

11 Workers' Movements and Women's Interests: The Impact of Labor-State Relations in Britain and Sweden

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Workers' movements and the development of trade unions are commonly conceptualized by feminists as basically male-dominated concerns, despite their liaison with socialist ideologies. Feminists generally explain trade union disregard of women's interests within the theoretical framework of patriarchy (see Weir and Wilson 1984). This chapter seeks to analyze the involvement of unions with women workers and women's issues within a totally different paradigm, one based on the relations between labor and the state. Stressing an alternative explanation does not necessarily imply an argument against the common feminist approach, but it does suggest an attempt to break out of the confines of conceptualizing patriarchy as the main problem in women's work. When all is said and done, it may well be that what is presented here is itself explainable by the patriarchal roots of the modern state; still, as the following account demonstrates, there are certain detours on route to the final analysis that feminists must come to terms with in order to gain a full understanding of the relationship between labor, the state, and women.

By focusing on the experiences of Britain and Sweden, this chapter traces the development of women's place in the unions and union initiatives on behalf of women workers within the context of organized labor's relations with its representative political party. In both Britain and Sweden, unionism has a long history of developing in concert with supportive socialist-democratic political parties. Both the Labour party in Britain and the Social Democratic party in Sweden have held office for considerable, albeit varying, periods of time because of their labor-based support. In both countries coalitions between the party in power and unions have informed government actions.

Here the similarities diverge. When the Labour party has been in power in Britain, organized labor has always been consulted on certain matters, and a form of tripartitism has been attempted on certain occasions, but labor has never been a consistent and integral partner at the level of the state. The interests of labor have frequently been interpreted (by both organized labor and the Labour

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party) as particular and outside the realm of the national interest, especially during troublesome economic times. In addition, organized labor itself in Britain has never formed a sufficiently united whole so that it could act at the level of the state as a viable representative of a large portion of the population.

In contrast, labor in Sweden has steadily become a coequal partner in the governing coalition. Its strength and position have been forged, on the one hand, by labor's own unity and centralization, and on the other by the continuity provided by the Social Democrats' long term in power. These two different kinds of labor-state relations—the one tenuous, the other close—have left organized labor in each country with very different sets of opportunities and constraints, with a different agenda and different priorities.

At the same time, the position of women workers in Britain and Sweden and the activism of unions on behalf of women have differed in significant ways. Before the 1950s, women's labor market conditions as well as women's participation in union life was about the same in the two countries—low on both counts. After this time, however, the situation for women workers in Sweden advanced considerably, surpassing by far any comparable changes for women in Britain. In Sweden, economic policies that contained special labor market measures for women, including the development of child care programs, greatly facilitated progress for women workers. But the government did not act alone in developing these policies. At every step along the way, organized labor not only supported but sometimes also fashioned the policy nexus as it concerned labor. In contrast, as the economy changed in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, labor and the state were preoccupied with concerns that had plagued them for decades. Policy discussion focused on attempts to devise income and price policies to see the nation through economic fluctuations. The special needs of women workers were virtually eclipsed by the constantly more pressing needs of the economy as a whole. The difference in these two nations' interpretations of and approaches to the role of women in the economy can be understood within the context of their different kinds of labor-state relations.

A corollary argument that emerges from this chapter's discussion speaks to the role of women themselves, both within unions and as an organized movement outside unions. It follows from the analysis here that the role of women, and the success or failure of women's organized efforts, must be examined within the broader context of social and political coalitions. The women's movements in Britain and Sweden are very different. In Britain, women within unions remain a separate and unequal partner in forming union positions on women's issues, and the women's movement as a whole is fragmented and segmented (see Chapter 12 in this volume). In Sweden, as women's numerical representation within the unions increased (although not in leadership positions), unions continued an integrationist strategy, adopting policies that benefited women in the same way as they benefited all low-paid workers. The concern that often accompanies such absorption, concern that women's special interests become watered down, is diffi-

cult to accept completely, given the results presented below. Outside unions, the women's movement in Sweden is coherent and coordinated, if not exactly centralized. It is interesting to note that both these pictures of organized women reflect the broader contexts of labor-state relations in each country. Where appropriate, I indicate throughout the specific contributions that organized women have made to union and state positions on women's issues.

In the sections below I outline the main features of labor-state relations in Britain and Sweden; then for each country I present the history of women's place in the unions and unions' concerns with women's issues, focusing in particular on equal pay. In the conclusion I turn again to the contention that the analysis presented here offers an alternative understanding of the relations between unions and women workers to that found within the theoretical framework of patriarchy.

LABOR AND THE STATE IN BRITAIN

From its beginnings the relationship between labor and the state in Britain has been punctuated by disunity and misunderstanding. There have been periods of cooperation and accord, to be sure, especially when the Labour party was in power in the 1920s and 1930s. But any historical unity was relative and temporary, and insufficient to prevent the cleavages that developed later. We can trace the ebbs and flows in harmony between labor and the state by focusing on the development of unionism and the Labour party and the relationship between them.

British manufacturing began to industrialize earlier than that of any other country, and while industrialization was slow, it was thorough, affecting even farming. Corresponding to the pace and tone set by industrialism was the development of the working class and its organization into trade unions (Thompson 1963). Two facts about early trade unionism in Britain are important: its organization along craft lines, and the fierce sectionalism and antagonism that resulted. This early divisiveness and its consequence have never been fully overcome. We see it emerging in the "feudal" nature of both British industry and labor relations (Shonfield 1965, 118). The founding of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1868 provided at least a semblance of institutional coordination for organized labor. But the TUC has never been able to effectively centralize labor in Britain: only one-quarter of Britain's approximately 480 unions are affiliated with it. Moreover, unions have remained entrenched in their sectional differences; consequently, the TUC's ability to speak for labor at the level of the state has been constrained. This failure of cohesion has been most obvious and most unfortunate in the various attempts of both Labour and Conservative governments to formulate incomes policies (Martin 1975a). While deals were struck between the TUC and the party in power, agreement was not always forthcoming between the TUC and its affiliates.

In 1899 the TUC founded a Parliamentary Labour party. The early Labour party was a trades union party, not a socialist party; it was devoted to promoting

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through parliamentary politics the cause of workers for better working conditions (Beer 1965). Later, the party did become socialist, carrying labor with it in its declarations of socialist ideals. But as this unity developed, so too did another discord, this time between the rank and file of the Party and its elected representatives. While the former became more socialist, the latter became only moderately so; while the former wove the interests of labor into an agenda for social change, the latter pitted the particular interests of labor against the "national" interest (Coates 1975). This tension grew and finally culminated in the creation of the Social Democratic party in 1981.

There have been certain key periods in the development of Britain's welfare state when organized labor could have been involved as a central actor in shaping policies concerning production and redistribution. That it was involved only perfunctorily reveals the fundamental cleavage between labor and the state—and further reveals the superficiality of British socialism, a shortcoming that is at the heart of the issue under discussion here. For, as I have argued elsewhere, the development of policies for women has followed the same path and been subject to the same set of constraints as the development of the welfare state (Ruggie 1984).

The area most telling of the strained relationship between labor and the state in Britain is incomes policy and the manner in which it has been consistently imposed without full union backing. Since the issue has relevance to the development of equal pay measures, it requires examination.

By tradition, an earnest attempt is made to keep industrial relations in Britain removed from the political arena. Disputes between employers and employees are settled in collective bargaining without interference from government or politicians. In the early part of this century the principle of abstention of the law in industrial relations prevailed, but the last few decades have brought an increase in legislation both to protect workers and to protect the nation from industrial disputes (as in the Industrial Relations Act of 1969, later repealed). Negotiations are conducted within the framework of these laws. Along with the increased, albeit mild, presence of the state in regulating collective bargaining, the development of a type of tripartite system in Britain has increasingly involved leaders of unions and employers' organizations in concerns at the level of the state, with varying degrees of strength and real participation. Despite these developments, however, the freedom of collective bargaining remains sacrosanct.

Besides modifications in the political context, collective bargaining is also strongly circumscribed by the prevailing economic climate. To put it simply, unions cannot be too aggressive in their demands when economic conditions are poor; their gains have occurred during periods of growth and nearly full employment. This is because wage increases are inflationary; when governments are concerned about inflationary pressures, one measure they try to institute is a wage control policy. Such a policy has its place in the overall array of measures designed to stabilize an economy; to be successful, however, a wage control policy requires the support of labor, and it is more likely to receive such support if a

price control policy is included in the measure. In the interests of planned economic growth, a few Labour administrations, most notably those under Harold Wilson in 1964 and James Callaghan in 1974, attempted to capitalize on their relations with union leaders to develop viable policies for wage and price constraint. Although the details of the two attempts differed, the general thrust was similar.¹ In both cases, voluntary efforts to institute wage controls failed. Both failures reflected the fact that "social contracts" existed between government and union leaders, but not between union leaders and their rank and file. Eventually, both governments resorted to imposing an incomes policy and administering it alone. Both times, strikes followed; conciliations were arranged; and the Conservatives regained power with the vow to put the unions back in line.

The main factor behind the failure of incomes policy and the discord it signifies is certainly Britain's poor economic situation. However, Britain's economy is not to be considered an objective determining force on its own. It is the result of policy choices that have shown a remarkable lack of creativity on the part of government leaders of both parties unwilling to take greater control over external factors. What this further means is that the Labour Party has not adopted the sort of socialist program that could keep its relations with workers and organized labor bound by ties of affinity even in times of hardship. When in office the Labour party has provided no better than the Conservative party for policies and programs to support workers and see them through periods of stress and change.

Besides its broken ties with the Labour party and the state, organized labor has suffered from its own disunity and internal discord. Despite the appearance of greater centralization in the 1970s, the TUC never captured the effective voice of or control over the labor movement. The attempts at tripartitism have accordingly been unrepresentative—especially on the part of employers organized in the Confederation of British Industries (CBI)—and unsuccessfully channeled. There have been times, therefore, when workers have felt betrayed not only by their party but also by their top union representatives. Little wonder that the gains British workers have won have been hard fought and jealously guarded—by women no less than men.

WOMEN AND LABOR IN BRITAIN

Where in this picture of mistrust and conflict have women fit in? Nowhere, actually. The workers' movement in Britain has been a predominantly male concern. The political disunity and dissension outlined above has not helped; in fact, it provides an important explanation for the inability of the labor movement to go beyond fragmented interests in order to coalesce a wider united base, necessarily including women. The determination on the part of male workers to maintain the differential between themselves and women workers has smacked of the same motivation as that behind the defense of differentials in general—jealous guarding of turf because of the inability to see, let alone actualize, a common working-

ass interest in the face of persuasive capitalist co-optation. I outline first the historical relationship between women workers and trade unions before assessing the current situation of grudging, albeit growing, alliance.

From the beginnings of the trade unionism in Britain, women were pitted against men, setting the stage for the diverging development of their interests and movements.² As improving technology broke down heavy and complex production into menial tasks, employers preferred to hire women, both because of the lower wages required and also as a tool against men who were forming unions, legally and contentiously. So in the mills at first and later in the factories, women were functioning as a true industrial reserve army and indeed taking jobs away from men. The result was distrust and resentment on the part of male workers and their unions. Several early unions, most notably the spinners and weavers, excluded women. When the Combination Acts were repealed in 1824, some men workers formed their own organizations. These were largely ineffective—small, financially weak, unable to secure any improvement in working conditions. A few sporadic and, in the end, unsuccessful movements combined the efforts of men and women in organized agitation (an amalgamated Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and Chartism). However, it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the union movement began to reorganize nationally on craft lines (often throughout an entire industry), that women were included and actively recruited, but only in areas and industries with considerable female representation. Thus, a pattern developed throughout the country: where working-class organization was traditionally strong, as in the textile industries in the north and midlands, women were members of trade unions along with men; elsewhere, they developed separate organizations. After World War I, mergers were more common. However, there are still several unions in Britain with predominantly female membership, representing the persistent occupational segregation of women. There are still several unions with predominantly male membership as well, indicating the continuing effectiveness of apprenticeship and other discriminatory requirements, despite their illegality. Today, about 39 percent of women workers are unionized, compared to about 60 percent of men workers. Working women in Britain continue to be burdened with a dual work load, precluding their ability to be actively involved in unions, which hold most of their meetings in the evenings.

The inclusion of women in previously male trade unions by no means signified adoption of women's interests by these unions. It signifies instead the realization that added numbers of workers could bolster more nonviolent means of industrial agitation. Where women's interests completely coincided with men's, as in the setting of minimum rates in certain industries, the common cause was supported by the unions concerned. But where interests diverged, as in the issue of equal pay, union support remained token, at best. The development of equal pay for women deserves further elaboration, revealing as it does the force of divergence in industrial relations in Britain.

In 1888 the TUC passed a resolution supporting the principle of equal pay for

equal work. The principle remained on paper for decades. The first union to accept and successfully press for equal pay was the Civil Service Union, and this not until the 1950s. When increasing numbers of women were joining the labor force and unions in the 1960s, more unions, especially those with increasing female membership, began to support equal pay. But active agitation for equal pay rested on the efforts of women themselves—within the unions, on the streets, and in government. For example, in the 1960s the National Women's Advisory Committee of the TUC became more adamant in pressing for equal pay. Since this committee, founded in 1931, is advisory only, its position—even though accepted by the TUC General Council—would have remained on paper only had not a 1968 strike by women sewing machinists at the Ford Motors plant at Dagenham made action on the paper position imperative. Under normal circumstances the TUC General Council readily supports "industrial action," especially for such principles as equal pay. In this case, however, the TUC was in its all too frequent uneasy position of double agent. It was involved in tripartite discussions on the costs of implementing equal pay and felt it could not support the women strikers' cause without jeopardizing its negotiating position on the same matter vis-à-vis the government and the CBI. The national conference of unionists passed an amendment supporting industrial action for equal pay anyway, and the TUC once again found itself out of step with the rank and file. Officially, the TUC explained its position as favoring traditional and decentralized collective bargaining instead of legislation, saying "representations to Government, advice and guidance to affiliated unions, is as far as the TUC itself can go in the campaign for equal pay. Negotiations with employers are matters for individual unions and only the members of those unions can determine the policy to be followed by their negotiators" (Wootton 1978, 95). One can suggest that the TUC was also suffering from the constraining demands of tripartitism in Britain.

By the time these ambivalences within the trade union movement were emerging, the issue of equal pay had already made its appearance on the government agenda. Among the several reasons precipitating the public interest was the fact that the Labour party, in power throughout the second half of the 1960s, was preparing to join the European Economic Commission (EEC), and Britain would have to be ready to sign the EEC's clause on equal pay when it joined. Hence, the TUC and the CBI arranged bilateral talks to coordinate their positions. To precipitate matters, Secretary of State for Employment and productivity Barbara Castle—the first woman to serve in this post—initiated a series of tripartite discussions to introduce legislation for and begin appropriate implementation of equal pay for women. One important item, the meaning of equal pay, had already been settled in discussions between the TUC and the CBI. The TUC had favored the broad understanding embodied in an International Labour Organization convention, equal pay for work of equal value, but for the sake of expeditiousness it had conceded to the CBI's preference for equal pay for the same work (Wootton 1978).

When reports finally emerged estimating that equal pay would increase wages

and salaries by 3.5 percent, the tripartite actors in dismay reconvened for negotiations concerning the timing of implementation. The TUC tried to resurrect discussions of principle (equal pay for equal value) and tried to shorten the number of years it would take to make equal pay operative. It failed on both counts, this time because of the expediency of First Secretary Castle, who had several constituencies to please with an equal pay bill. The bill finally became a law in 1970, just before the Labour government lost office, and was given five years to become fully operational.

As this account indicates, at the upper echelons trade union support for women's interests in Britain has been readily absorbed into and circumvented by the requirements for "cooperation" in tripartite negotiations. At the lower echelons of the labor movement there has also been characteristic foot-dragging, even reactionary measures, on women's issues. The decentralized picture is more mixed, however, reflecting the many differences among unions in Britain. Two main differences have significance for women workers: (1) union control over the regulation of work, especially apprenticeship and training requirements, as well as the closed shop; and (2) wage differentials. Union control over labor requirements has traditionally been used by unionists to protect their members against arbitrary practices by employers. At the same time, of course, the measures served to exclude women from certain jobs and industries. That some unions (most notably printing and engineers) continue these policies to this day reveals as much about disunity in the labor movement as it does about the male domination of unions.³ The same can be said about the persistent tendency in wage negotiations to maintain differentials between different kinds of workers. This tendency is strongest among unions organizing skilled workers. It is exacerbated by the preference in such unions for separate negotiations with management rather than the establishment of multiunion or joint bodies for bargaining (Daniels 1976). If concerns about the comparability of pay occur between male workers, it is not surprising that they persist where women workers are involved. In 1972 the Office of Manpower Economics conducted a survey at company level of union attitudes toward the equal pay legislation that was slowly being implemented. It found that

about a quarter of the companies . . . had experienced union pressure for equal pay (and in other cases the question had been raised in the course of general pay negotiations), but in about one in ten it was contended by managements that its introduction had been blocked by the attitudes of male union members. In some cases it was said that the men had resisted pay changes which would have narrowed the differentials between themselves and female employees and had successfully demanded the same percentage increases. (Ellis 1981, 39)

Unions concerned about differentials are more likely to emphasize—for purposes of pay, promotion, and redundancy—those job criteria that place women at a disadvantage: strict interpretations of skill and training requirements, length

and continuity of service, mobility requirements, and age bars. Where these criteria are clearly discriminatory, they are now illegal according to the terms of the Sex Discrimination Act. However, when job evaluations have to be conducted to determine pay, the criteria reenter in indirect form.⁴ The section of the Sex Discrimination Act dealing with indirect discrimination is as insistent (if not more so) in its presentation of exceptions as in stating the rule.

Were women themselves a stronger force in the labor movement, the status of women's issues might also be higher in the unions. Those unions where female membership is the actual majority, or close to it, are persistent in pressing for greater equality in rights and opportunities for women. Foremost among these are the National Union of Teachers (in which women are 66 percent of the membership) and the National Association of Local Government Officers (50 percent). It is noteworthy that women are most strongly organized in white-collar unions and that these unions are more active in advancing women's concerns than either the TUC or the blue-collar unions it organizes. For example, even though the proportion of women in their membership is about the same (65 percent), the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers has a smaller proportion of women on its executive committee (19 percent) than the National Union of Public Employees (31 percent). Also, while some white-collar unions send delegates to the TUC annual conference, these unions are less integrated under the TUC umbrella than blue-collar unions, enabling the former to become more progressive than the TUC.

In sum, paralleling the tenuous relations between labor and the state in Britain, women within labor have also been secondary, and their interests have been removed from other interests and more pressing concerns. The position of women workers has advanced in Britain, to be sure, and some notable legislative measures have been forthcoming; however, these have tended to follow rather than facilitate and guide the changes in women's employment. Unions, too, have been less than active as vanguards, or even in keeping step with the needs and demands of their female constituency. As we turn now to the case of Sweden, we see a direct reversal of many of the events forming the relationship between labor and the state and women within labor.

LABOR AND THE STATE IN SWEDEN

Labor-state relations in Sweden are noted for their relative stability and consensus, as well as the innovation that results. It should be emphasized that these achievements have come about only after concerted efforts and calculated decisions, and their maintenance requires the same attention. Still, certain structural factors in the historical development of Swedish industrial relations can be identified as enabling the harmonious outcome (Stephens 1979).

Sweden did not begin to industrialize until the latter half of the nineteenth century; once industrialization came, it was swift but concentrated. Labor

nions began to form in close concert with the development of industry.⁵ The shift was rapid from small craft-based unions to large unions for unskilled workers to coordinated activity among unions in similar occupations to national industry-based unions. By the early part of the twentieth century, consolidated industrial unionism prevailed, paving the way for the development of coordinated industry-wide bargaining.

The first steps toward collective bargaining also occurred early. A central organization for the unions, the *Landsorganisationen* (LO), was formed in 1898. The LO's capacity to function as a central coordinating body was put to the test within a few years. After the first national strike in 1902, apprehensive employers formed their own central organization, the *Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen* (SAF) to counter the unions. Shortly thereafter, in 1906, the LO and the SAF were engaged in negotiations. The first round of talks concerned the right of organization for workers in a local dispute. And the first of many "compromises" was reached promptly, the SAF recognizing the right to unionization and the LO accepting employers' prerogatives to "hire and fire workers, to manage and distribute the work, and to use workers belonging to any union or to no union" (Henkins 1968, 135).⁶ This is not to suggest that relations between the two organizations were amiable from the start; in fact, there were no further joint efforts until the 1930s. But unlike the situation in Britain, in which employers did not begin to organize until the 1930s, forcing labor to deal with management at the shop floor level, in Sweden the early organization and collaboration provided a solid basis for later developments.

After a long period of labor unrest aggravated by economic stagnation, the LO and the SAF returned to the bargaining table in 1936. The immediate instigator behind these talks was the Social Democratic government's warning that legislation would be the only alternative if collective conciliation could not break the tension in industrial relations. The eventual result of the talks was a new spirit of cooperation and the institutionalization of collective bargaining as formulated in the first Basic Agreement, signed in 1938 at Salsjöbaden. Thereafter, centralized negotiations between the LO and the SAF have formed the basic frame within which decentralized bargaining is conducted. Whether adaptations are made at the industrywide or the workplace level, the basic frame is not superseded. Unlike the British situation, systematization of the levels of collective bargaining is facilitated by the fact that agreements are legally binding in Sweden. After the first Basic Agreement was concluded, the power of the LO steadily increased. The foremost factor behind the LO's position is its special relationship with the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Unionism and socialism took root in Sweden at about the same time. Very soon after trade unions began to form, the Social Democratic party was founded (1889), based largely on union support. In fact, until the LO was formed, the party functioned as a centralizing organization for the unions. From the beginning the LO and the SDP formed a close working relationship, the one actively involved in the efforts of the other to

achieve mutually compatible goals. Moreover, from the beginning both organizations and their respective movements decided on goals that were more pragmatic and liberal than radical and revolutionary. Labor's first national strike was over the issue of universal suffrage, which of course was an SDP goal as well. Decades later, cooperative efforts shaped Sweden's innovative economic policies and led to the development of the country's unique welfare state (Tilton 1979).

For a full comparison of the quality of labor-state relations in Britain and Sweden, it is instructive to see how they differed on a similar issue, namely incomes policies. An incomes policy was negotiated and applied in Sweden in the late 1940s in much the same way, for similar reasons, and with similar consequences as in Britain. However, unlike what happened in Britain, the failure of incomes policy in Sweden marked the end of any more such ventures "because the LO refused to consent to any more and no Swedish Social Democratic Government ever tried to impose any form of wage restraint over the LO's objections" (Martin 1975, 40). There have been times when the government has urged wage restraint, but the LO has not always been favorably inclined, as in the unstable period of "wage explosion" provoked by the Korean War. Still, economic factors were taken into account in central bargaining, a practice that became regularized and eventually led to the development of Sweden's alternative to incomes policy: namely, "a structural strategy of economic management" (Martin 1975b, 40).

The whole notion of economic management was one that Sweden had experimented with earlier (under Ernst Wigforss's guidance in the 1930s) and with which key actors were comfortable. So when a new phase of economic management came to be formulated in the 1950s, the ideas were readily accepted and implemented. It is important to note that the new plans originated with two leading LO economists, Gösta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner, presaging the role that labor's interests would have in the economy. While the Rehn-Meidner model proposed a way to reduce both inflation and unemployment simultaneously, it also put the goal of full employment at the forefront should a tradeoff become necessary. The model essentially suggested that labor be moved from industries that are inefficient, have low productivity, and low profits to the more productive and profitable industries. Two kinds of measures were to facilitate this move and direct its purposes. The first came to be known as Sweden's "active labor market policy," a set of government-run programs including career guidance, training, government-monopolized job advertisement and job finding, relief jobs in both the public and private sectors, and adequate financial support during job transition. The second set of measures precipitated the development of the Swedish system of industrial investment. It consists of a Reserve Fund to which companies have allocated some of their profits (in return for a tax advantage) and which the government controls, releasing funds for investment purposes when and where it is appropriate to do so.

To the extent that this model worked, it benefited both labor and business,

creating a unique combination of full employment and high economic growth. Moreover, the policy framework functioned as an alternative to incomes policy in at least two ways. First, to prevent high levels of unemployment and growth from generating increased prices or unusual profits, additional measures such as sales and other indirect taxes were used, thus controlling one facet of inflation. Second and most important, in light of these policies, unions willingly accepted some wage restraint, keeping their end of the bargain to contain inflation and contribute to economic growth. The following excerpt from a collaborative research project sponsored by the LO, the TCO (*Tjänstemännens Centralorganisationen*, which organizes salaried employees), and the SAF is remarkable for its tone of unity and the contrast it offers to anything that could emerge from Britain:

The primary task of the unions is to negotiate as large a share of the production result as possible for their members. But with the strength that these organizations have nowadays in Sweden, they must sense a responsibility for the economy which goes far beyond this primary task. It is true that they have often been accused of demanding too much in wage negotiations and, consequently, of having caused price increases. . . . But in negotiations the unions have been aware of the risk of making such heavy inroads into profitability that the basis for future development in business enterprises deteriorates. The negotiators have long become aware of a point beyond which no claim should be pushed lest it impair the prospects for future wage increases. (Flanagan, Soskice, and Ulman 1983, 303)

Despite these efforts and the mutual understanding involved, Sweden could not remain immune to inflation, nor to increased (though contained) unemployment, nor to consequent tensions in industrial relations. As the economy worsened in the 1970s, so too did the once harmonious compromises of the tripartite actors, resulting in wildcat strikes and a spiral of wage increases and inflation: "By Swedish standards, this must be considered a case of bargaining failure" (Flanagan, Soskice, and Ulman 1983, 327). The deteriorating situation culminated in the defeat of the Social Democrats after 44 years in power, and an even more unstable era of six years under a nonsocialist coalition.

The period of nonsocialist government provided the LO with an opportunity to sort out snags in its relationship with other unions, an effort that eventually served to consolidate the labor movement as a whole. The main issue involved wage and salary equality among different categories of workers (since it pertains to women workers, it is taken up in the next section). This same period also offered the LO and SAF a chance to let the differences between them, which they had kept under control for so long, finally erupt. In 1980, Sweden witnessed a startling general strike as well as an equally startling lockout. The events showed everyone what life was like without effective tripartitism, a sobering experience that facilitated the return of the Social Democrats to power in 1982.

The fundamental criterion in consensus-based labor-state-capital relations,

such as that discussed above, is the effective integration of labor at the level of the state, a condition that can occur only under a truly committed labor-oriented or socialist government. At present the inclusion of workers' interests within economywide concerns is entering a new phase with the development of wage earners' funds. This is an extension of the concept of industrial democracy into the sphere of collective ownership of industry. Through taxes on payrolls as well as excess profits taxes on companies, funds are to be set up—initially run by trade union representatives—to buy workers' shares in large enterprises. While the future of this scheme is uncertain, its presence on the public agenda reaffirms the place of labor within the governing coalition and the economic development of Sweden.

WOMEN AND LABOR IN SWEDEN

Where, in this picture of concerted efforts on the part of labor, state, and capital in the name of full employment and economic growth, have the special needs of women workers fit in? As a separate category with real and special needs, women workers remained in the background until only very recently. From their beginnings, the LO and the Social Democratic party adopted the position that women's concerns required no special organization outside a class-based labor movement (Strejffert 1974). But this is not to say that the economic position of women workers remained inferior and stagnant. In fact, it improved, but only as a byproduct of the broader concerns of the workers' movement. The main advance has been in the area of equal pay. Before elaborating this issue, I briefly review the background of women's participation in unions in Sweden.

Because unionization in Sweden developed relatively late, at a time when socialism was also in the air, women have never been excluded from Swedish unions, as they have elsewhere. However, women have never formed an effective power base within the workers' movement, neither at the beginning, nor in the later period of union activism. The same kind of male dominance and prejudices against women were to be found in Swedish unionism in the early twentieth century as elsewhere, and the same token statements supporting equal pay were placed on paper to languish for decades. Neither women's membership in unions nor their labor force participation were sufficiently high in the early decades of this century to make them a force to be reckoned with. Moreover, although women organized early in Sweden (the Frederika Bremer Society was founded in 1884, the Women's Association of the Social Democratic Party in 1892), they cannot be said to have formed an effective voice in Swedish society until very recently (in fact, only after the developments discussed below). The story of women workers in Sweden does not become noteworthy until the 1930s and does not take on real significance until the 1960s.

When the Social Democrats first came to power in the 1930s, their main

method of handling economic stagnation was an early form of Keynesian countercyclical financing, including the adoption of a full employment policy (Tilton 1979). Low-paid women workers in particular were drawn into the labor market and immediately came under the auspices of the LO; by 1940 women formed nearly 20 percent of its membership. The LO was involved with the Social Democrats in developing legislation for basic workers' rights, including some special protections for women workers (for example, making it unlawful for any employer to fire a woman who had become engaged, married, or pregnant). But these early laws were all basic, establishing such principles as equal pension rights and paid maternity leave.

At the same time that labor laws became established, family policy was also being formulated. The most important ideas presented by early family commissions were recognition of the need for women workers, both in the national economy and in private households, and recognition of the role of family policy in facilitating women's work, financially and through day care centers (Liljesfröm 1978). Again, these policies set more principles than programs, and tended to encourage a higher birthrate through financial incentives more than they encouraged women to work. But at least the tone was positive (and did not disparage women's work, as in Britain).

As women's labor force participation gradually increased in the 1940s and thereafter, the kind of work most women were doing—clerical, professional, and other white-collar jobs—meant that they were joining unions other than the LO. Foremost among these were the TCO (*Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation*: the Central Organization of Salaried Employees) and SACO (*Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation*: Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations).⁷ More women are now organized within these unions than in the LO; in fact, women are over half of the TCO's membership. But these unions have tended to lag behind the LO in their concern for women's issues. The reason for this lies less with any unique characteristics of the white-collar unions than with the special place of the LO in the tripartite system.

By the 1950s, the LO was beginning to conduct talks with the SAF on the issue of equal pay for women, spurred no doubt by the increased membership of women in rival unions, as well as by the International Labour Organization's adoption of a convention on equal pay for women. The talks gradually paved the way for Sweden to sign the ILO convention in 1960, but it took many years to eliminate the use of separate pay scales and to establish the principle of "work of equal value" embodied in the ILO convention. While these efforts of course led to some improvement in women's pay relative to men's, it is from another area of the LO's negotiations that women benefited even more. The issue of equal pay for women, as with other work-related matters in Sweden, was not discussed in a vacuum distinguished only by its relation to gender. It was contained in the context of developing fair and rational bases for wages and wage differentials, a policy framework that has come to be known as wage solidarity.

Since Sweden had rejected the use of income and price policies to control the economy, another method of holding back spiraling inflation proposed by LO economists in the 1950s was the policy of wage solidarity. It rested on the principle that wage increases and wage differentials had to be based on rational factors consistent across all industries so that wages would not be so out of line with productivity as to create economic strain. The policy rejected the notion that the productivity of any given industry could influence wages in that industry; it argued instead that cohesion among all industries in setting wages would create greater efficiency in the use of labor and improve economic productivity overall. Wage solidarity was not a policy to equalize wages but to systematize them and coordinate them with industrial and labor market policies. Among the criteria for differential wages were the degree of difficulty of the job, vocational training requirements, the danger of accidents, the insecurity of employment, and the nature of the working environment. One major consequence of specifying these factors was to eliminate the (irrational) bases for unequal wages for women and other low-paid workers. Thus, as a result of the gradual institutionalization of the policy of wage solidarity, the wages of all low-paid workers began to rise in relation to higher-paid workers, and women were the major beneficiaries. By 1970, women's pay as a proportion of men's in the industrial sector was 80 percent, and by 1980 it was 90 percent.

Other unions, most significantly the TCO, have supported the policy of wage solidarity—necessarily, for it to be effective. But the TCO's early support was chiefly in principle and for the sake of solidarity. The main difference was the TCO's own emphasis on equal pay for equal work and its efforts to refine job evaluations that justified wage differentiations. Since the TCO conducts its own bargaining sessions with the SAF, different agreements concerning women workers prevailed depending on their affiliated union. Recently, however (and especially because of the equality legislation discussed below), the TCO and the LO have come closer on several issues, including equal pay for work of equal value for women and all low-paid workers. The trend toward even greater centralization among unions is still progressing in Sweden, and it can only further benefit women.

Up to this point, nothing special for women on the part of unions has been discussed because nothing special for women within unions existed before the late 1970s. Special efforts on behalf of women workers are contained in Sweden's very active labor market programs, and unions were involved in developing these programs, since their representatives are members of the National Labor Market Board.⁸ By the 1970s, however, the demand for more special measures for women, particularly legislation on equality, increased. One can surmise that women themselves were by then playing a more active role, for organized labor and organized employers have always sought to avoid legislation, on this or any other matter, because they see it as interfering in the collective bargaining procedure. Indeed, by the 1970s the women's movement in Sweden had become more

widespread and decidedly more feminist and activist. Moreover, any earlier reservations about legislation among socialists, both women and men, were superseded when a nonsocialist government came into power in 1976. The political benefits to be derived from legislation based on a broad coalition of nonsocialist and socialist women seemed large to the newly elected officials. A law called "Equality between Men and Women at Work" accordingly was passed in December 1980. Interestingly, this law did not supersede but in fact reinforced the mechanism of collective bargaining as the main tool for the achievement of equality. When the equality ombudsperson is called upon to arbitrate a case, she or he must work within the terms of a collective agreement, and if one does not exist that speaks to the point of contention, a new agreement or clause is negotiated. Since 1980 the LO, the TCO, and most other unions have negotiated special agreements with the SAF pertaining to the situation of women workers. While these agreements are still separate among the unions, there is an increasing effort to standardize their terms. It must be emphasized that these special agreements for women do not stand outside the main collective agreement but are part and parcel of it.

The Swedish method of incorporating the concerns of women workers into the concerns of workers as a whole as interpreted by labor unions has not been without its critics both inside and outside Sweden. The criticism dates back to the beginnings of socialism in Sweden. Unlike its British counterpart, Swedish socialism has consistently emphasized and realized broad coalition building based on common interests. Because of this, women within the labor force have been treated as workers—low-paid and occupationally segregated to be sure, but workers nevertheless. As long as organized labor achieved basic socialist goals, women workers benefited, as did all low-paid workers. Hence, some of the concerns that a separate feminist organization would have advocated were fostered by the progress of socialism in Sweden. However, by the 1970s it was becoming clear that progress for women within socialism had gone about as far as it could. On the firm foundation of past achievements, women began to press beyond the confines of socialism, and as established members of the labor force, they were heard. Feminist groups supported the development of the equality legislation precisely because they felt that unions had so generalized the concerns of women workers as to ignore the unique problems that women face as women rather than as low-paid workers, primarily the problems of sex discrimination and occupational segregation. In addition, as one American commentator has noted, LO's attempts to preempt and contain feminist groups on the labor market, in the unions, and in the workplace can be described as "one-part male apprehension, one-part Swedish concern for union prerogatives, and one-part traditional Social Democratic ideology, which has always subordinated women's rights to class questions" (Scott 1982, 53).

Imperfections and patriarchal ideologies exist in Sweden, to be sure. Nevertheless, the situation of women workers there is so significantly better than the

comparative situation in other countries, especially Britain, that attention must be paid to the growth of these achievements. Generalizing the situation of women as workers has been at the root of this growth. The approach has not been unique to the union interpretation, for it is also to be found within Sweden's labor market policies. In many ways, these labor market policies can be analyzed as analogous to the contemporary form of collective agreements. That is, within the general framework of the best use of labor, special measures for women exist. In the field of labor market policies, these special measures include career guidance that encourages women (and men) to train for occupations not traditional for their sex in order to qualify for better job opportunities; hiring quotas and other incentives to employers to hire and train women or men in positions not traditional for their sex; and job creation programs that benefit women workers as much as men. Labor market programs and policies are not an entirely separate sphere of activity from union concerns with wages, job evaluations, and the like. As mentioned above, since union representatives sit on the National Labor Market Board, one can expect some similarity in the approach to women's concerns.

Above all, the basic assumption in all these measures is that women work. The issue of "choice" has been increasingly removed with the gradual recognition that equality between the sexes is based on sex *role* equality. The other side of the coin, greater participation by men in home and family responsibilities, while far from being realized, has been addressed and effected to a greater extent in Sweden than in any other country. In sum, changes in consciousness have had a material and collective base in Sweden, developing in concert with the development of socialism. At the same time, it appears that all of these changes have reached a standoff.

CONCLUSION

If unions are "patriarchal" and, accordingly, treat women's issues perfunctorily, then what accounts for the relative achievements of women workers as a result of union efforts in Sweden? This paper has attempted to demonstrate the inadequacy of patriarchy as a conceptual and theoretical base for understanding the relationship between workers' movements and women's interests. That the concerns of women workers in Britain have fared poorly has been explained here in terms of the broader context of strains and dissensions in labor-state relations. That women's causes have been more successfully promoted in Sweden has been explained here in terms of the broader context of consolidated labor-state efforts to achieve full employment, including women's, together with and for the purposes of economic growth.

This paper has indicated further that the form and fate of women's groups is similarly contained within a broader context of social and political relations. In the case of Britain, feminist activism has not been featured in the development of any of the special measures for women. Even when women have been organized

and active in pressing their own concerns, as in the agitation for equal pay in the late 1960s, the efforts were localized and specific to certain companies or groups of workers. In addition, even the most aggressive agitation had little impact on the TUC's position within the tripartite negotiations for equal pay. The final formulation of the Equal Pay Act reflected the tripartite consensus, not the preferred feminist version. This is not to say that British unions have been unresponsive to women workers. Joyce Gelb (see Chapter 12) discusses several areas of union support, such as day care and abortion. None of these areas of support, however, jeopardizes the more important role of the TUC within the tripartite system, a system that is separate from women's issues in both theory and practice. It is perfectly plausible to suggest that had women in Britain been more active and more consistently so, more could have been achieved. But it is less speculative and more to the point to explain why women in Britain have not become a stronger social and political force. Their incapacitation is understandable, given the pattern of fragmented interest structuration prevailing in Britain. Britain is indeed a patriarchal society. But I have suggested that it is the persisting fact of divisiveness, and the persisting onus of self-interest that derives from divisiveness, that explain lack of progress, for women as for all workers—and not the fact of gender alone.

The case of Sweden forms an important contrast—up to a point. Politics in Sweden are based on broad coalitions and a concerted effort to mitigate differences for the sake of rational economic growth. Such progress for women as has occurred in Sweden has advanced within this framework—and Swedish progress has been remarkable compared to that of other countries. But lately the confines of this framework and its limitations on the full achievement of equality for women have become more apparent. In particular, women's occupational segregation in Sweden remains curiously impervious to change. Why? Have we come to the final analysis in which the structure of patriarchy emerges as the root of women's persistent inequality? Perhaps. But it should be kept in mind that Sweden, like most other advanced capitalist societies, has reached an impasse of sorts in the prevailing approaches to achieving social progress. A realignment is underway. We cannot say with any certainty what its future impact will be on the status of women until we can see more clearly the contours of emergent social alliances.

NOTES

1. For detailed discussions of the events outlined here, see Martin (1975a), Coates (1975), and Crouch (1979).

2. The following historical discussion is based largely on Davies (1975).

3. Excluding women's entry to any job is now illegal under the Sex Discrimination Act, both explicitly and implicitly (in that the act recognizes indirect discrimination, which occurs when different training and experience requirements exclude women from certain jobs). However, the enforcement of the act has not been able to control the continued practice of exclusionary requirements.

4. The Equal Opportunities Commission (1981) has been working on ways of eliminating indirectly discriminatory criteria; see the commission's *Job Evaluations Schemes without Bias*.

5. For a full account of the history of unionism in Sweden, see Korpi (1978).

6. The clause remained in effect until 1976.

7. Similar to the LO, these are umbrella organizations for several industry-based unions. See Forseback (1980); Heidenheimer (1976); Wheeler (1975).

8. Union representatives were also members of the various commissions that developed day care policy as a special measure for working mothers.

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