like the IUE and the UAW have been evolving such programs for some time; but many unions are still brand new to the idea, and others are just starting out.

Union programs for women are dual purpose, serving affirmative action both within the union and on the job. University labor education is uniquely suited to help unions initiate, develop, and carry out programs that further these goals.