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# Unions' Responses to Family Concerns

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*In analyzing labor unions' responses to family concerns, this paper makes three arguments. First, analyses of unions force us to shift our perspective. Many union officials insist that work-family issues should include not only what have become the conventional benefits in the work-family literature (like family leave, childcare, and alternative work schedules), but also health benefits, vacation time, and a broad range of issues that are usually excluded from such analyses. By reinvigorating the class component, this change in focus shifts our understanding not only of what policies should be included, but also whom the policies can and do serve. Second, unionization cannot be treated as a dichotomy, but rather requires a more nuanced analysis. Our interviews revealed striking differences among unions, with regard to the more conventional work-family benefits, including flextime, childcare and the FMLA. Finally, we argue that not only cultural factors (like member expectations), but also structural factors, including the gender of the membership and leadership, as well as union strength, help explain why such variation among unions exists.*

Job obligations often make it difficult to take care of families, and family responsibilities often interfere with jobs. At least four related forces shape this tension: the preferences and families of individual women and men and the powers and policies of three institutions—the state, employers, and labor unions. Individual preferences have been well researched as have many state and employer policies. Most discussions, however, have neglected unions and the workers they represent. By analyzing work-family issues from the perspective of unions, this paper seeks to reinvigorate the class component. Such an analysis provides an understanding of the ways—and for whom—family benefits at the workplace have been construed and constructed.

Union members represent a diverse population not often captured in studies of work-family issues. While much research on work-family issues focuses on either the poor or the affluent (Lambert 1999), a study of unions provides access to experiences of both the middle and working class. Twenty-five percent of union members are graduates of college; 75% are not. While many studies of family benefits focus on women, unions contain both women (6.5 million) and men (9.9 million). So, too, a study of unions moves beyond the focus on white employees, who dominate the research on work-family issues. Unions cross racial lines: of the women members, 1.1 million are black and .6 million Latina; of the men, 1.3 million are black and 1.0 million Latino.<sup>1</sup> Analyses of unions, then, have the potential to broaden our understanding of “working families” and the social movement infrastructure necessary to promote workplaces broadly responsive to those families.

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1. These figures include not only members of labor unions, but also members of employee associations similar to labor unions, such as the National Education Association. Data are for 1999 and come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics web site (<http://stats.bls.gov/news.release/union2t01.htm>). Other racial groups are not included in these calculations.

This paper makes several broad arguments. First, analyses of unions force us to shift our perspective—rethinking both what should be considered under the general umbrella of work-family policies, as well as the contours of specific policies, whether childcare or flextime. This focus shifts our understanding not only of *what* the policies should be, but *whom* the policies do and can serve. Under the impact of movements that began in the 1960s and continue to the present, we have learned, and continue to learn, just how different the world looks if we put front-and-center the perspectives of women, African Americans, other people of color, gays and lesbians. However, the class component has been the least developed in recent years. Approaching work-family issues from the perspective of ordinary wage workers, and from the perspective of the organizations that represent their collective interests, helps reinvigorate the class component.

Second, we argue for a more nuanced understanding of unions, their circumstances, and stance. In attempts to explain who obtains work-family benefits, most researchers have treated unionization as a dichotomy: they analyze whether members of unions have more family benefits than those who are not members. And they write either that unions—as bastions of male privilege, as embattled collectivities—do not and cannot support these issues or, conversely, that unions—as key players in progressive politics—have become important advocates of these emerging work-family issues. Our interviews revealed striking differences *among* unions: a small number make work-family policies, as we conventionally understand those, central to their contract negotiations, training, and legislative agendas; others do not (or have very little success when they try). For this area, as for so many others, we argue the union/non-union dichotomy may conceal as much as it reveals.

Finally, and most tentatively, we ask *under what conditions* have unions either neglected work-family benefits or served as vehicles for their implementation. While no one has examined this question directly, some scholars have addressed closely related issues and relied on two broad theoretical perspectives—one emphasizing culture; the other, structure. Emphasizing the importance of cultural shifts in the development of legislation promoting work-family solutions, Burstein and Wierzbicki (2000) argue that changes in the definitions of the problem and in public opinion led to such new legislation. Addressing the union context itself, other even earlier work suggests that broad cultural systems, including men's patriarchal attitudes, have historically pushed unions away from embracing family issues (Hartmann 1976; Feldberg 1987). From this perspective, members' expectations—whether about the validity of family expectations or their rights to demand family benefits in the workplace—are central in explaining whether they seek and obtain such benefits.

While respecting the contributions of a cultural approach, Milkman (1990) emphasizes a structural perspective in her insightful analysis of gender and unions. She, too, argues that unions are not monolithic, explaining variation by the historical period in which the union took form and expanded. Extending Stinchcombe's (1965) analysis of organizational inertia, she argues that four waves of unionization produced four distinct cohorts of labor organizations—craft, craft/industrial, industrial, service—each of which brought a growing “openness to alternative ideologies and modes of organizing in general” and, more specifically “openness to demands from women and feminist approaches” (p. 94).

While Milkman uses this structural model to explain the extent to which women are members and leaders of unions, we argue these factors, in turn, help explain the degree of union support for work-family issues. Perhaps most obvious among these is the gender of members. Because women workers still tend to have more responsibility for domestic demands than do men, we expect those unions with a higher proportion of women in their ranks would put issues like childcare and paid family leave higher on their agenda. Simultaneously we expect that it is not simply the gender of the workers that matters, but of the leaders as well, for those unions with a higher proportion of women leaders will have the power, personnel, and commitment to advocate for greater work-family benefits.

Finally, we add to gender another structural factor: the strength of unions themselves. While the other three factors help explain the extent to which unions make work-family benefits a priority, this focuses on a union's ability to win that priority.

These four factors—member expectations, gender of members, gender of leaders, and union strength—are highly correlated. Milkman's analysis helps explain why these factors are correlated. For our purposes, this makes it difficult to disentangle the effects of each. Our aim, however, is not a precise specification of the contribution of each factor. Instead, in this paper, we want to explain variation among unions by beginning to specify which union conditions are associated with the promotion of family concerns.

The paper begins with a brief review of the literature and discussion of our methods and then is divided into two main sections. The first examines the range of work-family policies that an analysis of unions brings to the fore. The second critiques the dichotomous understanding of unions and analyzes why and which unions do (or do not) win substantial work-family benefits.

## Literature Review

Very little literature, to date, examines union responses to work-family issues. The literature that does exist can be divided into two quite different strands. The first set addresses those institutional factors associated with the availability of work-family benefits. These include analyses of unions, typically almost in passing, as one among a number of factors shaping these benefits. Even here, the findings are inconsistent. Both Galinsky (2001) and Glass and Fujimoto (1995) found that unionized workplaces were more likely to provide a range of family benefits. Glass and Fujimoto (1995:398) also found unions "somewhat more successful in gaining family benefits in predominantly male workplaces despite the lesser care-giving responsibilities of men." A similar gender bias was found by Gerstel and McGonagle (1999) who found no effect of union membership on taking family leaves; yet, when examining the length of family leaves, they found union membership significantly increased the length of men's leaves but had no impact on the length of women's. Although they did find that a higher rate of unionization was associated with more generous provision of conventional fringe benefits, Deitch and Huffman (2001), along with Osterman (1995) and Knoke (1996) found no significant effect for unionization on family benefits. In a rare study focusing on a range of unions, Budd and Brey (2000) suggest that while unionization may not have an effect on actual family leave taking, union members—compared to those not in unions—do appear to obtain better information about the FMLA, and they are more likely to use that information to positive effect. Union members are, for example, less likely than non-union members to worry about losing their jobs because they take a family leave. However, Kelly (1999) found that unionization had a negative effect on employers' adoption of maternity leave policy both before and after the passage of the FMLA (although as Osterman (1995) points out, this negative association may be a result of the fact that major American employers have developed family policies as a way to avoid unionization). Overall, existing studies provide inconsistent, and limited, results. More important, the existence of policies can tell us neither about workers' views of those policies nor the social and political processes by which employers came to offer them or unions sought to win them.

The second set of literature focuses on unions themselves to document the practices of those particular unions that have made considerable progress on issues relating to work and family (Clawson forthcoming; Cobble 1993, 1994). Much of the work on unions themselves comes out of the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and the Labor Project for Working Families. Most of the union research, like *The Survey of Working Women*, is based on a volunteer sample and is directed toward mobilizing (see, for example, AFL-CIO Working Women's Department, 1998). Other existing work, like that by the Labor Project, is equally important, but aimed at documenting the "best practices" that select unions

have been able to achieve (Grundy and Firestein 1997; Grundy, Bell and Firestein 2000). However, this literature does not, by and large, address variation among unions or those characteristics of workers and their unions that lead to these “best” practices. Though no one has studied its relationship to work-family benefits, research does suggest that one important characteristic is likely the union’s strength. Not only is it important whether unions assign priority to family issues, but also whether unions have the strength to achieve their aims; that strength is determined, in significant part, by unions’ ability to organize and represent a substantial fraction of the work force (Bronfenbrenner, et al. 1998; Freeman and Medoff 1984; Western 1997).

To find material directly relevant to variation in the provision of work-family benefits, we must turn to a broader literature on organizations rather than on unions themselves. Employers are no more monolithic than unions: certain employers are likely to support particular benefits while others do not (e.g., see Baron, et al. 1986). Some organizational researchers have, for example, predicted that the proportion of women—as either workers or employers—likely shapes the availability and provision of work-family benefits. While the findings are not altogether consistent (e.g., see Knoke 1996), Auerbach (1990), Goodstein (1994) and Seyler, Monroe and Garan (1995) all find a higher percentage of women employees predicted various family supportive benefits. As Galinsky (2001) and Deitch and Huffman (2001) both suggest, the relationship may be curvilinear, with organizations that have a predominance of women less likely to provide the more expensive family benefits, like paid family leaves. Other organizational studies have suggested that it is not simply the representation of women among workers, but rather the presence of powerful women in positions of leadership who can push for the implementation of such benefits. Thus, in her national study, Galinsky (2001:211) finds that having a larger proportion of top executive positions filled by women is associated with the provision of such benefits as flextime and on- or near-site childcare.

On one hand, these analyses of organizations provide useful models and clues for analyses of unions. On the other hand, they typically consider a conventional and rather narrow view of family benefits. These policies, and the very definition of work-family issues they entail, come from or are at least shaped by the needs of corporations (Gross 2001) rather than the workers themselves.

This paper uses a different organizational lens, that of unions rather than employers. We ask: what is the role of unions in helping employees deal with family responsibilities? What explains variation among those unions?

## **Method: Sample And Interviews**

Material for this paper comes primarily from a set of interviews we conducted with a purposive sample of key informants. Through a series of contacts and phone calls, we attempted first to identify the most knowledgeable and centrally positioned person at every major union. We then interviewed one or two well-informed people at the national headquarters of all but one of the unions that have 300,000 or more members. Finally, we supplemented that by interviewing key informants at a few other unions (one national, three local, one at AFL-CIO headquarters) that were identified by our respondents as having the most innovative family policies, for a total of twenty-three interviews. These informants are in unions that collectively represent 68.0 percent of all U.S. union members (calculated from Gifford 1998).

We developed a detailed interview schedule that covered general work-family policies and a number of specific policies, including childcare, family leaves, elder care, and alternative work schedules. The interview covered three broad elements of union activity regarding each of these policies: efforts to win better contract language; programs to educate members and increase utilization of existing options (both those secured by the contract and those based on the state policy), and activities to promote passage of government programs and legal protections. While we used these questions to frame all interviews, the respondents guided us through as we probed particular areas. We conducted interviews, all of which we taped in full,

over the phone or in person; they lasted from about one-half hour to almost two hours, depending, in part, on how much the person we contacted knew and how much their union was actually making progress on work-family policies.

Generating our sample and interviewing were themselves informative—both about the character of union activity and our study. To verify that we had identified the key informants at large unions and to identify other unions with innovative programs that merited attention, we asked our informants at the end of their interviews to give us names of people whom they thought it would be useful for us to call. A small number of names came up over and over again.

We supplemented the face-to-face interviews in several ways. In addition to arranging and attending a two hour meeting to discuss childcare with AFL-CIO officials and representatives of a number of national unions, we asked informants to complete a self-administered mail questionnaire about basic characteristics of their union including, most importantly for our purposes here, the proportion of members who are women. All unions supplied this information on gender composition of membership; for most it is hard data, but some unions do not collect the information and, therefore, estimated it for us. These data are recoded into three categories: high (more than 50%) medium (25–50%), and low (less than 25%). We used this breakdown because, on average, national union membership includes 40% women and because each of these categories (high, medium, and low) contains approximately one-third of the unions in our study.

For information on the gender composition of union leadership, we obtained data from Yong-Dal Chung (2001). Using the 1997 Bureau of National Affairs *Directory of Labor Organizations* (Gifford 1997), he determined what proportion of executive board members were women for each national union. Applying these rankings to the unions in our study, we combined them into two categories: those in which more than one quarter of the leaders are women were ranked high (one-third of unions); those with less than one-quarter women were categorized as low (two thirds). We did not use a middle category here because there was a dramatic break from those categorized as high (in which at least one quarter of leaders were women) to the top of the next category (in which only 14% of leaders were women).

No such systematic measure is available for the two other variables of interest—union strength or union success in obtaining work-family benefits, especially childcare and family leave. Ideally, these variables would be measured at the level of the local, not the national union, which is where most union contracts are bargained. The AFL-CIO is a federation of 78 national unions, but together these unions have more than 40,000 union locals, some of which may represent several different groups of workers, each with a separate contract. Within a given national union, some locals are strong, others weak; some may have negotiated excellent work-family benefits; others have won little or nothing. For these two variables, we therefore, relied on assessments by three experts. None are members or employees of any of the unions included in our study. Because all three are centrally placed and therefore, easily identifiable, they provide their rankings only with a promise of complete confidentiality, since no union would be happy to be ranked low on either of these variables. For both these variables, the experts divided unions into high, medium, and low groupings. They stressed the limitations of these assessments, emphasizing that a single ranking cannot capture the range found within many unions. We concur: more research is needed, especially at the local level. But the initial research findings reported here can help to guide and inform future work, and some attempt at systematic assessment is better than none at all.

We are confident that we identified and were able to interview key union people as well as key experts for our assessments, but it is important to note that we only know what our informants think and told us. They were remarkably open, generous with their time and knowledge. Much of that knowledge, nonetheless, comes out of a culture of activists who have jointly developed a paradigm over the years. We have very little data on locals and we do not have any data directly from members themselves—either what they themselves might say to us about these policies or what family benefits they actually obtain.

## Viewpoints: The Social Construction of Work-Family Issues

The conventional issues that the growing cadre of researchers interested in work-family issues tends to address include childcare, family leave, alternative work schedules, and elder care. The first thing we learned is that many unions don't share that "conventional" perspective. As one informant noted: "When you look at a union contract, there's lots in there that's a work-family issue, for instance, your pay, your insurance, your hospitalization, your pension, your days off." Many of the things that professionals take for granted, another informant suggested, "you don't realize are work and family issues until workers no longer have them—for example, sick leave or vacation or disability pay—all of which are things that, for the most part, were originally union-negotiated benefits." One union survey found that "one-third of low-wage women don't even have paid sick leave, much less have it for their children." In that context, some unions are justifiably proud of the benefits they have won and conscious of the ways they improve family life:

One of the most striking differences between unionized workers and non-union workers is in the area of benefits. Our typical member with 13 years of seniority has 4 weeks paid vacation, and that's for men and women. Thirteen paid holidays is the average for our typical member. So you're talking about 6–7 weeks of paid time off, which is significantly higher than comparable non-union workers. That's a big family issue, having that kind of time off.

We also take for granted that health-care benefits, for example, will be extended to all family members, but unions often have to fight for this:

There have been times in the history of our union when employers have proposed that we negotiate benefits simply for the individual worker, and that if anyone's concerned about dependent coverage, he or she can pay for their own dependent coverage, and we have always insisted that we negotiate for the full family, and that has been a potential division for our membership, because not everyone in our membership has dependents. But we have insisted that all of us fight for all members of families.

Some ranged even more widely, including as work-family issues "contaminants coming out of the mill into the community," the learning disabilities of the children of lead workers, the 8-hour day, voter registration, and food banks.

This broadening of what is included in "work-family" is open to opposing interpretations. One hypothesis would be that it is a defensive posture most likely to be adopted by those whose unions have done relatively little to address childcare or family leave, and who can only claim success by including a very broad range of issues on the work-family agenda. These unresponsive unions, however, are not the only ones who argue the work-family agenda should be broadened. Indeed, to cast their response as simply defensive is itself a defensive posture on the part of those academics and policy makers who have established a circumscribed perspective (for a related point, see Gross 2001). This limited perspective may be shaped by middle class privilege that takes for granted what unions and workers have to fight hard to win.

At the same time, a number of our informants did address precisely those issues that the conventional analyses of work and family consider central to their agenda. Most important for them were alternative work schedules, childcare and family leave.<sup>2</sup> Although we have separated these issues for purposes of analysis here, they are related issues that our respondents often would discuss simultaneously, even conflate, for purposes of their own analysis. With regard to all three issues, informants spoke of specifications necessary to make these issues relevant to the lives of a range of employees and suggested that all too often they are construed and constructed to serve the needs of those other than workers or only very privileged workers.

2. To be sure, respondents mentioned other conventional work family issues, like elder care, domestic violence, and homework, but they figured far less prominently in most discussions and, especially given space constraints, we have not focused on them here.



### *Alternative Work Schedules*

About one in five employees now work “non-standard” schedules (Presser 2000). A growing number of researchers debate the use and meaning of such schedules—one variant of “flextime”<sup>3</sup>—asking whether workers choose them as a way to take care of family responsibilities or whether such schedules are taken involuntarily, at the behest of the employer rather than the worker. In her recent ethnographic piece, Deutsch (1999) found many who choose equal parenting also choose shift work as the only means to such equality. But these equal sharers are still a relatively rare group. Suggesting this is not primarily a result of workers’ own choices, or at least their parenting, Galinsky found that “there are complex reasons that couples work different shifts, not just childcare” (2001). In fact, Presser (2000) finds that “complicated work schedules” are most often determined by *employer* demand rather than personal choice, and Lambert (1999) concludes her review of low wage workers by suggesting they have little choice about their work schedules (see also Golden and Figart 2000; Kahn and Blum 1998).

Perhaps the most important point our respondents make about flextime is that it must be recast if it is to be of value for workers. We found a wide range of responses about this issue, from those who argue that flextime entails an attack on workers and is a policy to support corporate interests and profits to those who see it as a policy their members very much needed and wanted. An informant at a union that represents many public sector clerical workers said:

The need and the desire for it is huge, and I think people feel that if they get some of that flexibility it makes them feel so much less stressed, and it makes them feel that their employer understands that they’re trying to work and do a good job at work and do a good job at home, and when they don’t get that from their employer, they’re very angry.

In contrast, an informant at a predominantly male union representing factory workers reported that one of their most important recent campaigns had focused on resisting flextime:

In 1999 [a major employer] had put a stake in the sand saying giving flexible work hours was their chief goal in the negotiation, to get 7/24 coverage so that they could run their factories around the clock, compete by using all of the productive capacities all the time. Our members just said . . . the slogan was “Seven Day—No Way.” It really became a work and family issue. How can you have a family life if you’re working five shifts and seven days a week? It just doesn’t compute. And we were able to resist the company’s demands for that. We organized a very aggressive campaign to educate our members about what the company’s proposal really was and to let people know what the effect of that would be, that there was going to be some more money on the table, but it would really disrupt their family life. At the end of the day, the company didn’t even propose it. When we got to negotiations, they had got the message; they knew if they put that on the table it was going to cause a huge problem.

Another noted the growing recognition even among women of the problems with flextime:

If you’re a young person, or if you’re a woman with a number of children, it may appeal to you because you think, this is going to allow me to make better childcare arrangements. But what ends up happening is it just makes you work for straight time rather than your overtime hours and they still end up working, because we find that there’s more work than there are people usually. Employers don’t hire enough people to do the work, and so they always have to make people work more. So what happens is they end up doing away with overtime altogether and working people all week long on these flexible schedules, and it depresses the amount of money people make and the amount of pensions. Our standard position, every time I go into a local, I always ask what do you

3. As Carre, et al. (2000) point out, a wide range of terms has been used to describe the various forms of non-standard employment, including alternative, flexible, nontraditional, and market-mediated. In this section, we use both “flextime” and “alternative work schedules” to refer to the range of shifts and time on the job.

think about alternative work schedules and they go, uh-uh, no, no, no, we'll do anything but that. That, I would say, is the majority. There's always a few people who say I would love to have an alternative schedule.

Another informant noted one key to the differences we found: the issue "is actually control over work hours as opposed to flextime. . . . The real issue is whether you make those decisions yourself or whether those are all management decisions."

The importance of who has control over time emerged when a union succeeded in negotiating a change in the rules on the use of personal days. Instead of giving more than a month's notice for emergencies, workers were permitted to give notice up until the time their shift started. The managers who negotiated this benefit

got more than 55 calls, from managers screaming and yelling at them, telling them they gave away the company to the union, the company was going to go down the toilet, there goes productivity. And yet on our [union] side, all I was getting was phone calls from males saying, this was the best thing you ever could have done to negotiate for me in terms of my family—I've now got flexibility.

Even when flextime means some control over their time, it may be a very limited control within oppressive constraints:

When I talk to working women and ask them, do you have flexibility, and they say, oh, yeah, I've got a flexible work schedule; I work nights and my husband works days. So the fact is people have a painfully contracted view of what flexibility means; it means I don't have to pay a baby sitter because somehow we can always manage to have someone at home, but I haven't seen my husband in four years.

Workers often face mandatory overtime, and may be working 60 to 70 hours a week with no right to refuse overtime. On the one hand, this is oppressive and disrupts family life; on the other, workers may see it as necessary to survival and be angry if the union tries to limit overtime. When that happens, sometimes "our members want to rip our heads off—'are you crazy? I want that overtime!'—I'm sure they don't want to work 80 hours, but they want the money." Unions historically insisted on overtime pay as "a penalty that companies paid for taking people away from their families. That's really the concept of overtime."

Overtime and flextime, then, are viewed as competing ways to frame and regulate the organization of work time; many (though not all) unions prefer the former and believe that the latter has become, in the hands of employers, a means to squeeze still more time, at less cost, from workers. And employers now can claim to do so in an increasingly legitimized manner that is, under the umbrella of the fashionable concept of "flextime."

Not all workers, however, want the money from overtime; unscheduled mandatory overtime is especially disruptive, since workers cannot predict when they will be able to pick up their children. One of our informants told us about a creative job action. The National Labor Relations Board has ruled that workers may not engage in a "partial strike" of any kind; they must either work the full hours the employer demands, day in and day out, or they must go on a complete strike. In *Valley City Furniture*, for example, the employer, in violation of the act, had unilaterally increased the workday by one hour; the union refused to work the extra hour in protest of the company's failure to bargain about the longer workday. The Board ruled that, "the union, by trying to bring about a condition that would be neither strike nor work, was attempting to dictate the terms and conditions of employment" and therefore, the employer had been justified in firing all of the participants in a one-day stoppage (Gross 1995:115–116). Recognizing this, a union local with an all-women workforce coordinated an action that does not qualify as a strike:

A group of women had mandatory overtime, meaning that at the end of your shift, your supervisor could come up to you and say you have to stay two more hours. So the women who had children called their babysitter who said, "I'm sorry; I can't stay." So what the women were doing as a group, they made a decision as a group—I'm talking 500 or 700 employees—they started having

the babysitters drop the children off at the plant. The security guards were, what are we supposed to do with these kids? When the women were confronted by the managers, they would say, "I would be put in prison and my children would be taken away from me if I leave them at home alone—I cannot do that. You told me I had to stay, so they're going to come here." It was basically a showdown.

The variation from one union to the next—with some organizing job actions to disrupt and prevent overtime, while at others members "want to rip our heads off" if the union tries to limit overtime—indicates how impossible it is to specify "the" union position on flextime. Large-scale quantitative analyses that compare union to non-union workers are likely to find no overall union effect, when the reality may well be strong effects that vary from one union to the next.

### *Childcare*

It is not just flextime that evokes mixed responses. For very different reasons, there is hardly unanimous support of childcare. The very term "childcare" conceals a range of policies—from the institutional childcare provided by employers (for which there is very little support) to the availability of vouchers that members can use for kids of various ages in various settings (which receives much more support). Many suggested that on site childcare is impossible for most workers to afford.

A lot of times, work site centers are real model programs—they are higher quality, they might be accredited, they might have a lot of the bells and whistles because the corporation or in some cases, the state, wants it to be a showcase. People know it's not going to be affordable, so what good is it to them?

One union that has negotiated funds that helped set up over 50 centers, has found that "one of the ongoing struggles has been that it's difficult for our members to afford them. So what we've wound up with is a wonderful management center for high-level professionals, but we don't represent the professional group, so this is a problem." Similarly, at another union our informant sits on a committee that allocates money from a fund in response to applications; a key criterion is that many proposals are in practice for executives: "the childcare tuition is so high, the occupational people aren't going to take the benefit from it."

Even if cost were not a consideration, an on-site childcare center may not be what workers want: "If you have a chemical factory, do you really want to have a childcare facility on-site?" Others talked of how workers preferred kin over strangers to take care of their kids. Also, "folks are more interested in having their children go to childcare near their home than near their work. If you live in a suburb, bringing your child into the middle of downtown is not most people's first choice."

Referral services were also regarded as problematic. One union introduced such a program as part of a package that also included other initiatives; it reported that, "the counseling referral was not used and was less than .1% utilization." The problem was that "basically, it's advice on how to get childcare you can't afford." In another case, two unions jointly negotiated a program that provides assistance not directly to workers, but rather to childcare centers or providers. Contributions might, for example, be used to train providers or to extend the hours of an existing center. A couple of unions mentioned programs where, often at employer initiative, childcare is provided on-site when a school holiday is a work day; these seemed popular both to workers and employers—presumably such programs help employers reduce absenteeism.

Across many settings, subsidies seem the most popular program. At one union, the employer established a fund to provide subsidies to employees, "but that fund ran out real quick." A large local provided some type of childcare benefit to 8,000 children, but had benefits requested on behalf of 29,000 children. Within the subsidy program "the most popular and needed program is the informal—where you can pay anyone other than yourself or

your spouse, i.e., your mother-in-law, your neighbor, your cousin, your friend's baby sitter, up to \$100 a month for that kind of care." Even though subsidies are the most popular, unions face potential opposition if they make them a priority:

Subsidies are much more expensive; they're harder to win. I do think, maybe, subsidies is the only place that some people think: why should that person get another \$1,000 a year just because they have kids? My kids are older now, but I'm trying to send them to college, and I don't get that money. So a subsidy is a little bit tough sometimes to justify, although we have won them in places.

As this comment suggests, variation exists not only between unions, but also within unions—whether between men and women, young and old, or those with children at home and those without.

### *Family Leaves*

For a number of reasons, there seems to be less variation in union support of family leaves. There is less variation because leaves are likely to be needed by the large majority of union members at some point in their life course (to take care of a sick child, a sick parent, and then sick spouse). In addition, one of our informants noted that FMLA has "been easier than some issues." This is only "partly because the union talks about it." At least as important is that "it's gotten a lot of attention in the commercial press."

Moreover, there is probably less variation because the law is not the "Family Leave Act," but rather the "Family and Medical Leave Act." Researchers (Armenia, Gerstel, and Fisher 2000; Gerstel and McGonagle 1999) found that since the passage of the FMLA, women are much more likely than men to take job leaves to care for other family members; in contrast, men are significantly more likely than women to take leaves to care for themselves. Especially in heavily male unions, the individual or medical aspect of the leave is at least as important as the family aspect of the leave.

Perhaps most important, because the law now mandates that employers provide family leaves, there is less need to prioritize this benefit in bargaining, although some unions have fought for and won extensions beyond the law (for example, paid leave). Given recent legislative progress on family leaves, union members often saw their role in this area more as one of monitoring, education and lobbying than contract negotiations. With regard to family leaves, then, unions play a different but important part: they serve as a key mechanism through which state policy is developed, disseminated, and ensured. As our informants suggested, unions provide the means to translate policy into action.<sup>4</sup>

A number talked about lobbying in the early nineties to get the FMLA passed; more talk of lobbying now for paid leaves and longer leaves for a wider range of employers (those with fewer than the current minimum of 50 employees). While many unions are working for an expanded legislative agenda, even more pointed out that just getting the current law enforced is itself an important part of their role. As Executive Director of 9 to 5, Ellen Bravo (1995:13) notes: "Enforcement has been greatly weakened over the years so little monitoring is done to see if businesses are complying."

Others discussed their role as provision of information about the current law. As one commented:

I have had people numerous times call on the phone, either members or staff reps, and they say we have a case where this person was in a car accident and they've been going for physical therapy and now they've used up their fourth day off this year and so they're getting a warning. And you say, oh no, no, no, they're not! It says in FMLA that it qualifies.

4. As Budd and Brey (2000) show in their analysis of a national sample of workers, union members have greater knowledge about their rights under the FMLA than do those not members of unions.

With the support of the FMLA the union is “always successful” in such disputes, in part because the union simply knows the law better than many employers do, and runs “a lot of workshops” to be sure union members and staff are well informed:

Employers are very frequently not going by the law, don't know what the law is, don't understand it. Employees are confused, too, but there does seem to be a fairly decent recognition that there is a law out there that says something about this, and maybe I should ask my union rep. . . . Sometimes they'll have us fax them some of the regulations from the Department of Labor which they show the employer, and a lot of times the answer is, oh, really?

Given misinformation, and misuse of information about the law, unions did still work to ensure its broad use and interpretation:

We want to expand the scope of the interpretation to the extent that we can and the companies want to narrow it. It's just a totally converse relationship. . . . We keep encouraging local unions to negotiate into their contracts these gray areas.

Others made it clear that they played an active part in enforcing existing law so there would be fewer violations. One spoke about the union's role in a recent court case:

We filed suit on this issue of family and medical leave. We went to court and there was an out-of-court settlement agreed to on this issue, but we were told we could not advertise this. But the company was violating FMLA right and left. You name it; they were violating it.

The union knew there was a problem, but was not aware of its extent until an anonymous source in management sent the tip-off and supporting materials. Workers “were saying, I have to go down to Florida—my parent just had a heart attack” and the company was refusing permission, as well as requiring unreasonable documentation prior to any approval, “just violations right and left in terms of being unreasonable.”

The company was so mad about the FMLA, they felt it put their absence control plan totally down the toilet; immediately [the company] tried to implement a very restrictive absence control plan in retaliation for the FMLA—so we had to work to get rid of that, which we finally did; it was part of the court settlement. But it was such an enormous fight, it took up a huge amount of our time.

## **Why Benefits Are (or Are Not) Won**

While many of our informants emphasized the range of family benefits unions supported and won, some unions were more supportive in general of these issues—and won more—than others. Of the 13 national unions that our external experts assessed, four negotiated and won a high level, two a medium level, and seven a low level of work-family benefits.

Why such variation? Several possible explanations need to be evaluated. The first emphasizes cultural expectations; the remainder, structural factors: (1) Work-family issues are a top priority for some, but not most members; (2) Gender of members is crucial; women care far more about the issues than do men; (3) The members (who, by this point, are more than 40 percent women) are eager for these benefits, but the leadership (which is often male, white, older, entrenched, and concerned above all with holding onto their jobs) has resisted making any effort; and (4) Unions have tried to win these benefits, but the resistance of employers, especially combined with the weakness of unions, has limited the gains.

We use two sets of data to address these explanations for variation. First, we present our informants' comments about each of the explanations. Second, we use expert assessments of, and quantitative data about, thirteen national unions to analyze the factors associated with union success in obtaining work-family benefits.

### *Members' Expectations*

Many of our informants emphasized the power of culture, rooting their explanations in members' expectations. Most union leaders we interviewed agreed that the membership is not aggressively demanding either childcare or family leave:

When I travel, I don't hear this groundswell of excitement about family medical leave.

Because you're only going to get as much at the table as the membership pushes for in the workplace.

To be honest with you, the work and family issues (with the exception of the 7-day campaign)—day care facilities, getting extra FMLA paid time off, getting additional holidays and vacation time—it's close to the bottom of the list. Job security is always the Number One issue. Improving health care and improving pensions is almost always ranked number two and number three.

Some reported that they had done surveys, showing these were not the priorities that members list:

It's not as hotly felt an issue as other things . . . in other words, if we didn't get it, we weren't going to get elected out of office—the members weren't really holding our feet to the fire about this.

We do a survey and we ask them what their priorities are, and we'll list some family issue stuff in there, and it will fall low on the list of priorities.

I think that what we find over and over again is that if you do a survey of the membership in a particular local or council, you will find that childcare might rank at best third, maybe fifth. Number one would be wages, number two would be benefits and health care. There might be some other things going on, but even among people who are desperate for better childcare and can't afford what they have, wages and health care are going to come first, in part because with higher wages you could buy better childcare, and then you add in everyone who doesn't have a childcare need right now. I think childcare will never be first, but that doesn't mean it's not incredibly important to people.

Several factors limit the likelihood that a substantial fraction of the membership will see family benefits, especially childcare, as a union priority. The first is that childcare "is a distinct period in any worker's life." Second, not only is it most pressing only when the children are young, but in order to be employed at all, workers must find a way to care for their children; those that are unable to do so are (probably) no longer in the workforce.

People find that at one particular point, or three or four particular points, it's a crisis for them that they *have* to find a solution—so they find a solution. So the next month if you ask them, they might be back to wanting wages again, because whatever they found, at least they have some level of comfort there because they keep getting to work every day, and if they don't keep getting to work every day, they are no longer there to respond to the union's survey.

At least equally important are members' cultural expectations: Most do not feel that it is their right or privilege to demand help from others, especially employers, with their families. That is an individual responsibility:

It's still the culture of the society that people believe that if you have kids, then it's your problem, that people really haven't broken through yet that society should be taking some responsibility for working parents' responsibility for their kids. If you can't handle it, you shouldn't have had them. I think that's still the norm out there.

As one informant noted:

People still believe that things like childcare are their own burden. They are not society's burden, they are not their employer's burden, it is not the union's job. It's just something they have to do. They chose to have these kids, and they just have to deal with it.

Union leaders who are committed to these issues compellingly argue that member survey responses are misleading, dramatically understating the issues' potential. Members, these leaders argue, do not feel entitled to expect employers to address their problems:

You've got a membership that has been trained to think that the most that they can expect out of their employer is money as opposed to benefits: give me better pay and I'll make the arrangements.

Members think that way for a simple reason: "because it's their reality."

That's why, in poll after poll, you'll find out women or men are not likely to list childcare as an employer benefit as something new to put high on their list; they're far more likely to identify higher pay or health care as top priority. That doesn't mean they don't have acute problems, but there's just not the history that makes you think that employers will take this up. If your employer won't even allow you to get your kid covered to go see the doctor, why would you expect that your employer is going to provide quality childcare?

Thus, even though there is an "acute" *need* for childcare, there is also a lack of what an economist would call "member effective demand," and this shapes and constrains union activity. If members aren't asking for it, why should unions make it a priority? And if staff or leaders wish it to be a priority, will members support them?

While these assessments of our respondents seem convincing, we do not have quantitative measures or outside experts' assessments of variation on this cultural dimension. Consequently, we cannot more systematically address the extent to which this factor influences the level of benefits fought for and won.

### *Gender of Members*

A central operating assumption of most, if not all, of our key informants, is that women's presence in the union is key to the ability to make family issues a part of the union's agenda and contract negotiations. This assumption appeared again and again in the interviews:

I'm absolutely sure that in most places you're going to find women behind these initiatives.

Our union is predominantly male and now I'm speculating, however, it could be that the lack of excitement is due to the fact that, perhaps, they're not the primary care givers.

After all, we *are* a construction union. We don't have many women. Of course we are very concerned about these issues, but they are not our highest priority; we are concerned more to support the AFL-CIO since these issues don't affect our members.

Albeit quite limited, our more quantitative data also suggests that the gender of union members matters. The three unions with low female membership (<25%) all have low work-family benefits and three of the five unions with high (>50%) proportions of women members are high in work-family benefits (while two are medium). Of the four unions with medium proportions women members (25–50%), three have low work family benefits and one is high.

A view stressing the centrality of gender reinforces the understanding of family care giving as women's responsibility. To be sure, this view is, to some extent, rooted in the reality of experience: a great deal of literature shows that women far more than men provide care for children as well as other kin and are responsible for arranging that which they do not provide. (See, for example, Gerstel and Gallagher 1994; Gerstel 2000; Di Leonardo 1987; Rossi and Rossi 1990.) Union informants see that reality. However, especially among the married, men financially support their children, at least in large part, and younger men (as a number of our informants emphasized) are doing at least somewhat more of the work of parenting. They are or could be stakeholders in these policies. Consequently, with a changed perspective, these work-family policies would be viewed as financial benefits fitting comfortably within a male breadwinner role.

Moreover, from our intensive interviews, it became evident that "gender" appeared to have its impact through structure, which was subject to change and which many of our informants saw changing. Some men took a lead on these issues, but

if you scratch beneath the surface, you see that these men have been the sole support of their children because their wife died or because they got custody of their children, and when they're in the same position that we're in—of having primary responsibility for the family—all of a sudden they get it.

The rise of single-parent fathers had created a new constituency, and with them taking a visible stance "it was not a women's issue, it was a member issue." One enthused: "I've been amazed at the increase in calls I get from fathers who are the sole support of their kids." In one key city, two of the men who had been very active in pushing for better benefits both had wives who had recently died of cancer. At a meeting on work-family issues, one of the leading women activists said, "I hope we don't have to all die for you guys to get it [laughs]."<sup>5</sup>

### *The Importance of Leaders?*

Women are 40 percent of union members, but a smaller proportion of leaders and a much smaller proportion of top leaders—for example, they are 13 percent of the AFL-CIO Executive Council. Based on more general organizational analyses that find women executives are more likely than their male counterparts to advocate for work-family benefits, we expect that the presence of women leaders in unions might also be significant. Some of our informants articulated such views: "My feeling is that this is 90 percent an issue of lack of women being in positions of power in the trade union movement to shape an agenda, and a lack of men leading on it." Although this was the most extreme formulation of the position, several informants argued that women's presence in leadership makes a significant difference, and expect these issues to assume a higher priority as more women move into leadership positions.

Our data do not allow us to disentangle the effects of gender of membership from gender of leadership—all the unions with a high percentage of women leaders also have a high percentage of women members, and all of the unions with a low percentage of women members also have a low percentage of women leaders. Although we must be cautious about interpreting these data, gender of leadership does appear to be related to the level of work-family benefits won: of eight unions with low proportions of women leaders (<15%), seven have low levels of work-family benefits (though one has high benefits); of five unions with high (>25%) levels of women leaders, three have high, and two have medium, levels of work-family benefits.

However, only a minority of our informants in the intensive interviews highlighted gender of the leadership as a key factor in explaining union support for work-family benefits. It is true that these issues did not tend to be a priority for most union leaders and they were not mobilizing their constituency around these issues. At the same time, though, it cannot be said that they were holding back a wave of protest. A number felt that the leadership was not out front on the issue, and they linked that position back to the membership. They suggested leaders would be prepared to support campaigns if the members wanted to do so. As one informant said,

Even if the president is not fabulous but just okay, if there are women who are pushing, I think it makes a difference because most sort-of, 'okay' men are not going to stick their necks out if there's not a constituency that's saying to them this is an issue that we want you to follow through on.

5. Given our argument that the relevant factor is structural—primary responsibility for raising a child—rather than biological, our theory would be better tested by data on the percentage of members who had primary custodial responsibility for children, but those data are not available.



### *Union strength and Employer Resistance*

As we have argued, both cultural expectations and social characteristics of members and leaders are important for winning family benefits. At the same time, the resistance of employers, especially combined with the weakness of unions, can obviously limit any gains.

Central to overcoming employer resistance, our informants argued, was showing them the ways that family benefits are in their interest. One union faced employer complaints about worker absenteeism and tardiness.

The union said we have an idea: we suspect that a lot of the absenteeism and tardiness and distraction have to do with people's concerns about their families outside of work, while they're at work. Let's put together a program that addresses those concerns and put some concrete support in it, i.e., money, and we think that's going to address your concerns as well.

Similarly, one union found that it had won paid family leave at only a handful of locals, and "It was in units where worker retention was important. It was either in remote areas or in industries where they were struggling with trying to hire qualified workers or workers who would stay." In fact, sometimes the employers "were the ones who proposed the language."

As more general literature on work-family benefits has shown, employers may grant benefits that they believe inexpensive, but are reluctant to grant any benefit that they think will cost a significant amount of money. Resource and referral programs, and altered tax treatment of childcare expenses, are relatively cheap for employers, "so they're easy to win. Subsidies are much more expensive; they're harder to win." But the cost of a program is not always a simple matter. The strength of the employer's opposition is crucial, with victories most likely when the employer can see (or be shown) some benefits for their bottom line.

As important, however, is the strength of the *union*, itself determined in large part by organizing. For example, we interviewed officials at two local unions because they had won the best childcare benefits; both represent a high proportion of workers in their jurisdiction. In an interview, one of us made the remark that it takes innovative ideas to win, and the informant immediately responded, "it takes innovative ideas, but it also takes power to get the employers to do it." An informant reported that at her international, the local with the best policy has "got a good part of their market up there organized. You can't do this if you've got 20 percent of the stores organized, because you have no clout." When we asked an informant at a union with one of the two best policies why they had been able to win the benefits, the response was, "We are an active union. The members are extremely active and participate." Our follow-up query asked why members were active on these issues and not others, and the informant rejected that formulation:

I don't think that's the particular way to look at it; our members are active, period. . . . When you've successfully, continually, and aggressively organized non-union [establishments], you're able to maintain an increased standard of living for the members, and so that's our top priority. We're able to continue to grow so the standards have been able to include things like child/elder care. Does that make sense? If you do not continually organize, you become less and less powerful where you are. If your power diminishes, you're unlikely to be able to negotiate new programs like child/elder care. We're a fighting union. We have one of the highest quality of life experiences for [industry] workers in the country, and it's because we are constantly organizing our members to stand up and be involved in constantly organizing non-union properties—that's the core of our existence, and that's why we're able to do breakthrough things like this.

Although it is again very difficult to disentangle the effects of union strength from other structural factors, the data from external experts at least do not disconfirm our speculation that the strength of unions matters for the winning of work-family benefits. Three unions were classified as low in strength; all three have low levels of work-family benefits. Six unions were classified as medium in strength: two have high and four have low levels of work-family

benefits. Four unions were classified as strong: two have high and two have medium levels of work-family benefits. Although obviously limited, these data, too, lend some support to the view that structure—here the strength of the union itself—is important for explaining variation among unions in their support for work-family benefits.

## Conclusion

Unions have been almost invisible in academic analyses of work and family issues. At least two factors contribute to this: First, academics have neglected unions in general, and thereby have missed an opportunity for fresh insights; second, unions have not—*yet*—played a major role in shaping the work-family agenda.

By now it is not news that issues look different depending on the standpoint of the observer. But despite frequent references to “race, class, gender” analysts frequently neglect class, and rarely remember unions, workers’ most important collective organizations and voice.<sup>6</sup> A union perspective advances our understanding of work-family issues in four ways.

First, why does the conventional framing of work-family issues include childcare, family leave, and flextime, but exclude many other issues? Why has the field drawn the lines where it has, and should the lines stay where they are? Because we too were absorbed in the perspective of the field, we initially did not think to ask these questions. We would now suggest that what a group sees as a work-family issue depends on its circumstances. If a benefit can be taken for granted, or if it seems clearly beyond reach, people will not (routinely) think of it as a work-family benefit; instead, attention will focus on benefits that are contested but within reach. For professionals and managers, sick pay, vacation days and family health care can now typically be assumed, but childcare and family leave are less certain. For workers and unions, sick pay (for the worker—never mind to take care of a child), health benefits for family members, and vacation days are uncertain but winnable (and can, of course, have a huge impact on family life); hence, union leaders’ insist that these should be counted as work-family issues. Across unions, we find support for these benefits—like vacation days or family health care—that have *not* been conventionally understood as family issues. In some subset of unions, we find strong support for precisely those issues—like childcare or paid family leaves—that are conventionally understood as work-family concerns.

Thus, our second argument is that unions—like employers, families and workers—are not monolithic. Hoffman (1987) argued some time ago that, when studying consequences for families, it rarely makes sense to simply ask whether a woman is employed or not (instead of asking about the character of her employment). In a similar vein, Baron, et al. (1986) have insisted it makes little sense to treat a job as a job (using job titles or broad occupational categories) when assessing the benefits associated with employment arrangements (see also Kalleberg, et al. 1996; Lambert 1999). So too, we found, it rarely makes sense to refer to “the” union position. Hence, it is counter-productive to use a dichotomous variable about union membership in quantitative analyses of work-family issues. Some unions bitterly oppose flexible schedules; others push for them. Most unions put childcare low on their priority list; some fight for some forms of childcare. Meaningful evaluations of unions must take into account this variation.

Third, from the perspective of workers and unions the first necessity for any benefit is that it be affordable. To the affluent, it may seem obvious that parents would want the high-

6. For economics, Freeman and Medoff (1979:69) found that the percentage “of articles in major economic journals treating trade unionism dropped from 9.2 percent in the 1940s to 5.1 percent in the 1950s to 0.4 percent in the early 1970s.” We know of no comparable study for sociology, but would expect comparable results.

est possible quality childcare. But if a top quality daycare center charges more than workers can pay, it is less help than lower quality, but affordable, benefits. So, too, what one group of workers assumes is "top quality" may not be viewed in the same way by other workers. The most successful union childcare benefits offer workers a range of options. One union, for example, reimburses members \$100 a month for informal care and up to \$225 a month for licensed care (which is considerably more expensive); nonetheless, the informal care subsidy is much more popular. Recently the union has added a new element: if an unlicensed provider attends a union-sponsored training program, the reimbursement to the member increases by \$25, from \$100 a month to \$125 a month. The union is recognizing that workers prefer informal care, but working to increase the formal skills of those that provide such care.

Fourth, although collective bargaining contracts are one important means to obtain family benefits, workers win their greatest advances when the state becomes involved. The Family and Medical Leave Act is a good example. Although the FMLA covers only about half of all workers, that is still substantially more than are covered by collective bargaining contracts. The law is weak, but unions can and do build on it in at least two ways. First, using the law as a base, unions negotiate to extend the benefits provided by the law; they negotiate, for example, paid leaves or longer leaves. Second, because employers often ignore the law, government monitoring is ineffective, and workers rarely know their rights or how to enforce them, unions help workers enforce the rights legally won. The law itself, and the campaign to pass the law, increase public awareness and thus, make it more likely that workers will approach the union seeking assistance. Workers and unions thus benefit from the public awareness generated by a campaign driven primarily by feminist organizations like the Women's Legal Defense Fund (now called the National Partnership for Families) and NOW.

The neglect of union perspectives comes not only because of an academic blind spot regarding unions, but also because unions have not yet had a major impact on these issues. In 1989, a Bureau of National Affairs study projected that "work and family concerns may become the dominant issue of the 1990s for the American labor movement" (Bureau of National Affairs 1989:4). That has not yet happened. Our interviews indicate the potential for unions to play a significant role in a transformed and invigorated social movement focused on work-family issues. That will not happen if unions wait for members to raise this issue as a priority. We do not yet have a public culture where workers feel entitled to demand work-family benefits.

One response to this situation might be to blame the members, or to sit back and wait for a general cultural shift. Those feelings *de facto* shape the responses of some union leaders, who would like to move on the issue but feel that their hands are tied. Others, however, make a compelling counter-argument and have actually carried through the victories that demonstrate their case. These leaders argue that in fact the potential demand is there, if workers and the union could break through the sense that they have no right to expect good work-family policies. Once a policy is in place, they argue, it will develop a powerful constituency, so the problem is "only" how to win that entering wedge.

The union that won one of the most impressive childcare programs did so primarily because of the efforts of one leader.

I felt very strongly that this was an issue that we all needed to address through using our collective power, and all of us were looking at it as a personal problem and workers were looking at it as a personal problem because there weren't widespread policies. People would think, what can the union do? They [wanted] more wage increases, more holidays, and they wouldn't think about childcare because there weren't a lot of models out there.

Rather than simply accepting this, she pushed hard to make this a union priority, even *without* evidence that members viewed this as one of the most important issues. Because

of her position as one of the leaders of the bargaining team, she was in a position to say to the employers:

No settlement without [childcare]. Basically, that's what I had to say. [The employers] said, "This is not going to be a strike issue if we don't give it, and it's not going to be a deal breaker." And I said, "How do you know? You could put this either way: I could say this is not that great, it's not going to be a deal buster for your side either. Your employers are not going to not approve this whole package if you added [a small amount] for childcare. And no, I'm not recommending to the negotiating committee that they approve this unless you say yes."

With the threat of a strike over the issue, with childcare as a potential issue that would prevent an agreement from being reached, employers accepted a fund, with payments equal to a small percentage of payroll. Once the fund was won, it *created* a constituency and a sense that workers had a right to expect this, such that now there is no going back (at least not without a major fight). As one informant noted about one of the largest existing programs:

Last year we served 8,000 children with some type of childcare benefits, but we had benefits requested on behalf of 29,000 children. So we could use 1% or 1.5% of payroll. The fact that this large amount of people are requesting childcare or some type of benefit—whether it's after-school care or weekend care, summer camp, whatever—[means that] if the employers try to take this away right now there would be an absolute uproar.

Our interview with another union that has won a similar benefit indicates that they had a strikingly similar experience. Although members wanted the benefit, demand for it was not especially pressing. Once it was won, however, the union was surprised at the enthusiasm of the response:

We set up an application week in which we intended to open the first day at 7:00 a.m., first come first served, and there were people standing outside the office at 3:00 a.m. in the dark in [a dangerous downtown area] with their children, waiting to apply. We realized how insensitive that was of us. The next year we had an in-person application week run by lottery, so if you came in anytime during that week, you would be a participant in the lottery and we would award your benefits in the order in which your numbers were pulled out of a hat.

As these examples suggest, unions have the potential to serve as social movement entrepreneurs, mobilizing resources that could make work-family issues a priority in the populations that have been least able to win benefits. A charismatic and committed union leader (often a woman), along with women members and union strength, makes that all the more likely. Historically, social movements mushroom when they break out of their past confines and tap into new constituencies and networks. This is what happened to the labor movement in the 1930s, as the craft base of the past gave way to industrial unions (Bernstein 1970); to the student anti-war movement, when it moved outside elite institutions and expanded into the mass of public colleges and universities (Gitlin 1980); and to the gay liberation movement, when it moved beyond respectable professionals and incorporated the bar scenes of San Francisco and New York (D'Emilio 1983). These past expansions have changed the character of movements, re-defining the issues and introducing new cultural styles, with the initial core group often opposed to this transformation and uncomfortable with the new participants. Work-family issues, programs, and victories have been primarily associated with professionals and managers. A movement would gain much momentum by expanding its base to more fully include the groups currently represented by unions. Doing so would change the movement's issues and priorities, make some of the current leaders uncomfortable, and have the potential to create a far more powerful movement. At the same time, including work-family issues would lend new momentum to labor unions themselves, challenging some entrenched leaders but increasing unions' appeal to women and younger workers, two of the demographic groups unions are striving to incorporate.

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