

Union Women and the Social Construction of Citizenship in Mexico

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May 2005

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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ISBN: 978-0-494-21628-6

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ISBN: 978-0-494-21628-6

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Abstract

In Latin America, women's ability to participate in the paid workforce on equal terms as men is constrained by many cultural and political obstacles, and this reinforces women's unequal citizenship status. Even though unions have rarely supported women's rights historically, and are currently losing political power in the neoliberal economic context, I argue that union women have a crucial role to play in the social struggle to expand women's labor rights. Building on theories about the social construction of citizenship, I develop an original theoretical framework suggesting that civil society acts on three levels to expand citizenship rights: the individual level (working with individuals to make them more rights-conscious), within social institutions (working to ensure that policies within social institutions actually reflect the rights of individuals), and at the level of the state, where civil society contributes to the construction of new citizenship discourses.

The framework is then applied to the Mexican case. Examining the rise of working class feminism in the context of the debt crisis and transition to economic liberalism in the 1980s, and the subsequent democratic transition in 2000, I show how these contexts led union women to participate in civil associations active at each of these three levels of citizenship construction. More specifically, this participation has been important in raising awareness of women's labor rights among women workers, challenging patriarchal union structures, and bringing the issue of women's labor rights into the debate over reform of Mexico's Federal Labor Law. I ultimately conclude that in the absence of support from a broad women's labor movement, the chances that women's

labor rights will be supported by the Mexican government and Mexican unions will be low.

Résumé

La capacité des femmes d'Amérique Latine à participer à la main-d'oeuvre en toute égalité avec les hommes est limitée par des obstacles culturels et politiques multiples – ce qui souligne la nature inégale de leur citoyenneté. Malgré le fait que, historiquement, les syndicats n'ont que rarement soutenu les droits des femmes, et que dans le climat économique néo-libéral actuel, ils perdent de leur pouvoir, je soutiens que les travailleuses syndicalisées jouent un rôle crucial dans les combats sociaux visant à étendre les droits professionnels des femmes. En ayant recours aux théories de la construction sociales de la citoyenneté je propose un modèle original pour suggérer que la société civile agit à trois niveaux différents dans la promotion des droits de la citoyenneté: premièrement, au niveau de l'individu (où il s'agit d'augmenter la conscience individuelle de la pertinence des droits); deuxièmement, au niveau des institutions sociales (où il s'agit d'assurer que les institutions en questions reflètent les droits de l'individu de façon effective); et troisièmement, au niveau de l'état (où la société civile participe à la création d'un nouveau discours sur la citoyenneté).

J'applique ensuite ce modèle au cas du Mexique. En prenant en compte l'ascension du féminisme dans le milieu des travailleuses dans le contexte de la crise de l'endettement et du passage au libéralisme économique des années 80, ainsi que la transition démocratique après 2000, je démontre comment ces circonstances ont poussé les travailleuses syndicalisées à participer activement à des associations civiques à

chacun de ces niveaux de construction de la citoyenneté. De plus, cette participation aida à faciliter la prise de conscience par les travailleuses de leurs droits professionnelles en lançant un défi aux structures patriarcales des syndicats eux-mêmes et en introduisant le sujet des droits professionnels des femmes dans le débat sur la réforme de la loi fédérale du travail du Mexique. J'en conclus qu'au bout du compte, la probabilité que les droits professionnels des femmes soient soutenus par le gouvernement mexicain et les syndicats mexicains est faible étant donné l'absence de soutien par une coalition des mouvements professionnels des femmes.

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Acknowledgments

During one of the many moments of extreme frustration I experienced while doing fieldwork in Mexico, my mother suggested a helpful analogy: doing a Ph.D., she said, reminded her of the scene in *The African Queen* when Rose (played by Katharine Hepburn) and Charlie (Humphrey Bogart) must make their way through the dark, murky, leech-infested mangrove swamp. Unsure if they are even going in the right direction and incapable of moving at more than crawl, Rose and Charlie make their way agonizingly slowly through the swamp until, delirious from malaria and exhaustion, the swamp muck gives way to clear lake water.

There were many times on the journey through this Ph.D. program when I felt stuck in my own version of *The African Queen*, unsure of what I was really doing or how to make it happen, and fairly certain that I was not going to make it to the end. Luckily, whereas Rose and Charlie had only each other, I had what seemed like an army helping me through:

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Philip Oxhorn. He has encouraged me through every phase of this program, from my first spark of interest in labor politics in the Brazilian auto industry to my current job search. Along the way he has provided me with generous financial support, and his feedback on my work has been invaluable. If this dissertation makes any sense at all, it is because Phil's suggestions for "minor revisions" helped me turn my own good ideas and data into chapters that were well organized and argued.

Among the faculty at McGill, Alan Patten and Catherine Lu provided me with my first introduction to political theory, which plays a major role in this dissertation. They

have also helped me financially through the years and, more importantly, have been friends. Rex Brynen gave me office space at ICAMES despite the fact that Mexico does not quite fit in with Arab and Middle East studies. Thanks also to the office staff in the Political Science department—especially Helen Wilicka, Angie Coppola, and Emilia Scognamiglio—for always making things happen.

My fieldwork in Mexico City was an incredible personal challenge, and I cannot thank enough the many people who made it easier. Pamela Starr and MaryAnne Leenheer at ITAM first helped me get my feet on the ground. Lilo Kasperek warmly opened her home to me and kept me supplied with milk, bottled water, and bananas. Angela Herren and Ana Jaimes were great friends. Jenny Cooper, Ancelmo García Pineda, Svenja Blanke, Alicia Ortiz, and Hernán Yanes helped open so many doors. The women of the Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas—especially Gloria Olvera, Inés González, and Rosario Ortiz—and Mujeres en Sororidad Sindical welcomed me to their meetings, provided me with honest accounts of their experiences in Mexican unions, and also inspired me with their commitment to promoting women's equality in such a challenging environment.

This dissertation would have been impossible to write without the generous funding I received over the years from the J.W. McConnell Foundation, the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women, the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Office, and the Department of Political Science.

This dissertation would also have been impossible to write without the support and friendship of many friends and colleagues at McGill, who helped make this an amazing experience, not just a tough one. Thanks to Jenny Anastasoff, Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, Brian Greene, Allison Harell, Matthew Hennigar, Manal Jamal, Alana

and Michael Maurushat, Brent Sasley, Gopika Solanki, Geoff Stahl, Monica Treviño Gonzalez, and Bill Wieninger. Bryan Smyth has my comrade-in-toast from nearly the beginning. And Montreal has not been the same without Christine Straehle, whose honesty, humor, wisdom, and altogether civilized manner, have made her such a perfect friend.

I have had the good fortune of having the most amazing series of roommates, all of whom have home such a good place to be. Thank you to Maya Kuloy, Yasemin Heinbecker, Rebecca Achtman, and Branwen Williams. To Pablo, my faithful alarm clock and napping partner. And most especially, a couple-a-three thank yous to Natasha Guinan, who in opening her home to me, helped make Montreal my home too, who encouraged my latent feminism, and who became one of my best friends in the world.

And speaking of best friends, I cannot be grateful enough to Christy Petroff and Clare Pfeiffer Ramsey, who have been cheering me on from home (and may now choose to revoke my n.g. status). And to Iain Macdonald, who is my favorite part of every day.

Naturally, my parents have had a hand in this too. I'm sure I would not be a social scientist if I had not inherited my father's love of history and politics. And I'm not sure I would have made it through graduate school if my mother had not been there along the way, whether on the phone from Michigan or on the bus to Oaxaca, to remind me that I could, murky swamps or no.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Beulah K. Fenner, whose intelligence, strength, humor, and humanity mean so much to me.

Acronyms

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
ATM	Alianza de Tranviarios de México Alliance of Mexican Streetcar Workers
Casa	Casa del Obrero Mundial House of the World Worker
CAW	Canadian Autoworkers
CEN	comité ejecutivo nacional national executive committee
CMT	Comité de Mujeres Telefonistas Women's Committee of the Telephone Workers
CNM	Coordinación Nacional de Mujeres (del FAT) National Women's Coordinating Body (of the FAT)
CNTE	Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación National Council of Education Workers
CNMT	Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Trabajadoras National Council of Women Workers
CODIM	Centro de Organización y Desarrollo Integral de Mujeres (del FAT) Women's Center for Integral Development and Organization (of the FAT)
CONAMUP	Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular National Council of the Urban Popular Movement
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers
CT	Congreso de Trabajo Labor Congress

CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México Confederation of Mexican Workers
EAP	economically active population
ENMT	Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Trabajadoras National Meeting of Women Workers
FAT	Frente Auténtico de Trabajo Authentic Labor Front
FENASIB	Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios National Federation of Banking Unions
FESEBES	Federación de Sindicatos de Empresas de Bienes y Servicios Federation of Goods and Services Unions
FNALIDM	Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de las Mujeres National Front for Women's Rights and Liberation
FSCSP	Frente Sindical, Campesino, Social y Popular Union, Peasant, Social, and Popular Front
FSM	Frente Sindical Mexicano Mexican Union Front
FSTSE	Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions
FES	Fundación Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation
GEM	Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres Women's Popular Education Group
ILO	International Labour Organization
Inmujeres	Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres National Women's Institute
Inmujeres-DF	Instituto de las Mujeres del Distrito Federal Women's Institute of the Federal District

LFT	Ley Federal de Trabajo Federal Labor Law
MAS	Mujeres en Acción Sindical Women in Union Action
MUTUAC	Mujeres Trabajadoras Unidas, AC Women Workers United, Inc.
NSGWU	Sindicato Independiente de Trabajadoras de la Costura 19 de Septiembre Nineteenth of September Garment Workers Union
OIT	Oficina Internacional de Trabajo International Labour Organization
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional National Action Party
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática Party of the Democratic Revolution
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional Institutional Revolutionary Party
PRONAM	Programa Nacional de la Mujer National Women's Program
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad National Solidarity Program
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores Workers' Party (Brazil)
RMS	Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas Union Women's Network
SAF	secretaria de acción feminil secretary for women's action
SIA	Sindicato Independencia de Aviación Independent Aviation Union
SJF	Social Justice Fund (of the Canadian Autoworkers)

SME	Sindicato Mexcano de Electricistas Mexican Electricians' Union
SNTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación National Union of Education Workers
SNTSS	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Seguridad Social National Union of Social Security Workers
STRM	Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana Telephone Workers' Union of the Mexican Republic
STUNAM	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Workers' Union of the National Autonomous University of Mexico
SUNTBANOBAS	Sindicato Único Nacional de Trabajadores del Banco Nacional de Obras y Servicios Públicos National Workers Union of the National Bank of Public Works and Services
SUTS	Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de Serfin Single Serfin Workers' Union
UAW	United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America
UNT	Unión Nacional de Trabajadores National Workers' Union

Introduction: Understanding Union Women's Role in the Construction of Women's Labor Rights in Mexico

1.0 A WOMEN'S LABOR MOVEMENT IN MEXICO?

In March of 2003, I sat down for an interview with Patricia Mercado, a long-time feminist activist in Mexico and, more recently, the president of a new political party, México Posible (The Mexico That's Possible). In the 1980s and early 1990s, Mercado was active with Mujeres en Acción Sindical (Women in Union Action), a feminist organization that works with union women, and I was interested in getting her insights on the changes over the years in the way union women have been organizing in support of women workers' rights. Mercado's perception of union women's organizing was extremely critical:

I don't think there is a movement of union women. I think that there is some leadership of union women...but it isn't a strong movement; it isn't a very visible movement. I don't think that they have much strength...And no leadership among union women has emerged that is capable of bringing together a big movement with specific demands... (personal interview with Patricia Mercado, 3/25/2003).

When I asked why this was the case, Mercado suggested that women are "trapped in unions," which, she pointed out, are not democratic and are very resistant to change. She added that union women would have little success in promoting women's rights "if these

leaders don't get out of the union environment and in some way call women workers together through specific demands that they have" (personal interview with Patricia Mercado, 3/25/2003).

On one level, Mercado was obviously right. Despite women's long history of involvement in the Mexican labor movement, union women have not yet taken the lead in a large, well organized movement advocating the rights of women workers. Mercado was also correct in highlighting the obstacles to union women's organizing posed by union structures, which have historically served to exclude women and stifle alternative points of view. At the same time, I felt that Mercado was perhaps too dismissive of the efforts union women have been making to promote women workers' rights. I had spent the six months prior to our interview speaking with union women who were active in improving the rights and working conditions of women workers, including women who were committed to challenging traditional union structures. These efforts might not qualify as a "movement" of union women, but I thought there was something important taking place.¹

While it may be debatable whether or not there is a women's labor movement in Mexico, it is undeniable that working women face cultural obstacles and forms of discrimination that prevent them from taking part in the workforce on equal terms as men. Gender discrimination ranges from overt actions like sexual harassment and mandatory pregnancy testing to cultural-structural problems like occupational segregation. Moreover, women's primary responsibility for domestic labor (and men's

¹ We can define a social movement as the collective action of actors with some shared identity who mobilize in support of common political goals and in conjunction with other political actors (see Foweraker 1995: 4). Interestingly, Linda Stevenson's (2004) examination of Mexican women's activism against gender discrimination in the workplace led her to conclude we are seeing the beginnings of a women's labor movement in Mexico.

culturally accepted role as primary wage earners) poses challenges for women's participation in work and union life, contributing to their exclusion from higher paid positions and leadership ranks. It is also undeniable that, "movement" or no, union women are organizing in support of the rights of women workers that will redress these obstacles and forms of discrimination so that women can participate in the workforce on equal terms as men. The ways in which union women are doing so is the subject of this dissertation.

1.1 QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENTS

My focus on the mobilization of unionized women in support of the rights of women workers (or, "women's labor rights") is a response to the theoretical literature highlighting the important role that organized labor plays in struggling for the citizenship rights of workers. Although labor's role differs from case to case, this literature argues that in Europe and Latin America, organized labor has been an important political force supporting the expansion of civil rights (particularly the freedoms to associate and strike) and social rights (especially minimum wage laws, health care, and retirement benefits). Theorists also argue that because labor tends to be repressed under authoritarian regimes, unions have an incentive to support the political rights associated with democracy and that, within democracies, they are one of the strongest voices on the political left. More recently, labor literature has examined the declining political capacity of organized labor in the neoliberal era.

What is often overlooked in labor literature is organized labor's historic failure to support women's labor rights: Not only have labor organizations typically not advocated the rights that would allow women to take part in the workforce on equal terms as men,

they have sometimes actively supported policies that would exclude women from the workforce. This tension between labor's support for citizenship rights broadly speaking and historic neglect of women's labor rights raises important questions that have received little research attention. First, what are the consequences for the development of women's labor rights if unions ignore or are resistant to them? Moreover, if unions do not support women's rights, what further consequences are there for the development of women's labor rights when union strength declines as a result of economic liberalization? Both questions turn our attention to the potential role that union women play in the development of women's labor rights

I argue that there is a crucial role for union women in the social struggle to expand women's labor rights, regardless of the historical neglect of unions, because there is no other sector of working women with the organizational tools and political strength of union women. I use the social construction of citizenship approach to understand exactly how union women are participating in the social struggle to expand women's labor rights in Mexico. This approach, as exemplified by Philip Oxhorn (2003; 2001), Charles Tilly (1995a), and Elizabeth Jelin (1996a), refers to the way in which civil society's discourses with and struggles against the state can lead, over time, to the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship rights. An important aspect of the social construction of citizenship approach is that *who* is taking part in these state-society discourses and struggles over rights will help determine the outcome of rights construction. Social groups that are well organized and involved in political discourse and struggle are more likely to have their rights addressed by public policy, whereas groups that are not organized or involved will not. In other words, if union women (and

other women workers) are not involved in the political discourse and struggle surrounding their labor rights, these rights are not likely to be incorporated into law in meaningful (i.e., enforceable) ways.

But this basic conception of the social construction of citizenship does not provide a theoretical framework for understanding two important elements of citizenship construction—the way in which individuals first come to understand what rights they should have and the way that various social, economic, and political institutions come to respect the citizenship rights of their members. I address this theoretical lacuna by building on social construction of citizenship theories to develop an original theoretical framework incorporating these additional two elements. I argue that the social construction of citizenship is a process in which civil society acts on three levels to create, expand, or redefine citizenship rights: the *individual level*, where civil associations work with individuals to make them more rights-conscious; the *institutional level*, where civil associations work to ensure that policies within social institutions and organizations actually reflect the rights of individuals; and the *state level*, where civil associations contribute to the construction of new citizenship discourses vis-à-vis the state.

I apply this framework to the case of union women in Mexico. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, in the context of the rise of working class feminism (or “popular feminism,” as it is known in Mexico) in the 1980s, union women began participating at each level of citizenship construction, usually in alliances with other civil society actors. Union women’s participation in the social construction of citizenship has been important in raising women workers’ awareness of their rights, challenging patriarchal union structures, and bringing the issue of women’s labor rights

into the debate over reforming Mexico's Federal Labor Law. Of course, union women's participation in the social construction of citizenship is not without challenges: among the most salient are the difficulties women have balancing domestic responsibilities with other activities, continued political resistance from union and government leaders, and, as Patricia Mercado noted, solidifying a broader women's labor movement capable of exerting sustained pressure on the government. Nevertheless, union women's participation at each level has been an important factor in the gradual construction of stronger labor rights for women and has contributed to the beginnings of a growing movement of women workers in Mexico.

1.2 CASE SELECTION AND METHODOLOGY

In *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman comments that "women workers are often invisible in the chronicles of the working class" (1988: 138). And indeed, one of the particular challenges in conducting this study was that there has been very little research done on the role of union women as political agents, despite the large respective literatures on women and organized labor in Latin America.² Aside from a few chapters and articles devoted to cases of union women's organizing (see French 1997; Cortina 1990; Galvez and Todaro 1990; Anderfuhren 1994), most references to union women consist of small sections in a larger studies (see Cook 1996; Seidman 1994; Hathaway 2000; Rodríguez 2003). These are important contributions, to be sure, but they are

² For example, on women in Latin America see Craske and Molyneux (2002), Craske (1999), Jaquette and Wolchik (1998), Jaquette (1994), Safa (1995c), Jelin (1990b), Alvarez (1990), and Nash and Safa (1986). On labor in Latin America, a small sample of literature includes Spalding (1977), Bergquist (1986), Collier and Collier (1991), Middlebrook (1995), Cook (1996), Keck (1992), Munck (1998), Levitsky (2003), Garza Toledo (2001b), and Murillo (2001).

insufficient for understanding in depth the challenges, achievements, and significance of union women's political agency.

One consequence of the paucity of literature on union women's organizing in Latin America was that there was no obvious choice of cases to study the political agency of women unionists. An ideal comparative study would focus on two or more cases where union women's agency had led to different outcomes at each of the three levels of citizenship construction; however, the lack of literature on union women's organizing made it difficult, if not impossible, to choose cases that, in the methodology lingo, varied on the dependent variable. So in an effort to build a foundation for future comparative studies of union women's engagement in the social construction of citizenship, I have focused on a single country.

In selecting the case to study for this dissertation, I focused on three major criteria: an historically strong labor movement that has been able to influence the direction of workers' citizenship rights, the historical presence of women in the labor movement, and a recent process of labor law reform, which would create an opening for women workers to organize in support of women's labor rights. In light of these three criteria, Mexico was an obvious choice.

First, the Mexican labor movement has played an historically important role in Mexican politics since the time of the Mexican revolution (1910-17). Workers' mobilization during the revolution forced revolutionary leaders to recognize labor's importance as a political actor. This recognition led political leaders to establish a broad series of labor rights in the 1917 federal constitution and, in the 1940s, led the ruling party to incorporate organized labor into its governing coalition. The corporatist

relationship between Mexico's authoritarian regime and the "official" organized labor movement involved restrictions on organized labor's autonomy, particularly its ability to challenge the ruling party politically. For these reasons, many researchers assume that labor has had no role to play in the development of citizenship rights (see Foweraker 1995: 99). While it is certainly true that labor's ability to participate in the social construction of political and civil rights was restricted, labor leaders' important role in the governing coalition allowed them to secure important social rights for workers.

Economic transition has weakened the Mexican labor movement, as it has weakened all Latin American labor movements, but it has also fostered the emergence of an independent labor movement that has rejected the corporatist relationship with the state. This new independent labor movement is promoting union and political democracy in Mexico and, as a consequence, is changing the way that organized labor is engaging in the social construction of citizenship rights.

Second, women have been active in the Mexican labor movement since the time of the revolution. Union women's agency was important to the development and success of the first important union federation in Mexico, the House of the World Worker and, more recently, to the success of major union movements in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the democratic teachers' movement and the telephone workers' strikes. Throughout history, women workers have stood up for their rights as women and as workers, such as in the 1925 May Day parade, when women marched in protest of their exclusion from unions, in the 1970s when women in unions started demanding official union offices to address the issues of concern to women workers, or in the 1980s when garment workers formed the first modern Mexican union with 100 percent female leadership and feminist

advisors. Even though union women's participation in the labor movement historically was not sufficient to advance the rights they had as workers, their organizational activities are beginning to have a greater impact, especially at the individual and institutional levels of citizenship construction.

Finally, the Mexican case is appropriate because of ongoing efforts to reform the Federal Labor Law, which was originally enacted in 1931. Both the 1917 constitution and the Federal Labor Law established protections for women workers. Some, such as the constitution's guarantee of fully paid maternity leave, were quite progressive. However, much of the legislation actually prevented women from engaging in the workforce freely. Both documents were reformed in the 1970s to guarantee women's full equality under law and in the workplace, but these changes did not explicitly prohibit certain kinds of discrimination (e.g., sexual harassment and pregnancy testing), and today many women's labor rights simply go unenforced. In 2002, President Vicente Fox initiated a process labor law reform. This has provided union women and their allies with the best opportunity since the 1970s to promote changes to the labor law that improve the rights of women workers. These three factors combined make Mexico an excellent case with which to study union women's agency in the construction of women's labor rights.

I examine union women's engagement in the social construction of citizenship by focusing on NGOs, unions, and union women that have taken part in the process of citizenship construction at each of the three levels. Because not all groups, unions, or individuals operate with the same membership, strategies, or goals, I compare the work of different actors in order to present a richer analysis of various efforts at citizenship construction and the factors that may lead to the success or failure of these efforts. At the

first (individual) level of citizenship construction, I examine three types of organizations: union federations, an NGO whose members are all union women, and an NGO whose members are non-unionized. Analyzing these three types of organizations allowed me to compare the strategies and approaches of groups of union women versus groups of non-union women. Additionally, it allowed me to compare the strategies and approaches of groups internal to unions versus groups external to unions.

At the second level of citizenship construction, which focuses specifically on efforts internal to unions, I have compared cases of unions that have different histories of women's agency within the union and different levels of support for women's labor rights from union leadership. These factors allowed me to understand the relative importance of women's activism versus leadership in the question of constructing women's labor rights.

One group of union women developed a gendered proposal for labor law reform and was involved in public discourse over the reform of the Federal Labor Law in 2002. When examining the third (state) level of citizenship construction, I examine the work this group, placing it in the context of earlier efforts of the women's movement to propose changes to labor law that would have expanded women's labor rights.

I carried out field research in Mexico City over the course of seven months in 2002-03. During his time, I collected information through a series of semi-structured interviews and personal communications with women unionists, women's movement activists, NGO workers, politicians and civil servants, and academics. I also attended the meetings of two union women's organizations and reviewed a number of primary

documents, including collective contracts, union statutes, and proposals for labor law reform.³

1.3 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The rest of this dissertation consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 2, I present my theoretical argument about the social construction of citizenship. I argue that because the labor sphere holds such important links to citizenship, and because women have historically been excluded from full participation in the labor sphere, it is crucial that union women become involved in the construction of women's labor rights as a means of helping women fully realized their citizenship. Chapters 3 and 4 provide historical background on the Mexican case. In Chapter 3, I examine the history of organized labor in Mexico from the time of the revolution, paying particular attention to the ways in which organized labor contributed to the social construction of citizenship of workers' rights in Mexico. In Chapter 4, I examine women's participation in the labor movement

³ Because this is a study of the political agency of unionized women, I do not discuss the one sector of working women that has received a lot of research attention—the women workers of the maquila (or maquiladora) industry. Established in 1965 to attract foreign investment and boost export manufacturing, the maquila sector now employs over 1.1 million workers, of whom 49 percent of whom are women (CFO 2004). Because the industry is a major employer of women, and because abuses of labor rights are so prevalent in the industry, it has become an important site of organization in support of the rights of workers and of women workers and a popular subject of literature on women workers in Mexico. On women's experiences in the maquila industry, see Tiano (1994), Tiano and Ladino (1999), and Cravey (1998). On discrimination against women in the maquila industry, see Bremer (1999), Briones (1999), and Plumtree (1999). Finally, on organizational efforts in the maquila industry, see Frundt (2002) and Juárez Nuñez (2002).

Despite the importance of the organizing that takes place in this sector, most workers in the maquila industry are not unionized or belong to so-called "white" unions, in which leadership supports management at the expense of workers' rights and does not engage in collective bargaining (Quintero Ramirez 2001). Because the goal of this study is to understand the role of *unionized* women in the construction of women's labor rights, non-unionized maquila workers are beyond the parameters of the study. This does not mean that the study of women workers' agency in the maquila industry is not important. On the contrary, I would suggest that the organization of both unionized and non-unionized women is crucial for the advancement of women's labor rights throughout all sectors of the Mexican work force, and the movement of women workers in Mexico will be stronger if both unionized and non-unionized women are collaborating.

and, beginning in the 1970s, its parallels to trends in the women's movement. Notably, by the mid-1990s, changing economic and political contexts helped union women realize the importance of becoming explicitly involved in the construction of women's labor rights. In Chapters 5-7, I analyze union women's involvement in the social construction of women's labor rights in Mexico at each of the three levels. Chapter 5 examines the strategies, successes, and challenges of groups helping to raise union women's awareness of their labor rights. Chapter 6 looks at union women who are making efforts to transform their unions into institutions that respect women's labor rights. Chapter 7 examines the role of one group of women in inserting a gendered perspective into political dialogue over labor law reform. Finally, in the concluding chapter I revisit my three-level theoretical framework in light of my empirical findings and highlight the ways that future research can refine the three-level framework as a tool for understanding the burgeoning movement that is supporting the construction of women's labor rights in Mexico.

Women, Work, and the Social Construction of Citizenship

2.0 INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING DEMOCRACY, CONSTRUCTING CITIZENSHIP

However democracy is defined, whether as a set of institutions employed in political decision making (Dahl 1971; Schmitter and Karl 1993; Przeworski 1999), a forum for political deliberation (Dryzek 2000), or a form of social organization (Roberts 1998), there are two significant points of convergence. First, democracy is inherently self-reflexive and, therefore, constantly in a process of redefinition. Second, citizens are a fundamental component of democracies.

That democracy is constantly being redefined stems from its procedural aspects: regular, competitive elections provide voters with the means of holding leaders accountable for past decisions and allow for new actors, with new policy platforms, to take part in elected decision-making positions. Moreover, protection of key civil liberties such as the freedom of expression and freedom of association allows individuals to constantly bring new ideas and new perspectives into public spheres of political discourse, where they can be debated and sometimes incorporated into public policy. Because of this self-reflexive character, democracies will continually change in order to

meet the needs of society. A democracy, however defined, is always “under construction.”

Furthermore, no democracy can exist without citizens, those individuals who claim equal membership in a democratic society and who exchange certain duties (paying taxes, adhering to the rule of law, accepting the legitimacy of elected representatives) for the right to participate in political life and to enjoy other rights and freedoms granted or protected by the state. So fundamental are citizens to democracy that Schmitter and Karl (1993) argue that only democracies can have citizens (whereas other political systems have subjects).

It is common to acknowledge that democracies are always being (re)constructed (Dryzek 2000: 28; Jelin and Hershberg 1996; Oxhorn 2001). It is less readily acknowledged that citizenship, as a democratic institution, is also constantly under construction, both in terms of the rights and obligations citizens have and in terms of who is included as a citizen and how they can participate in a democratic society. Because citizens are the actors ultimately charged with the construction of democracies, understanding how citizenship is constructed is fundamentally important to understanding the development of democracy generally, and is particularly relevant when certain groups of the population have been historically marginalized and excluded from political, social, and economic life.

As important as citizenship is to democracy, it is a difficult concept to define. At a basic level, citizenship refers to the idea of membership in a political community and the relationship of individual members to the state and each other. Historically, citizenship has been understood in two ways. In the liberal tradition of John Locke and John Stuart

Mill, citizenship has been understood as a relationship between the state and individuals that is governed by a set of rights protecting individuals from the excesses of the state and other individuals. In this tradition, citizens are understood to be the bearers of rights. Alternatively, in the republican tradition represented by the classical Greeks or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, citizenship is understood in terms of civic participation, wherein individual citizens have a duty to participate in political life in pursuit of the common good (Lister 1997).

A more recent definition incorporates both the liberal emphasis on individual rights and the republican stress on civic participation, while stressing the universality of citizenship: Sylvia Walby (1994: 391) suggests that “today, citizenship means universalistic democratic rights of social and political participation. In popular discourse it entails the full integration of all adults, regardless of their ‘race,’ ethnicity, sex, or creed.” Walby’s definition stresses the modern view that all citizens have an equal claim to the protections and freedoms afforded by basic rights, and all citizens have an equal right to participate in political processes, regardless of ascribed characteristics. What Walby’s definition does not explicitly convey is that the ideas of participation and rights are mutually reinforcing (Lister 1997). Certain rights of citizenship—for example, the right to vote or the right to associate freely—allow individual citizens to become active participants in the political process and to add their voices to political debate. Conversely, it is frequently through this participation in the political process that individuals can advocate the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship rights. It is through social struggle and participation in the political process with the end goal of affecting rights that citizenship becomes “socially constructed.”

Understanding citizenship as socially constructed makes citizenship a valuable political institution—especially for those groups in democratic or democratizing societies that historically have been disadvantaged or marginalized because of sex, race, class, or other ascribed characteristics. If citizenship is always under construction, then marginalized groups can challenge their exclusion through public struggles and discourses aimed at creating a more inclusive citizenship.

The ideas that citizenship is socially constructed and that this is beneficial to historically marginalized groups are not new. However, there is a need to develop a more precise understanding of how civil society actors representing marginalized groups engage in the social construction of citizenship within different spheres of public life. To that end, in this chapter I first explore the concept of citizenship and develop a framework for understanding how civil society engages in the social construction of citizenship at different levels of society. I then argue that the public workplace is an important social institution within which to examine the social construction framework. Finally, I develop an argument for why women have a particular stake in the social construction of citizenship and why, as a result, the workplace becomes a crucial site in women's struggle to construct a more inclusive citizenship.

2.1 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP

RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP

The roots of understanding citizenship in terms of individual rights are found in early liberal thinkers like John Locke, who argues in the *Second Treatise of Government* that men enter into governments in order to protect their natural right to life, liberty, and property (Locke 1980 [1690]: Chapter 9). However, it is to T.H. Marshall's influential

work on the development of citizenship in Great Britain that many theorists turn to understand the character and meaning of citizenship rights as we know them today.

For Marshall, whose categorization of citizenship rights forms the foundation of this dissertation, citizenship is “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community.” And he goes on to note that “all who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (1950: 28-29). If citizens are bearers of rights, it follows that citizenship is defined in part by the kinds of rights citizens hold. Marshall (1950) famously divides citizenship rights into three distinct categories—civil, political, and social. As he describes them,

The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom—liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought, and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice....By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body....By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society (1950: 10-11).

Thus, we can understand citizens as the bearers of civil, political, and social rights, although the specific rights included under each of these categories will vary in different societies and develop over time.

Notably, Marshall links the development of these categories of citizenship rights in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries to the changing nature of British social classes and the need to ensure a degree of equality between social classes as a basis for the proper functioning of the capitalist economy. For Marshall, civil rights of citizenship were those that provided the cornerstone of capitalist development, granting individuals of all classes the right to own property, conduct business transactions, and seek

employment in the occupation of their choosing (Marshall 1950: 15). Marshall argues that the ability for “each man, as part of his individual status, [to have] the power to engage as an independent unit in the [capitalist] economic struggle” was secured by the protection of the individual’s personal freedoms, the aforementioned freedoms of person, speech, thought and faith, as well as the right to justice (1950: 33-34).

The extension of civil rights of citizenship allowed citizens to participate in capitalist society regardless of social class, and Marshall argues that once this was the case, no citizen could logically be barred from formal political participation. Political rights of citizenship were subsequently extended to these “civil citizens,” granting them the right to participate in the democratic process by voting in periodic elections and/or serving as an elected official.

Finally, Marshall argues that social rights of citizenship, which secure the right to a minimum level of economic welfare as well as the right to share in the cultural heritage of society, were developed for three purposes: to minimize the inequalities arising from capitalism, to satisfy the needs of a capitalist economy, and to better prepare citizens for democratic society (1950: 25-26, Chapter 4). Access to education was the primary social right, as it helped to create a more qualified workforce and to prepare a more qualified citizenry. Marshall states:

It was increasingly recognized, as the nineteenth century wore on, that political democracy needed an educated electorate, and that scientific manufacture needed educated workers and technicians. The duty to improve and civilise oneself is therefore a social duty, and not merely a personal one, because the social health of a society depends upon the civilisation of its members (1950: 26).

Other social rights were granted subsequent to the establishment of universal public education, including access to a national health service, legal aid services, old age

pensions, and material allowances for families (which today might take the form of things like family tax credits). The aim of these social rights of citizenship was to reduce economic inequalities between citizens,⁴ but what is essential to understand about Marshall's arguments is the implication that citizenship rights were not randomly generated. Rather their development was dependent on other processes of social transformation, specifically the development of capitalism.

Marshall argues that the evolution of citizenship rights in Britain followed a specific sequence: civil rights were established first, followed by political rights and finally social rights (Marshall 1950: 14). One common challenge to Marshall—arising from scholars of developing areas and from feminist scholars—is that this sequential development of citizenship rights has not been universal. The former argue that in developing areas, social rights of citizenship have often preceded political rights, which have in turn often preceded civil rights (Oxhorn 2003; Caldeira 1996: 200). This has been very much the case in contemporary Latin America. In the non-democratic corporatist and populist regimes of Latin America, such as Mexico's post-revolutionary authoritarian regime and Peru's military dictatorship, social rights were much more advanced than political and civil rights, although often these social rights resulted from patron-client relationships between individuals and the state rather than being universally granted

⁴ Marshall's argument about the importance of education in enhancing a capitalist, democratic society is echoed in modern arguments about the importance of social rights for fostering democracy. Material inequalities that result from capitalist economies (poverty and unequal access to education are notable examples) can be serious obstacles to an individual's ability to participate in public life and, therefore, can undermine the formal political equality of democratic citizenship. As Lister argues, one necessary "justification for recognizing social rights as a legitimate expression of citizenship is that they help to promote the effective exercise of civil and political rights by groups who are disadvantaged in terms of power and resources. Without social rights, gross inequalities would undermine the equality of political and civil status inherent in the idea of citizenship" (Lister 1997: 16; see also APSA Task Force Report 2004). Theorists of developing democracies have also shown a particular concern with the importance of social rights of citizenship in order to allow marginalized groups to enter public life (see Roberts 1998).

(Jelin 1996a). During the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes that held power in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay at various times from the 1960s until 1990, all rights were reduced or restricted, particularly political and civil rights, despite adherence to the capitalist development model (O'Donnell 1979; Garretón 1989; Caldeira 1996). Moreover, as Latin American states began their transitions to democracy in the 1980s, political rights of citizenship have been accompanied by declining social rights⁵ and unenforced or underdeveloped civil rights (Oxhorn 2003; Haagh 2002).

Feminist scholars have also challenged Marshall's sequencing. In the Western, industrialized states, women often gained political rights of citizenship before full civil rights (Lister 1997: 68; Walby 1994: 384-85). In Britain, women's struggle to gain full civil rights of citizenship were part of their struggle for a general expansion of their citizenship rights. As Walby notes, British women won some civil rights⁶ before they gained the right to vote, but they gained other civil rights after they had won full political citizenship (Walby 1994: 384-85). In the US, Britain, and Canada, laws protecting women from rape (including marital rape), sexual assault, and domestic violence, which are all key aspects of Marshall's idea of "liberty of person," only began to be developed in earnest in the 1980s (Nussbaum 1999: 136-46).

This feminist critique of Marshall's sequence holds true in much of the developing world as well (Jelin 1996b). In Latin America, political rights for women have lagged behind most countries in the industrialized West. Ecuador was the first Latin

⁵ The decline in social rights that has accompanied the rise of political democracy in the region has often been regarded as a consequence of the concurrent shift to the neoliberal model of economic development (Oxhorn 1998b, 2003; Roberts 1998; Schild 2000; Weeks 1999; Haagh 2002).

⁶ These included, according to Walby, access to education, the right to own property and to terminate a marriage, the right to bodily integrity (in the form of freedom from domestic violence), broader access to professional employment, and the right to sit on juries and join the police force (Walby 1994: 385).

American country in which women won the right to vote (in 1929), while Paraguayan women were the last Latin American women to win full political rights (in 1961). Mexican women, the focus of this study, gained full political rights in 1953 (Espinosa Torres 2002: 309). But as in the industrialized West, the extension of civil rights to women has frequently lagged far behind their achievement of political rights. The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), a body within the Organization of American States, identifies a litany of areas where Latin American women's civil rights remain absent or underdeveloped to this day. Among other things, they identify the problems of sexual harassment and violence against women (violation of the liberty of person⁷), legal and social obstacles women face in accessing credit and financing and obtaining property (violations of the liberty to own property and conclude valid contracts), and legal restrictions on the type of work they can do (violations of the right to participate equally as economic agents). The CIM (1995) argues that even after women have gained full political rights,

⁷ The liberty of person, of which bodily integrity is an important element, is a civil right that has gone unprotected for many Latin American women. The absence of this civil right is manifest in many ways, from restrictions on abortion throughout the region, to other legal constructs that fail to respect women's physical persons. For example, Teresa Caldeira has identified two juridical constructs that have served to legitimate violence against women in Brazil. First, the Brazilian penal code identifies rape as a crime against custom rather than a crime against a person. The result, Caldeira argues, is that customs about proper sexual roles, and not women's personhood, are protected by the law, an illustration of "how far [Brazilian laws] are from recognizing women's integrity and rights." Second, she notes that Brazilian men can still use the "legitimate defense of honor" to justify domestic homicide (Caldeira 1996: 204-05). Both of Caldeira's examples reveal the failure of Brazilian law to respect women's liberty of person; moreover, they reveal that Brazilian law fails to ensure women's right to justice, another key component of civil rights of citizenship. The murders of young women in the cities of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico are another example of violations of women's physical persons that go unprotected by law. In these two manufacturing cities bordering the United States, approximately 370 young women have been murdered (of whom about 137 also were sexually assaulted). The failure of Mexican local and federal governments to act efficiently has prompted the mobilization of many women's organizations, who have argued that this is a clear display of the Mexican government's apathy about the rights of poor women (La Botz 2003). These examples from Brazil and Mexico show that for many Latin American women, what is at stake is not merely their civil right to take part in economic life, but more fundamentally, their civil right to live free from bodily harm.

Legal provisions that discriminate against women, mainly in civil, labor, criminal and commercial law, still persist, as do traditional concepts of the role of women that underlie those national laws or court decisions that stand in the way of the full and effective equality of women under the law, including, for example, access to loans, land ownership, or jobs for women.

The failure of Marshall's *sequencing* to hold up to such criticism does not make his *categories* of citizenship rights useless to the current project. As noted, Marshall's categories were based on the development of capitalism and reflected the ways in which the state fostered the equality of citizens, particularly their ability to participate equally in the public sphere of work and politics, by mitigating inequalities in the distribution of and access to political and material resources. Understanding the failures of Marshall's sequencing in developing areas and for women offers us a point of entry into understanding both how political, social, and economic processes have played out differently in different regions and for different groups as well as the struggles of women within these regions to construct a more inclusive citizenship. As Walby suggests, "Marshall's concept of citizenship opens the way to discuss degrees of citizenship obtained by different social groups at different times. That Marshall does not take advantage of this is no reason why we should not do so today" (1994: 381). In this vein, I develop in the following section a framework through which we can understand the process of socially constructing citizenship and the ways in which political, economic, and social variables can influence this process.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At the heart of an argument about the social construction of citizenship is the fundamental understanding that rights themselves are neither historically given nor

universally applied (Marshall 1950; Walby 1994: 384). The idea that the development of rights took place over time was clearly fundamental to Marshall, since he argued that the development of political, civil, and social rights took place in stages. But he also acknowledged that there was no standard determining what rights a society should bestow or who should be included as citizens:

All who possess the status [of citizenship] are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties should be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed. The urge forward along the path thus plotted is an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed (Marshall 1950: 28-29).

Although Marshall recognizes the developmental nature of citizenship, he does not really address the question of how this development occurs, nor does he examine the ways in which the “image of an ideal citizenship” can change over time.

More recent work, however, has focused more explicitly on the development of citizenship in terms of social struggle, specifically between actors in civil society and the state (Tilly 1995a; Jelin 1996a; Oxhorn 2003; Cook 2000). For Charles Tilly, citizenship is a continuing set of transactions to which actors—in this case citizens and the state—attach shared understandings of their rights and duties. Tilly argues that focusing on citizenship as this constant set of transactions between citizens and the state centers our attention on state-citizen interactions, and this attention to the interaction between state and society helps us to see how it is possible that “struggle and bargaining between expanding states and their subjects created citizenship where it had previously not existed” (Tilly 1995a: 7, 9). Tilly’s attention to the social struggle central to the

construction of citizenship raises the issue of who is included in this struggle and where and how it takes place.

For contemporary theorists of democracy, the public sphere is the key site of political discourse and contestation, where the diverse actors of a political community compete to influence public policy. It is through the mobilizations of the associations of civil society actors⁸ vis-à-vis each other and the state that individuals can collaborate within the public sphere to advocate the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship rights and to challenge the social, political, and economic structures that serve as barriers to the equality between citizens (Young 2002; Dryzek 2000; Oxhorn 2001, 2003; Avritzer 2002; Somers 1993; Lister 1997; Guidry and Sawyer 2003; Weyland 1996). Furthermore, it is in the public sphere where ideas about the rights and obligations of citizens (and the state) are contested and broadened. Over time, the sustained struggle on the part of civil society, and changing conceptions of rights that result from this struggle, can result in the official expansion of rights through changes to public policy and law.⁹

⁸ Civil society has been a widely debated concept in theoretical literature. I use it here to refer to the social organization of functional and territorially based groups (including, for example, labor unions, professional associations, interest groups, church groups, and community organizations) that peacefully coexist while they represent and mediate the collective interests and demands of citizens at all levels of society between the individual and the state. These groups simultaneously resist subordination to the state (that is to say, they endeavor to maintain their autonomy from the state) and demand inclusion into political life (meaning that they assert their right to represent the interests of citizens in political dialogue) (Oxhorn 1995b). Given this key role of civil society in representing the collective interests of individuals, it follows that civil society plays a key role in the public sphere, both in terms engaging in political discourse and in defining whose voices are included in this discourse. There are two common conceptions of civil society that vary from the one used here. One common definition of the phrase identifies civil society in terms of the liberal marketplace, wherein *individuals* use group membership to further their own interests. In this sense of the term, collective group identity loses any intrinsic value, and groups will be created or destroyed according to changes in the aggregate interests of individuals (see Madison 1998). A second definition of civil society emphasizes the *civility* of society, focusing on pluralist and tolerant discourse between citizens (see Gellner 1991).

⁹ Commonly cited examples of this kind of pressure from civil society are the civil rights movements in the United States during the 1960s, worldwide feminist movements, and the challenge to ending Apartheid in South Africa. A more recent example of this social pressure to expand rights of citizenship is in the movement to allow same-sex marriage. Years of activism on behalf of gay and lesbian organizations has

The capacity of civil society to engage in the public sphere in order to influence public policy derives from the political power generated through collective organization, since the political engagement of civil *associations* can bring to bear greater political pressure on the state than the disaggregated voices of *individuals*.¹⁰ So as Oxhorn argues, when groups within a society organize themselves, autonomously from other actors, to define and defend their interests within the larger political processes, they contribute to the dispersion of political power in their favor and the likelihood that their political interests will not be subsumed under the interests of other political actors (Oxhorn 2001: 4). This implies that within civil society there is an open competition between civil associations (or groups of associations) to have their interests taken into consideration by the state. This competition within the public sphere enhances a democratic regime by giving an ever expanding diversity of public voices a forum in which they can be heard and in which an ever changing set of issues are debated, with the possibility that this public contestation will influence public policy.

been changing social perceptions of the rights and protections that should be granted to homosexuals and homosexual couples, and this has been met, albeit slowly and unevenly, with changes to public policy and laws. In the US, Vermont, and Massachusetts allow gay and lesbian unions, and Connecticut is currently considering legislation to legalize these unions. In 2003, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that his Liberal party would draft legislation legalizing same-sex marriage, in response to court rulings in the provinces of Quebec, British Columbia, and Ontario, and this legislation is in process under the Paul Martin government. These changes have been legislative and judicial responses to gay and lesbian activism and demands from society. Of course, the example of same-sex marriage highlights the fact that participants in the social construction of citizenship are not always seeking to expand groups' rights. In the US, the pressure by gay rights advocates to legalize same-sex marriage has been met with an even more powerful mobilization by individuals, religious organizations, and civil associations opposed to it. Pressure from these groups led to ballot initiatives on the constitutionality of same-sex marriage in 11 states in the 2004 elections, and all 11 of the initiatives passed. That the debate on same-sex marriage is nowhere near resolved is testament to the ongoing nature of citizenship construction.

¹⁰ Dryzek argues that civil society has four ways of exercising control over the state: by changing the terms of political discourse and affecting the content of public policy; by legitimating particular forms of collective action; by establishing politically oriented deliberative fora that elicit government reaction; and by instilling fear or uncertainty in the government, through collective action, that forces the government to respond (Dryzek 2000: 101-02).

The importance of civil society's participation in the public sphere as a means of engendering democracy and enhancing democratic competition raises the issue of the inclusiveness of civil society and the public sphere. Political discourse will be richer, and political decision-making more inclusive, when civil society includes a great diversity of civil associations that are capable of translating their interests into political influence. Accordingly, Oxhorn argues, "the public sphere should be evaluated according to who is included in it (and who is not), as well as the significance of that inclusion in terms of the ability of those actors to pursue their self-defined interests" (2001: 2).

By contributing through civil society to the ongoing political dialogue within the public sphere, new social actors become engaged in the social construction of citizenship. For those sectors of a given society that are traditionally marginalized from the political process and/or whose rights of citizenship are restricted or underdeveloped, participation in the public sphere is crucial for two reasons. First, it is through the participation of marginalized groups that previously unimagined ideas about citizenship are brought into public discourse (Guidry and Sawyer 2003: 279). Second, it is through the mobilization of civil society that marginalized social groups can make demands on the state for the expansion of citizenship rights. Young echoes this idea when she states that

The self-organization of marginalized people into affinity grouping enables people to develop a language in which to voice experiences and perception that cannot be spoken in prevailing terms of political discourse... Civil society enables the emergence of public spheres in which differentiated social sectors express their experience and formulate their opinions. Perhaps even more importantly, the public sphere enables citizens to expose injustice in state and economic power and make the exercise of power more accountable. Through public discussion and agitation, moreover, citizens can and sometimes do influence the politics of the state... (2002: 155).

Since participation in the public sphere is crucial to the social construction of citizenship, especially for those groups who are traditionally excluded from the political process and who have a key stake in the expansion of citizenship, it follows that the public sphere needs to be accessible to those groups. When different political, economic, or social structures prevent groups from engaging effectively in the public sphere, political discourse is more limited, and engagement in the social construction of citizenship becomes more limited as a consequence (Oxhorn 2003).

Tilly and Oxhorn focus on the important role played by civil society, interacting with the state, in the social construction of citizenship, and this aspect of the struggle is indeed crucial to the process of constructing citizenship rights. It is important to emphasize, however, that the process of constructing citizenship goes beyond civil society's public struggle vis-à-vis the state. Elizabeth Jelin's (1996a) discussion of the social construction of citizenship in democratizing states helps clarify this point.

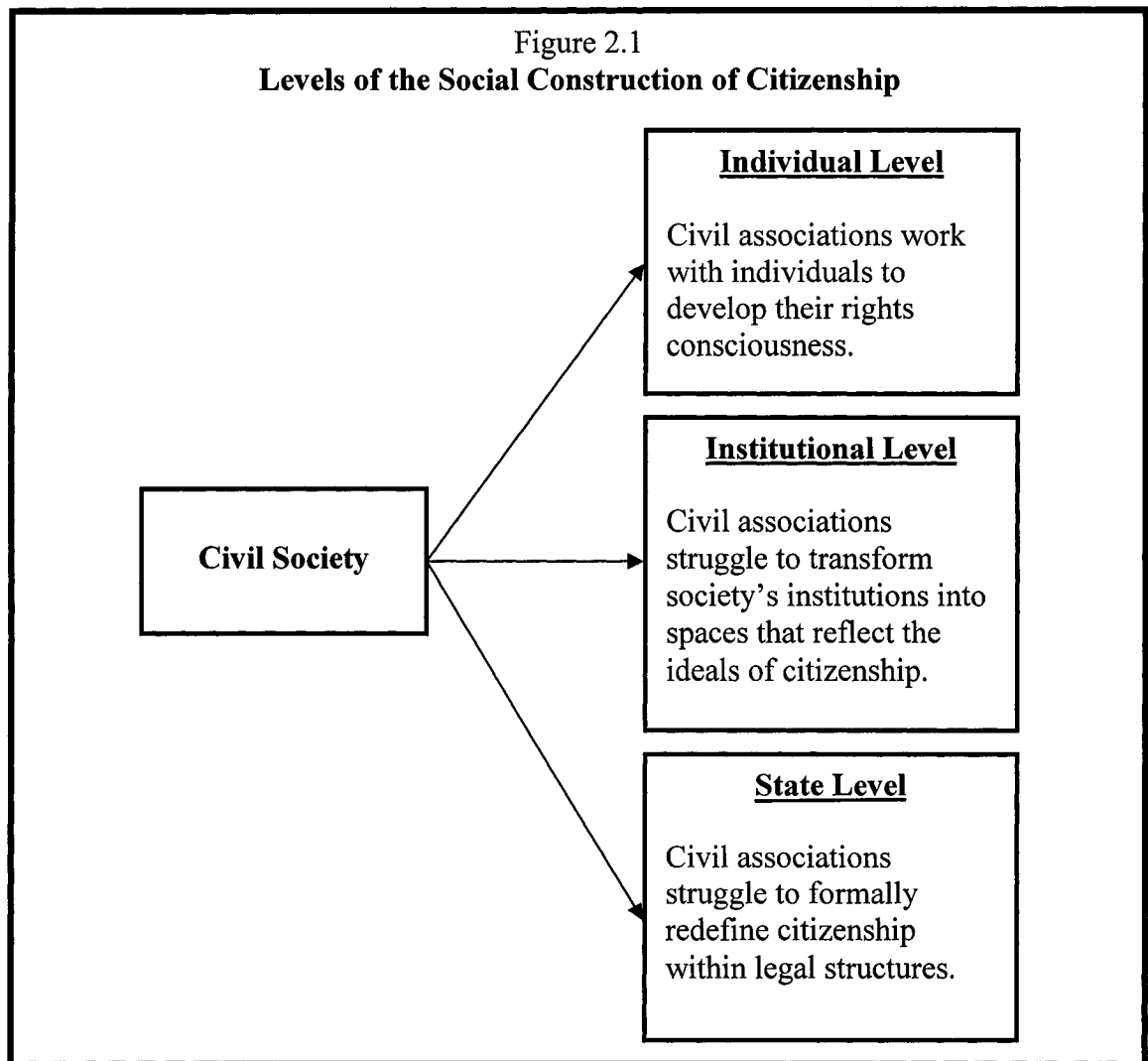
For Jelin, the social construction of citizenship refers to "the way in which formally defined 'subjects of law' actually become such—in social practices, institutional systems, and cultural representations" (Jelin 1996a: 101). Accordingly, it is not sufficient to be a legally defined citizen (i.e., a bearer of certain rights, equal before the law, and able, formally, to participate equally in public life) if formal rights of citizenship are not meaningful at all levels of society. The social construction of citizenship, therefore, must be seen as a process of creating a culture of citizenship that extends to all levels of society. Through this process, citizens learn about their rights and responsibilities. Subsequently, they contribute to the development of institutions that reflect the rights and responsibilities of citizens by monitoring these institutions and by advocating changes,

through public discourse and social struggle, when the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are not realized within them.

Like Oxfhorn and Tilly, Jelin focuses on the social construction of citizenship as taking place in the public sphere, but her attention to institutions, the process of learning about rights and responsibilities, and focus on the importance of individuals being equal subjects of the law within the public sphere suggests that the social construction of citizenship is a process that takes place at multiple levels of society. I build on Jelin and argue that the social construction of citizenship can be seen in terms of a three-level framework, in which civil associations work with individuals, with public institutions, and with the state to redefine society's ideas of what rights are, who has them, and how they are implemented in society.

First, in the process of socially constructing citizenship, civil associations engage with individuals, helping them become conscious of the rights they formally hold or should hold. This is important because if individuals have no conception of what their rights are or should be, there will be no mobilization in support of these rights. Second, civil associations engage with political, economic, and social institutions and organizations (including other civil associations) with the goal of transforming them so that they reflect and promote ideals of citizenship. As Jelin suggests, formal citizenship is not enough if the rights of citizens are ignored or infringed upon within different institutions. Finally, the social construction of citizenship is the process of formally redefining citizenship

through explicit social struggles vis-à-vis the state.¹¹ This framework is illustrated in Figure 1.



¹¹ Like Jelin (1996a) and Oxfhorn (2003), I understand “social construction of citizenship” as the bottom-up process wherein individuals pressure the state for a redefinition of what it means to be a citizen. However, “social construction of citizenship” has also been used to refer to a top-down process, wherein state-level discourses, rhetoric, stereotypes, and theories about the presumed characteristics of individuals shape policy debates and structure beliefs about how different groups of people (minorities, women, immigrants, etc.) should be included in a polity and what rights should be extended to them. For example, Dionne Benson-Smith (2002) uses “social construction” in this way to explore how stereotypes about gender and race influenced American welfare policy and how it was extended to African American women. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1993) use “social construction” similarly, in reference to the cultural characteristics of social groups and populations that influence policy making. Unlike Benson-Smith, Schneider and Ingram do not specify that social construction is a top-down process; nevertheless, their version differs from mine insofar as it does not refer to the political agency of social groups in pursuit of political goals.

Given the importance of social struggle to the social construction of citizenship, citizens' and civil associations' access to public spheres of discourse and agency regarding citizenship rights is critical. This is particularly true for those groups who are or have been excluded from citizenship and marginalized from the political process. When these groups are marginalized from access to public dialogue, gaining access to the public sphere is one important aspect of the struggle to socially construct citizenship.

Nevertheless, there are political, economic, social, and organizational variables that can shape the ability of different social groups and sectors of civil society to engage in the social construction of citizenship. These variables (and changes to them) can alter the political power of certain associations or groups, causing them to gain or lose effectiveness in translating the demands of their members into an effective mobilization in support of citizenship rights. For example, political liberalization will open up opportunities for more civil associations to become engaged in political dialogue and to pressure for political change (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). On the economic side, neoliberal reforms may shift the balance of social power toward international capital and away from organized labor (Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1997; Oxhorn 2003; Roberts 1998). In terms of social variables, attitudes regarding certain social groups, such as attitudes about women's "proper" social roles as wives and mothers, may prevent them having a full understanding of what rights they hold formally and hinder their entry into public debate. Finally, if a group is particularly effective in obtaining the resources necessary to carry out its projects, it will be more effective than groups that cannot secure regular funding. Thus, understanding how citizenship is constructed hinges to a great

degree on how certain variables shape the ability of different actors to become engaged in public struggle.

The workplace is one space within the public sphere that stands out due to its historically important role in the social construction of citizenship. In the next section, I discuss the workplace as a site of learning, of social struggle, and as a springboard into participation with civil associations struggling for workers' rights. I subsequently examine how economic transitions are reshaping the links between work and the social construction of citizenship.

2.2 THE CENTRALITY OF WORK TO CITIZENSHIP AND ITS CONSTRUCTION

Work has been associated with citizenship at least since the development of the capitalist economy. Marshall argues that one of the fundamental civil rights that developed with the rise of capitalism was the right to work, by which he meant the right to seek employment in the industry of one's choosing (Marshall 1950: 15). No free society, by Marshall's logic, could dictate to its citizens the type of work they should undertake based on their social class. But the link between work and citizenship is much more complex than the ability to seek work as a fundamental right. In welfare states (and variations on them) work is a citizen's primary link to many social rights of citizenship. Moreover, the workplace is linked to the social construction of citizenship, both as a space where individuals learn about rights and social relationships and because workers' associations and labor unions are important agents in public discourse over citizenship rights.

WORK AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP

Marshall argues that the extension of social rights of citizenship was intended to make citizens, particularly those from the working classes, better prepared to meet the needs of a domestic and capitalist society and to counteract the naturally occurring material inequalities of the capitalist economy. As capitalism evolved, the development of the welfare state in the industrialized West and of corporatist regimes in Latin America and Southern Europe, consolidated the link between participation in the paid workforce and many social rights of citizenship (Lister 1990; Walby 1994; Pascall 1997; Pateman 1989: especially Chapter 8; Portes 1985), to the extent that Walby notes,

...social citizenship usually depends upon being a worker for full access to such rights. Significant aspects of income maintenance payments by the state, pensions, and related welfare provision are provided as a result of waged employment. Those who do not make provision via employment can fall back on only very meagre levels of support (1994: 386).¹²

Full social citizenship, in terms of having, in addition to political and civil rights, access to important social welfare benefits like retirement income and health care, means that the citizen has to have participated in the work force. Dependents of the state, and even the legal dependents of workers, do not have the same “status” as rights-holders. Participation in the public sphere—in this case through the paid workforce—is therefore of paramount importance to full citizenship.¹³

¹² There is also a sense of duty attached to paid labor that reflects the link between social rights and work. Pateman powerfully illustrates this “duty” to work in her discussion of the United States, where there is a clear distinction made between social security—the social rights granted to “deserving citizens” who have paid for them with contributions over a lifetime of work—and welfare—the public “handouts” made to the non-working and therefore undeserving poor (Pateman 1989: 187).

¹³ The logical conclusion to this line of argument is that the state has an obligation to either alter its distribution of social rights so that work is not a direct link or to guarantee full employment so that no citizen is unable to access social rights as a worker. The reality suggests, however, that while full social citizenship is still directly linked to work, there is no political movement towards guaranteeing full employment.

The important link between paid labor and social rights of citizenship has not existed only in the industrialized West. Throughout much of their history, Latin American states were the main providers of social rights, although these social rights were provided mainly to those working in the formal economy, particularly to unionized workers (Portes 1985: 12-13). Therefore, in Latin America as in the developed world, participation in the workplace was one important link to citizenship for some workers because it provided direct access to social rights of citizenship.

More recently, in Latin America and elsewhere, the neoliberal economic context is altering the relationship between work and social rights of citizenship. In Latin America, resource constraints—often mandated by liberal economic reforms—have forced the state to withdraw from providing social rights at previous levels. In many cases, state resources for things like health care are targeted at certain sectors of the population, usually the very poor (Oxhorn 1998a: 205-06; Roberts 1998: 276-77). As Latin American states move increasingly toward schemes of targeted assistance (Chile and Mexico have been the frontrunners), participation in the paid labor force is crucial so that the working, middle, and upper classes can have access to social welfare benefits through their jobs or can afford them on their own. The same is true in the industrialized West, where the state is withdrawing more and more from the role of social welfare provider, particularly in areas like health care and social security/retirement pensions. Increasingly, the worker is dependent on her employer for the provision of these social rights, but the private sector can hardly be called a provider of universal rights. As the state pulls resources away from traditional social rights, they are becoming viewed more

as *benefits* than as *rights*. Nevertheless, the state still plays a role as a major provider of social rights, and paid labor remains a critical link to their provision.

WORK AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP

Beyond its direct link to citizenship through the provision of social rights, the workplace and organizations representing workers are two important social institutions that have a role in the construction of citizenship, first as social spaces where individuals learn about citizenship rights; secondly, as sites of struggles surrounding rights of workers *within* the workplace or workers' representative organizations; and finally, with regard to labor unions specifically, as civil associations historically engaged with the state over the creation, expansion, and redefinition of citizenship.

The workplace and workers' representative organizations are social institutions, and as such, the social dynamics within them will tend to reflect or even reinforce the social dynamics in society generally (ILO 2003: 99). For example, oppressive social dynamics such as sexism and racism will undoubtedly be played out in the workplace through practices such as harassment, unequal remuneration, discrimination in hiring, occupational segregation, and exclusion from leadership and executive positions because of sex and race.

Because formal citizenship is hollow unless rights and ideals of citizenship are realized at all levels of society, tackling obstacles to full citizenship necessitates taking on oppressive and discriminatory practices at the workplace and in workers' organizations. This necessitates the struggle for change on the part of workers and employers themselves. The ILO maintains that

While the State is a key actor in the fight against discrimination and the promotion of equality at work, workers and employers and their representative organizations play an equally important role. No meaningful or lasting outcomes can be attained if employers and workers do not believe in the value and necessity of equality of treatment and opportunities (ILO 2003: 99).

And indeed, because of the opportunity to become involved in work-related civil organizations, including NGOs, labor unions, professional organizations, and other workers' organizations, the workplace offers workers a chance to engage in the struggle over the realization of the ideals of citizenship (Young 2002: 159-60; Lister 1997: 139). This occurs in two ways. First, as a basic level, these organizations can raise individuals' awareness about workers' rights—an important first step in the construction of citizenship.¹⁴ Educational campaigns directed at raising awareness of sexual harassment or workplace diversity are examples of organizational efforts directed at individuals.

Second, when the efforts of workers' organizations are directed at changing the workplace or industry (such as the case of collective bargaining), the efforts can be part of an important political discourse about the citizenship rights of workers. Therefore, when workers and their representative organizations take on issues of central concern to workplace—including gender and racial equity, equal opportunities for disabled workers, workers' access to social welfare benefits, the relationship between organized labor and

¹⁴ In addition to being a site of learning about citizenship rights, the workplace and workers' organizations can provide training, skills, and networking opportunities that enable citizens to engage in other forms of political life (Lister 1997: 139). One excellent example of this is in Mexico, where union leadership has often been an important springboard into electoral politics. For example, Rosario Robles, the former President of the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD), and Elba Ester Gordillo, who ended her term of office as president of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI) in 2003 both hail from important unions in Mexico. Thus, an important reason why the workplace and workers' organizations need to reflect the inherent equality of citizens is because work can be a bridge to other life opportunities. If, as has been the case in Mexico, union leadership can be a springboard into national politics, then when union leadership is more accessible to *all* citizens, then all citizens have an opportunity to use union leadership as a springboard into other forms of political life, thereby helping to assure a diversity of input at other political levels.

capital, or any number of different issues that have an impact on work life—they are also participating in a broader discourse about important aspects of citizenship.¹⁵ Young notes that “much of the social movement work aimed at making professional workplaces more accepting of women and people of colour...has involved such associational activity within private businesses” (Young 2002: 160).¹⁶

However, it is important to note that, as social institutions, labor unions and other workers’ organizations can mirror the discriminatory practices of broader society (ILO

¹⁵ Two recent collective bargaining processes between the United Autoworkers (UAW) and the “Big Three” US automakers (Ford, General Motors, and Daimler Chrysler) are indicative of how interaction between labor unions and businesses can lead to important political discourse—even regarding issues that do not immediately seem connected to work life. In 2000 the UAW and the Big Three announced that as part of the new contract, the domestic partners of homosexual employees would be eligible for full health care benefits, a benefit that gay and lesbian employees’ organizations had been lobbying for for years. For the automakers, the interest in accepting the UAW’s proposal to extend health care benefits was to enhance recruiting, but at the same time the measure was intended to signal that the automakers embrace a diverse and inclusive workforce. The measure sparked disapproval on the part of some organizations, like the Catholic church, but in the end the companies felt that it was an important business strategy that reflected the ever changing world of work and notions of family (Phillips and Truby 2000). In the 2003 negotiations, the UAW sought to extend health benefits in order to cover elective abortions. Once this news reached the rank-and-file autoworkers, they began organizing petition drives to have the union abandon the proposal. This movement on the part of autoworkers reflected not only the conservative nature of many autoworkers, but also concerns over the political stance of the union and how the traditionally liberal nature of the UAW might conflict with efforts to expand union membership in the largely conservative southern US. In the end, the UAW dropped the abortion coverage proposal (Webster 2003). Both of these examples reveal how the workplace can be the site of participation and discourse about broad social issues and how discourse about social issues can result, at times, in concrete changes in work policy.

¹⁶ This is not to say that the state does not have a strong role to play in advocating changes in the workplace that would lead to greater equality or social justice. The state is an important actor in this regard, and ultimately, it is only through the state that changes in the workplace and in the rights of workers can become universal and legally enforceable. For an excellent discussion of the unique capacities of the state (as compared to civil society) in the pursuit of social justice, see Young (2002: Chapter 5; 1999). However civil society (here in the form of work-based organizations) still has a major role in the pursuit of political changes regarding the workplace. First, the state does not always act on the needs/demands of workers. As I will develop in the empirical sections of this work, there may be a lack of awareness, political obstacles, or even resistance on the part of the state to making legislative efforts that address workplace inequalities. This makes worker/civil society activism crucial to the process of bringing the concerns of workers to the attention of the state and broader society. Secondly, and closely related to the first point, workplace policy may be far more progressive than what the state would be willing to consider pursuing in legislation. As shown by the example of the UAW/automakers’ decision to extend health benefits to domestic partners of homosexual employees, there may be sound business decisions behind politically charged workplace policies that are too difficult for the state to take on. Though it can never fully substitute for state action, civil society can help to set precedent so that other actors, including the state, will recognize the salience of particular policies. Moreover, civil associations are helping their members realize certain ideals citizenship at an institutional level.

2003: 99). When the organizations supposedly representing the rights of workers are themselves discriminatory, they can be obstacles to positive change for those members who are discriminated against within the organization. In such cases, labor unions and other workers' organizations can be the targets of political struggle, as actors from the state and other civil society organizations alike struggle to end oppressive and discriminatory practices within them. The struggles to change these organizations are an important part of the more widespread process of socially constructing citizenship. For example, like many other social and political institutions in the United States through the mid-1980s, labor unions were characterized by racial segregation. From 1964 to 1985, bolstered by the broader civil rights project, unions became a major target of class action lawsuits and judicial activism, and federal courts imposed significant financial penalties on unions that did not comply with orders to integrate. This legal action resulted in a dramatic increase in the percentage of minority workers in some of the major unions in the US, as the unions finally began to reflect the ideals of citizenship reflected in US law (Frymer 2003).

In terms of constructing citizenship, workplace struggle as discussed so far is important for two reasons. First, mobilization by civil associations against discriminatory practices can help raise the awareness of individual workers about their rights as workers and citizens. Second, workplace struggle can help to create a socioeconomic institution where the rights of citizens are realized.

ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP: AN HISTORIC OVERVIEW

As noted, work also has an important role in the social construction of citizenship because it opens the door to participation in labor unions. Because unions have had an historically important role in social struggles supporting political, civil, and social rights of citizenship, this is among the most important links between work and citizenship.

A review of recent literature on organized labor suggests that it is linked to the social construction of citizenship in three ways. First, workers' struggles have been crucial to the extension of civil and political rights of citizenship. Tilly argues that as a result of state building and the consolidation of capitalism in nineteenth century Europe, states began to intervene much more directly into the lives of their subjects. One major consequence of this intervention was the generation of new forms of resistance and struggle between society and the state/capital. Workers were at the forefront of this social struggle, and beginning in the 1850, workers' collective action across Europe won them an array of rights, including but not limited to the right to organize, to strike, and to seek political representation (Tilly 1995b: 8-10).

Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John Stephens suggest that this historic role also applied to organized labor in Latin America. They argue that in capitalist states, including those in Latin America, organized labor is among the social classes most supportive of democratic government and that a strong working class has been a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of democratic consolidation. According to Rueschemeyer et al., as the capitalist economy develops, the industrial working class is strengthened at the expense of the historically powerful agrarian and landowning classes. Because the working class is traditionally excluded from positions of

political power and kept under a watchful eye from the political elite, this shift in the domestic balance of power creates an opportunity for organized labor to demand greater political inclusion (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 59-60).

In Latin America, organized labor implicitly, if not explicitly, supported the restitution, expansion, or consolidation of political and civil rights of citizenship by supporting democracy and democratic transitions in the 1970s-1990s. For example, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter argue that given its size and organizational capacity, coupled with discontent arising from having labor's rights manipulated and curtailed under authoritarian rule, organized labor would often be at the forefront of a civil society's movement against the regime (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 52-53). Ruth Berins Collier extends this argument, claiming that in addition to playing a significant role in the political opposition to authoritarian regimes, there are cases where organized labor actually forced the transition.¹⁷ In these cases, she argues, the unrelenting and escalating labor protests against the incumbent authoritarian regimes challenged the regimes' ability to maintain social order and undermined internal regime cohesion vis-à-vis this social disorder. In doing so, labor protest forced the regimes to embark on a process of democratization (Collier 1999: 112-32).¹⁸

¹⁷ These are the cases of Spain (1977), Peru (1980), and Argentina (1983).

¹⁸ Of course, labor unions are not universally pro-democratic. Different economic and political contexts can affect the level of union support for democracy. Eva Bellin (2000; 2002) argues that some studies of democratization attributing a particularly pro-democratic character to labor neglect both the complexities of the demands of organized labor and its relationship with the state. Unlike O'Donnell and Schmitter and Rueschemeyer et al., she argues that workers are "contingent democrats" and can be for or against political democratization depending on whether organized labor gains or loses significantly from corporatist state-labor structures and suppressive political environments. Where such corporatist structures exist, organized labor can gain political inclusion in the ruling coalition and social rights of citizenship in exchange for support for the regime, and these benefits may be jeopardized by political liberalization or democratization. While this may be true, even in non-democratic and corporatist state-labor contexts, democratic unions exist within the labor movement, and these have challenged the non-democratic movement, although with varying degrees of success. This is certainly the case in Mexico, one of the countries Bellin (2000) cites as

Even in corporatist, non-democratic contexts common in Latin America, organized labor has been among the most important actors involved in political struggles for expanding social rights of citizenship (Collier 1992; Zapata 1998; Middlebrook 1995; Cameron 1994; Keck 1992). In these corporatist regimes, the state seeks to establish political stability by integrating important sociopolitical actors, such as organized labor, into the political apparatus. The corporatist state will institutionalize the process of labor relations, becoming the mediator of labor-management conflicts and intervening in collective contract negotiations. In these regimes, the state restricts labor's autonomy and certain civil rights of citizenship, notably the freedom of association and the right to strike; however, labor gains political influence and the capacity to negotiate better wages, working conditions, and social welfare policies, including rights to such things as education, housing subsidies, health care, and retirement benefits (see Schmitter 1974: 99-105). As Collier (1992: 12) notes regarding the corporatist exchange,

In order to mobilize support successfully, an exchange was necessary in which real concessions were offered for the support sought, for...the popular sector leaders were not so passive nor so easily duped that they would collaborate without extracting some benefits.

It is also important to highlight that because the corporatist state relies on the political support of organized labor to maintain political stability, it cannot afford to be overly repressive. Consequently, labor will have a prominent place in the negotiation of public policy, thus an important role to play in the construction of social rights of citizenship, and ultimately, a voice in the structure of the political system itself. As Francisco Zapata states with regard to Mexico,

having a non-democratic labor movement. Overall, as demonstrated above, labor has been a key actor in promoting citizenship rights through democracy. Moreover, as I discuss further on, labor has played an important role in promoting citizenship rights in non-democratic contexts as well.

Corporatism represents a form of citizenship development in which the political system is subordinated to the link between the state and the [ruling party]. In spite of the control that corporatism exercises over unions, the fundamental fact remains that there are workers and organizations at the base of this structure. If contradictions appear in the control that corporatist structures exercise over these organizations and their control over individuals, including their behavior in elections, it is possible that corporatism could begin to experience serious tensions threatening its survival (1998: 165-66).

Thus, we can argue that even when corporatism restricts labor's autonomy and ability to mobilize, its political power as part of the ruling coalition can still play an important role in the construction of social rights of citizenship in addition to its potentially constructive role in the development of political, civil, and economic rights of citizenship.

Finally, labor movements help open spaces and expand the limits of discourse and contestation within the public sphere. In doing so they often incorporate other marginalized sectors, whose participation and struggle within the public sphere is an important condition of the social construction of citizenship. Collier argues that labor mobilization during recent democratic transitions opened space for pro-democratic contestation. In some cases, labor mobilization thwarted elite efforts to exclude actors from the political left from transition negotiations;¹⁹ in others, labor organizations or affiliated parties were able to enter directly into transition negotiations²⁰ (Collier 1999: Chapter 4). Regardless of the method, labor was able to ensure that alternative voices were heard in these transition periods.

Labor's support for civil, political, and social rights of citizenship and ability to expand political discourse and represent the voices of other marginalized actors makes

¹⁹ Collier cites the cases of Spain (1977), Uruguay (1985), and Chile (1990) as examples of labor mobilization helping to insure the inclusion of leftist political actors in transition politics.

²⁰ For example, Argentina (1983) and Brazil (1985).

labor's participation in the social construction of citizenship relevant beyond periods of democratic transition. For example, Kenneth Roberts argues that in Latin America, as in Europe, organized labor is a necessary condition for the emergence and resilience of a strong political Left and pressure for social democracy. Labor, he argues, is at the core of the broad political and social networks central to the Left and uses its size, structure, and capacity for collective action and social outreach not only to push for demands but also to incorporate other actors into leftist politics (Roberts 1998: 63-64).²¹

Organized labor's importance as a political actor generally, and in the social construction of citizenship specifically, derives from the fact that it has a greater capacity for political mobilization than most other actors in civil society. Workers are members of more or less permanently established unions that can relatively quickly and efficiently organize strikes, protests, and other demonstrations. Moreover, the workers themselves tend to have a common set of interests around which they can build a common identity. Finally, from a political standpoint, workers' strikes have the ability to disrupt the economy, and so workers and their unions must be taken rather seriously as political actors (Valenzuela 1989: 447). Because of labor's political and economic power resources, governments have historically curtailed labor rights and have answered labor

²¹ The role of organized labor in the Brazilian transition is perhaps the clearest example in Latin America of labor mobilization encompassing other (marginalized) actors within civil society. During the period of democratic opening, the massive strike mobilizations beginning with the autoworkers' strike in 1977 took on a national character and, according to Margaret Keck, represented "a massive demonstration of unrest within civil society in Brazil. At the grassroots level they helped to generate mass support for the opposition from various kinds of social movements" (Keck 1989: 266). The *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party—PT) is another example of organized labor taking on the interests of other Brazilian actors. When the PT was founded by Luís Ignacio "Lula" da Silva in 1979, the intention was to create a party that would represent the interests of workers *and* other marginalized actors. In this way, the PT came to take on issues of concern to women, racial minorities, and gays and lesbians (Keck 1992: 15; 1989: 62). The PT has remained a significant political actor in Brazil, and in 2002 Lula soundly won the presidential election.

mobilization with cooptation and repression, giving labor an incentive to mobilize in support for rights of citizenship.

A growing body of literature suggests that the global shift to neoliberal models of economic development has severely weakened labor's organizing power and, consequently, its ability to engage in the social construction of citizenship. There are two primary reasons for this. First, economic processes associated with neoliberalism, such as privatization of state enterprises and implementation of flexible employment policies, have reduced employment in the formal, unionized sectors of the economy. Increasingly, workers are employed on a temporary, contract, or part-time basis, or they are forced into the informal sector as a result of unemployment.²² Given that labor's political weight and power to influence policy stems from its ability to mobilize a relatively large number of workers, the decline of the unionized workforce represents a serious blow to the mobilization capacity of organized labor (Weeks 1999; Roberts 1998: 65-66; Cook 1999: 240; Tilly 1995b: 19).²³ One important consequence of the decline in labor's mobilization capacity is that it may become reduced to the status of a special interest group, struggling to defend narrow economic interests at the firm level, thereby losing its former capacity to mobilize vis-à-vis the state on behalf of other social groups as the core of a broader political movement (Roberts 1998: 66-67; Cook 1999: 240).

²² This has been particularly true in Latin America, where there has been a major shift to economic liberalization since the beginning of the 1980s. Since the economic transition began in the region, jobs in the public sector have dropped from representing 15.7 to 13% of all formal sector employment. At the same time, the informal sector, which is notoriously difficult to organize, has grown from encompassing 40.2% to 48.5% of the economically active population (EAP), representing approximately eight of every 10 new jobs (Tokman 2002: 161-62).

²³ The unionized workforce in Latin America has dramatically declined since the 1980s. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the percentage of workers belonging to unions fell from 48 percent to 25 percent in Argentina, 38 to 16 percent in Uruguay, 25 to 14 percent in Venezuela, 23 to 12 percent in Costa Rica, and 22 to 18 percent in Brazil. Only Chile saw an increase—from 11 to 15 percent (Smith 2005: 241).

Second, neoliberal economic reform results in a shift in the social balance of power away from organized labor and toward some sectors of capital, especially international capital. Organized labor's important role in the social construction of citizenship derives from its ability to engage with the state in debates or struggles over citizenship rights, but the neoliberal economic agenda requires states to cede much economic decision making power to powerful economic actors. International capital's more dominant economic position, combined with the threat of capital flight, puts both governments and workers in a position to have to make concessions to business interests (Huber et al. 1997: 335-36). One form these concessions are likely to take is in the deregulation or restructuring of labor law, which further reduces the power of unions to act. But labor's inability to act is also linked to the changing role of the state in the economy. Cook notes with respect to Latin America that this is partly due to the fact that the state, with a reduced role in economic decision making, is no longer a principal target of union action, and so unions must increasingly target individual firms (Cook 1999: 241). Moreover, Tilly argues with respect to the European Union that

As the scale of economic action rises and the free flow of resources...accelerates, the capacity of individual states to intervene on behalf of labor, the utility of any such intervention, and the power of organized labor relative to international capital all decline. Since rights depend on enforceability, all state-based rights decline. That emphatically includes the rights of workers (Tilly 1995b: 19).

By shifting the balance of economic power in society towards some sectors of capital and away from labor, neoliberal economic reform further weakens organized labor's capability to mobilize on behalf of citizenship rights. For Huber et al., "a weaker power base and lower participation on the part of those who stand to benefit from redistributive reforms...have left the winners of neoliberalism with no effective political adversaries

capable of pushing through social democratic policies,” which, they say, correspond to social rights of citizenship (1997: 338).²⁴ Clearly, organized labor has an important role to play in the social construction of citizenship rights—a role that has weakened as a result of policies of economic liberalization.

2.3 WOMEN, WORK, AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP

Independently of the strength of organized labor and its role in the social construction of citizenship in general, it is important to consider these arguments from a gendered perspective. Tilly’s discussion of the link between workers and citizenship, like most analyses of organized labor, treats workers as gender neutral, but a gender neutral analysis overlooks the ways in which the construction *women’s* rights of citizenship have *not* been addressed through traditional worker struggles. This raises a fundamental question: If unions are so important for citizenship construction, what are the consequences for the social construction of *women* worker’s citizenship rights when unions ignore or are resistant to them?

As I will discuss, throughout history, women have been excluded from full citizenship because of various arguments about their proper social role, their morality, and their unsuitability for work and public life. These same understandings led unions to

²⁴ Not everyone has such grim ideas about the fate of organized labor in the era of neoliberalism and globalization. In her analysis of global labor movements since 1870, for example, Beverly Silver argues that we are not witnessing a “race to the bottom,” wherein capital mobility and competition from Third World workers leads to the weakening of labor power and the steady and dramatic decline in workers’ wages, benefits, bargaining power, and rights. Rather, she argues that we are witnessing shifts in labor movement trends. Globalization is not leading to an overall decline in workers’ bargaining power; it is simply changing the geographical location of the centers of labor power as production shifts from the industrialized world to the developing world. Moreover, we are seeing shifts in the dominant industries in the labor movement—workers in automobile industry are losing labor power, but workers in emerging industries are gaining strength (Silver 2003). While Silver’s analysis is intriguing, it is overly optimistic given the relative impotence organized labor has displayed vis-à-vis international capital since (neo)liberal economics became fashionable.

exclude women from membership and, at times, to actively promote legislation that would exclude women from broader participation in public life.

This is where the argument about participation in the social construction of citizenship becomes relevant, particularly for historically marginalized groups like women. Citizenship is always being socially constructed. If women's rights have not been fully realized, it is because women have been absent from the process and/or because the more powerful participants in the social construction process have either neglected women's rights or actively sought to repress them. It follows that when there are few other advocates for women's rights, it falls on women themselves to be active in the struggle to create, expand, or redefine women's citizenship. Because work is so central to citizenship, women have a crucial stake in gaining equal opportunities within the workplace and workers' organizations, despite historical experiences of exclusion from both work and labor unions. In fact, in women's quest for citizenship generally, the workplace and workers' organizations become important sites of struggle. In this section, I discuss the ways in which women have been excluded from citizenship. I go on to show why the workplace thus becomes important in women's struggle for citizenship and why women workers are important agents in this struggle.

WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM FULL CITIZENSHIP

Women's need to become involved in the social construction of citizenship derives from the fact that women's ability to participate as political agents in public life has been constrained. Carole Pateman argues that democratic public life has been founded on the basis of a sexual contract, in which men, viewed historically as the only sex naturally suited for public life, have been able to exercise political power over

women. This political control has served to exclude women from public life (politics, work, civil society, education) and has led to the gendered nature of citizenship,²⁵ wherein a citizen was conceived as a male head of household who could freely participate in public spheres of work, politics, and civil society. The citizen's public activities were facilitated by the unpaid labor of a woman, who remained in the domestic sphere tending to the needs of her husband and family (Pateman 1988).²⁶

Even as the public sphere has become more open to women, throughout the world they have remained the centers of the domestic sphere and continue to provide the greatest share of child care and household labor (Benería 2003: 146-48). The time commitment required for taking care of domestic responsibilities has made it difficult for women to enter into public life (Lister 1990, 1997, 2000; Phillips 1991: 44-46; Walby 1994). As Lister argues,

The question of time is a crucial one. Implicit in the notion of active citizenship is an assumption about time: that people have time to be active citizens, be it as good neighbours or volunteers or as active participants in the political life of the community. This assumption is rarely made explicit. Once it is, it raises important questions about the distribution of time between men and women.... Whether trapped in the home full time

²⁵ Women's exclusion from public life has historically taken many forms, including restrictions on suffrage and running for office, the inability to enter into legal contracts, the need for a husband's permission to enter into the workforce or forced retirement upon marriage, prohibitions from attending university or from practicing a profession, etc.

²⁶ Although many liberal theorists distinguish between "public" and "private" spheres, I prefer to refer to the "public" and "domestic" spheres. The meaning of the public sphere has already been discussed. By domestic sphere I mean the household and corresponding activities of family and child care. The domestic sphere, as feminists have long noted, is a site of power differentials between men and women (and adults and children) and is a space where the state has a legitimate claim to partial interference and regulation. It is therefore not politically irrelevant or free from political intervention (the original liberal interpretation of the private sphere). I would argue that there is such a thing as a private sphere, but it refers to the autonomous sphere of the individual, wherein she can make choices or represent herself according to her conception of the good life, particularly with respect to issues that truly should remain private from state or social interference, such as sexual orientation, the decision to have children or not, or the kind of employment to undertake. This understanding of "private" has been heavily influenced by Drucilla Cornell's concept of the "sexuate being" (see Cornell 1998). For an excellent feminist critique of the public-private distinction see Pateman (1989: Chapter 6).

or exhausted by the double shift, women's caring and domestic responsibilities in the private sphere make it very difficult for many of them to participate as citizens in the public sphere (Lister 1990: 456-57).

Women's responsibilities in and association with the domestic sphere have not meant that they do not participate in public life, only that when they do, they have engaged "asymmetrically," that is, in less politically and economically influential or powerful ways than men. This is true in all areas of the public sphere, including the government, civil society, and the workplace. For example, throughout the world, women participate in democratic governments as elected representatives at far lower levels than men, and they are far less likely to lead political parties or to hold high level cabinet/ministry positions. Frequently, women who do hold cabinet-level positions head up "soft" departments, such as health, social services, or official women's offices, rather than those involving the economy, defense, or foreign affairs (Waylen 1994; Smith 2005: 249-53).

Women's participation in the workforce is perhaps a more telling example of how they participate in the public sphere asymmetrically from men. Women's participation in the workforce is increasing throughout the world; however, they enter the workforce at a disadvantage. Women frequently are faced with occupational segregation, a phenomenon that finds women clustered together in certain "feminine" sectors of the economy characterized by lower incomes, greater job instability, and reduced career potential (Jelin 1996b; Cooper and Guzmán 2000). Finally, they are more likely to work in part time jobs with low levels of unionization and minimal access to social rights that are associated with full time employment (Cook 2000; Schild 2000; Galvez and Todaro 1990; De Avelar 1998).

Women's asymmetric access to employment is linked to the fact that their status as workers is viewed differently by society at large and within work institutions. "A 'worker,'" Pateman notes, "is a husband, a man who supports/protects his wife, an economic dependent" (1988: 136-37). And so the understanding of women's status as workers is often shaped by women's traditional responsibility in the domestic sphere (Pateman 1989: 4). For example, in discussing the impact of economic restructuring on women in the Caribbean, Helen Safa (1995a) has argued that despite the large number of Caribbean women who have become heads of household and primary wage earners, the norm of the male breadwinner is so prevalent through the region that women's incomes have continued to be viewed as supplementary.

In Latin America, labor laws historically institutionalized this view that women are mothers first, and that when they are workers, are supplementary workers in need of special protections from the state (Safa 1995a: 46). Since the early twentieth century, the goal of labor legislation has been to paternalistically protect women, for example by preventing them from performing heavy work, from working at night, or from performing unhealthy tasks. Jelin argues that these protective measures have been costly to women: Given the more limited tasks women are allowed to perform and the added costs of protecting them, hiring women can be perceived as more expensive to employers.²⁷ This increases employers' incentive to discriminate against women when hiring, thereby reducing women's opportunities to seek stable, possibly unionized, employment (Jelin

²⁷ According to a recent report from the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the non-wage costs of hiring women workers are on average less than 1% more than the non-wage costs of hiring men. Moreover, the fact that women earn less than men on average compensates for their added non-wage costs. Ultimately, the idea that women cost more to employ is more myth than reality, yet it is a pervasive myth among employers in Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2004: 44).

1996b). The treatment of women as supplementary earners in need of special protections results in women entering the work force without the same status as political and economic agents that men have.

Yet even the protective nature of labor legislation often fails to protect women's basic rights as workers, such as freedom from sexual harassment and workplace violence. Sexual harassment is prohibited in many countries, but it continues to be a significant and unlegislated problem for women in many regions, including Latin America. Sexual harassment can serve to undermine women's position within the workplace, hinder their advancement, and prevent them from moving and acting freely, securely, and confidently in the workplace and other public spheres (as well as in the home). Ultimately, the burden of harassment can deny women equal opportunities to participate in the workplace, thus jeopardizing their equality as citizens and capabilities as public agents (Jelin 1996b; Lister 1997; González Nicolás 2002).

The workplace is an important site for discourse within the public sphere about the needs and rights of workers—women as well as men—but women's asymmetrical relationship to work makes it more difficult for women to engage in ways that could help eliminate such asymmetries. Often, Phillips argues, women have a “more broken and distanced relationship to their place of work” because they take time off when they have children, often return to work on a part time basis, and invariably find themselves struggling with the demands of paid and unpaid (domestic) labor (Phillips 1991: 45).²⁸

²⁸ It is important to stress that not all women are able to take time off from work during their child bearing years or to work on a part time basis. Many have pointed out that lower- and working class women (who in many societies are also racial and ethnic minorities) have always had to work (Cornell 1998; Crenshaw 1998; Engels 1972 [1884]; Collins 2004). Moreover, in some societies, such as in the Caribbean region,

Women's "broken" and flexible relationship with the workplace constrains their ability to participate in work-based representative organizations like labor unions (Lister 1997; Phillips 1991; Galvez and Todaro 1990).²⁹ Phillips notes that,

Every study of women's involvement in trade unions ends with necessary if monotonous regularity by recommending that union meetings should be held in work hours, for women need their lunch breaks to do the shopping and often have to dash off after work to collect the children and make the tea (1991: 97).

Thus women's family responsibilities limit their ability to participate in union (and other organizational) activities when these activities take place outside of work hours. Lister echoes this, claiming that although men tend to work longer hours on average, they are not burdened to the same degree as women with domestic care giving responsibilities, giving them greater flexibility in their off hours to participate in union activities. Moreover, she says, by working longer hours in the paid workforce, men have more opportunities to take part in political activities and committees at work (Lister 1997: 137). Women's ability to participate in important work-based organizations—and in the case of labor unions, organizations that have tremendous potential to affect work life—is asymmetric from men's, in many instances reflecting their historically central role in the domestic sphere.³⁰

women increasingly are heads of household, with the responsibility of providing for their families' material needs (Safa 1995b).

²⁹ I will discuss this in more detail with regard to the Mexican case in later chapters.

³⁰ Walby argues that the causal relationship between women's subordinate position in the paid workforce and their role in the domestic sphere is the opposite of what I have suggested here. She claims that women have always worked, so to understand why we find women's paid work life constrained and why women are often the primary domestic laborers, we need to look to the patriarchal structures that condition their employment and drive them out of the paid workforce. In fact, it is these patriarchal social relations and structures of the state and the workplace that exclude women from participation in these spheres and force them "back" into the role of domestic laborer rather than the role of domestic laborer that limits women's participation in the paid workforce. (Walby 1986: Chapter 3). This argument, which is similar to Pateman's (1988) is compelling, and may in fact be the historical explanation for women's primary responsibility for domestic labor. Even so, the fact remains that at present women's domestic labor *does* prevent their

But women's ability to participate in work-based organizations like unions is also linked to unions' historic exclusion of women from membership. As unions developed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in Europe and in Latin America, many unions simply denied women membership. In many industries, women organized in their own unions, but as women began to be allowed membership in "men's" unions and as women's unions were merged into men's unions, women rarely were represented in leadership positions. Often, the interests of women workers were represented by a single office or officer in charge of women's issues, but these were rarely powerful. Beyond excluding women explicitly, in Europe, the US, and Latin America, unions have actively lobbied for laws that restricted women's participation in the highly paid, skilled trades and promoted legislation, such as the family wage, that forced women out of the workforce and back into the domestic sphere (Walby 1986; Hartmann 1997: 104-08; Porter 2003; see also Mohanty 2003: 143). The upshot is that although unions have played a crucial role in the social construction of citizenship, and although women have long been active unionists, labor unions have not played the same political role for women as for men and, consequently, women workers have not had the same capacity for collective organization or influence in the construction of citizenship as working men (Walby 1986; Jelin 1990a: 193-94).

Given the problems women have historically had accessing the state and the workplace, civil society has often been an attractive alternative for women's participation in public life and political discourse (Phillips 1999; Stephen 1997; Molyneux 2000). Theoretically, the very nature of civil society lends itself to women's participation

participation in the paid labor force, in unions, and in other public activities, and this has consequences on their ability to participate in the social construction of citizenship.

because a vibrant civil society is open to an unlimited number of associations representing an unlimited number of views, both traditional and progressive. Women pushing for progressive change can find a space in civil society that does not necessarily exist in the rigid structure of the state. Practically, the informal politics of civil society offer a level of flexibility more adaptable to women's domestic responsibilities—and that even can allow women to incorporate their domestic role into public/political activity. Consider, for example, how in Latin America during the debt crisis in the 1980s, many women began their political lives by participating in community kitchens. Their goal of providing for their families' material needs was transformed into organizing against local governments to demand better public services. Or consider the case of women's organizations such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Madres de Plaza de Mayo) in Argentina, a group of women who protested the authoritarian regime's violence against their family members. These women organized based on their identities as mothers and wives, and because these identities are revered in Argentine society, they offered the women protection from state violence and allowed the group to make one of the most effective and publicized campaigns against the regime (Waylen 1994; Molyneux 2000; Stephen 1997; Navarro 2001).

However accommodating of women's participation civil society can be, it is essential to note that civil society itself is not egalitarian or democratic, and this may result in women having an asymmetric relationship to civil society as well. Civil associations may offer women more flexibility than is typical of other spheres, but because these associations reflect the choices of their members and existing distribution of resources within society (time, money, information, respect), they are not *necessarily*

more accommodating of women or their needs. Labor unions are a prime example of important actors within civil society that have historically been unaccommodating of women. Furthermore, women are often underrepresented in the leadership of local organizations, even when they make up the greater share of an organizations' membership (Stephen 1997). So while civil society holds opportunities to get involved in the public sphere, women may still have an asymmetric relationship to this type of public participation compared to men because the nature of social organizations are not *necessarily* accommodating of women, and because of women's other time commitments. In short, women's ability to participate as citizens in the important public spaces of government, work, and civil society has been and continues to be constrained, just as women's access to rights of citizenship has been and continues to be.

Women's exclusion from the public spaces where citizenship discourses take place and their presumed dependency on men have been significant factors explaining why women rights of citizenship have lagged behind men's. Women's exclusion from political rights reflected the same ideas about women's nature and their proper place in the domestic sphere. As Phillips notes, anti-suffragists in Britain repeatedly argued that "women had no need of a voice of their own, for they had fathers and husbands to speak for their interests and it made no sense to think of women apart" (Phillips 1991: 25). In Latin America, anti-suffragists argued on similar grounds that women's domestic sensibilities, passionate nature, ignorance, and their role in the household (as opposed to on the battlefield) left them unsuited for political judgment and participation (Molyneux 2000: 131-32) Throughout the region, full political suffrage was granted for most women only starting in the mid-twentieth century.

Women's dependence on men also served to exclude them from civil rights of citizenship. Well into the nineteenth century in Great Britain and the United States, women became non-persons after marriage and could not hold property, enter into contracts, or go to court on their own behalf. Nor did they have rights against their husbands (including the right to refuse sexual intercourse) or claims to child custody, rights that still have been evolving well into the twentieth century (Lister 1997: 67; Phillips 1991: 25). Women's lagging civil rights in developing countries have also reflected their dependence on men. Mala Htun (2003) describes how in Brazil and Chile, women's legal personhood became subordinated upon marriage. Until 1977 in Brazil, married women needed their husband's permission to work outside the home, obtain a passport and travel outside the country, enter into contracts, accept or refuse inheritances, and buy or sell goods. Chilean law gave husbands control over the person and property of their wives until 1989.

Finally, women's social rights have been often mediated through men. Since many social rights in welfare states are granted to the worker, women who stay at home are not themselves bearers of these rights. Rather, they are dependents of actual rights-bearers. For Lister, this status of dependent is equivalent to a state of non-citizenship: "if married and cohabitating women are to enjoy these economic and social rights of citizenship to the full, it is not good enough that they come to them second hand, mediated by their male partners, so that, in practice, they cease to be rights at all" (1990: 460). In Latin America, the enforcement of social rights takes on a patriarchal character. Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution states that "general minimum salaries should be sufficient to satisfy the normal necessities—material, social, and cultural—of the head of

the family and the provision of obligatory education for children” (quoted in PRD 2003: 33). The concern here is with the ability of the head of the family to provide for his dependents through his wage. Because the head of the family is typically understood to be a man, female heads of household are not recognized. While this reflects a social bias rather than the letter of the law, the failure of the Mexican government to enforce gender equity in the workplace leaves women, as “supplementary” wage earners, open to discriminatory practices, such as unequal remuneration, that have negative consequences for the material, social, and cultural needs of women and their families. In such cases, women’s formal rights as citizens are simply not protected by the state because of well entrenched, gendered social views.³¹

Even now that women increasingly hold formally equal citizenship status throughout most of the democratic world,³² there is a difference between formally holding equal rights and having, in Maxine Molyneux’s terms, “really existing citizenship.” Implicit in the distinction is the idea that many structural factors—including lack of time, poverty, segregation, discrimination, and stereotypes—can prevent formally existing rights from being exercised in practice (Molyneux 2000: 122; see also Jelin 1990a: 193).³³ Lister makes a powerful argument, for example, that poverty and gender

³¹ In Mexico, as in Latin American generally, most new job growth since the 1980s has taken place in the informal economy where workers do not have access to labor protections or social welfare guarantees (Tokman 2002). Exclusion from minimum wage guarantees is not simply a problem for Mexican women; however, the *machista* nature of Mexican politics does not lend itself to equal enforcement of law for women. This will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.

³² For example, over 180 countries (including all the countries in Latin America) have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By accepting the terms of the Convention, states party to it commit to incorporating the principle of equality between men and women into their national legal system (UN 1979).

³³ This discrepancy between formal rights and “really existing rights” makes Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s work on the capabilities approach an interesting alternative to the discussion of rights (see Sen 1999b; Nussbaum 2000). Nussbaum in particular develops a theory of how a focus on human *capabilities* (what people are actually able to do and to be) can provide the basis for political principle and

can combine to curtail the exercise of political rights, since women who find themselves forced to work long hours to make ends meet have less time and money available to become active politically, especially as a candidate for elected office (Lister 1990). What is important to draw out of Molyneux's distinction is that formal rights are hollow if structural circumstances prevent the individual from realizing them.

Marshall, who infamously constructs his argument without taking women into consideration,³⁴ makes the claim that citizenship is never given and fixed, but remains a goal toward which societies must constantly strive. Accordingly, if women have been excluded from citizenship historically, or if their formal rights are hollow because they are unenforced or unprotected at various levels of society, it is essential that women have access to the public sphere and become involved in the social construction of citizenship in order to rectify this exclusion and make their formal rights "really existing."

constitutional guarantees. She argues that there is a group of human capabilities (ranging from the ability to lead a healthy life of normal length to being able to participate politically to being able to form a conception of the good life and engage in the planning of one's own life) so fundamental that without them life ceases to be fully human. A public policy that focuses on fostering these human capabilities would largely avoid the problem of "not really existing rights," since consideration of a person's capability to be or to do something would be built in to the public policy.

³⁴ Feminist scholars have criticized Marshall's conception of citizenship because it fails to take into account the fact that women, and other minority groups, were excluded from citizenship as he develops the concept (see Pateman 1989: 184-85; Lister 1990, 1997; Walby 1994). Although it is true that women are excluded from citizenship as he describes it—and that he does not bother to investigate why this is so—in fairness to Marshall, he is at least explicit about the fact that women were not full citizens at the time he was writing. For example, in describing the Poor Laws Marshall states,

Although in fact they led to an improvement in working conditions and a reduction of working hours to the benefit of all employed in the industries to which they applied, they meticulously refrained from giving this protection directly to the adult male—the citizen *par excellence*. And they did so out of respect for his status as citizen, on the grounds that enforced protective measures curtailed the civil right to conclude a free contract of employment. Protection was confined to women and children, and champions of women's rights were quick to detect the implied insult. Women were protected because they were not citizens. If they wished to enjoy full and responsible citizenship, they must forgo protection (1950: 24).

That Marshall is explicit about ignoring the gendered nature of citizenship does not satisfy Pateman, however. At one point she responds to Marshall's comparison of the development social rights to the remodeling of a building by asking, "are women in the building or in a separate annex?" (1989: 185).

Because citizenship is always under construction, citizenship will continue to develop toward some goal with or without women's involvement. As we have seen historically, without women's participation in the social construction of citizenship the outcome for women is not ideal. For example, although it is unlikely, especially in a democracy, the state can bestow rights in a top down fashion, without the input of citizens and civil society, but there will always be the dangers that these rights will fail to reflect the real interests of women,³⁵ that they will lack enforcement mechanisms or fail to challenge the structures that have really hindered women's achievement of full equality, or that they will be rejected by the citizens themselves.³⁶ Moreover, without women's participation, there is the possibility that groups who are active in citizenship discourse will neglect questions of women's rights or will actively reject them, as has happened in the past. Therefore, if the development of citizenship rights is going to

³⁵ Owing to the great diversity of women and women's diverse identities and interests, it is controversial to claim that there is such a thing as women's real interests. One common critique of Iris Young's (1989) argument supporting mandatory group representation for historically oppressed groups (e.g., women, African Americans, Native Americans, etc.) has been that members of all these groups have competing (sometimes conflicting) identities, making it impossible to know if, for example, the representative woman will really represent the interests of women and not the interests of her social class (see Phillips 1992). While I agree that the competing identities of individuals make it nearly impossible to claim that specific representative groups have universal interests, I do argue that citizenship is universally beneficial. In much the same way that Sen makes the argument that democracy is a universal value because people anywhere in the world may have reason to regard democracy as valuable (Sen 1999a), I argue that bearing rights of citizenship and being capable of participating in public life (should that be an individual's choice) make "really existing" citizenship potentially valuable to any person or social group, regardless of competing identities. The fact that the meaning of citizenship in any society is constantly being redefined is a primary reason why all individuals may find value in its development.

³⁶ The latter is exemplified by the case of the former Soviet states in East Central Europe. Gender equality was built into the communist system of social rights: women were expected to take part in the paid workforce and consequently were guaranteed maternity leave and access to day care, as well as abortion rights and full access to education. However, these measures did not eliminate women's primary responsibility for domestic labor. After the democratic transitions in these states, these gender-equal rights became associated with the authoritarian nature of the communist state, and there was a backlash against them by women who identified these rights negatively because of their association with authoritarianism rather than as a positive commitment of the state to foster women's freedom to participate in public life (see Einhorn 1993; Molyneux 2000).

reflect the interests of women, women have to be involved as agents in their construction, and this means being able to participate in the public spheres of society.

Work as a Site of Struggle in the Construction of Women's Citizenship

Throughout the world, women's and feminist movements have successfully engaged in the struggle to expand women's rights of citizenship. However, what is often overlooked in the literature on women's movements and women's rights is the important link between work and citizenship and the implications this relationship has on, first, the workplace and labor unions as the sites of struggle for citizenship and, second, women workers as political agents in this struggle.

As noted, paid labor often provides a direct link to social rights of citizenship. The workplace and labor unions (henceforth referred to as the labor sphere) are crucial sites in the social construction of political, civil, and social rights. For women, the equal opportunity to take part in the labor sphere is one important aspect of participation in the public sphere in the social construction of citizenship. However, despite their formal equality of opportunity to participate in the paid work force throughout much of the world, women, especially in the developing world, face many obstacles that bar them from or undermine their ability to participate in the labor sphere, including gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and their overwhelming responsibility for domestic labor. For this reason, a fundamental goal of the construction of women's citizenship must be developing a set of labor rights, workplace and organizational policies, and relevant enforcement mechanisms that ensure women's equal opportunity to participate in the paid workforce and in workers' representative organizations, as well as equal access to the social rights of citizenship associated with work. This series of labor

rights—an enforced set of civil and social rights—include freedom from discrimination based on sex, civil status, and pregnancy, freedom from violence and harassment in the workplace, and access to day care facilities. Labor rights also must promote gender equity regarding family responsibilities, such as allowing men to take paternity leave and leave to care for sick children or parents. The failure to protect women’s ability to participate on equal terms in the paid workforce essentially denies women equal access to the public sphere, thus denying them the full ability to participate in the construction of citizenship, and, consequently, to fully engage in democratic society.³⁷

While these changes are of immediate interest to women workers, they have important implications for women in general, since they would enshrine in the law particular protections of women’s civil and social rights and help secure women’s access to one crucial space within the public sphere. These laws would create social and legal precedents for laws in other areas besides the workplace and would provide a legal mechanism with which women can hold others responsible for violating their rights. And women presumably could use their access in the labor sphere to increase their ability to become involved in other public spaces (especially if they have more personal economic resources and more freedom from domestic responsibilities if men share in them more). Finally, achieving real equality in the workplace contributes to the equality that should exist by definition between citizens. As Jelin argues, socially constructing citizenship is the process by which formally equal subjects of law actually become such at all levels of society. Creating effective equality of opportunity for women workers within the

³⁷ Admittedly, my focus on women’s citizenship here stresses the importance of bringing women into the public sphere of work, not on any links between unpaid caregiving activities and citizenship. I do not deny the importance of exploring these links and the implications of them (for both men and women); however, it is beyond the scope of the present work.

workplace and labor unions is a giant step toward transforming these two critical socio-political institutions into ones that reflect women's status as "real" citizens.

Achieving this equality necessitates that women become engaged in the social construction of citizenship through collective action aimed at transforming the labor sphere and the legal structures that govern women's access to the paid workforce. One obvious source of collective action on behalf of women workers would be labor unions, since they are charged with advocating and protecting workers' rights. However, unions have rarely been strong advocates of women's rights, and in the neoliberal economic era, unions have become less effective in promoting workers' rights generally. This does not mean that unions are not important to women workers' engagement in the social construction of citizenship, only that the role unions will have in the construction of women's citizenship will differ from the role in citizenship construction that is historically attributed to unions when viewed in terms of the gender-neutral worker. Given the male-bias of unions and the decreasing influence of unions generally, women unionists might seek alliances within civil society to help them engage in the social construction of women's labor rights on each of the three levels—transforming union women's gender consciousness, challenging the patriarchal nature of unions, and influencing discourse about women's labor rights at the level of the state.

More specifically, we can expect the following roles for labor unions in the process of socially constructing women's citizenship: At the individual level of citizenship construction, unions will be spaces for collective action aimed at raising awareness of the women's rights as workers, as women's groups run workshops, training programs, or conferences for union members. At times, the groups running these

programs will be committees of women from within the union, in which case the union will be the political agent *and* space for collective action.

At the institutional level of citizenship construction, labor unions will be targets of collective action. In such cases, union women and civil associations representing women workers will promote progressive change within the unions structures, statutes, and/or collective contracts so that women have equal opportunities to participate in unions, so the internal procedures of labor unions reflect the rights of women workers, and so the unions advocate the rights of their women members.

Finally, at the state level of citizenship construction we should look for union women to really move beyond the union as a space for their political agency. Because it takes a concentrated and sustained effort to advocate the expansion of rights at the state level, a successful effort will require that women look for allies within civil society with whom they can build a broader movement in support of women's labor rights. We should look for union women forming alliances with other civil and political associations, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties, to advocate the interests of women workers vis-à-vis the state.

Of course, just as the social construction of citizenship is shaped by political, economic, social, and organizational variables, the success or failure of union women's engagement in the social construction of women's citizenship at each of these levels will be shaped by these variables as well. In examining the social construction of women's citizenship, it is therefore necessary to look at the effects of political variables (the influence of democratization, the increased international attention to women's rights), economic variables (the effect of the neoliberal economic model on the organization of

women workers), social variables (attitudes within unions or the government about the rights and interests of women workers), and organizational variables (group membership, resources, and effectiveness of strategy in achieving goals) to get a better picture of the effectiveness of women's engagement in the social construction of citizenship.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Citizenship refers to both a series of rights and the participation of individuals in political discourse. These two conceptions of citizenship are mutually reinforcing, as rights secure the ability of citizens to become engaged in the public spheres of government, work, and civil society, and this engagement allows them to become more involved in political discourse in order to demand the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship rights. It is this intersection of rights and participation that I refer to as the social construction of citizenship.

That citizenship is socially constructed, rather than fixed or given, is of fundamental importance for those "citizens" in a democracy who are considered formally equal, but who, because of past discrimination or entrenched social, political, and economic structures are prevented from turning formal citizenship into "really existing" citizenship. These individuals can become engaged in the social construction of citizenship by taking advantage of the public sphere, however exclusionary it may be, and becoming involved in a political demand for the enforcement or creation of citizenship rights that will open up public spaces and secure really existing citizenship.

Women have historically been excluded from full citizenship, but unless they participate in the social construction of citizenship they are not likely to benefit, or benefit in the most important ways, from the continuous construction of citizenship

rights. I have argued that because work is so intimately connected to citizenship, one fundamental focus is the construction of women's citizenship must be opening up full access to work for women. As such, establishing and protecting women's labor rights is a key piece of expanding full citizenship to women.

In the rest of the dissertation, I focus on social construction of women's citizenship in Mexico and the ways in which union women there are engaging in new forms of organization at all three levels of citizenship construction in an effort to establish real equality for working women and to contribute to the development of a democratic Mexico where women are truly equal citizens.

Organized Labor and the Social Construction of Citizenship in Mexico

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Organized labor has been an important political player in Mexico since the Mexican revolution, which began in 1910 when liberal reformers sought to overthrow the 34-year rule of Porfirio Díaz and reshape the political and economic structures of the country. The revolution ended in 1917 when forces led by the ostensibly pro-labor Venustiano Carranza defeated the predominately peasant forces led by Emiliano Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa. After the revolution, organized labor’s political role grew, particularly from the 1940s through the 1980s when labor was one of three major socioeconomic sectors incorporated into the ruling coalition of the Mexican state.

The Mexican labor movement is most frequently viewed in terms of this corporatist relationship with the state, in which official labor unions accepted restrictions on their autonomy and freedom to mobilize in exchange for privileged representation in the government and material benefits for workers. State-labor corporatism has been beyond doubt the defining feature of Mexican labor relations, but a singular focus on how

labor was constrained by the corporatism ignores the ways in which organized labor contributed to the social construction of workers' citizenship rights.

The social construction of citizenship refers to civil society's efforts to create, expand, or redefine conceptions of citizenship at all levels of society, including within institutions below the level of the state. The corporatist state-labor relationship, despite its authoritarian nature, allowed labor leaders to bargain with the state for better social rights and material benefits for workers (state level construction). Moreover, independent unions and dissident factions of official unions continuously struggled for union democracy and broader civil rights for workers (institutional level construction), even if this struggle was rarely successful.

The neoliberal economic transition dealt a major blow to organized labor's political power in the 1980s. However, the emergence of a new independent labor movement in the 1990s and Mexico's democratic transition has opened up a new space for one sector of organized labor to dramatically reshape the way that labor has engaged in the social construction of citizenship rights, by calling for political democracy, union democracy, and a restructuring of Mexico's economic model.

In this chapter, I argue that organized labor in Mexico has played an important, if restricted, role in the social construction of workers' rights. Nonetheless, organized labor leaders were rarely concerned with promoting the citizenship rights of women workers, and the corporatist state-labor relationship exacerbated labor's neglect of women workers' rights by creating a difficult context for union women to advance their own interests. For this reason, the emergence of a new independent union movement and the

transition to democracy may provide a more conducive context for union women to engage in the social construction of women's labor rights.

3.1 ORGANIZED LABOR DURING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Organized labor was in its infancy during the Mexican revolution and did not play a significant role in the fighting.³⁸ However, John Lear argues that the revolution helped to transform organized labor into a more militant force, especially in Mexico City, the dominant economic center of the country. Workers' escalating mobilization from the outset of the war through the general strike of 1916 forced the leaders of the revolution's triumphant faction (the Constitutionalists) to acknowledge their importance as social and political actors. Labor's growing importance as a political force *during* the revolution put labor organizations in a position to help shape a postrevolutionary political structure that would be inclusive of workers and responsive to their interests (Lear 2001: 2, 364).

Workers' entry into the politics of the revolution was first manifest in their support for Francisco Madero in the 1910 presidential election. Madero was a political liberal opposed to the reelection of Porfirio Díaz, who had held the presidency since 1876. Under Díaz's rule workers faced repression for engaging in collective action. Instead, Díaz encouraged mutual aid societies, organizations often sponsored by employers that provided educational and social services to members and aid to workers in times of economic hardship. Madero, on the other hand, supported workers' right to organize, and his support for civil rights garnered enthusiastic support for his candidacy from the working class (Lear 2001: 129-30). When Díaz won the election, Madero fled to

³⁸ Peasants were far more likely to take up arms during the revolution.

Texas and issued a call for armed revolt against him. The fighting forced Díaz to resign in May of 1911, and Madero returned from exile to assume the presidency (Lear 2001: 123-42; Collier and Collier 1991: 117-18).

In first months of Madero's presidency, new types of workers' organizations began to flourish alongside mutual aid societies with the goal of changing the way that workers participated both in the workplace and in society as a whole. These "resistance societies" challenged the ideology of the mutual aid society and tested Madero's liberal doctrine regarding the rights and demands of workers. They also adopted more combative methods to call for an end to industry abuses of workers, an improvement of wages, hours, and working conditions, to challenge the presence of foreign managers and industrialists, and to support the rights of workers, including the right to unionize (Lear 2001: 162-80, 194, 361).

Workers began engaging in strikes as a means of testing their political strength. In July of 1911, a strike of 3,000 Mexico City streetcar workers shut down the public transportation system for four days, although the strike ultimately failed because of the lack of organization and strike funds to support the workers. A more successful strike took place in the textile industry. Textile workers across the country had been striking throughout the summer and fall of 1911 to protest wages, hours, working conditions, and the absence of industry regulations. On December 26, 1911, workers at a Mexico City factory went on strike to protest reduced wages. The strike soon spread across the city and the country: in less than two weeks, over 9,000 textile workers in Mexico City and 40,000 others nationwide had walked off the job. The striking textile workers addressed their claims directly to Madero as well as employers. One striker noted that because "they

the workers had elevated Señor Madero to the presidency, it was only just that he support the petition they were making” (quoted in Lear 2001: 206). Madero conceded to schedule a national textile workers convention for July of 1912. At the convention, employers and workers agreed to a maximum 10-hour workday, an end to a system of fines, the prohibition of verbal and physical abuse directed against workers, and the elimination of company stores (Lear 2001: 201-14). Workers did not receive everything they wanted (regulations on wages were not included in the agreement), but, importantly, their collective action was beginning to generate a political response.

Workers’ direct action intensified beginning in 1912, when an anarchist-oriented group of craft workers and intellectuals founded the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker, henceforth “Casa”). The Casa was initially established as a cultural and educational center for workers, but it quickly moved beyond this educational function to focus on direct criticism of unjust labor structures and the political roots of inequality. The Casa was fundamental in helping workers transition from mutual societies to unions and became the dominant labor federation for the rapidly increasing numbers of unions that were forming in Mexico City and throughout the country (Lear 2001).

Importantly, the Casa stressed the equality of men and women. Women were active within the Casa, especially in its educational activities, and by 1914 the Casa had been very successful in bringing women into the rank-and-file, especially from the textile, garment, corn processing, and tobacco industries where the majority of women worked. Although women resorted to striking less than men (culturally, it was not as acceptable for women to strike as for men to), the Casa and its affiliated unions supported women’s strikes when they did occur (Lear 2001: 222-30). And so the Casa’s importance

during the revolution was not just in organizing workers, but in incorporating a plurality of workers—skilled and unskilled, men and women—into the labor movement.

The political role of the Casa and organized labor emerged more clearly after Madero was assassinated in a 1913 coup led by his military chief of staff, Victoriano Huerta. Madero's death intensified the fighting, as competing factions struggled for political control of Mexico. This led to a revolving door of occupiers in Mexico City, who inevitably had to deal in some manner with the burgeoning and increasingly political labor movement. Collier and Collier note that after 1913, "the continuing armed mobilization by many groups created a setting where the importance of the working class as a base of support for the rival political factions became critical" (1991: 121). In a pattern that would continue throughout the revolution and be consolidated in the postrevolutionary regime, political leaders exchanged workers' benefits and protections for labor's political support.

The first leader to engage in this exchange was Victoriano Huerta, who seized political control in 1913 in the wake of Madero's assassination. Recognizing the need to build a popular base of support for his administration, Huerta made overtures to labor, helping unions win recognition from employers, promoting legislation on industrial accidents, and pushing for an extension of wage regulations to industries not covered by the textile agreement. Until the final months of his short regime, Huerta gave workers and the Casa substantial freedom to organize as long as they avoided overt political action. In spring of 1914, however, Huerta began to use repressive force against workers, forcing factory workers to join his army, shutting down the Casa, and forcing several Casa leaders underground (Collier and Collier 1991: 121; Lear 2001: 215-16).

When Huerta's faction was replaced in August of 1914 by the Constitutionalists, led by Victoriano Carranza and General Alvaro Obregón, the Casa immediately reopened and was poised to take aggressive action. The economic disruption caused by the revolution had left workers facing an endless cycle of inflation, changing currencies, shortages of consumer goods, and unemployment. Beginning in the fall of 1914, the Casa took the lead in organizing a two-year period of nearly uninterrupted strikes by different groups of skilled and unskilled workers that were directed against employers' practices and the absence of government labor regulation. Despite the strike activity, Constitutionalists proved to be rather supportive of the Casa. Lear notes (2001: 248) that when the Constitutionalist generals took control of Mexico City, they "desperately needed a social base to support them in their battle to consolidate local and national power...and so sought support...from urban workers in general and their most organized representative in particular, the Casa del Obrero Mundial." Rather than suppressing the strikes, Carranza appealed to labor by regulating a nine-hour workday and Sunday holidays. He also made efforts to strengthen the Labor Department in order to better implement these reforms and directly intervened in labor disputes on the side of the workers (sometimes going so far as to turn the administration of business operations over to workers temporarily). Carranza also made direct overtures to the Casa by offering to give them an old upper-class church in the heart of Mexico City for use as a new headquarters (Lear 2001: 248-53).

Carranza and the Constitutionalists briefly lost control of Mexico City to the rival Convention forces (led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa) from late 1914 to early 1915, but the Conventionists did not actively recruit the support of workers. Moreover,

they were hesitant to get involved in resolving labor disputes and were slow to address proposals for labor legislation. Not surprisingly, Zapata and Villa were unable to successfully gain workers' support. In fact, the Casa officially threw its support behind Carranza and the Constitutionalist in 1915, when about 1,000 workers from the Casa formed the "Red Battalions" and joined Carranza's military forces. Their role in the fighting proved to be limited, but the symbolism of workers joining the struggle was important. For workers, the idea that they had shed blood for the revolution was important in legitimating their class demands (Lear 2001: Chapter 6; Collier and Collier 1991: 123).

Despite the participation of the Red Battalions, organized labor's primary form of mobilization during the revolution continued to be strike action, which culminated in Mexico City's general strike of 1916. On July 31, 1916 the electricians' union cut off power in Mexico City, effectively bringing the city a halt. Electrical workers were then joined by thousands of workers from the public utilities, factories and shops, who gathered in Mexico City's Alameda Park (Lear 2001: 171-80, 333; Collier and Collier 1991: 119-20). Notes Lear,

By its very nature, the general strike was a challenge to political authorities. It both expressed the demand of workers for control over their labor and asserted the broader rights of the community of working people to act on the revolution's promises of social justice and to participate fully in the life of the city (Lear 2001: 333).

The period ended with Carranza using repressive force to end the general strike, and in the wake of the strike the Casa was forced to disband. However, the period is notable for workers' solidarity and militancy in support of their basic rights as workers and citizens.

With a Constitutionalist victory secure by the end of 1916, delegates met in Querétaro to draft a new federal constitution. Union leaders were not a significant

presence at the constitutional congress; however, a faction of the delegates understood the importance securing the support of urban and rural popular sectors in order to consolidate the new state. This faction, led by Alvaro Obregón and Plutarco Calles, won the day. Article 123 of the 1917 federal constitution established an impressive array of workers' rights, including the right to unionize and strike, protections against dismissal, an eight hour workday, minimum wage, overtime pay, occupational health and safety standards, maternity leave, the prohibition of child labor, and conciliation and arbitration boards that would be composed of workers, employers, and government representatives. Wording of Article 123 cautioned workers against disturbing social order, but on the whole workers gained tremendously from the new constitution (Lear 2001: 342-43; Collier and Collier 1991: 205; Burgess 2004: 64). Although workers did not participate in drafting the federal constitution of 1917, their actions during the revolutionary period played an important role in the securing workers' rights and helped set the tone for the development of state-labor relations in the following decades. As Lear argues,

The pattern of mobilization, accommodation, and confrontation by which the working people of Mexico City asserted their presence as workers, members of a community, and citizens of the nation during the decade after 1910 established many of the possibilities and limits for popular urban participation in postrevolutionary Mexico.... Previous and ongoing mobilizations of working people forced the faction that triumphed in the revolution, particularly leaders like Obregón and Calles, to acknowledge their importance (2001: 364).

Had workers not been a militant force during the revolution, the constitution's authors could have easily seen fit to ignore their rights, and the historical trajectory of state-labor relations in Mexico could have been dramatically different.

3.2 STATE-LABOR CORPORATISM AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

As it was, workers were emboldened by the rights they had gained in the constitution and continued to mobilize against employers and the government in support of collective contracts and increased wages. In his 1919 presidential address, Carranza noted that the government had officially recognized 70 strikes and 85 work stoppages involving 26,500 workers (Lear 2001: 344). But rather quickly, the ideology of the labor movement shifted toward official collaboration with the government rather than confrontation with employers, an ideology that would characterize the mainstream labor movement through the present day.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE-LABOR CORPORATISM

The Casa's reign as Mexico's most influential labor organization ended when Carranza forced it to disband after the general strike of 1916. Its successor was the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers—CROM), founded in 1918. In the 1920 struggle to determine Carranza's successor, the CROM threw its weight behind Alvaro Obregón, organizing nation-wide strikes denouncing Carranza. Obregón's victory in the election helped put the CROM in a privileged position within the labor movement and the federal government, such that the CROM and its leaders "emerged as powerful players in the construction of mass politics, imposing their organizations and regulations in the workplace and their candidates in local and national politics" (Lear 2001: 347). For the next eight years, CROM leaders collaborated with Obregón and his successor, Plutarco Calles, using their powerful position to effectively promote protective regulation of industry, gain material benefits

for workers from state resources, and facilitate the entry of workers into national and local politics. In exchange, the CROM kept workers demands to a minimum and used its influence to repress independent unions (Lear 2001: 345-50; Collier and Collier 1991: 211-19). The result was relative labor peace (strikes fell during this period), with a potentially militant and confrontational working class replaced by an essentially cooperative one (Collier and Collier 1991: 217).

Leadership change in 1928 marked the end of the CROM's dominance and tighter state control over organized labor. Not surprisingly, important actors such as capitalists and the agrarian sector opposed the government's close relationship with the CROM. Toward the end of his term, Calles began to cultivate closer ties with these groups and abandon the alliance with the CROM. When the CROM was accused of assassinating the president-elect, Calles turned to an outspoken CROM critic as provisional president. During the six year period from 1928-34 (known as the "Maximato"), many of the pro-labor policies of the previous period were reversed (Collier and Collier 1991; Collier 1992).

Two events that occurred during the Maximato are significant to this discussion. In 1929, Calles formed a national political party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party—PNR), as a means of centralizing a strong state and ensuring the political stability necessary for economic development. The party's name changed twice, to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution—PRM) in 1938 and Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI) in 1946, but it came to play the centralizing role that Calles had hoped for. The party provided an institutional framework that could mobilize

different social actors in support of the party's goals of economic development and social justice. The party also came to dominate the electoral process: from 1929 to 1988, no party candidate lost a presidential, federal senatorial, or gubernatorial election. Eventually, the party became synonymous with the state (Middlebrook 1995; Collier and Collier 1991).

Second, in 1931 the Ley Federal de Trabajo (Federal Labor Law—LFT) was passed. The LFT maintained the important protections and rights for workers that were established in the constitution, but it imposed restrictions on unions' organizational activities and institutionalized the political power of "official" unions. For example, the LFT gave the conciliation and arbitration boards authority to recognize the legality of unions and of strikes. The requirement that both strikes and unions be officially recognized has been an important tool for restricting politically oriented strikes and the formation of independent unions. The LFT also regulated internal union activity in a way that gave union leaders enormous power over the rank-and-file. For example, the LFT did not give workers the automatic right to use secret ballots in union elections. And "exclusion clauses," which obligated employers to hire union members, gave union leaders effective control over hiring and firing workers (Middlebrook 1995: 51-71; Bensusán and Cook 2003).³⁹ These regulations in the LFT gave unions, and especially union leaders, a great deal of power, but they created obstacles to union democracy.

³⁹ The power of union leadership over the rank-and-file has led to the proliferation of "protection contracts" and "white" unions in certain sectors. Protection contracts are collective contracts established by union leaders without the knowledge or agreement of the rank-and-file. These contracts provide minimum protections to workers and are rarely updated through collective bargaining, but they are legally registered with the conciliation and arbitration boards. White unions belong to federations affiliated with the PRI (e.g., the CROM), but unlike larger, more powerful unions, they support the companies and managers in pursuit of higher profits at the expense of workers' interests, often by establishing protection contracts. In fact, workers are often unaware that they even belong to a union. The result is that workers rights are

The corporatist structure of state-labor relations that has dominated postrevolutionary Mexican politics fully emerged under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40). Cárdenas assumed the presidency with the goal of consolidating political power in order to implement a wide range of socioeconomic reforms.⁴⁰ Like Carranza, Obregón, and Calles before him, Cárdenas sought to mobilize popular support as a means of consolidating power.⁴¹ To mobilize labor's support, he encouraged unionization, took a pro-labor stance on workers' economic demands, and, importantly, promoted the creation of a single workers' federation that would become affiliated with the PNR.⁴² For Cárdenas, unifying the labor movement would mean an end to factional union rivalries, expand the political base of support for his party, and consequently facilitate his ability to govern.

The unification of the labor movement also appealed to unions. The ever present threat of a political shift that would lead to retraction of labor rights encouraged them to

routinely violated (women workers in particular are subject to sexual harassment and pregnancy discrimination), wages are kept to a minimum, working conditions are poor, and efforts to form independent unions are resisted, often violently (Quintero Ramirez 2001; Stevenson 2004).

⁴⁰ One of the significant achievements of the Mexican postrevolutionary regime was to foster political stability, and one manifestation of this stability was the PRI's absolute control of presidential succession. Mexican presidents are elected for one six year term (referred to as a *sexenio*) and cannot be reelected. As the PRI became consolidated, the current president would appoint his successor, who would then become the official PRI nominee. In this way, personal ambitions of potential, current, or former presidents became subsumed by the party. This process had not been worked out when Cárdenas assumed the presidency. Although the three presidents who served during the Maximato belonged to the PNR, the party at that time was still the personal vehicle of Plutarco Calles, and he was really running the show. Moreover, there was still the ever present threat of military uprising or a coup from some other armed militant group. For Cárdenas, the need to end political factionalism within the party and end the threat of military uprising was necessary before any president could effect other political and economic changes.

⁴¹ Cárdenas eventually incorporated four sectors into the party. Besides organized labor, these were the agrarian sector, the popular sector (representing state employees and the middle classes), and the military. The military sector was quickly eliminated.

⁴² The disintegration of the CROM after 1928 led to a real fragmentation of the labor movement. By the early 1930s there were 2,781 individual unions represented by some 17 confederations and 57 federations (Middlebrook 1995: 86). Nor did these unions reflect the same ideology. The demise of the CROM led to a resurgence in support for union autonomy, especially among the large unions representing national industries.

join forces with Cárdenas. In February of 1936, labor leaders convened a “national unification congress” that resulted in the creation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers—CTM). The CTM became the largest and most powerful labor federation in Mexico.⁴³

Initially, two dominant tendencies were represented in the CTM. On one hand, smaller and weaker unions that had always depended on state support sought to collaborate with Cárdenas in the manner of the CROM. On the other hand, the major national industrial unions (e.g., the railroad workers’ and electricians’ unions) sought to maintain labor’s autonomy from the government. Tensions flared early between these camps (and would periodically continue to). In the interest of maintaining labor unity, the pro-autonomy president of the CTM appointed leaders of collaborationist unions to other key leadership positions. These collaborationist leaders used their powerful positions in the CTM to build a labor movement loyal to them, and ultimately, the collaborationist tendency prevailed (Middlebrook 1995; Collier and Collier 1991; Collier 1992).

The corporatist state-labor exchange grew out of the alliance between the PNR (henceforth, PRI) and the CTM (and subsequently other “official” unions). The CTM became officially affiliated with the party (members of the CTM were automatically members of the PRI), and the CTM accepted party constraints on its autonomy, union leadership, and the freedom to mobilize. In exchange, the PRI guaranteed the CTM access to political positions in elected office and in important bureaucracies like the

⁴³ The CTM was the dominant labor organization of those that would become officially affiliated with the PRI, but over the years many federations and confederations representing various unions would formally affiliate with the party (including the CROM). The multitude of “official” labor organizations actually benefited the PRI by allowing the party to play the groups off one another. For example, if the CTM’s demands became unreasonable, the PRI could shift resources and support to the CROM, thereby forcing the CTM back in line.

conciliation and arbitration boards, used state resources to deliver socioeconomic benefits to workers, and gave union leaders control over the day-to-day functioning of unions (Collier 1992; Middlebrook 1995; Burgess 2004).

And so, during the Maximato and subsequently under the leadership of Lázaro Cárdenas, the three pillars of state-labor corporatism were established. The LFT, while continuing to guarantee workers the right to strike and bargain collectively, created obstacles to democratic and independent union organizing. The PRI was consolidated and incorporated organized labor into its ruling coalition. And finally, the CTM was created as a means of unifying the labor movement in official support of the PRI in exchange for political input and socioeconomic benefits for workers.

WORKERS AND CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS UNDER STATE-LABOR CORPORATISM

It is important to underscore that although the CTM was closely allied with the PRI, it was not simply a puppet of the state. The PRI incorporated labor into the postrevolutionary governing coalition because it needed labor's support, and the party's need to maintain its alliance with labor gave the CTM room to engage in a constant series of negotiations with the PRI to secure better representation and better social welfare rights for workers (Collier 1992). Through the 1980s, the CTM achieved this by following a standard method of attack when faced with government resistance to its demands: the CTM would adopt a confrontational stance and instruct affiliated unions to file strike petitions simultaneously, threatening strike action until the PRI made concessions (Middlebrook 1995; Burgess 2004).

The CTM's ability to negotiate better social rights for workers grew dramatically after the early 1940s, when the Mexican government began an economic policy of import

substitution industrialization (ISI). This state-led model of development allowed the government to pursue the goals of economic expansion and income growth through policies promoting domestic production. For three decades (1950-70), this strategy led to rapid growth (an average annual rate of 7.8%) with low inflation. During this time, the CTM was able to deliver major material benefits to workers. New employment opportunities in unionized industries yielded millions of jobs. The CTM also pressured employers to increase wages and benefits in collective contracts, and these set the pace for the minimum wage. Between 1952 and 1976, average real wages quadrupled (Middlebrook 1995: 209-10; Burgess 2004: 65-68; Cook 1996: 78-79).⁴⁴

Among the most important social rights secured for labor were the non-wage benefits. In 1939 the Legislature created the Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social (Mexican Social Security Institute—IMSS), which made provisions to provide free health care to workers and their families and also established protections for workers in the case of accidents, disability, illness, and unemployment. In the 1970s, IMSS coverage was expanded to include rural Mexicans and to create state-run day care centers for women workers. In 1972, workers gained access to subsidized housing through the Instituto Nacional del Fondo de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores (National Worker Housing Fund—Infonavit) (Cravey 1998: 32, 39; Burgess 2004: 66). Altha Cravey stresses the importance of the corporatist exchange in developing these social rights of citizenship: “The guarantee of such important goods as health care was a response to labor militancy

⁴⁴ It is important to note that although ISI was successful in Mexico for several decades, the benefits of economic growth were not shared equally throughout society. As was the case in other Latin American states, unionized workers benefited greatly during this period of state-led development, but economic inequality actually worsened over all (see Middlebrook 1995: 213-17; on the theoretical implications of state-civil society relations under different economic models, see Oxhorn 1995a).

but at the same time it served to insure the continued loyalty of those on the receiving end” (Cravey 1998: 67).

The CTM’s ability to make demands for such social welfare benefits was facilitated by CTM leaders’ representation in elected and appointed political positions. As an official sector of the PRI’s governing coalition, organized labor was guaranteed certain levels of government representation. The CTM, as the dominant labor organization of the corporatist regime, had a dominant share of labor’s allocated positions. Burgess notes that the CTM controlled an average of 60 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies that were allocated to organized labor and also controlled labor’s representation in important bureaucracies such as the conciliation and arbitration boards, IMSS, and Infonavit (2004: 68-74). Of course, the CTM was expected to support the PRI’s economic policies in return for such representation, which they ultimately did. But importantly, this representation put the CTM in a powerful position to bargain with the PRI in support of workers’ material benefits—especially workers of CTM unions (Middlebrook 1995). The CTM thus used its powerful position within the PRI’s ruling coalition to push for the extension of important social welfare rights for workers, thus helping to construct workers’ citizenship rights (even if it did not mobilize *against* the state to do so).

Organized Labor’s Support for Union Democracy

The official relationship between the CTM and the PRI prevented the CTM from challenging the authoritarian nature of the PRI and the restrictions of workers’ freedoms to associate and organize, but other unions took up this task. The CTM was the biggest and most powerful union organization in Mexico, but it was by no means the only one. Steve Dubb (1999: 13) observes that at most the CTM represented half of unionized

workers and that some of the most important unions did not belong to the CTM even if they were affiliated with the PRI (including the teacher's union, the oil workers' union, and the telephone workers' union). Moreover, there were independent unions not affiliated with the PRI, as well as dissident factions within "official" CTM unions. In short, the unionized labor force was diverse, and there were plenty of workers ready to support broader civil rights for workers.

Challenges to official state-labor corporatism were almost continual in the 1950s and 1960s, and reached an explosive peak in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, strikes by the national and industrial unions representing workers in the telegraph, railroad, petroleum, and mining industries, as well as the teachers' union, challenged corporatist leaders and sought to install democratically elected, independent leaders. In the 1970s, labor mobilization escalated in response to an economic downturn that was hurting real wages coupled with political liberalization measures initiated by President Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). Among Echeverría's reforms were the explicit recognition of workers' right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively. These reforms helped spark a period of labor insurgency led by auto, metal and telephone workers, electricians, university employees, and teachers (Collier 1992: 54-63; Middlebrook 1995; Cook 1996; Foweraker 1998; Perez Arce 1990; Williams 2001). Collier notes that throughout these three decades, strike patterns had a similar nature:

Typically, the movement within each union started with economic demands and broadened as the existing union leadership came to be seen as an obstacle. In this way, the insurgency came to take on the dimensions of rejecting the existing union structure and advocating a more militant, representative, democratic, and autonomous form of unionism. Though the movement thus took on a political coloration—and indeed it had profound political implications—it was not political in its origins.... (1992: 61).

For most of these dissident groups seeking union autonomy, the power of the PRI was too much to overcome. The party used a number of tactics to reign in opposition movements, offering material concessions to appease the workers' initial economic demands, pushing leaders sympathetic to the PRI to crush the dissident movements within their unions, and resorting to force as a last result. Even Echeverría's political liberalization policies were not enough to spur on a democratic labor movement that could challenge state-labor corporatism, and by the end of the 1970s most labor unions remained firmly allied with the PRI (Collier 1992). Although most of these movements failed, it is important to emphasize that there are sectors within Mexico's corporatist unions willing to take advantage of political openings and become politically engaged in support of democratic freedoms for workers when the dominant political structure is no longer meeting workers' needs.

It is also important to note the examples in this period of organizing in support of autonomous, democratic unions by labor organizations with no connection to the PRI. The Frente Auténtico de Trabajo (Authentic Labor Front—FAT) was founded in the 1960s and promoted political and economic democracy within grassroots organizations of urban and rural workers. The FAT often allied with dissident union movements that were looking to break from the CTM and offered political and financial assistance to these groups. Despite serious resistance from official unions and employers to the FAT's organizing efforts, by the end of the 1970s the FAT represented about 30,000 workers in the automobile, electronics, mining, and metallurgy industries (Hathaway 2000; Collier 1992: 62; Middlebrook 1995: 224).

What does this period of state-labor corporatism say about the role of the Mexican labor movement in the social construction of workers' rights? The central argument of the social construction of citizenship is that civil society must act to create, expand, or redefine conceptions of citizenship at all levels of society, including within institutions below the level of the state, and that the groups who participate most effectively in public discourse over citizenship rights are best able to influence the rights that citizens have. From the development of the corporatist relationship under Cárdenas through the 1970s, Mexico's official labor organizations, especially the CTM, were the dominant voice of workers at the state level. Their political role within the corporatist structure allowed labor leaders to bargain for expanded social rights, such as health care and housing subsidies, even if the corporatist relationship restricted their ability to promote political and civil rights.

The role of demanding these other rights, specifically the civil right to organize freely and democratically, fell to the dissident movements for union autonomy and the independent labor organizations. These groups acted at the institutional level to challenge corporatist leaders and to endeavor to transform their unions into democratic spaces. In short, the strength of state-labor corporatism in Mexico restricted the way labor was able to engage in the social construction of citizenship, but it did not prevent labor from doing so. The fact that the dissident movements had limited success is certainly a sign of the strength and antidemocratic nature of corporatism, but it does not rule out that labor will one day play a stronger role in the social construction of political and civil rights of citizenship in Mexico. In fact, although the corporatist regime stayed mostly intact throughout the 1980s, some of the actors in the dissident movement, like the FAT, the

telephone and university workers, and the electrician's union, would emerge again in the 1990s to promote union and political democracy in Mexico.

3.3 NEOLIBERAL TRANSITION AND THE CHALLENGE TO ORGANIZED LABOR

In 1982 Mexico experienced a severe economic crisis. Heavy borrowing from international lenders during the 1970s coupled with declining oil prices in the early 1980s led to escalating debt payments, capital flight, and inflation-induced currency devaluation. By August of 1982, the crisis had reached a climax. The "debt crisis" prompted a transition to a neoliberal economic model and a dramatic shift in the state-labor relationship. In response to the crisis, Presidents Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88) and Carlos Salinas (1988-94) pursued economic reforms that hurt workers materially and also severely weakened the power organized labor held within the ruling coalition. Organized labor's ability to engage in the construction of citizenship rights for workers, which was already restricted, was subsequently diminished (Collier 1992; Middlebrook 1995; Cook, Middlebrook, and Molinar Horcasitas 1994).

To cope with the effects of the 1982 debt crisis, de la Madrid first adopted a series of short term economic austerity measures aimed at cutting social spending, reducing government subsidies on basic consumer goods and services like transportation and food stuffs, privatizing state-owned industries, and promoting export-oriented industrialization.⁴⁵ When the economy had not recovered by 1985, de la Madrid took

⁴⁵ Under ISI, Mexican industries manufactured goods predominantly for the domestic market. However, the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) was initiated in 1965 to create an export processing zone along the US-Mexico border. The BIP allowed multinational companies to import raw materials, machinery, and parts duty free to Mexican assembly plants, as long as the finished goods would be exported out of Mexico. The *maquila* industry, as this export sector came to be known, began with only 12 assembly plants and accounted for only 3% of manufacturing in Mexico. The economic crisis helped to boost productivity in the

steps toward more long term economic restructuring, intensifying privatization efforts and liberalizing trade (Collier 1992; Tiano 1994).

The CTM joined forces with independent labor unions to protest these policies, threatening to call general strikes in 1983 and 1984 and organizing some 3,000 union strikes during a single week in June of 1983 (Collier 1992: 82-83). Initially, de la Madrid responded to labor by increasing social spending, but after 1985 he began to view labor as an obstacle to achieving economic transition and took a tougher stance against both official and independent labor federations. De la Madrid rebuffed the CTM's demands for more moderate stabilization measures and used his administrative power over unions to thwart unionization drives and deny strike petitions (Middlebrook 1995: 259-63).

De la Madrid's policies of liberalizing the economy and undermining organized labor were intensified by his successor, Carlos Salinas. It was Salinas who stepped up the process of trade liberalization by opening up free trade negotiations with the US and Canada for what would become the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), eventually signed in 1994. Salinas also continued to undermine the role of organized labor in the Mexican ruling coalition by denying the CTM representation in important bureaucracies like Infonavit, undercutting union bargaining power during contract negotiations, and even going so far as to jail labor leaders who opposed his economic plans (Middlebrook 1995: 293-99).

maquila industry, as falling real wages made labor costs more competitive for foreign investors. De la Madrid saw the maquila industry as a model for export oriented production and in 1983 made the industry a priority sector, enacting policies to make it more attractive to foreign investors (Tiano 1994: 18-26). De la Madrid's plan was successful, and by 2000, the maquila industry accounted for 45% of all Mexican manufacturing (Quintero Ramirez 2001).

The economic hardships that resulted from these reforms have led the 1980s to be known as the “lost decade.” Workers’ real wages plummeted while inflation rose. Unemployment and underemployment in the formal sector increased. It is estimated that in 1987, 30.5% of the economically active population (EAP) worked less than 35 hours per week or worked more than 35 hours per week for less than minimum wage. Decreased social welfare spending and cuts to basic subsidies made it vastly more difficult for workers and their families to meet their basic needs (Middlebrook 1995; Collier 1992; Garza Toledo 1994; Aguilar García 2001). Economic hardships continued into the 1990s, especially after 1995 when the peso was devalued by 40%, leaving one million workers unemployed within six months. Through the end of the 1990s, the only stable growth in the formal economy occurred in the maquila sector (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 233).

The economic transition also hurt the political power of organized labor. First, the transition led to a decline in the unionized workforce. Privatization of state enterprises decreased the strength of once powerful public sector unions. Employment in heavily unionized industries such as mining, basic metals, and textiles fell dramatically, whereas employment grew in the service and commerce sectors, which had traditionally lower rates of unionization.⁴⁶ Moreover, organized labor’s numbers declined as private sector companies turned to the use of more “flexible” labor practices (e.g., part time work or limited term contracts). Increasingly, newly negotiated collective contracts stripped unions of their role in the hiring and firing of workers and gave management more

⁴⁶ Comprehensive statistics on unionization rates in Mexico are not readily available, but it is estimated that between 1984 and 1996, the percentage of unionized workers fell from 24.4% to 15.9% (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 237).

authority to make employment changes based on production needs (Garza Toledo 1994: 208-10; Weeks 1999). The decline in the unionized work force thus weakened labor's mobilization capacity. Under the corporatist regime, the CTM and other official unions kept labor conflict to a minimum, but they used the *threat* of strike action as an important bargaining chip with the PRI. Declining numbers of unionized workers meant that there were fewer workers for labor organizations to mobilize.

The "lost decade" hurt labor in terms of the quality of possible labor mobilization as well as the sheer quantity of workers able to mobilize. Specifically, neoliberal reforms undermined the capacity of unions to mobilize in support of union democracy and organizational freedom. Heather Williams argues that the plant closings and layoffs that accompanied privatization were deliberately planned and that the militant unionists who had fought for greater union autonomy and democracy in the 1970s were among the first workers to lose their jobs. Analyzing the case of the steel industry in the city of Lázaro Cárdenas, Williams notes that when the workforce in the steel mills was downsized, management paid particular attention to dismissing the most combative workers. She argues that this "purge" of steel industry unionists not only "exhausted the insurgent capacity" inside the local union, it also impeded the ability of other workers to engage in national union networks and take part in strong labor actions (Williams 2001: 36, 139). The neoliberal transition thus undermined labor's ability to mount labor action to reject corporatist unionism.

But perhaps most importantly for workers at the time, labor's loss of political power weakened its capacity to deliver material benefits. Enrique de la Garza Toledo (1994: 203-06) argues that the reason workers' wages plummeted in the 1980s primarily

reflected unions' failure to negotiate for wage increases, something that had been a key aspect of union strength since the heyday of ISI. Neither was the CTM able to successfully negotiate with the PRI on workers' behalf. The CTM and other unions participated in the development of economic pacts with Salinas. However, in entering these pacts, which were aimed at controlling inflation and encouraging economic growth, the CTM was called upon to contain workers' wage demands without receiving incentives for workers in exchange. These economic pacts allowed CTM leaders to maintain their political voice, but they were no longer able to deliver material benefits to workers or contribute to the construction of social rights as they had during the ISI period (Collier 1992; Middlebrook 1995; Burgess 2004; Zapata 1998; Garza Toledo 1994; Aguilar García 2001: 63-65; Weeks 1999; Bronstein 1997).⁴⁷

Workers' efforts to protest the neoliberal transition did little to help them maintain the favor of Salinas and the PRI. The 1988 election is a case in point. In the election, Salinas' primary opponent in the presidential race was Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who had broken from the PRI and formed the left-leaning party that would become today's Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD). Frustrated with the economic hardships caused by De la Madrid's austerity measures, many rank-and-file workers abandoned the PRI in favor of Cardenas' party. Salinas squeaked out a

⁴⁷ The CTM was not completely ineffective. For example, the federation was able to block a reform of the LFT, which, given the economic and political context, would probably not have favored workers. (Moreover, if the reform had included measures to increase union democracy, it would have meant a loss of political benefits for leaders of the CTM and other corporatist unions, giving the CTM another reason to reject it.) However, CTM leadership's tendency to support PRI economic programs that hurt workers materially signaled that leaders were mainly concerned with protecting their political position rather than the interests of workers. But as Javier Aguilar García (2001: 382) notes, "In Mexico, nobody believes that union leaders represent the rank-and-file."

victory in the presidential race,⁴⁸ but several labor leaders running for the PRI were defeated in other races (Collier 1992; Garza Toledo 1994: 211). Levy and Bruhn (2001: 75-76) argue that the growing standoff between the state and rank-and-file workers, as exemplified by the defeat of labor's PRI candidates in the election, gave the PRI more incentive to cut labor out of its political coalition.

Recognizing that labor's support could no longer guarantee electoral victory for the PRI and, consequently, the need to secure new bases of popular support, Salinas took steps to restructure state-society relations in ways that ignored organized labor. One notable example was the creation of the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program—PRONASOL) by Salinas in 1988. PRONASOL was a major national program of state support for community initiatives aimed at providing material benefits, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation. By focusing on community level initiatives and encouraging community level responsibility for the projects, Salinas hoped to promote local leaders as a new kind of interlocutor between individuals and the state and build a broad base of community support for the government. In short, PRONASOL would restructure state-society relations by funneling government resources to community level organizations rather than to the traditional sectors like organized labor (Cornelius, Craig, and Fox 1994; Cook et al. 1994; Fox 1994). PRONASOL may not have been a direct attack on labor, but it did signal that labor was not as crucial a player as it traditionally had been.

Officially, the corporatist state-labor relationship remained intact during the neoliberal transition. Leaders of the CTM and other official unions still had a prominent

⁴⁸ It is widely accepted that the PRI resorted to electoral fraud in order to ensure Salinas' victory. As such Cárdenas never officially conceded the race.

political position and a voice in the government (Levy and Bruhn 2001: 75-76). But the relationship was practically changed. This did not mean that the organized labor was no longer an important political actor or that labor would no longer play a role in the social construction of citizenship, only that the nature of the labor movement would inevitably change. De la Garza Toledo (1994: 199) suggests that “should the restructuring process generate a reduced number of wage earners and increase the number of more politically independent unions, this could also contribute to the crisis or restructuring of authoritarian unions themselves.” Events in recent years suggest that Mexico may be beginning to witness such a transformation of corporatist unions, which has important implications for a transformation in the role of labor in the social construction of citizenship.

3.4 THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDEPENDENT UNION MOVEMENT

Independent unions have always existed in Mexico, and anti-corporatist action has been an important aspect of labor mobilization. But beginning in the late-1990s, the corporatist labor movement began to change in dramatic ways, and a new independent labor movement began to emerge to challenge corporatism and neoliberalism and to support Mexico’s democratization. It is too early to tell what kind of impact this new independent labor movement will have in promoting the democratic rights of Mexican workers and citizens, but this new movement is without question an important player in Mexican politics and is dramatically altering the role that organized labor plays in the social construction of citizenship rights in Mexico.

The emergence of this new independent labor movement began in 1997 when six unions broke away from the Congreso de Trabajo (Labor Congress—CT), the umbrella

organization representing the official unions and federations affiliated with the PRI.⁴⁹ These six unions joined forces with the FAT and other independent labor organizations to form the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (National Workers' Union—UNT), an independent union federation dedicated to challenging neoliberal economic policies and to promoting democratic reform and union democracy in Mexico (La Botz 2005). As the leaders of the UNT noted in 1998,

One of the major historical objectives of the National Workers' Union is to achieve a democratic restructuring of unionism that will permit the authentication and strengthening of unions as organizations that defend and promote the interests and rights of workers, that transform and reverse the inequalities and imbalances inherent in capitalism, and that promote change and justice...as a conscious social critics (UNT 1998).

The UNT was certainly not the first independent, pro-democracy union organization in Mexico. What is significant about the UNT is that its formation represented a major exodus from the CT and rejection of traditional state-labor corporatism: in one single action, the CT lost just over 18% of its membership. The UNT is now the second largest labor federation in Mexico, after the CTM (Aguilar García 2001: 401; Bensusán and Cook 2003: 245).

In 1998, the strength of the independent labor movement grew when the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (Mexican Electricians' Union—SME) formed the Frente

⁴⁹ The CT was formed in 1966 as a means of unifying the many labor unions and federations that were affiliated with the PRI. It became the principle organization charged with articulating the demands and interests of the official labor unions. Additionally, it served as an institution within which affiliated unions and federations could resolve disputes. At its height in the 1970s, the CT encompassed most of the organized labor movement (Middlebrook 1995: 151). The six unions that left the CT in 1997 represented close to 360,000 workers (Aguilar García 2001: 401). These unions were the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social (National Social Security Workers' Union—SNTSS), the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (Telephone Workers' Union of the Mexican Republic—STRM), the Asociación Sindical de Sobrecargos de Aviación (Association of Flight Attendants of Mexico—ASSA), the Asociación Sindical de Pilotos de Aviación (Association of Airline Pilots—ASPA), the Alianza de Tranviarios de México (Alliance of Streetcar Workers—ATM), and the Sindicato de Trabajadores Técnicos y Manuales de la Industria Cinematográfica (Union of Technical and Manual Workers of the Cinematographic Industry).

Sindical Mexicano (Mexican Union Front—FSM), an independent coalition of approximately 40 unions, peasant, and urban popular organizations. The primary objective of the FSM is to mobilize against the neoliberal economic agenda, and it has paid specific attention to fighting the privatization of the Mexican Light and Power Company (the state-owned power company whose employees are represented by the SME). Unlike the UNT's affiliated unions, some unions belonging to the FSM (including the SME) remain affiliated with the CT. However, even if the FSM is not as vocal in challenging the corporatist structure, its anti-neoliberal stance is a major departure from the tendency of the CT and CTM leaders to support the government's economic agenda. This is an important divergence from official labor policy as well as an important means of speaking out on behalf of workers' interests.

In speaking of the independent union movement in Mexico, it is important to include the FAT. Since it was founded in 1960, the FAT has promoted democratic grassroots organizing, a task made difficult by the corporatist system's efforts to repress independent organizations. As Hathaway notes (2000: 47), "Many say that one of [the FAT's] great accomplishments has been simply to survive." But the FAT is notable for more than its mere survival in a hostile political environment. First, the FAT organizes four different sectors of the working classes: labor unions, peasant organizations, urban popular organizations, and cooperatives. Thus, the FAT aims to make democratic grassroots organizing a *social* project affecting all urban and rural social sectors. This stands in stark contrast to the corporatist system, in which these sectors were organized separately as a means of preventing a broad social movement capable of mobilizing against the state. Second, the FAT is active in forming transnational alliances, especially within

North America. It works closely with the United Electrical Workers Union in the United States in promoting independent union organizing in Mexico (Hathaway 2000; La Botz 2005). The FAT's commitment to broad domestic and international social organizing in the face of challenges to workers was made clear at its 12th National Congress:

Facing transnational globalization, the labor union agenda cannot be limited to the defense or extension of gains for labor, nor to alliances with the working class alone. The mission of labor organizations must be to develop relations and alliances with other sectors and to take up other issues in addition to labor and union matters (Alexander 2001).

The FAT is thus committed to building an international network of support for all urban and rural social sectors. Given the challenges to labor organizing posed by the Mexican political and economic context, the FAT's strategy of international and cross-sectoral organizing could be a model for transforming the way that workers organize for the construction of citizenship. Building a broader base of support for the social, political, and civil rights of all workers (urban and rural, unionized and non-unionized) will bring more social pressure to bear on the state than if a few labor organizations go at it alone.

The independent labor movement's opportunities for promoting union democracy, and democracy in general, opened up in 2000, when the election of Vicente Fox ended almost 80 years of PRI rule and heralded a transition to democracy (see Bensusán and Cook 2003). For the independent union movement, this democratic opening was complicated by Fox's commitment, as a member of the conservative, pro-business Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party—PAN), to continue the neoliberal economic agenda that had been in place since 1982. The tensions between democratic opening and the neoliberal economic reforms provided a context for the independent labor movement, and especially the UNT, to challenge Fox's economic policies in the

name of expanding democracy and social justice in Mexico. As UNT co-president Augustín Rodríguez Fuentes stated at a PRD forum on labor law reform in 2002,

The democratic transition for which millions of Mexicans voted is at a standstill. A year and a half after the government of our country changed, the big reforms are still pending that would, under a new social and political pact, allow us to consolidate democracy with social justice....

Globalization and Mexico's insertion into the new international economic context have not translated into a more just distribution of wealth, nor in rising salaries and employment. In fact, they are built on a greater exploitation of labor. Neoliberalism in the hands of the new pro-business government has led those hoping for a real change to become disenchanted and disappointed.

The prevailing political, economic, and social situation presents the union and labor movements with important challenges that must be taken on in a creative way (quoted in PRD 2002: 27).

Ultimately, these comments reveal the new approach to the social construction of citizenship taken by the independent labor movement in Mexico. These unions are no longer simply concerned with securing material benefits, but with transforming Mexican society politically, economically, and socially. Expanding democratic freedoms, within unions and in society more broadly, is key to this project.

The task, of course, is a big one, and the independent union movement has approached it by broadening its base and mobilizing against the government. In 2002, the UNT joined with El Barzón (the debtor's union), peasant organizations, and anti-neoliberalism groups to form the Frente Sindical, Campesino, Social y Popular (Union, Peasant, Social, and Popular Front—FSCSP) as a broad social movement to protest Fox's neoliberal agenda. La Botz (2005) argues that the FSCSP has “become the center of social struggle in Mexico.” In part this is because, like the FAT, the FSCSP brings together diverse social sectors in a united movement calling for a more just economic regime.

The UNT, FSCSP, and FSM have organized large-scale demonstrations and labor actions in protest of Fox's policies. On August 31-September 1, 2004, they led hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the country in a series of walkouts, protests, and marches to contest Fox's plans to reform social security and labor law. The independent union movement has been successful in preventing the privatization of the electric power and petroleum industries. And as will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 7, mobilization in December of 2004 helped to stall congressional negotiation of Fox's proposal for labor law reform, which weakens workers' rights vis-à-vis business while maintaining some of the regulations that perpetuate state-labor corporatism .

The emergence of this independent union movement in the late-1990s has important implications for the changing role of organized labor in the social construction of citizenship in Mexico. I argued earlier that state-labor corporatism did not *prevent* organized labor from participating in the social construction of workers' rights, only that it *restricted* labor's input to questions of material benefits and social welfare rights. Without any official ties to the government, independent labor organizations like the UNT and the FAT are not restricted in the same way, and the result is that their calls are not simply for broader social rights for workers, but for civil and political rights and a transformation of the economic system (Alexander 2001; PRD 2003).

A second important implication is that the independent union movement is becoming an important and recognized political player. It is in no way the case that workers are able to organize in Mexico free from government interference or

repression,⁵⁰ or that independent union organizations represent the majority of the unionized workforce. However, the UNT's leadership has been invited to participate in government dialogues, most notably with regard to reforming the LFT.⁵¹ It is too early to tell how effective the UNT and these other groups will be in the long run in promoting workers rights, but what is important is that they can command the government's attention and, at times, have a seat at the table. This makes it infinitely more likely that they can influence the construction of workers' rights.

Finally, it is significant from the perspective of the social construction of workers' rights that the independent labor movement increasingly represents a wide array of social sectors and organizations and, in the case of the FAT, transnational actors as well. A broader social movement may have better success in promoting the creation, expansion, and redefinition of citizenship rights and, importantly, can speak for workers in sectors beyond the formal, unionized sector. In short, the emergence of the new independent union movement has helped to shake up Mexican corporatism, and has the potential to dramatically alter the way in which organized labor participates in the social construction of workers' rights.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Regardless of the renewed influence the independent workers movement may have on the expansion of citizenship rights more generally, it is unclear whether the

⁵⁰ In its 2004 annual report on violations of trade union rights in Mexico, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) highlights several continuing obstacles to the free association of Mexican workers, notably workers in the maquila sector but also those in government agencies. These obstacles include conciliation and arbitration boards' denials of union registration to workers attempting to organize independent unions, protection contracts, blacklists, and the intimidation and harassment of union organizers (ICFTU 2004).

⁵¹ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

independent union movement will redefine the role of organized labor in supporting the construction of women's labor rights. Historically, women workers' rights have rarely been advanced by unions, despite women's participation in them. After the Casa closed in 1916, labor organizations rarely made an explicit effort to lobby for women workers' rights or to incorporate women into leadership ranks. For example, in its early years the CROM recruited women workers as members but simultaneously marginalized women from skilled occupations and leadership positions in workplaces, affiliated unions, and the federation itself (Porter 2003: 96-97). Not until the 1980s would a few labor organizations really begin to promote the rights of women workers and their inclusion within union leadership ranks.

The corporatist structure has done little to help women advance their interests within unions. Union leadership has been overwhelmingly male, and the power leaders have over the rank-and-file makes it difficult for workers to advance particular issues that do not concern leaders. The exclusion clauses that give leaders control over hiring and firing free leaders from having to cater to the interests of any particular group of workers (e.g., women) as a means of recruitment (Cooper 2002). Furthermore, the existence of white unions in the maquila industry, where women comprise a significant percentage of the workforce, means that workers have no real union representation. Women workers, therefore, have been subject to the decisions of male leaders who have no structural need to support women's rights.

Even unions that belong to the UNT and FSM have an imperfect record on supporting women's rights and inclusion. For the most part, these unions have corporatist histories and have at one time or another been affiliated with the CTM or CT. The

structural obstacles preventing union support for women's labor rights have been at one time or another part of the structures of the independent unions as well, and these unions continue to have predominantly male leadership. However, if any unions begin to seriously promote women's labor rights, it should be the independent unions because of their greater commitment to union and political democracy. For example, the FAT began addressing women's issues throughout the organization in 1990. And so, the independent union movement is significant because it has the potential to be a space where women workers can organize relatively more freely in support of their labor rights. There is also the potential that the independent labor movement will begin to support women's labor rights in political discourse. The independent labor movement thus has the potential to be a major actor in the social construction of women's labor rights if the leadership begin to effectively represent women's interests.

Aguilar García (2001: 392) argues that "only with their own organization can workers affect the politics of the country and the formation of a new political regimen that is more open, civilized, democratic, and above all, more just." Of course, a labor movement that is truly just will promote the rights and interests of women workers as well as those of workers generally. By and large, unions and union leadership ranks have been male realms, and the corporatist structures that gave union leaders so much power over the rank-and-file have made it difficult for women to challenge their exclusion and the lack of union attention paid to women's labor rights.

This does not mean that union women have been silent on the subject of women's labor rights. It does mean that, without the organizational support of unions, they have had to address their specific interests on their own and with other allies in civil society. In

the next chapter, I examine the history of women's participation in the Mexican labor movement and show how, over time, union women began to understand that if women were to have equal rights to participate in the workforce, they needed to become directly engaged in the social construction of women's labor rights.

The Women's Movement and Women in the Labor Movement in Mexico

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Women have been important political agents throughout Mexican history. They have confronted the political, social, and economic challenges facing Mexico as revolutionaries, suffragists, feminists, popular sector organizers, mothers, workers, and politicians. Throughout contemporary Mexican history, women have been engaged in bringing into the public sphere discussions about and demands for women's citizenship rights. As the twentieth century progressed, women workers became increasingly involved in this discourse over women's rights, among each other, within unions, and within civil society at large.

In this chapter I explore the history of the Mexican women's movement since the 1970s and, subsequently, its parallels with the history of the women's labor movement. Women have been active and important participants in the Mexican labor movement at least since the early twentieth century. Uniting with their male colleagues, they have been instrumental in major strike actions—from the general strike of 1916 to the telephone workers' and teachers' strikes of the 1970s and 1980s. While some of these strikes have

led to important advancements for workers generally, they have not been effective in ending the discrimination that Mexican women continue to face in unions and the workplace. In fact, ending such discrimination requires women workers to mobilize as *women* workers. This became more common as the work of the feminist movement began to influence women workers in the 1980s and as women's groups and union women began collaborating within civil society. In the late-1980s and 1990s, the National Meetings of Women Workers reflected union women's recognition that women workers must be involved in a national dialogue about women's labor rights alongside civil society allies and, moreover, that they need to become engaged at all three levels of citizenship construction to successfully promote them. Without such engagement, it is not likely that women's equal access to the labor sphere will be secured.

4.1 THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN MEXICO, 1970-2000

The Mexican women's movement has historically lacked a broad base of popular support and a coherent political agenda. Partly for these reasons, the Mexican women's movement has not been as effective in challenging obstacles to women's full equality as citizens as the women's movements in Western industrialized countries. Nevertheless, the women's movement in Mexico has struggled for many of the same goals as women's movements around the world. In the first half of the twentieth century, the movement focused on women's suffrage. Subsequently, women's demands have turned to civil rights issues like reproductive freedom and equal access to the work place and to education. Although the Mexican women's movement remains small, over the last three and a half decades it has transformed from one fraught with ideological and class tensions into a more cohesive movement focused on building alliances that can mobilize in

support of women's citizenship rights (Rodríguez 2003: 102; Lamas, Martínez, Tarrés, and Tuñón 1995; Lamas 1994).

THE 1970S: A FRAGMENTED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

That Mexican feminism began to take root in the early 1970s is partly due to the political liberalization of the Echeverría *sexenio*, during which opposition discourse—from political parties, new social movements, labor unions, and feminist groups—was tolerated and even encouraged (Lamas 1994: 146; Rodríguez 2003: 102-03). The participants in the early years of the women's movement represented a rather narrow sector of Mexican society. They came predominantly from the middle class, were college educated, and had an awareness of the feminist movements of Europe and the United States (Lamas et al. 1995: 331). As a result, the goals of Mexican feminism in the early years were profoundly influenced by the nature of Mexico's socioeconomic structure: Because women from the middle classes in Mexico could afford to hire domestic help, early feminists were not so concerned with women's unequal burden of domestic labor, nor were they immediately focused on the class-based concerns of poor and working-class women. Rather, these early feminists focused on challenging Mexico's *machista* culture (that is, extreme male dominance and female submission in social, economic, and political life). Their activity was concentrated in consciousness-raising groups, and their demands centered around issues of sexuality, including "voluntary maternity" (the idea that women should be able to decide for themselves whether or not to have children), legalizing abortion, stiffer penalties for violence against women, and support for rape victims (Lamas et al. 1995: 331; Lamas 1994: 147; Rodríguez 2003: 103-04).

Other women's activist groups emerged during the 1970s, representing Christian base communities, leftist political groups, the urban and rural poor, gays and lesbians, and labor unions. However, these groups did not always have explicitly feminist perspectives or demands, and this made collaboration difficult between feminists and other women activists. For example, women participating in the 1970s union movements were not always motivated by feminist concerns (Lamas et al. 1995: 333). Mexican feminist Marta Lamas (1994: 146) argues that the early efforts of feminist organizations to work with union women were unsuccessful because

The world view of the women workers themselves corresponded to the dominant ideology. They considered the [double work day] and sexual harassment to be "private" problems that had no relation to their work situation. Furthermore, it was difficult for them to accept the complicity of their coworkers or union leaders in the oppressive situation in which women found themselves, let alone confront them. It was better to avoid the issue than recognize the discrimination or the indifference of a coworker.

There was, thus, a fundamental tension between the feminist organizations whose work focused on issues of gender and sexuality and the organizations whose work focused on other aspects of women's identities, such as class. This tension was a major obstacle in the creation of a more cohesive women's movement.

The "traditional" feminist orientation of the Mexican women's movement was challenged in 1975 when Mexico City played host to the United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year. Mexican feminist groups decided to boycott the official conference and hold a counter-conference in order to draw attention to the Mexican government's neglect of women's issues, but the UN conference also gave women from around the world a forum within which to reflect upon what "women's issues" were. The presence at the conference of women from developing countries whose

interests were linked more closely to class and development issues forced the more “traditional” Mexican feminists to begin to recognize class issues as a feminist concern (Rodríguez 2003: 104-05).

This broader understanding of women’s issues led to the creation of a more inclusive women’s organization within Mexico. The Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de las Mujeres (National Front for Women’s Rights and Liberation—FNALIDM) was formed in 1979 in an effort to unite feminist groups with labor unions, gay rights organizations, and leftist political parties. The FNALIDM was the first Mexican effort to solidify a broader political base with the explicit goal of lobbying for political and social change that would improve women’s lives. The priorities of FNALIDM centered on supporting reproductive freedom, creating more daycare centers, condemning sexual harassment and assault, and denouncing violations of the LFT. However, members’ divergent interests, political positions, and identities complicated efforts to establish a coherent agenda. When the Mexican Congress failed to pass a voluntary maternity law that FNALIDM had supported in the early 1980s, the organization broke apart (Lamas et al. 1995: 332-33; Rodríguez 2003: 104-06; Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 94).

At the end of the 1970s, the women’s movement in Mexico was still fragmented and struggling with how to reconcile “traditional” feminist issues and other issues, such as class, that affected women’s lives. Lamas et al. (1995: 333) sum up the situation, stating that,

Though the diversity among emerging women’s organizations demonstrated the broad range of women’s concerns and activism in Mexico, this did not constitute a collective will that could be translated into a political force. Each of these social and political initiatives followed

parallel paths without meeting in a broader movement and without developing a clear feminist perspective capable of providing a shared framework for the activities of women's groups in this decade.

And so, neither FNLADIM nor the UN conference, which opened up a space for dialogue about the definitions of "feminism" and "women's issues," served as a catalyst for unifying a women's movement that could support a common agenda.

THE 1980S: POPULAR FEMINISM

The 1982 debt crisis and the 1985 Mexico City earthquake helped unify the women's movement in a way that the UN conference and FNLADIM could not. The economic recession, sharp cuts in the government's social spending, and decline in real wages that resulted from the debt crisis created enormous economic hardships for families, and many women had to break from their traditional housekeeping role in order to ensure the material survival of their families. Social organizations dedicated to meeting the material needs of poor Mexicans proliferated. Among these groups were NGOs formed by feminists, but there were also groups formed by poor women themselves, who engaged in their own discourse about the intersection of class and gender issues and developed links with other women's organizations across the country. Similarly, organizations such as the Coordinating Committee of Earthquake Victims and the Nineteenth of September Garment Workers Union, which united feminists (who often served as advisors) and other women's activists, helped provide essential services to

those people who had lost their homes and jobs in the earthquake (Rodríguez 2003: 48-59, 106-08; Lamas et al. 1995).⁵²

Thus, the Mexican women's movement transformed into a "popular feminist" movement, in which women from feminist organizations began to work more intensely with the leftist organizations already working with urban and rural poor women. These new collaborative efforts helped link the feminists' gender concerns to the demands for public services, affordable housing, basic consumer goods, just wages, and access to credit that were promoted by popular sector organizations. Because of Mexico's deeply rooted social and economic stratification and cultural and racial prejudices, popular feminism was a truly progressive form of social mobilization, and it helped create a more cohesive women's movement (Lamas et al. 1995: 335).

One of the organizations most reflective of popular feminism was the Women's Regional Council of the Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular (National Council of the Urban Popular Movement—CONAMUP), established in 1983. CONAMUP itself formed in 1981 as an umbrella organization for popular sector groups dedicated to improving the living conditions in poor urban areas. Its activities "focused on procuring land, housing, running water, drainage, schools, clinics, and public transport...as well as on rent freezes, sustaining price subsidies [and] eliminating the value-added tax...." (Stephen 1997: 127).

Although women made up the majority of CONAMUP's membership and were active in the organization's many projects, they rarely held leadership positions or were vocal in meetings. Women (and men) who were active in CONAMUP saw this as a

⁵² The Nineteenth of September Garment Workers' Union is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2 of this chapter.

problem, so in 1983 a group of women organized the Women's Regional Council of the CONAMUP. The Council gave women a space within which they could more freely speak and take on leadership positions, as well as a space where they could engage in a discourse about their unique experiences as women. Throughout the 1980s, Council programs such as a free breakfast program for community children in Mexico City and a campaign to keep subsidies on tortillas helped poor Mexicans cope with the economic hardships of the debt crisis. The Council also focused efforts on raising awareness of traditional feminist issues such as domestic violence. Because participation in the Council's marches, sit-ins, and other actions was so critical to the organization's success, the Council helped to foster the political agency of poor women. These factors—bridging class and gender issues through women's political agency—are the essence of the popular feminism that dominated the Mexican women's movement in the 1980s (Stephen 1997: 128-46).

This period of crisis helped build a more cohesive women's movement that mobilized successfully in support of women's immediate material needs. However, while needs-based mobilization was one successful outcome of popular feminism, a stronger legacy has been women's recognition of the importance of building broader coalitions to support changes to public policy that would benefit women over the long term. As Rodríguez says, "the popular feminist movement helped the older feminist movement redefine its priorities, so that by 1987...the movement was no longer focused on 'strategic' challenges, but on policy-related issues" (Rodríguez 2003: 109).

The focus on policy began in the run up to the 1988 elections, when women's groups helped mobilize women of all classes to participate in the elections. The

fraudulent outcome of the election helped feminist and women's groups realize the importance of direct engagement in the political process in order to secure desired outcomes. Groups consequently became more focused on coalition building and engagement with political parties in order to promote public policy goals. Their efforts were successful in 1990 and 1991 when laws were passed making sexual harassment a crime in the penal code and establishing harsher penalties for rape (Rodríguez 2003: 109, 192-93).

The 1980s was a period of important growth in the women's movement, from a very fractured movement to one that was able to unite more fully in support of immediate material interests and, subsequently, to build the first political coalitions to support changes in public policy. There are, thus, two important legacies of popular feminism: first, although ideological, class, and identity tensions did not disappear, feminists became more willing to work with other women activists. The effect of this changing strategy, says Rodríguez (2003: 111), has been to create "a two-way process of transformation. Feminists extend their definition to include a more diverse female experience, while NGOs and government agencies incorporate feminism into their discourse and programs." The second legacy was a greater recognition that women's collective action could yield important expansions of women's citizenship rights.

THE 1990S AND 2000S: ORGANIZING FOR REPRESENTATION, RIGHTS, AND DEMOCRACY

Since the 1990s, the emphasis on alliance building between women's groups that began with popular feminism in the 1980s has continued, but the focus of women's political engagement has become broader, emphasizing the role and rights of women in a democratizing country. In the 1990s and 2000s, women have become more engaged in

the national political process, focused on getting a “critical mass” of women elected to public office and on creating alliances between female politicians, professionals, NGOs, feminist academics, and workers who can help Mexican women achieve equality at all levels of society. (Rodríguez 2003: 109-10; Lamas 1994: 155-57; Lamas et al. 1995). What also sets the 1990s apart from previous decades is the way that the federal government has begun to focus more attention on women’s issues and rights.

This attention from the government is due to many factors, but among the most important are the influence of the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the proliferation of women’s groups in Mexico. The focus of the Beijing conference was on women’s rights, and the final Platform for Action called on governments and civil society associations to alter their practices in order to be more favorable to women. In Mexico, one important outcome of the Beijing conference was the creation of the Programa Nacional de la Mujer (National Women’s Program—PRONAM) by President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) in 1997. PRONAM established an institutionalized space in the federal government charged with advancing initiatives aimed at improving the lives of women. In 2001, President Fox replaced PRONAM with the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Women’s Institute—Inmujeres), dramatically increasing its budget and giving it more autonomy from government ministries. Inmujeres’ primary objective is to promote gender equity and fight gender discrimination in Mexico, and its 2002 national action program, *Proequidad*, specifies the

organization's objectives for establishing gender equity over the short, medium, and long term (Rodríguez 2003: 130-36, 175-77; Stevenson 1999: 75; Inmujeres 2002c).⁵³

The activity of NGOs and other civil society actors working on women's issues has continued unabated throughout the 1990s and 2000s alongside this new government attention to women's rights. A survey carried out before the Beijing conference in 1995 revealed that there were approximately 200 NGOs in Mexico working on women's issues related to development, rights, education, and health (Inmujeres 2002b: 31).⁵⁴ Many of these organizations have joined with other activists and politicians to propose (and sometimes push through changes on) legislation regarding a quota system for political parties, sex crimes, women's equality before the law, and women's labor rights. And many of these proposals for legislative change have been initiated and/or supported by the bicameral, multiparty Equity and Gender Commission in the national legislature, which was created in 1998 to ensure that the interests of women were being taken into account in legislative proposals (Rodríguez 2003: 169-73; Stevenson 1999; Espinosa Torres 2002; Lamas et al. 1995: 343-44; Lamas 1994: 158).

From the perspective of the social construction of citizenship, the importance of these civil associations in promoting the rights of women cannot be taken for granted.

⁵³ The objectives of *Proequidad* fall in nine areas: 1) incorporating the gender perspective into all facets of the federal government; 2) promoting a judicial framework that would reflect international obligations regarding women's human rights and guarantee these rights for women and children; 3) promoting equal economic opportunities for women through measures such as affirmative action; 4) promoting the development of public processes and policies that are sensitive to the ways in which gender differences influence poverty; 5) promoting an appreciation for diversity, tolerance, and respect for gender differences among all people, at all levels of society; 6) eliminating the inequalities that prevent women from achieving personal health; 7) preventing and penalizing violence against women; 8) guaranteeing women access to power structures and decisionmaking roles; and 9) promoting a balanced and stereotype-free image of women in cultural and sporting spheres and in the media (Inmujeres 2002c: 56-57)

⁵⁴ The Inmujeres report does not specify how the principal investigators of this survey went about counting or classifying the NGOs. Presumably, these are NGOs that are officially registered in some capacity, and undoubtedly, there are many more ad-hoc and unofficial civil associations that work on women's issues, among other themes.

Even if certain actors in the government have a commitment to pursuing gender equality, the impetus for effective and meaningful change must come from civil society. Inmujeres recognizes this, stating in its National Program that

Proequidad recognizes the role of women's organizations in strengthening the gender perspective of public policy [and]...recognizes that the mobilization of women's organizations has been the factor triggering social, political, and economic transformations benefiting the equality of men and women (Inmujeres 2002c: 52).

From the 1970s to the present day, there has been a marked development in the strength of the women's movement in Mexico. But despite these trends, there is still not a women's movement strong enough to force many policy issues through the legislative agenda. Lamas et al. (1995: 330-31) argue that,

Although individual women's lives and consciousness have been transformed, the women's movement has not yet been able to adequately incorporate these changes into a political dialogue. There has not yet been a feminist political initiative capable of involving the whole society. This has meant that contemporary Mexican feminism has yet to deal with some of the goals proposed during the 1970s.

This is compounded by resistance to women's rights within government and social institutions. Despite the Mexican government's overtures to promoting women's equality, as in the creation of PRONAM/INMUJERES, it remains the case that women's rights are rarely advanced in Mexican law. For example, in the 57th legislature of the Chamber of Deputies, there were 28 proposals for legislative change with respect to gender equity and women's rights, yet only six of these proposals were passed during this legislative period. Former Deputy Patricia Espinosa has argued that the failure to pass more of these proposals was due to the lack of political will on the part of many deputies and other political actors (Espinosa Torres 2002; n.d.: 34). Thus, for women to construct

a quality of citizenship equal to men's they face the challenges of building a broader movement capable of taking on resistant political institutions.

4.2 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEXICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

Union women have been promoting the citizenship rights of women workers since the beginning of the twentieth century, and many of the same trends of the women's movement—consciousness raising, coalition building, and efforts to promote changes to public policy—have also been reflected in women's participation in the labor movement since the 1970s. However, women's role in the labor movement, and the ways union women have promoted the rights of women workers, often goes unrecognized. The agency of women workers and their allies is thus an important, if overlooked, aspect of the women's movement and the story of the construction of women's citizenship in Mexico.

WOMEN IN THE MEXICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, 1900-1970

Assessing the exact number of women who were part of the EAP and the unionized workforce is difficult, owing to the paucity of reliable statistical information. This is especially true for the first half of the twentieth century. Nationwide, women's participation in the labor force through 1930 was low. However, in Mexico City, the country's largest city and industrial and economic center, women worked in greater numbers. In 1879, women represented 32% of the workforce in Mexico City. This percentage increased to 35% in 1910 before falling to 28% in 1921 and 17% in 1930 (Porter 2003: Chapter 1). Nationally, women's participation in the EAP remained low over the next two decades—in 1950, women made up only 13.6% of the EAP—but

women's participation in the workforce began to increase by 1970, when women made up 20.6% of the EAP (INEGI 2003). Despite women's small presence in the workforce, they were still important players in the labor movement throughout the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Women's participation in the labor movement came before women had full political citizenship or labor rights, but it was critical in influencing the direction of the working class movement in the early part of the century (Porter 2003: 117-18; Rodríguez Bautista 2002: 1).

Women's participation in the labor movement prior to 1970 followed at least three different trends. First, women were active in movements to create and consolidate unions and union federations. For example, in 1906 women workers in the tobacco harvesting and textile industries⁵⁵ of Veracruz were early participants in the workers' groups that led to the creation of the CROM.⁵⁶ Moreover, women workers' activism in the early years of the Mexican Revolution led many to participate in activities of the Casa and helped it flourish until its suppression in 1916. Furthermore, women participated with workers in the electrical industry in the consolidation of the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (Mexican Electricians Union—SME), which was founded on December 15, 1914. In the 1930s, women workers in the commerce and food industries participated in the labor struggles that led to new unions that were eventually amalgamated in the CTM. And in 1962, the mostly female workforce of Ropa Irapuato, a garment manufacturer in

⁵⁵ In the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the tobacco and textile industries were among the largest sources of women's employment. Susie Porter (2003: Chapter 1) argues that women's employment in these industries owes largely to the fact that workers in these industries had not organized in guilds prior to the period of Mexico's industrialization. Because workers' guilds typically excluded women from their membership, women's employment opportunities during the period of industrialization were limited to newer industries or those that did not have a workers' guild.

⁵⁶ As noted in Chapter 3, the CROM was not very progressive with regard to women and marginalized them from skilled occupations and leadership positions.

Irapuato, Leon, organized one of the first unions of the FAT (Porter 2003: 96; Lovera 1995: 37; Hathaway 2000: 66-68; Rodríguez Bautista 2002: 1; Aguirre Camacho n.d.).

Second, women workers were active in strikes and protest activity around such issues as consumption, wages, working conditions, production quotas, enforcement of labor regulations, and the right to negotiate with employers. From 1881-1907, there were at least 250 strikes in Mexico, the majority of which were staged by workers in the textile and tobacco industries. At the time, women represented roughly 25% of textile workers and dominated the tobacco industry, “so their participation in these strikes was central in the history of labor organizing during the [rule of Porfirio Díaz]” (Porter 2003: 76-77; also see Lear 2001).

Although women were predominantly employed in tobacco and textiles, they also participated in labor organizing in other industries. For example, in December of 1914, after a manager of the Ericsson telephone company fired operators who were protesting the company’s low wages, poor working conditions, fines, and punishments, two women—Maria Bustos and Josefina Soto Mayor—played a major role in initiating worker protest against Ericsson, which lasted until March of 1915. Union women were represented in the general strike in Mexico City in 1916. They were also active in the first strike of Mexican railroad workers in 1921 and later, in 1958, participated in the shock brigades in the railroad workers’ struggle against corporatist unions. In 1934, women led the movement of the Sindicato Cementos Hidalgo (Hidalgo Cement Union). Finally, in late 1960 through early 1961, the telegraph workers of the Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Obras Publicas (Ministry of Communication and Public Works) went on strike for higher wages, maintaining the struggle even when the government called in the army

(Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001; Rodríguez Bautista 2002; Lear 2001; Porter 2003).

Finally, women in the early part of the century were involved in movements defending the interests of women workers. In the early years of the twentieth century, women workers' mutual aid societies focused on issues such as child care and education, the need for a shorter workday so women could do shopping during markets' business hours, and the importance of women being able to collect their pay during safe hours. The first women's labor union, Las Hijas de Anahuac (the Daughters of Anahuac), was formed in 1907. The union promptly threw its political support behind the Mexican Liberal Party, which advocated issues of concern to women workers such as the eight hour workday, the regulation of wages and the workday for those paid by the piece, and regulation of work done outside factories or business establishments (Porter 2003: 90-91). In the 1920s women working in the railroad industry formed the Women Workers of the Mexican Railroad and fought successfully to guarantee equal wages for men and women workers. And in 1935 women from the PNR (the precursor to the PRI) and the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party) formed the Frente Único por Derechos de la Mujer (Single Front for the Rights of Women), which was instrumental in unionizing the textile industry and in organizing support for women's issues in the areas of work, education, social welfare, and political participation (Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001).

Women also organized outside of unions in order to promote the interests of women workers. As Susie Porter (2003: 118) notes,

Though some worker organizations formulated demands that clearly reflected the influence and interest of working women, women's work-

related issues were not fully represented by unions. Because of this, women did not rely solely on unions and took to the streets to voice their demands. Demonstrating in the streets, women criticized their position in the workforce, their treatment by unions, and their unequal citizenship.

One notable example of such organizing is the 1925 May Day parade, when women of many occupations—waitresses, tobacco, textile, and printing industry workers, vendors, teachers, and labor organizers—marched in protest of their exclusion from unions. One woman at the parade carried a banner reading, “Upon women are imposed the laws of humanity; but she is not called to become part of it” (quoted in Porter 2003: 114, 116). Clearly, women workers have been engaged in important ways in the labor movement and in making demands, as workers, for the expansion of women’s citizenship, from very early on. However, women were still a very small percentage of the paid workforce and an even smaller percentage of the unionized workforce. Those women who were unionized were not able to push forward widespread advancements for women workers, even if they had some successes in their own unions. And women throughout the workforce faced various forms of discrimination. As the percentage of women engaged in the paid workforce began to climb in the 1970s, a new generation of women workers began to engage in the labor movement to promote the general demands of workers and their specific demands as women workers.

WOMEN IN THE MEXICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, 1970-2000

In the 1970s, the success of ISI combined with President Echeverría’s political liberalization created an environment within which the labor movement flourished. As women’s participation in the paid workforce began to increase in the 1970s, so did their participation in the labor movement. Even so, women faced a number of obstacles that

prevented them from participating in the workplace, and in unions, on equal terms as men.

Obstacles to Women's Equality in the Labor Sphere

In Mexico, the interests of women workers have been nominally protected under the law. Women did not have full rights of citizenship when both the constitution (1917) and the LFT (1931) were written, so although both documents granted some protections and rights to women workers, including maternity leave, the citizens and workers whose rights and interests were implicitly protected in these documents were men.⁵⁷ The fact that the paid workplace was effectively a male sphere and work an *a priori* right of men is exemplified by the fact that until 1974, in certain states a married woman had to have written permission from her husband in order to be hired (Lamas et al. 1995: 331).

In the 1970s the rights of women, as citizens and as workers, were articulated in changes to the constitution, the LFT, and other federal laws. In 1974, Article 4 of the constitution was added to guarantee the equality of men and women before the law. Similarly, Article 3 of the LFT was changed to guarantee women's equality in the workplace and with respect to labor laws. Other changes to federal law included giving peasant women the right to own land, and rescinding the law requiring married women to have their husband's permission to be hired. Although it was a step forward for women to have these rights articulated in federal law, the changes did not end discrimination against women in the workforce. One of the results of the weak and fragmented women's

⁵⁷ As mentioned in Chapter 2, Mexican women gained full political citizenship in 1953. The history of women's labor rights as articulated in the Constitution and LFT will be developed more thoroughly in Chapter 7.

movement in the 1970s was that feminists and women workers did not unite to take advantage of constitutional and LFT reforms to promote women's labor rights. In fact, the changes that were made in 1974 did not result from women's mobilizations; rather, they were made in anticipation of Mexico hosting the 1975 UN conference. The effect of implementing changes "for show" was that the changes were not accompanied by enforcement mechanisms that would help eliminate discrimination against women, nor did the changes indicate a shift in the cultural views—paid work as men's primary responsibility and domestic labor as women's—that have contributed to women's unequal opportunity to participate in the labor sphere (Lamas et al. 1995: 331-32; CNMT 1995: 86).

Because work has been considered a male realm, women have to deal with a wide range of challenges and discrimination in the labor sphere, and their rights often go unenforced. First, women face direct forms of gender discrimination. For example, despite laws against gender discrimination in hiring, many companies routinely administer pregnancy tests and do not hire a woman if she is pregnant. Similarly, despite laws protecting maternity (e.g., guaranteeing paid maternity leave), women are sometimes fired after becoming pregnant in order to avoid the extra costs of maternity leave. Moreover, sexual harassment of women workers by male coworkers and managers has been a significant form of discrimination since women began entering mixed-sex workplaces early in the twentieth century (CNMT 1995; Porter 2003: 126-28).

Women also face indirect forms of gender discrimination, such as occupational segregation, a structural obstacle that results in women being concentrated into jobs that are considered to be more feminine or more compatible with women's domestic

responsibilities, such as sales jobs in the service industry, clerical work, domestic labor and child care, teaching, and nursing. Except for teaching and nursing, these jobs tend to be lower paid, less stable, and have less social value than traditionally masculine jobs (CNMT 1995: 3, 43; Cooper and Guzmán 2000: 219-220). Moreover, some companies engage in what could be called “gender profiling,” the practice of specifically soliciting women for low-level secretarial positions and men for more highly paid management and administrative positions.

The fact that women have continued to be primarily responsible for domestic work has contributed to other forms of indirect gender discrimination. As Figure 4.1 indicates, like all women, married women entered the workforce in greater numbers during the 1980s economic crisis, but they entered the workforce without institutional support for daycare centers, which made it difficult for women with children to engage in full time jobs. This meant that women entering the labor market out of economic need often opted for jobs that were temporary, part-time, non-salaried, or located in the informal sector—jobs that paid less, were non-unionized, and offered few, if any, legal protections. In the formal workforce, women found it difficult to participate in additional training for their jobs when the training occurred outside of normal working hours because they had domestic work and child care responsibilities after working hours. Therefore, women were less likely than men to advance at their job or to gain higher salaries (García and Oliveira 1998: 72-73; Rodríguez 2003: 55-59; CNMT 1995: 43-44).

Even union women, the most protected and easily organized sector of working women, face discrimination and challenges to equal participation in their unions.⁵⁸ As in the workplace generally, women are subject to sexual harassment within unions. Women's domestic responsibilities make it difficult for women to take part in union activities outside working hours. Moreover, even in industries where women made up a significant (or majority) of the workforce, women hold few leadership positions within unions.⁵⁹ Those women who do have leadership positions often hold "soft" positions, in areas such as culture and education. In the late-1970s, union women's attention to gender issues was beginning to take off, but in those unions where women were beginning to focus on gender issues, the overwhelmingly *machista* nature of Mexican unions meant there were few sympathetic leaders who would implement change.

Figure 4.1
Women's Participation in the Workforce by Civil Status

Rates of Women's Participation

<u>Civil Status</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1987</u>
Total	26.9%	31.5%	37.4%
Single	56.1	60.6	60.7
Married	17.4	21.3	28.2
Separated/widowed/ divorced	60.0	63.0	70.7

Source: García and Oliveira (1998: 43)

⁵⁸ Currently, approximately 36-37% of Mexican women are part of the EAP, but as few as 8.2% of them have or have had unionized jobs. This represents roughly 1.5 million women, out of a total unionized workforce of roughly 10 million (INEGI 2002: 317, 413; OIT 2002a: 96-97).

⁵⁹ In 2002, the number of women in union leadership positions was still quite small. Inmujeres (2002b: 30) notes that in the CTM, women had a total representation of only 4.3% in directive bodies. In the Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado (Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions—FSTSE) women had only 5.7% representation in directive bodies. Moreover, women held secretary general positions in only 15% of industrial unions, 11.5% in public sector unions, and 7.7% in service unions.

Given these obstacles there is a clear need for union women to become more active in promoting the rights and interests of women workers within and beyond their unions. If they do not, unions will continue to be institutions where women's labor rights are ignored, and this will make it difficult for women to become more active in their unions, particularly at the leadership level where they are best able to effect change. Moreover, if union women do not take advantage of their organizational ability and political weight to contribute to (or even lead) a broader women's movement supporting the expansion and enforcement of women's labor rights, it is less likely that these rights will be secured. This affects not just union women, because all women workers are likely to benefit from better labor laws.

Union women's organizing did begin to increase in the 1970s. Sara Lovera (1995) argues that their organizational strategies fell into three categories—organizing within unions for demands unrelated to gender, organizing within their unions in support of gender demands, and organizing outside of union structures in support of gender demands. The first two types of organization are similar to those of the previous period, but the changing political and economic context provided an opening for union women to eventually become more engaged in the third type—building alliances outside of unions to promote women's citizenship rights.

Women's Organizing within Unions for Demands Unrelated to Gender

As in the early twentieth century, women workers in this period were frequently involved in labor organizing around issues that had no link to gender issues. There are several examples in this period of women organizing with their unions for issues unrelated to gender. For example, in 1972 women workers of the Medalla de Oro (Gold

Medallion) garment factory in Monterrey declared a strike to protest the unjust firing of some coworkers, low wages, the company's non-recognition of seniority, absence of medical insurance, and harassment. When neither the company nor the state government of Nuevo Leon addressed their demands, the workers marched to Mexico City. The marchers faced resistance from the Echeverría government along the way, and were assailed by police and a riot squad on the way to Los Pinos, the presidential residence, but they continued nonetheless (Rodríguez Bautista 2002: 2-3).

In September of 1987, nurses, daycare workers, and administrators with the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social (National Union of Social Security Workers—SNTSS) mobilized to demand union democracy, salary restructuring, and an improvement of general working conditions. During the mobilization, women did begin discussing some gender issues, such as the importance of women's representation on the union executive committee, and in one section of the union, the section leader began to conduct gender training classes. But for the most part the women's demands centered around non-gender demands (Lovera 1995: 46-47).

Two of the most significant examples of union women's participation in labor mobilizations without gender-specific demands were the participation of telephone operators in the strikes of the Sindicato de las Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (Telephone Workers' Union of the Mexican Republic—STRM) against Telmex, beginning in the late 1970s, and the democratic teachers' movement, which lasted from 1979-89. After the STRM was founded in 1950, the union was closely affiliated with the PRI and the CT. Despite this corporatist bent, Mexican telephone workers had a history

of militancy, and this anti-corporatist militancy reared its head in 1976.⁶⁰ Until that time, the corporatist leadership of the STRM had made moderate gains in real wages, but participation of the rank-and-file in the union's negotiations with Telmex was virtually non-existent, particularly with regard to the departmental contracts that regulated working conditions within each individual department. This created a significant level of discontent among the rank-and-file. Steve Dubb notes that "this discontent, coupled with union leadership's neglect of workplace issues and increasing focus on pursuing national political posts for themselves, led to a nationwide wildcat strike in 1976 and the election of more autonomous union leadership under Francisco Hernández Juárez" (Dubb 1999: 124).

From 1976-82, the STRM engaged in four major strikes revolving around wages, working conditions, and the relationship of the union to the government. At the heart of the strikes during this period were the telephone operators, all of whom were women. The telephone operators worked in some of the most difficult conditions in the company: among other things, work spaces were inadequate, management of the workers was unreasonably strict (for example, the workers received only two 10 minute breaks to go to the bathroom during an eight hour shift), and the poor state of the equipment and the

⁶⁰ Until 1950 when they merged to form Telmex, two telephone companies—Ericsson and Mexicana—operated in Mexico, each with their own union. The Mexicana workers' union was affiliated with the CROM and was generally cooperative with the Mexican government. Conversely, the Ericsson workers' union had an anarcho-syndicalist orientation and a reputation for militancy, striking six times between 1928-49. When the companies merged, the two unions also merged to form the STRM. For most of the period 1950-76, union leadership reflected the corporatist bent of the old Mexicana workers' union. Nevertheless, the militant nature of the old Ericsson workers' union was always present in certain factions of the union rank-and-file, emerging in the anti-corporatist movement of 1958-62 and again, more permanently, in 1976. As noted in Chapter 3, the STRM officially broke with the CT in 1997 and became a founding member of the UNT (Dubb 1999: 120-24; Garza Toledo 2001a)

telephone lines led to illness and injury.⁶¹ As such, one of the key demands of the first strike, in April of 1978, was the agreement to negotiate a new departmental contract with the operators and to secure a wage increase for them. Although Telmex agreed, as of March 1979—nearly a full year later—the company had still not negotiated the new departmental contract with the operators. On March 12, 1979, the union called it's second strike. The strike was led by 9,000 (women) operators and supported by 15,000 other *telefonistas* who struck in solidarity (Garza Toledo 2001a; Rodríguez Bautista 2002; Dubb 1999: 172-74).

As a result of the strikes, the operators were able to achieve better working conditions and break the oppressive control that the administration had over their working environment. However, although women were the heart of the STRM strikes, their demands were not linked to gender issues. One telefonista who was active in the strikes said that,

...frankly no, there weren't these demands, gender demands....There was a numerous group of women who were the operators, and at this time they had very difficult working conditions, and this was the cause of...their negotiations, which included going on strike for the creation of a departmental contract. But [this was] seen more from the point of view, or from the perspective of how to get rid of the reactionary effects of the old administration, but not with the gender perspective of today (personal interview with Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003).

Women workers gained collectively from the mobilizations from 1976-82. In particular, by helping break the control of the old, corporatist leadership of the union, they helped

⁶¹ For example, Gloria Olvera, a retired operator, said that the operators' equipment, which was manufactured in Sweden, was not comfortable for Mexican women, who have smaller statures than Swedes. The ill-fitting equipment contributed to repetitive stress injuries (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/6/2003).

pave the way for a greater union democracy. But gender was irrelevant, both as a catalyst for the strikes and as a source of specific demands.

The second case involves women's participation in the democratic teachers' movement. The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Education Workers—SNTE) is the largest union in Mexico, with a membership of over one million. Together with the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education—SEP), the SNTE tightly controlled all aspects of public education in the country. For example, union leaders controlled the appointment of teachers as school directors or supervisors and to professional positions within the union, the SEP, and even within the PRI (of which the SNTE has always been a strong ally). The professional careers of teachers were consequently beholden to the crony system of the SNTE, and professional advancement meant playing by the rules of union administrators. For women, “playing by the rules” could mean dealing with demands for sexual favors and other types of harassment—to the extent that some women would bring their father or brothers with them when they had official business with the union. For any teacher, not playing by the rules could mean demotion, transfer to a worse school district, loss of advancement opportunities, or even being fired (Cook 1996: 77-80; Cortina 1990: 250).

In the late 1970s the PRI proposed to decentralize the SEP. The SNTE rejected this proposal and looked to its members to mobilize against the government. Instead of supporting the SNTE, dissident factions within the union, including the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Council of Education Workers—CNTE), used the opportunity to mobilize against the SNTE leadership and in support of a democratic union that would give the teachers more control over their own professional

careers. The dissident movement lasted from 1979 to 1989, and the persistence of the movement led to electoral victories for the CNTE in three union locals in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas and challenged the leadership of the union itself. Given the close relationship between the SNTE and the PRI, the democratic teachers' movement was by all accounts an important instance of union mobilizing in Mexico (Cook 1996, 1990; Rodríguez 2003: 76-77).

Women made up a majority of the rank-and-file of the SNTE. They were drawn to the teaching profession for many reasons: for many years, women were barred from universities, but not from teaching colleges, which were also cheaper than universities and required fewer years of study; teachers' working hours made the profession more conducive to women's domestic responsibilities; and in general, it was considered a more "feminine" occupation (Cook 1996: 235-36). Regardless of the reasons women became teachers, as state employees and part of the union, women's material benefits from teaching were considerable (at least on paper). They were eligible for maternity leave, free child care, social security, paid vacations, and retirement pensions after 30 years of service. They were also guaranteed equal pay for equal levels education and experience (Cortina 1990: 244-46).

At the beginning of the democratic teachers' movement, approximately 57% of Mexico's teachers were women (although in some areas, women held as many as 80% of teaching positions). Yet despite their overwhelming presence among the rank-and-file, women rarely held leadership positions within the union. Some women simply were not interested in the extra work that went along with union positions or were not interested in being a divisive force within the union. Women also found it difficult to juggle their

domestic responsibilities with union participation, which involved travel and time commitments outside of normal working hours (Cook 1996: 238). It is also important to highlight that women were sometimes blocked from greater participation in the union by strategies of union leaders. For example, just before the beginning of the democratic teacher's movement in 1977, union leaders decided to eliminate the women's office of the SNTE, which had given women opportunities for separate representation (Rodríguez 2003: 77). Union leaders also channeled women's participation into social events (like Mothers' Day celebrations) and away from more political union events (Cortina 1990: 247-57).

Despite the barriers to their participation in the union, women played an essential role in the democratic teachers' movement. In fact, since women were the majority of the rank and file, the movement could not have succeeded without their active participation.

Cook notes that

Members...participated in direct collective actions—in marches, rallies, occupations, and strikes—or in the numerous support activities surrounding these mobilizations. Women were especially visible during these actions and almost always took charge of the cooking and child care, essential activities during mass mobilizations. Indeed without these activities, it is unlikely that the movement's actions could succeed (Cook 1996: 238).

Although women's participation was critical to the success of the democratic teachers' movement, the movement had no official gender agenda, and many women frowned upon focusing on gender issues or a feminist agenda for fear of being a divisive force within the movement (Cook 1996: 239; Lovera 1995: 48). Still, one of the unintended outcomes of the movement was that women's participation in the democratic teachers' movement *did* bring attention to issues of concern to women and, moreover, that women gained greater legitimacy as actors within the union.

When the movement emerged in the 1970s, it focused on demanding respect for teachers and their rights. Given the kind of harassment women faced within the traditional union structure/hierarchy, “ending the practice of sexual harassment of female teachers was one of the central banners of the movement” (Cook 1996: 79). Moreover, women’s crucial participation in the movement challenged traditional conceptions of women’s proper roles within the union. By 1989, women had come to play a more central leadership role in the movement and within union locals. This participation “led many male colleagues to begin to reevaluate the ability of women to participate meaningfully in the movement, and, perhaps more slowly, it raised member awareness about inequalities in the home” (Cook 1996: 237-39). Given the large percentage of women in the SNTE rank-and-file, it was perhaps inevitable that the democratic teachers’ movement took on a gendered agenda, even if it was not a goal of the movement—or even the women themselves—at the outset.

These examples of union women’s organizing reflect the state of the women’s movement in the 1970s and into the 1980s, when gender and class concerns were not easily linked. They also provide interesting insights into the social construction of citizenship argument. Two points in particular are worth noting. First, what is essential to note about this type of union women’s organizing is that women workers played a powerful role in advocating change—including democratic change—within their unions. Although gender specific issues were not the catalyst for these mobilizations, the strength of women’s mobilization suggests that if women do take on gender specific concerns en masse, the political force will be there. Conversely, if women do not mobilize together to

tackle gender concerns, these issues will most likely be overlooked in the process of constructing citizenship rights.

A second point can be drawn more directly from the democratic teachers' movement. Central to the social construction of citizenship argument is that for citizenship to be truly meaningful, it must exist at all levels of society. The teachers' movement shows how women came to realize the importance of challenging institutions when the institutions did not respect the formal principles of citizenship. As Cortina (1990: 261) powerfully states,

...if union culture accounts for the nonparticipation of women in union politics, women's active participation in dissident movements shows their interest in changing the institution that controls them as professional teachers. Their quest serves as a reminder that legal equality for women marks only the starting point of further efforts to remake the institutions that shape the work of women.

The SNTE is certainly not the only union where women's formal equal rights were not realized. As the next section discusses, in the late 1970s, women workers became increasingly focused on challenging the internal structures of unions that prevented them from participating in the workforce and in labor unions on equal terms as men.

Women's Organizing within Unions for Demands Related to Gender

The efforts of union women, organizing *as women*, to challenge the institutional structures that have prevented them from enjoying equal opportunities as workers and unionists began as the roots of popular feminism took hold in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Key among women's goals was opening official spaces in the unions where women could analyze the particular issues facing women workers and develop strategies for promoting changes. In the SME, women began lobbying the national executive

committee in 1982 for the creation of a Women's Secretariat and for gender-based demands such as the reduction in the number of years of labor necessary for retirement, training in occupations traditionally held by men, and greater representation on the national executive. The women were partly successful. Union leadership did initiate a series of workshops dedicated to examining the condition of women workers within the SME and, in 1990, the so-called "Women's Brigade" was given a space within the union. However, it was not formally recognized within the collective contract or the union statutes, and the national executive has remained an exclusively male realm (Lovera 1995: 51-52).

A more successful example of this type of organizing was in the banking industry. The nationalization of the banking industry in 1982 led to the creation of the first banking industry unions. In 1984, these unions were united under a common federation, the Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios (National Federation of Banking Unions—FENASIB). The women of the FENASIB (representing approximately 50% of the workforce) called for the creation of a Secretaría de Acción Femenil (Secretariat of Women's Action—SAF) in 1985 to address the concerns of women workers, such as the scarcity of women in union positions, sexual harassment, and discrimination of women in the banking sector. In May of 1987, FENASIB established a National Commission for Women's Action (in 1999 the name was changed to the Secretariat of Gender Equity). Moreover, 13 banking unions had their own official women's offices. While the work of most of these focused on social activities, two of the banks had women's offices that addressed issues such as access to daycare, women's involvement in union politics,

mobilization in support of International Women's Day, and the working conditions and rights of pregnant women (Lovera 1995: 52-53; González Nicolás n.d.-a).⁶²

Women workers affiliated with the FSTSE have been active in supporting women's issues since 1987. In this year, the Secretary of Agriculture and Water Resources and the Secretary of Commerce and Government tried to eliminate the half hour workday reduction for women with children under six years. Approximately 25,000 women mobilized in response. The women of the FSTSE exhibited a more sustained pressure on the federation and its unions through the Secretary for Women's Action. Between 1989-93, the Secretary held four Women's Congresses, in each demanding a reduction for women in the number of years necessary for full retirement to 22 years of service, elimination of pregnancy testing, longer maternity and breast feeding leaves, and the creation of daycare centers (Lovera 1995: 53-54). As with FENASIB, FSTSE used the official women's office to call attention to women's labor rights.

Perhaps the most symbolic example of union women organizing on behalf of women's interests is the movement of the Nineteenth of September Garment Workers' Union (NSGWU), which began in 1985. The NSGWU movement was the first modern union movement in Mexico in which both the rank-and-file workers *and* the union leaders were women. It is also significant because it quickly built alliances with feminist advisors and popular sector women's organizations and became known as a women's organization as well as a union (Carrillo 1991, 1990).

⁶² The success of women's internal organizing in the banking sector as opposed to the SME may have to do with the larger number of women workers. More likely, it has a great deal to do with the aggressive leadership of FENASIB's Secretary of Gender Equity. This case will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Mexico City's garment industry was centralized in two areas near downtown. On September 19, 1985, an earthquake hit the downtown area, damaging or destroying 400 garment production factories and leaving as many as 800 workers dead and 40,000 unemployed. Factory owners were slow to assist in the search for missing workers and also resisted making the legally required indemnity payments.⁶³ Outraged, the garment workers and volunteers from various feminist organizations and NGOs quickly formed two groups (one in each of the two garment factory areas) dedicated to organizing rescue work, filing complaints against factory owners with labor authorities, and publicly denouncing the poor response to the crisis of both the government and factory owners (Carrillo 1991: 77-80; Rodríguez 2003: 78). A few weeks after the earthquake, the two organizations held a joint meeting and developed a common set of demands, including the settlement of indemnity demands for affected workers, timely payment of back-wages and benefits owed, safe working conditions, and importantly, the creation of an industry wide union and industry wide collective contract. The list of demands was formally presented to President De la Madrid on October 18, 1985. On October 20, one month after the earthquake, the NSGWU was officially recognized and registered with the Secretary of Labor, becoming the first officially recognized independent labor union since 1976. Significantly, 95% of the union's 8,000 members and all 10 members of the national executive committee were women (Carrillo 1991: 82-83, 88).

⁶³ Indemnity is a form of compensation paid to employees when their work contract or agreement is ended due to factory closure, lay-offs, injury or accident, or natural disaster. The Mexican LFT guarantees indemnity payments equivalent to 90 days wages for the first year worked, 20 days wages for each additional year of service, and a Christmas bonus as severance. Labor authorities can determine additional payments for different categories of indemnity (Carrillo 1991: 89 fn35).

Prior to the earthquake, the overwhelmingly female makeup of garment industry workers led feminist organizations to support and advise garment workers' organizational efforts. Because there was already a history of support, feminist organizations became active supporters of the garment workers in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and helped to coordinate relief efforts. Subsequently, they began to take on important advising roles in the new union, helping with decision making and providing leadership training, administration, and important informational resources to union leaders (Carrillo 1991: 101-35).

In addition to feminist advisors, the NSGWU found early allies with women's groups like the Women's Regional Council of the CONAMUP. The NSGWU and their allies among women's popular sector organizations provided mutual support for each other's activities and, importantly, helped the NSGWU develop a "gender-based sense of collective identity" and adopt the characteristics of a women's organization, with gender based projects and programs (Carrillo 1991: 135). Among other things, the NSGWU operated a day care center, a collective kitchen, and a special cooperative workshop for workers over 40 (Carrillo 1991: 101-35; Lovera 1995: 44). As the NSGWU's "Platform of Action" stated,

The labor movement must open itself to not only defense of labor demands, but to the building of a popular power base. ... Our Union constitutes the first step; together with other women who have organized and struggled in poor neighborhoods, in other unions, and in the countryside, we constitute a powerful working women's movement (quoted in Carrillo 1991: 129).

The NSGWU thus became the ultimate example of union women bridging class and gender interests in an effort to transform a union into an institution that supported women's rights.

But the success of the NSGWU was short lived. After the union resolved the issue of indemnity payments to unemployed workers in March of 1986, it faced the difficult task of winning new labor contracts. In this case, the union faced major challenges. One problem was dwindling membership in the union, as many workers left for other jobs upon receiving their indemnity payments, shrinking the rank-and-file. The NSGWU also faced stiff resistance from factory owners, from the corporatist unions that were vying for the same labor contracts, and even from the De la Madrid government, which was undermining union strength as part of the strategy of neoliberal transition.⁶⁴ The NSGWU's difficulties gaining contracts in the garment industry hit the union hard. By 1990, the NSGWU represented only 275 workers in four factories (Carrillo 1991: 93-97; 1990; Lovera 1995: 43-44).

The union's alliance with its feminist advisors was also problematic in the long run. Two feminist organizations had played major advisory roles in the NSGWU, the Colectivo Revolución Integral (Integral Revolutionary Collective—CRI) and Mujeres en Acción Sindical (Women in Union Action—MAS). But conflicts between the CRI (a working class organization with a more confrontational style) and MAS (a middle class organization that leaned toward negotiation) prevented the union from pursuing a coherent agenda at the national level (Carrillo 1991: Chapter 4; Mercado 1990). One former leader of MAS indicated that these two combating visions of feminism, combined with the immaturity of the collective and the difficult economic context of the 1980s,

⁶⁴ In some cases, factories closed when the NSGWU won the title to new collective contracts. Moreover, the legality of the union was challenged by employers in court cases that drained the resources of the union and energies of the leadership and rank-and-file. One case challenging the legality of the union that was initially filed in 1986 was still unresolved in 1990. The government also resisted the union's ability to act: On May 1, 1986, 700 women from the NSGWU were prevented from joining the traditional International Labor Day march by a government contingent including 50 police officers on motorcycles, 12 patrol cars, 500 riot police, and a helicopter (Carrillo 1991).

helped bring about the end of the union (personal interview with Marta Lamas, 1/29/2003).

Several lessons can be drawn from these examples about the social construction of women's labor rights within unions. First, economic context makes it difficult for organizing in support of women's labor rights, not just in the NSGWU, which fought to win collective contracts for a union that operated with women's labor rights in mind, but also for unions like the SME and federations like FENASIB and FSTSE, where male leaders have other priorities, like countering the shrinking rank-and-file and securing wage increases. But clearly, economic context does not make the task impossible, as the successes of FENASIB and FSTSE suggest.

Second, it is of utmost importance to have groups of women leaders within the union that can unite in support of women's rights. The attention to women's rights in the unions and federations discussed here resulted from female leaders. Of course, the NSGWU example shows that women's leadership does not always unite in support of the same goals, and this is indeed a challenge, but as will be developed further in Chapter 6, strong women's leadership can bring about important advancements for women's labor rights in unions.

Finally, the case of the NSGWU in particular highlights the importance of building a broader movement around women's labor rights. The NSGWU may not have been successful in the long term, but at its height it captured the support of the women's movement as well as society more broadly. In 1986, for example, 60,000 people marched in support of the union (Carrillo 1991: 96). Building a broad base of popular support for

the rights of women workers is within the realm of possibility and an important aspect of the social construction of women's labor rights.

Women's Organizing outside of Unions for Gender Related Labor Demands

In the mid-1980s, but particularly in the 1990s, union women began to organize outside of traditional union structures and build stronger support networks within civil society to promote women's labor rights. As with popular feminism, this type of organizing emerged partly as a result of the debt crisis, but it also corresponds to the shift in the late 1980s from popular feminism to women's engagement with the government over issues of public policy as Mexico headed toward the period of democratization.

The economic crisis forced an increasing number of women into the paid work force to help their families make ends meet, and the challenges women faced at work and in unions, combined with social spending cuts in programs that facilitated women's entry into the labor market (e.g., daycare and health care), meant that women did not have the same opportunities to participate in the labor sphere as men. As popular feminism took hold and women began to link class and gender concerns, union women throughout the country began to see the importance of analyzing the specific situation of working women—from economic, political, union, and social perspectives—and joining forces with other social actors to establish a dialogue about the situation of working women and make proposals for change.

Accordingly, women workers from diverse sectors of the economy began holding national and regional forums to discuss the challenges they faced in the Mexican political

and economic context.⁶⁵ For example, in 1984, 400 women workers, feminists, and political leftists attended the Foro Nacional de la Mujer (National Women's Forum) to discuss the situation of women in the Mexican work force. Among the challenges these women discussed were issues of direct gender discrimination (e.g., obstacles to working resulting from pregnancy, sexual harassment), issues of indirect gender discrimination (lack of opportunities for employment, training, and union involvement), the shortage of daycare facilities, and the *doble jornada*, or double workday. Among the conclusions drawn at this forum was that to struggle against these challenges women would need broader solidarity, the assistance of democratic legal advisors, mobilizations, and the support of their families (Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 95).⁶⁶

Another major national forum took place in 1987, when a group of women from various unions and NGOs organized the first Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Trabajadoras (National Meeting of Women Workers—ENMT) with the goals of strengthening and broadening their dialogue about the condition of women in the current economic context and producing a national response to the problems facing women workers. To follow up on work from the first ENMT and to lay the groundwork for a second ENMT, women organized three regional meetings between 1993 and 1995 (CNMT 1995; Román 1995). The three regional meetings generated proposals in six issue areas: 1) Creating better employment opportunities for women; 2) Promoting public policies and institutions that support the rights and interests women workers; 3)

⁶⁵ There is a historical precedent for such meetings of women workers: In 1919, 1923, and 1925 working class feminists held conferences in Mexico City, helping to create a public space for working women's organizing around issues of concern to women workers (Porter 2003: 112).

⁶⁶ This national forum spawned two regional forums for working women: the Primer Encuentro Regional de Trabajadoras de las Maquilas (First Regional Meeting of Maquila Workers) held in Ciudad Juarez in 1985 and the Primer Foro Regional de Obreras del Valle de México (First Regional Forum of Workers in the Valley of Mexico) in August 1985 (Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 95).

Eliminating gender discrimination and harassment; 4) Eliminating the tensions between maternity and work; 5) Encouraging women's leadership and political participation; and 6) Establishing projects for rural women. Sara Román, an economist who has been involved with issues of women workers, noted that "the regional meetings allowed [the groups] to work out basic documents that focused on the principal problems women workers experienced at the national level" and helped organizers plan the second ENMT (Román 1995: 66, 65-83).

The second ENMT took place from October 20-22, 1995 in Oaxtepec, Morelos. A total of 509 women participated, representing 89 different unions and women's/feminist organizations. The participants also included representatives from Canada, Italy, and Brazil. There were four major objectives at the meeting, which, if achieved, would help to foster a broad women's labor movement. First, the women wanted to analyze the situation of women workers and develop proposals, based on the work from the regional meetings, that would promote more just public policies and better working and living conditions for Mexican women.⁶⁷ Second, they aimed to develop proposals for the creation of government bodies specifically focused on the concerns of women workers (e.g., a sub-Secretary of Labor responsible for ensuring equal opportunity in the labor force) and proposals to explicitly address issues of discrimination against and

⁶⁷ Participants developed proposals in five issue areas: the politics of employment and unemployment; workplace and union policies on productivity and training; social security and benefits; labor legislation; and equal remuneration for jobs of equivalent responsibility. Specific policy recommendations included the need to create more daycare centers, reduce the number of years of service required for women's retirement (to accommodate women who have stayed at home caring for children), and expand access to the social security system to domestic laborers, farm workers, and indigenous peoples. Not surprisingly, proposals for labor law reform were the most substantial; they included changing the LFT so it would explicitly define discrimination, emphasize the social responsibility for child care, prohibit firing women for reasons of pregnancy or civil status, prohibit sexual harassment, and mandate pay equity for work of equal value (CNMT 1995; Román 1995; Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 97).

representation of women in collective contracts and union statutes (CNMT 1995; Román 1995).

Third, the women of the second ENMT sought to open a dialogue with women from other countries—including the representatives from Canada, Italy, and Brazil—to understand those women's organizational experiences in the face of economic liberalism (CNMT 1995). And finally, they aimed to create a permanent council that would, implicitly, become the organizational center of a broad women's labor movement. This committee, the *Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Trabajadoras* (National Council of Women Workers—CNMT), would be responsible for developing a program of action for following up on the meeting's proposals, establishing networks between unionized and non-unionized women workers in Mexico, raising awareness of women's labor rights, and establishing ties to women's organizations in other countries (CNMT 1995; Román 1995; Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 97).

One of the most important outcomes of the second ENMT, though it was not a stated objective, was the explicit acknowledgement that women needed to be actively engaged in the process of analyzing women's situation in the Mexican labor force, making proposals for changes to labor institutions and public policy, and mobilizing in support of these changes. The authors of the official report of the second ENMT took note of the fact that women were not considered citizens when either the constitution or the LFT came into force. Accordingly, they noted, women did not have the opportunity to defend their interests when these laws were being drafted. Not surprisingly, the laws did not take women's interests into account. The authors also noted that because subsequent changes to federal law guaranteeing men and women equality before the law “were not

the result of an organized movement of women workers, the declaration of equality was not accompanied by any concrete norms that would guarantee it” (CNMT 1995: 85-86). In other words, they realized that if public policies and rights of citizenship are to really reflect the interests of women (workers), then women (workers) need to be active in demanding and developing those policies and rights. The final report of the second ENMT reveals that women workers were developing ideas about engaging in the construction of women’s labor rights at all three levels: First, their proposals reflect the importance of raising awareness of the rights and situation of women workers (the individual level), challenging and changing the patriarchal nature of unions (the institutional level), and involving themselves more in public policy discourse (the state level). Second, they discuss the importance of generating pluralistic ties between women workers and NGOs throughout Mexican society and internationally. Finally, with the CNMT they illustrate the importance of having an organized effort, outside of the official union structures, behind their drive. This is at the heart of the argument about citizenship construction.

To date, there has not been a third ENMT, and the CNMT did not remain active. However, participants of the second ENMT have been very active within unions and NGOs in helping raise the gender consciousness of women workers, promoting women’s labor rights within unions, and lobbying for changes to the LFT. As subsequent chapters will show, the second ENMT provided both an intellectual precedent for women’s work in constructing citizenship through a broad labor movement and, in at least one case, enabled the creation of a new NGO that has been dedicated to promoting women’s labor rights.

4.3 CONCLUSION

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Mexican women have become an increasingly formidable political force. In a political and social context infamous for its *machista* nature, women have successfully mobilized in support of the needs of the urban poor, in support of laws penalizing rape and domestic violence, and have also made significant inroads into elected political positions. Nevertheless, scholars of the Mexican women's movement are quick to comment that there is still much work to be done before women achieve full equality as citizens in Mexico (Rodríguez 2003: 86-87; Lamas 1994; Lamas et al. 1995). One of the areas where there is a need for women to mobilize in support of women's equality as citizens is in the labor sphere, for although women are an increasingly large and important part of the Mexican work force, they still enter this workforce on unequal terms and face unique forms of marginalization and discrimination.

Women's equality as citizens in Mexico, from the social construction of citizenship perspective, requires that women's formal equality is realized not just on paper, but in a meaningful way at all levels of society. Moreover the argument for social construction of citizenship suggests that women themselves must be engaged in the process of demanding/defining the rights and enforcement of rights that will give them this equality. As I have argued, women workers and unionists were active in demanding equality as workers throughout the twentieth century, from the time of their protests against exclusion from unions in 1925 to the their demands for organizational spaces within unions in the 1980s to their demands for changes to the LFT coming out of the second ENMT in 1995. But frequently, union women's biggest mobilizations did not

revolve around gender concerns, and so the expansion and enforcement of women's labor rights were not achieved.

Significantly, the ways in which union women have organized have changed since the 1970s, and these changes reflect the changes within the women's movement broadly. In the 1980s, with the rise of popular feminism, an increasing number of union women began tackling issues of gender within their unions, recognizing that women faced unique challenges as workers and that class and gender issues were linked. Toward the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, as the women's movement began to focus more attention on alliance building and engaging in public policy discourse, union women began to recognize that in the face of the economic challenges facing women, women workers had to form a more organized effort to analyze the particular condition of women in the labor force, to raise awareness of that condition and of women's rights, and to mobilize in support of those rights.

As will be seen in the remaining chapters, the legacy of this recognition has included more organized efforts on the part of union women to build alliances, both among union women and with other social actors, and to work to ensure that the formal equality between men and women in the workplace becomes a reality. Like the women's movement generally, there is much to be done to achieve this objective, and many cultural, political, and economic obstacles to overcome, but as the organizational efforts of the STRM, CNTE, and NSGWU illustrate, union women, when they organize with a common purpose, can be an effective force for change.

Constructing Citizenship at the Individual Level: Raising Union Women's Gender Consciousness

5.0 INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s, the rise of popular feminism led many feminist and women's NGOs to begin a dialogue with union women about the gendered nature of unions and the workplace and to work with union women on projects that would promote the interests and rights of women workers. The NSGWU is the most symbolic case of union women's collaboration with NGOs because of the dramatic nature of the events leading to the creation of the union, the fact that its leadership was entirely female, and because of the union's conscious effort to play the role of a women's organization as well. The success of the NSGWU was short-lived, but union women's collaboration and alliance building, both with and within civil associations, has continued unabated and is an important component of the first level of the social construction of women's labor rights.

Because women tend to be underrepresented in union leadership and because unions tend to ignore women's labor rights, one of the main objectives of civil associations working with union women is to use workshops, seminars, and training programs to educate union women about their labor rights, the obstacles they face in the

labor sphere because of their gender, and the tools that can help them overcome these obstacles and promote gender equity. Consistent with the first level of citizenship construction discussed in Chapter 2, these projects help to raise union women's gender consciousness, which is the first step in sparking their political agency—both within unions and in civil society more broadly—in the effort to advance women's labor rights.

In this chapter I discuss three different cases of groups working to raise the gender consciousness of union women. The first case examines an alliance of union women formed after the second ENMT that works to promote union women's leadership. The second case examines an NGO formed during the period of popular feminism and its project to help one group of women workers promote a gendered agenda within their organization. The third case examines the preliminary work of two union federations that have recently begun to conduct workshops with their members on gender equity and women's rights. I use these three cases to demonstrate how consciousness raising programs are important in encouraging some union women to become more active in promoting women's labor rights. Moreover, because of the overwhelmingly non-democratic nature of Mexican unions, I suggest that alliances and collaboration between union women and other civil society actors is important in challenging the rigidity of these union structures. Finally, I show how the role in these collaborative efforts for NGOs that date from the period of popular feminism is changing. While they are still important actors in raising union women's gender consciousness, as more union women become aware of women's labor rights and active in promoting them, the work of union women themselves may be taking on a more important role in the construction of

women's labor rights at this level, and this may force traditional NGOs to adopt different strategies and programs.

5.1 THE UNION WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas (Union Women's Network—RMS) is an alliance of women from many different unions. Officially formed in 1997, its primary mission is to transform and strengthen unions by providing women with the tools to become leaders who are dedicated to the struggle for women's rights and equality within unions (González Nicolás 1998). To achieve this, they have conducted leadership training programs and sexual harassment awareness workshops for union women throughout Mexico. Moreover, the RMS also trains its members to be facilitators of these courses, an effort to further empower women unionists by involving them more directly in the advocacy of change.

A core group of the RMS's founding members came from MAS, one of the feminist organizations that had worked intensely with the NSGWU.⁶⁸ Although MAS counted women unionists among its members, many of the leaders of the organization and facilitators of its events worked for the organization full time. Eventually, tensions flared between the unionists and non-unionists in MAS. According to Jennifer Cooper, an instructor and researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and a founding member of the RMS, the first source of tension concerned how the organization was funded. In the 1990s, some members of MAS started arguing that they should form separate NGOs to work on "hot" issues such as reproductive rights, which would allow

⁶⁸ Eventually, MAS joined forces with another organization, Mujeres Trabajadoras Unidas, AC (Women Workers United—MUTUAC) and is now known by the acronym MUTUAC-MAS.

them to secure more overseas funding but shift the organization's attention away from work with union women. Conversely, Cooper and others felt that relying on overseas funding would threaten the groups autonomy to work on the issues they wanted. A second source of tension concerned the role union women played in MAS. Although they did much of the legwork for the organization, the union women did not receive wages and rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to facilitate training activities and workshops. This led some of the union women to feel used by the full time/paid staff of MAS. The combination of these two very different conflicts led Cooper and some of the union women to split from MAS after the second ENMT in 1995, in which MAS participated.

The development of the RMS began with the help of contacts two of these women made at the second ENMT. During the second ENMT, representatives from the Social Justice Fund (SJF) of the Canadian Autoworkers union (CAW) approached Cooper and Inés González to discuss the CAW's leadership training program for women. In 1996 the SJF sponsored Cooper and González to attend a two week leadership program (the Women Activists' Program) in Port Elgin, Canada. Cooper says that the Women Activists' Program profoundly affected their ideas about the importance of union women taking charge of leadership training activities, such as those MAS had facilitated. As Cooper recalls,

Inés said, "How come I have never facilitated a meeting [with MAS]? I've never given a talk...and look, in Canada the facilitators are women workers. They've been trained to do that." And she didn't use the word "empowerment," but she was talking about empowerment and how she felt that the NGOs in Mexico...didn't know how to empower women workers (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2003).

Cooper and González left Canada with a new strategy for conducting leadership training for union women based on the concept of progressive education ("Educ-Action")

used in the Women Activists' Program. This training method uses a more democratic model of leadership and exchange within the course, rather than a hierarchical style of education where the facilitator simply lectures to the group. Moreover, the "Educ-Action" model emphasizes participation from members of the group, draws on the personal experiences of group members, and encourages critical thinking about power, social consciousness, and social change. As employed by the SJF, and later the RMS, the "Educ-Action" model also stresses the importance of union women, rather than outside academics, professionals, or "experts," acting as facilitators (CAW 1998: 18-19; RMS 1997: 9-10).

Working closely with the SJF, Cooper and González created a version of the Women Activists' Program for the Mexican context. In the spring and fall of 1997, they conducted three leadership training sessions for approximately 70 women representing 14 unions. The RMS was formally established in March 1997 after the completion of the second course, with the explicit mission of working "to change gender inequalities through leadership training for union women in order to contribute to social transformation towards an equitable society" (CAW 1998: 7, 10).⁶⁹

In 1998, after a year of existence, the RMS held its first official Congress to evaluate the organization and develop more explicit organization objectives and a governing structure. At the meeting, which brought together 40 old and 40 new members, the women agreed on six fundamental objectives for the organization:

⁶⁹ Owing to the tensions some of the founding members of the RMS experienced within MAS, members of the RMS were initially adamant about not becoming an officially registered NGO. They preferred to be a more informal network. Additionally, one of the first rules of the organization was that members had to be unionists. While it remains the case that the members of the RMS are union women, the organization eventually had to acquire official NGO status in order to handle its financial resources (accepting grants, etc.) without going through a third party (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002).

1) Develop a gender consciousness among unionized workers in the sectors represented in the [RMS]; 2) Act as a force of support and solidarity to help women activists reach decision making positions; 3) Create a “culture of gender” through the development of women union leaders in order to construct an equitable society; 4) Create a training structure for union women based in participatory education methodology; 5) Work inside union structures to put women’s issues on the union agenda; and 6) Work to eliminate segregation and other forms of discrimination in the union and the workplace (CAW 1998: 11).

They also discussed ways to consolidate their governing structure, which had previously been a coordinating committee whose members rotated positions, and improve communications between members (CAW 1998: 11; UOM n.d.).

Training Programs of the RMS

In accordance with the group’s mission to challenge gender inequalities in unions by training women to be union leaders capable of promoting women’s interests, the leadership training course first focuses on increasing the union women’s gender consciousness. It does this by examining how social, economic, and political structures (e.g., women’s family responsibilities and occupational segregation) condition the experience of women within the workplace and the union, as well by giving participants information on the rights they have as workers. The course then goes on to help the participants identify the host of obstacles women face in assuming positions of leadership, including personal qualities (low self esteem, feelings of guilt), social attitudes (sexism, stereotypical models of leadership), socioeconomic structures (family responsibilities, biases toward educating boys over girls), union structures (male leadership, the absence of support networks for women), and workplace violence. The course helps the participants identify ways to overcome these obstacles. Sections of the course also address the ways that unions can function to respond to the particular needs

of women. Finally, the course aims to illustrate for the participants the value of a women's network within the union and to empower women to take on leadership abilities and encourage other women to become more active as well (RMS 1997).

The leadership course goes into considerable detail about how violence against women and sexual harassment affect women workers (an entire day of the course is devoted to harassment alone), but the women of the RMS also created a training program and video dedicated solely to exploring the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace to be used in workshops for unionists (see RMS 2002). They have also coordinated a course on women in the labor market in conjunction with National Autonomous University of Mexico.

One of the important elements of the RMS's training courses is that they are facilitated by union women. Because of the initial popularity of the leadership training courses, in the fall of 1997 the RMS hosted a train-the-trainer program, open to any of the women who had taken the leadership training course. In this course, 23 women from 10 unions were trained to be facilitators of the RMS's leadership program (CAW 1998).

Although the courses conducted by the RMS have reached many women, the core membership of the group remains quite small. Both Jennifer Cooper and Rosario Ortiz estimate that there are a total of 15-20 active members and approximately 60 others who participate occasionally (personal interviews with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002 and Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002). As I will discuss below, increasing active membership is one of the constant struggles of the organization.

Impact of the RMS and its Training Courses

The RMS, although it has a small core, can cite many positive results from its efforts. These fall into three broad categories. First, the RMS has succeeded in raising the gender consciousness of many women workers. Eleonora Elwes, who participated in the second leadership course and became a founding member of the RMS, wrote her Bachelor's thesis on women's participation in banking sector unions and the importance of gender ideology as a tool for democratizing union culture.⁷⁰ Discussing the RMS in her thesis, she says that "the challenge of union women activists, [such as those of the RMS] is to make visible men's domination of unions, which makes it difficult to introduce the specific demands of women workers" (Elwes y Reza 2002: 60). And for Elwes personally, the importance of the RMS's leadership training program lies precisely in the way it helps to raise the gender-consciousness of women. Before the course, Elwes felt that her feelings of isolation and many of the struggles she faced at work were personal problems. After the course, she realized that these feelings and struggles were common to women generally (personal interview with Eleonora Elwes, 12/10/2002). Elwes' response was not uncommon. Another woman who participated in the leadership course said that "the course gave us a greater understanding of gender issues in the union. Talking among ourselves we realize it isn't 'personal' but 'structural'" (quoted in CAW 1998: 14).

⁷⁰ One of the suggestions for personal action described in the leadership training program as a means of empowering women workers is for the women to write a history of women in their unions (RMS 1997; Cooper 2002: 112). In writing her thesis on the experiences of women leaders in banking sector unions, Elwes was not just fulfilling an academic requirement; she was also legitimating her own experiences as a union woman and her views on gender in union culture (and contributing a much needed academic focus on issues of gender and unionism in Mexico).

The sexual harassment course conducted by the RMS has had a similar effect on raising women's gender-consciousness. Cooper says that although Mexican companies and unions are nowhere near institutionalizing policies for handling sexual harassment claims, the course has helped raise awareness of what harassment is. Discussing the video that the RMS put together for their courses, she says, "I mean, the video we did, there's a lot of problems with it.... But in the last course we gave in Acapulco, one of the women said, 'I never realized *that* was sexual harassment.' And you feel the impact [the video is having on the women]" (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002).

From the perspective of consciousness raising, the fact that RMS workshops are facilitated by other union women is also important. As noted by some members of the RMS, one of the strengths of the organization is that its leaders and members come from and work for the union rank-and-file (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002 and Gloria Olvera 2/3/2002). The women of the RMS understand first hand the challenges faced by the women they are training. But even more importantly, in a hierarchical and patriarchal union culture such as Mexico's, women taking on the facilitator role helps to empower both the facilitators and participants. The CAW/SJF report on the RMS maintains that

Using women workers as the course facilitators challenges the status quo where male dominated unions want (mainly male) academics to teach union courses. It also challenges the assumption that workers, and particularly women, don't have the knowledge and skills needed to be educators (CAW 1998: 19).

So the goal of the courses is not merely to raise union women's awareness of the rights of women's workers and the obstacles they face in the labor sphere; it is also to show them by example that union women have the potential to be leaders.

Second, by raising awareness of the way that certain social, political, and economic structures lead to discriminatory conditions for women within the labor sphere, as well as by giving women the tools for tackling these issues within their unions, the RMS has helped union women become active in raising awareness of gender issues within their unions. As Inés González noted, even for women who are already leaders in their unions, gender consciousness is critical if women are going to be able to make changes that positively affect women's work lives: "I can have total support from my secretary [general], but if I don't have a gender consciousness, I don't know what I'm going to do, or what I want to do, or what direction to take" with respect to women's issues (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

Armed with a heightened gender consciousness from the RMS's training courses, some women have been successful in creating spaces or networks within their unions that allow women to discuss the issues that affect them as workers. According to Gloria Olvera, a retired telephone operator, one of the effects of the RMS has been to get people talking about the simple fact that not all workers are men and that women workers experience a different work environment:

I think there has been a favorable impact for women in all the unions where the [RMS] has a presence.... In particular, [the impact] has been to open spaces for women within the telephone workers' union when there has never been talk about women in the union, no? Before, we weren't *compañeras* and *compañeros*, we were only *compañeros*. There wasn't, there wasn't language, there wasn't a concern, there was no respect for women because [the union] was very aggressive. The environment for women in the union was very aggressive, [it was] an environment of harassment (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003).

This idea of opening spaces for women and getting them communicating was reflected by another woman who participated in one of the initial leadership training courses: "We began as three and now we have nine women in the union network. We have a newsletter

and hold discussions with other women in the union” (quoted in CAW 1998: 14). Opening discussions about the experiences, needs, and rights of women workers in this way is a necessary step in these women’s efforts to make changes in their unions.

Beyond opening spaces and generating discussions, women trained by the RMS *have* gone on to promote changes within their unions. One woman who took the leadership course commented that as a result of her training, “I have been giving ideas for revising our [collective] contracts with gender related items” (quoted in CAW 1998: 14). Among the issues that RMS members have tried to bring to the union agenda, sexual harassment has been one of the most common. In October of 2002, for example, an article by Laura Bracho Tinoco, Secretary of Gender Equity for the National Workers Union of the National Commission for the Protection and Defense of Financial Service Users (SINACONDUSEF), defined sexual harassment, denounced it as an obstacle to a healthy work environment, and encouraged workers to step forward with worries or claims about harassment, assuring the workers that they would be treated with full discretion and respect (Bracho Tinoco 2002). According to Mónica Gama Godínez, a member of SINACONDUSEF’s national committee, this article was a result of her participation with the RMS (personal interview with Mónica Gama Godínez, 12/3/2002). Similarly, several of the active members of the RMS representing the STRM commented that much of the work that has been done to promote women’s rights within the union, such as promoting contract negotiations with Telmex for a clause prohibiting sexual

harassment, has been initiated by the members of the RMS (personal interviews with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003; Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; and Emma Rodríguez, 2/21/2003).⁷¹

These examples show how the work of the RMS has been important in raising individual and organizational awareness of gender issues and women's labor rights. Almost as important from the perspective of women in the RMS is the solidarity and support that comes from being part of a *network* of union women committed to improving the situation of women workers. This support has made it easier to confront union leadership with their demands. Gloria Olvera states that

...it is not the same for an isolated woman...to go to talk to [her] secretary general as it is for her to come with a woman from the electricians' union, one from the telephone workers' union, one from the petroleum workers' union, one from a bank union, one from the health sector union to talk about an issue that interests women. This is very powerful. So I think that when women unite on good terms for a certain objective, they achieve it, and they achieve it in a good way (personal interview, 2/3/2003).

Finally, the RMS has raised awareness among individual women and in the broader community that union women are effective leaders in the effort to educate women workers and advocate change. In her thesis, Eleonora Elwes claims that through its training activities and participatory-style education the RMS has created a new paradigm for bringing ideas about gender equality into union culture (Elwes y Reza 2002: 53-63). This new paradigm of union women working in a network to conduct training and raise awareness of women's labor rights has been recognized in Mexican society more broadly. For example, Mexico City's municipal government contracted the RMS to conduct a sexual harassment workshop for city work inspectors so that they would be

⁷¹ The efforts of women in the STRM to promote a contract clause prohibiting sexual harassment will be discussed in Chapter 6.

able to identify cases of sexual harassment and violence against women in the workplaces they visit (CAW 1998).

Most notably, Inmujeres contracted the RMS for two projects. One project was to conduct a series of workshops on sexual harassment for union women belonging to the FSTSE. Although Cooper remained skeptical of what kind of overall effect the courses would have in official, corporatist unions, she said it was significant that Inmujeres tapped the RMS, which uses a much more progressive and democratic method of training than is customary in Mexico, to conduct workshops for a government union federation:

Inmujeres organized this. Now, where it's going to go with the unions, I don't think very far, because they're only dealing with the official establishment. But obviously in these training courses you're getting down to the people, the base...and we, the [RMS], which would be, or theoretically anyway, much more radical, gave the courses—and not MAS. They wanted the union women (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002).⁷²

Inmujeres also worked with the RMS to produce the manual for its “Gender, Work, and Social Change” workshop, which Inmujeres has offered to union representatives as part of its project to encourage women’s participation at decision-making levels of unions and to help transform discriminatory work and union culture (Inmujeres 2002a: 3). Much like the RMS’s leadership program, the Inmujeres workshop discusses issues such as the

⁷² When Inmujeres was created in 2001, President Fox was presented with a shortlist of three women from which to choose the first president of Inmujeres. The women were Cecilia Loria and Patricia Duarte, two well known activists within the feminist movement, and Patricia Espinosa, a former deputy from the PAN. Under pressure from his party, and much to the chagrin of the larger women’s movement, Fox appointed the more moderate and admittedly anti-abortion Espinosa. While not what the women’s movement would have wanted, Espinosa has been a strong voice for women within her party and within the Mexican Congress, promoting a stronger presence for woman in the PAN and helping to found the congressional, multi-party Gender and Equity Committee. Despite her more progressive leanings, Espinosa remains under pressure from the more conservative voices in her party to toe the official party line vis-à-vis women (Rodríguez 2003: 133-36; see also Espinosa Torres 2002). Given the pressure Espinosa faces from her party, contracting the RMS, with its progressive methodology and mission, to work with government sector unions as part of the Inmujeres project to raise awareness about gender and combat women’s discrimination in the workplace is a sign that Inmujeres is sincere about challenging gender discrimination and that it is willing to work with independent, rather than corporatist, groups in civil society to do so.

concept of gender, obstacles to gender equality, discrimination, violence and harassment, labor law, and union power structures.

Through their efforts to raise union women's consciousness of their rights as women workers and the obstacles that prevent them from achieving equal opportunities in the workplace, and by providing the tools and support that allow women to bring gender issues onto the agenda of their unions, the women of the RMS have played an important role in the first level of the social construction of women's citizenship. There are, however, several problems the RMS confronts as an organization. Jennifer Cooper argues that perhaps the most fundamental obstacle to the success of the organization is the absence of union democracy in Mexico, which ultimately spares union leaders from having to respond to the demands from the rank-and-file, including gender related demands from women workers.

Three aspects of the corporatist union structure are particularly illustrative of this obstacle. First, the exclusion clauses in the LFT stipulate that anyone employed by a unionized company must be a member of the union, thus guaranteeing unions new members and relieving them of the burden of having to court new members by appealing to their interests. Second, in the majority of unions, even those claiming to be independent, leaders are not always selected through free and fair elections that would hold them accountable to the rank-and-file. Finally, most committee members (men and women) owe their political positions to the will of the secretary general, and as a result, their ability to act autonomously from the secretary general is constricted. In a context where the politics of the union are so centralized, it is extremely difficult to bring gender issues to the table in a meaningful way unless the secretary general is on board (Cooper

2002: 103-04).⁷³ This structural problem is related to power in general, but it has a clear gendered implication: union leaders resist democratization because they would lose their privileged positions. However, in the absence of union democracy, promoting a gendered union agenda is infinitely more difficult.

Cooper argues that this does not mean that gender issues are not addressed in unions, only that gender issues are not taken up by union leadership in a way that will lead to meaningful change. Although political and union leaders are willing to pay lip service to the issue of gender equality because it is politically salient, they are unwilling to discuss the structural obstacles that prevent women from achieving equality, such as the absence of real union democracy, income inequality and occupational segregation, and the well-entrenched patriarchal union culture. Cooper doubts that the RMS will have a significant impact until political and union leaders are willing to engage in real discussions about the link between gender and structure. Nonetheless, she considers the work of the RMS “revolutionary” insofar as it *is* trying to transform union culture by empowering women to take a more profound role in union decision making and giving them the tools they need to tackle major issues (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2003). Though Cooper does not say so herself, the work of the RMS is also important, even in a corporatist context, because without women pressuring for change, little change will occur.

⁷³ Interestingly, this view was not expressed overwhelmingly by the union women I interviewed. On the contrary, most had relatively positive outlooks on the possibility for change through their unions. Esperanza Gonzalez of the Sindicato Independencia de Avicación (Independent Aviation Union—SIA) even commented that it would be easier to work for the expansion of women’s labor rights at the union level than at the federal level because women had greater access to decision making structures (personal interview 2/2003).

Another obstacle the RMS faces is its small size. Although their courses are well attended and well received, they have yet to find a successful means of increasing the organization's membership (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2004). With only 15-20 active members, among whom only about 10 are currently trained as facilitators, the ability to conduct workshops, to act as a real political force within unions, and to get involved in other activities is limited. The problem of small membership is compounded by the fact that the core members have different ideas about the precise role the RMS should play within civil society. Some members, like Jennifer Cooper, are emphatic that the RMS should not be a political organization that lobbies on behalf of various policy proposals. Others, like Rosario Ortiz, feel that one of the problems with the RMS is its lack of political vision and would like to see it more explicitly engaged in political debates. Still others, like Inés González, maintain that whether the RMS becomes politically engaged or not is up to the will of its membership, but for the moment there is no momentum to become a more expressly political organization (personal interviews with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002; Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; and Inés González 1/8/2003).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ In fact, the RMS has been active in some public policy debates, especially with regard to the issue of sexual harassment. In 1999 they became involved with the Working Group Against Sexual Harassment, which formed with the intention of broaching the issues of sexual harassment in public policy discussions (see GTCHS 2000). Moreover, in 2002, Inés González spoke on behalf of the RMS at a conference on security and health for the municipal government of Mexico City about the need to confront the problem of sexual harassment (see González Nicolás 2002). Despite such involvement in policy discussions, the RMS is not an expressly political organization in the sense that it does not advocate a particular policy agenda or have an affiliation with a particular political party, although some individual members are very active politically. That the RMS does not have a particular policy platform does not negate its importance in the social construction of citizenship. The argument that citizenship is socially constructed implies that individuals and groups must become active in challenging the barriers to their equality as citizens, and this is precisely what the RMS does by raising women's gender consciousness and helping them challenging the obstacles to women's equality within unions.

Nonetheless, members of the RMS have a positive outlook on the organization's achievements, especially in their ability to unite women from different unions in a collaborative effort to effect change. Says González,

In the Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas we were able to find a space for discussion...a space for training, a space for preparation, because the *Red* offered something more than my own union, because my own union was closed to things for women workers that I aspired to [achieve] as a union leader. We formed the [RMS] not only for our personal growth, not only for the experience of knowing how she was doing in her union...[and] how I was doing in my union, but rather to build a political force (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

And this idea of union women collaborating in an alliance in order to raise the gender-consciousness of union women and help them challenge the socio-structural obstacles to women's equal participation in the labor sphere is what is above all unique about the RMS. Because they are all unionists who understand the union experience and the challenges of bringing gender issues to the union agenda, the women of the RMS are uniquely positioned to help other union women understand these challenges and to support each other's efforts to transform their unions.

5.2 THE WOMEN'S POPULAR EDUCATION GROUP

While the RMS has conducted training with specific unions, much of their leadership training is directed at groups of women coming from different unions. This strategy partly reflects the group's goal of forming a *network* of union women that can provide support and solidarity for each other, regardless of the union to which they belong. Other consciousness raising groups have different strategies. Through its "Women Workers Program," the Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres (Women's Popular Education Group—GEM) also seeks to raise the gender consciousness of union

women. Unlike the RMS, GEM's strategy is to work with women of a particular union and, through education on gender issues, help the women develop tools for promoting women's labor rights within the union's agenda.

GEM was formed in 1986, during the rise of popular feminism in Mexico, with the initial mandate of working with women organizing in the urban popular sectors to assist them in transforming and improving their lives and living conditions (GEM n.d.-a: "Antecedentes de GEM," para. 1).⁷⁵ In the subsequent two decades that GEM has been working with Mexican women, the group has expanded its programs and become active at all levels of the women's movement. GEM now administers two broad programs. Through the various projects administered under the "Women's Daily Lives and Political Participation" program, GEM works to educate women with the goal of challenging traditional family roles and encouraging greater social and political participation. The "Women Workers Program" administers projects aimed at educating women from a gendered perspective so that they can become more active in promoting policies that will transform the discriminatory work environment in Mexico (GEM n.d.-b). Through these programs and other projects, GEM works at all levels of society, from grass roots organizations to international networks, in an effort to help women become active in eliminating all forms of gender discrimination in Mexico and in promoting a more just, equitable, and democratic society (GEM n.d.-a: "Antecedentes de GEM" and "Misión de GEM").

⁷⁵ The "popular sector" refers to the disadvantaged groups in society. In Latin America, which has the most extreme levels of income inequality in the world, the "disadvantaged" include unionized and non-unionized workers in the formal economy, the unemployed, and workers in the informal economy. Women are members of each of these "disadvantaged" economic groups, but their presence in the popular sectors is also notable because they have played an important role in community organizing, especially during the period of economic crisis sparked by the debt crisis in 1982 (Oxhorn 1995b: 299-302; on women in the popular sectors, see Stephen 1997).

The Women Workers Program was an early development in the group's history. According to Cecelia Talamante, one of GEM's founding members, soon after beginning its work with women in the urban popular sectors, the group realized that the women organizing in the popular sectors were not just housewives. Many were unionized, working women who faced a host of additional problems, including sexual harassment from their bosses, low salaries, and the challenges of single motherhood. For Talamante, this realization raised concerns about the problematic relationship between women and their unions, since unions, as organizations that were supposed to be defending the rights of all workers, were not paying attention to the rights and needs of women. GEM started its Women Workers Program ("Programa mujeres trabajadoras") to try to remedy this problem. Talamante says that the program has evolved over the years. Initially, they worked more to educate union women on topical issues of concern to the particular group, things such as sexual harassment. Beginning in the 1990s, however, they started to focus more concretely on helping union women develop mechanisms for introducing a gender perspective into the agendas of their unions (personal interview with Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003).

One of the groups that GEM worked with in the late 1990s was the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Coordinating Body—CNM) of the FAT. As noted in Chapter 3, the FAT is an organization dedicated to promoting a democratic political and economic system in Mexico, where democratic decision making would begin at the grassroots level—in factories and unions, worker and consumer cooperatives, peasant and urban neighborhood organizations, and throughout civil society generally—and extend to all levels of Mexican society (Hathaway 2000: 149). Women had been

active within the FAT from its inception in the 1960s, but beginning in 1990 the FAT officially committed itself to working on women's issues. This commitment took several forms. As of 1990, it was required that there be at least one woman on the FAT's three-person National Coordinating Body. In certain regions, the FAT also began organizing activities for women, such as cooking workshops, in which discussions would take place around issues such as women's health, self-esteem, gender, and the economy. In certain states, official women's groups were created, such as the Centro de Organización y Desarrollo Integral de Mujeres (Women's Center for Integral Development and Organization—CODIM) that developed in the state of Leon to offer information, training, and organizational support to women (Hathaway 2000: 152-56).

According to one woman involved with the FAT, the development of the CNM began with a national meeting of about 70 women in 1993. After this national meeting, smaller groups of women began to meet informally, and the momentum of these meetings led to the establishment of the CNM in 1996-97. Although gender had begun to be addressed within the FAT, there were still many obstacles to women's full participation in the organization, including family responsibilities that restricted the time women could devote to the FAT, and there was no official national policy about gender equity within the organization. Therefore, one of the goals in creating the CNM was to introduce the concept of gender and promote a policy of gender equity in the four sectors of the FAT—unions, peasant organizations, cooperatives, and popular sector organizations (personal interview, 2/17/2003). Participation in GEM's Women Workers Program was an integral part of achieving this objective.

GEM's Leadership Workshops with the CNM

For almost five years in the mid- to late-1990s, GEM worked with on different projects with women from the FAT. In one project that took place between October of 1999 and April of 2000, GEM conducted a four-part leadership workshop with the 30 women of CNM representing nine different regions of the country. The workshops were aimed at empowering the women leaders of the FAT so that they could better develop platforms of action about gender and to increase the participation of women in the CNM-FAT (GEM 2000: 3). More specifically, one of the objectives of the workshops was to help the CNM begin to develop a proposal for the FAT's 12th National Congress about how to promote gender equity in the four sectors of the organization (personal interviews with Cecilia Talamante 1/20/2003; anonymous FAT representative, 2/17/2003).

Each of the four workshops treated a different theme, but each stressed in a different way how understanding the ways in which gender influences women's lives is a prerequisite for taking action for change, which is the fundamental point of the first level of citizenship construction.⁷⁶ In the first workshop, "the Gender Perspective," the objective was to give the participants "a critical vision of the gender perspective and different approaches to analyzing the condition of women, and, by reexamining the participants' experiences, deepen their gender consciousness" (GEM 2000: 6). To achieve this, the material focused on the concept of "gender" and how women's social

⁷⁶ Each workshop consisted of several elements, including a presentation by a specialist on the topic who introduced the problems and proposals for eliminating inequalities and subordination of women. However, as with the RMS, GEM's methodology stresses the importance of interaction and participation from all the members of the group. Before and after the presentations, there were exercises and discussions where the participants worked individually, in small groups, and as a whole to explore the themes in more depth, to develop questions or ideas to guide the workshop, and to give everyone a chance to participate. Some of the workshops also used role playing activities to help the women develop their understanding of a particular theme. Throughout the workshops, the participants were encouraged to participate by bringing in their own ideas, personal experiences, knowledge, and concerns (GEM 2000: 4-5).

roles and relationships have historically stressed domesticity and how political and economic structures were created to reinforce women's relationship with the domestic sphere. The workshop subsequently focused on the importance of women cooperating with one another in order to challenge these structures (GEM 2000: 6-14).

The second workshop focused on women's rights, with the objective of raising the participants' consciousness about the rights they hold (GEM 2000: 19). The workshop looked at the development of the concept of human rights and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Importantly, the workshop stressed how there is a decreased likelihood that the state can violate the rights of a group or individual if people understand their rights and are able to mobilize in support of them. The workshop stressed that this is particularly relevant to Mexican women given the fact that for many reasons—lack of enforcement mechanisms, social obstacles, subtle forms of discrimination, outdated civil codes—women's formal equality as made explicit in the constitution is not actually realized (GEM 2000: 20-24).

The focus of the third workshop was on women's relationship to work and reproduction.⁷⁷ The objective of the this third workshop with the CNM was that participant's should "have an integral vision of the condition of women in the workforce that goes into depth about sexual and reproductive rights, so that we get closer to identifying our needs and demands" (GEM 2000: 34). To that end, the presentation discussed common stereotypes about women and how these stereotypes, reinforced within social institutions, affect women's access to the labor market to the extent women

⁷⁷ The community of individuals and civil associations in Mexico City working with union women towards the construction of women's labor rights is quite small. As a case in point, Jennifer Cooper of the RMS was tapped as the expert to discuss the issues of reproductive rights and the relationship of work and reproduction that were the focus of this third workshop.

receive lower wages, have fewer job opportunities, are segregated into socially undervalued types of employment, and become vulnerable to both direct and indirect forms of gender discrimination (GEM 2000: 34-36).

Finally, the fourth workshop focused the participants' attention on issues of power and leadership, helping them to "analyze and reflect upon the exercise of women's leadership, starting with the relationship between gender and power, in order to promote and foster leadership in the organization" (GEM 2000: 40). This workshop focused on ideas about power structures and the reasons why women have historically held subordinate positions within different power structures. It also discussed different styles of leadership, both positive and negative, and how feminism has advanced our understanding of leadership by stressing the importance of equality, democratic forms of leadership, and the need for solidarity among women in order for them to advance through leadership ranks (GEM 2000: 42-46).

Each of the four workshops was designed to allow the participants to gain a better understanding of how ideas about gender affect the lives of women at the personal level, how they share common experiences *as women* in the workplace and in the community, and finally, how their experiences are shaped at an organizational level. The goal of looking at each theme in terms of how it relates to women at different levels of their lives was three-fold: to help women value their experiences, to help them understand some of the factors that explain women's situation in society, and, finally, to help women develop proposals for how to transform their personal lives and their experiences as women of the FAT (GEM 2000: 4-5). Two ideas ultimately come through in the workshops. First is the importance of women understanding the gap between their rights as citizens and the

current socioeconomic position that fails to reflect these rights. Second is the importance of women mobilizing as women to eliminate this gap. And indeed, the records from the workshop reveal that the workshops helped the women of the CNM develop a better understanding of how gendered conceptions affect women in the organization and sparked a greater interest strengthening the organization of women in the FAT.

Each workshop helped the participants to identify ways in which gendered ideas about women's role in society and at work have structured their lives and develop preliminary ideas about how to effect change. In the first workshop, participants worked in small groups to identify myths and common experiences related to gender that they had experienced in their own lives. Many of the myths and experiences they identified dealt with the division of labor (e.g., "Women are born to be in the home, they are made to serve and to attend to their husbands"), sexuality (e.g., "Virginity is seen as one of the most important virtues in a woman"), discrimination in employment (e.g., women are subject to sexual harassment and pregnancy testing), and ideas about leadership (e.g., "Women are less intelligent than men" and "Women who receive a promotion have slept with someone"). All of the groups who made proposals about how to challenge these myths stressed the importance of men and women sharing responsibilities, especially in the domestic sphere (GEM 2000: 16-17). The first workshop was thus important in helping the participants realize that the social roles that they thought of as natural have been socially constructed and that they have a right to a place in the public sphere, just as men have a responsibility to participate in the domestic sphere.

The second workshop was intended to help women better understand their rights and the obstacles to realizing them. This was achieved in part by discussing a series of

questions about rights. In response to the question “from whom did you learn about rights?” most women cited that they had learned from lectures or workshops, indicating that the consciousness-raising efforts of organizations like GEM are effective. The groups also noted that stereotypes about women, machismo, and men’s control over the power structures in society were the reasons that women’s rights were not given a high priority socially or legally (GEM 2000: 25-27). When asked to identify their principal rights in the spheres of personal life, family, work, and the organization, the responses showed that women identify as important rights that would rectify women’s subordination in Mexican society, such the ability to make personal decisions, especially marriage and children, equality between men and women in the home, just wages and benefits, access to training programs, freedom from sexual harassment and discrimination, and finally, the right to participate fully in organizations (GEM 2000: 30). The second workshop thus helped women understand that moving up power structures requires eliminating in all spheres practices that subordinate women.

In the third workshop, the participants were asked to describe their working conditions and the obstacles to them realizing their full labor rights. They mentioned various forms of discrimination (e.g., sexual harassment, discrimination against pregnant women, not being listened to or allowed to organize, etc.) as the biggest problem (GEM 2000: 37). Based on these discussions, each group developed a goal for improving women’s rights within the FAT and discussed the steps necessary to realize it. Three of the four groups focused on the need for various types of training that would help women in the organization become conscious of their rights as workers and help women become more active within the organization (GEM 2000: 38-39). The stress on training and

education, rather than pursuing concrete policies such as equal remuneration that would redress inequalities suggests that the women in the CNM felt that there was a general lack of awareness in the FAT about women's labor rights that must be addressed before pursuing other policies.

Finally, in the fourth workshop the participants discussed strategies and goals for women's leadership in the FAT. These goals included having women present in all the directive bodies of the organization and at all levels of the organizational structure, increasing the number of women in national, sectioning committees and secretariats, and revising the strategies of the CNM in order for it to function better. To achieve these goals, the women proposed sensitizing their male and female colleagues about gender, guaranteeing that women could take part in national training courses, and improving the coordination between the CNM and the FAT (GEM 2000: 49).

Together, the four workshops allowed women in the CNM to better identify the specific obstacles to women's equality and develop proposals and strategies for generating change. The fact that training and awareness-raising efforts came up repeatedly in discussions of how to effect change suggests that even in a progressive organization like the FAT, helping women realize their equal rights in the labor sphere requires basic work to make both men and women aware of what these rights are. Effectively, the GEM-CNM workshops underscore that consciousness-raising is an essential starting point in the construction of citizenship rights. The collaboration of union women with groups like GEM is, therefore, integral to this process.

Beyond helping women of the CNM identify specific obstacles to women's equality and strategies for change, the workshops helped women develop an overall

recognition of the common experiences of women workers and the importance of women working together to effect change. In their final reflections on the four workshops many women commented on the how working with GEM helped them realize the importance of solidarity between women. As one participant commented,

The group has reaffirmed for me that women are a great force in the FAT, in the country, and in the world. It was very gratifying to discover everyone's strength and creativity. I realize that I have to continue a process of self-discovery, a process that never ends. Thanks to GEM for your professionalism and support (GEM 2000: 51).

Another common theme of the participants' final reflections was the desire to take what they had learned in the workshops with GEM and either begin or contribute to ongoing work on gender equality in their own regions, sectors, or organizations. One participant expressed both gratitude for the experience and an interest in getting engaged at the base level of her organization, saying,

To the group I say that living together with women was a real pleasure. I'm happy to have participated in the group and to have gotten to know my compañeras from the organization. I realize that the FAT has proposals for work on gender, and I'm very interested in introducing the theme of gender in my sector, unions, and to help with the work that has been happening in my region (GEM 2000: 51).

In addition to inspiring them to become involved in promoting gender equity and women's leadership within the FAT, another participant commented that one of the benefits of GEM's workshops was that it taught them a methodology for approaching gender issues as well as how to look for resources that would enable their work (personal interview with anonymous FAT representative, 2/17/2003).

Finally, some of the women noted that one of the areas where women needed to direct their attention was on the upcoming National Congress, at which the CNM wanted to make a proposal for promoting gender equity throughout the FAT:

The group filled me with hope, that the motor for promoting the gender perspective in the FAT, has been placed in [the group] and that each day the extent to which we participate based on our identities as women will be greater. I am always amazed by every one [of the other participants], to get to know their lives, their personal and family difficulties, and still to be able to laugh, participate, and commit ourselves to each other. I notice every time we finish a workshop that we have more challenges to confront—now the National Congress—but that each day we go toward the challenges stronger than we were. (GEM 2000: 50).

The individual participants' responses to the workshops make it clear that GEM's work had the effect of raising women's awareness not only of gender issues, but of the potential power of women working together and the importance of working at all levels of the FAT to foster gender equity.

The Impact of the GEM-CNM Workshops on the 12th National Congress

As noted, one of the goals of GEM's workshops with the CNM was to help the women's network develop a plan for fostering gender equality in the FAT that would be presented at the 12th National Congress in November of 2001. In fact, the CNM introduced a proposal that "spoke of the need for 'transversality'—that the work with women must cut across the entire organization and must be the responsibility of all [members of the FAT], including the national coordinators. The proposal was rapidly incorporated with virtually no debate" (Alexander 2001).

The Strategic Program for 2001-04 that came out of the 12th National Congress reveals how the idea of transversality regarding gender was incorporated into the FAT's agenda. First, in summarizing the current challenges faced by the members of all sectors of the FAT in the current political and economic context, as well as by workers more generally, the Strategic Program recognized that women are an increasingly important part of the workforce and that this has changed the nature of domestic life and labor.

Moreover, the Program recognized that women make up the vast majority of the ranks of the poor and that they are rarely represented within the leadership ranks of unions and other representative organizations (FAT 2001: 4-11; Alexander 2001). Based on this recognition of the way women have been incorporated into the labor market, achieving gender equity in the FAT was one of the specific areas of focus in the Strategic Program. And the Program elaborated five specific goals for achieving gender equity: first, supporting gender equity in work, in the organization, in the family, and in all areas where men and women interact; second, promoting gender equity at work through equal pay for equal work; third, ending all forms of gender discrimination, including pregnancy exams and firing women who are pregnant; fourth, creating equal opportunities for hiring, promotion, and benefits in all areas of work; finally, recognizing domestic labor (FAT 2001: 16-17; Alexander 2001).

The work toward transversality also included restructuring the FAT's women's network. As of the 12th National Congress, the CNM was changed to the Coordinación Nacional de Equidad de Género (National Coordinating Body for Gender Equity), and this new body was charged with promoting gender equity in all organizations belonging to the FAT. Among its other objectives are ensuring that women have representation at the national, regional, sectoral, and organizational levels and that groups of women at each of these levels would be responsible for creating spaces for women to discuss gender equity; developing leadership training and awareness raising programs to help women become more involved in the FAT; developing a self-sustaining financial strategy to allow the group to carry out its work; working in national and international networks to promote gender equity; holding regional and national meetings on themes such as

development, poverty, labor rights, health, and education; and fostering and supporting projects initiated by women (FAT 2001: 23-27; n.d.-a).

The Strategic Program developed out of the FAT's 12th National Congress went a long way in acknowledging the important role of women in the economy and the importance of promoting gender equity and fostering women's leadership in the FAT. This is testament to both the progressive nature of the FAT and to the work of the CNM and other women in the FAT who had been consulted during the preparation of the Strategic Program.⁷⁸ Still, it is difficult to measure the exact impact GEM's workshops had on the development of the Strategic Program of the 12th National Congress. Much like Jennifer Cooper with regard to the RMS, Cecelia Talamante is reluctant to claim that GEM has been responsible for significant advancements for the women workers in any of the specific groups GEM has worked with, although she says that over the long term, GEM and other groups have had an impact on the work environment for working women:

I think the achievements have been [greater gender] consciousness and empowerment in many sectors. As for changes...they have not been produced by GEM alone, but by various organizations like ours who are pushing this issue, who are pushing the importance of unions taking gender into account in their proposals.... Yes, GEM has had an impact in highlighting, for example, the importance of work on gender equity...But this hasn't been the work of GEM alone (personal interview with Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003).

Although the issue of gender equality in the FAT had been receiving attention throughout the 1990s, the responses of the participants in GEM's workshops with the CNM indicate that awareness of women's labor rights and the gendered nature of social, work, and organizational life was not yet commonplace throughout the FAT. In this light,

⁷⁸ As will be discussed in Chapter 6, few traditional unions, or even independent unions belonging to the UNT, have policies on gender equity that go anywhere near as far as those of the FAT. The FAT really is a progressive worker's organization.

especially given the fact that many of the women who participated the GEM's workshops with the CNM felt inspired to carry on work towards gender equity in the FAT, it is clear that GEM played an important role in raising the gender consciousness of women workers in the FAT.⁷⁹ From the perspective of the social construction of citizenship that I have elaborated, this makes GEM's work more important than Talamante seems to realize. Citizenship rights and social institutions will not change unless there is some impetus for change. In Mexico, with its *machista* culture (especially union culture) there is not much impetus to meaningfully expand women's rights in the absence of a broad demand from women themselves. And yet there is not going to be this demand unless women are aware of the rights they have and want to see them reflected in institutional structures. This makes the work of GEM, which clearly had an effect on women in the workshops, an important contribution to the construction of women's labor rights.

5.3 CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING EFFORTS BY UNION FEDERATIONS

After the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, there was an increase in international pressure on developing countries to support programs that would contribute to gender equality, and international financial institutions offered developing countries funding for such programs. According to Ma. Elisa Villaescusa, the coordinator of MUTUAC-MAS, this helped to put gender on the political

⁷⁹ Regardless of the success of GEM's work in raising the gender-consciousness of unionized women workers, it is not certain that this part of their Women Workers Program will continue. Cecelia Talamante commented that the demand for this type of training fluctuates greatly. Partly, she said, this is because unions do not always have the financial resources to pay for GEM's programs. However, another factor is the increasing number of union women, such as those from the RMS, who have been trained to do this kind of work and who are working in their own unions. Given this situation, GEM is reevaluating the Women Workers Program and considering shifting its focus to women working in the informal sector (personal interview with Cecelia Talamante, 1/20/2003).

agenda in Mexico and created an important opening for groups like GEM and MUTUAC-MAS to work on gender issues with union women (personal interview with Ma. Elisa Villaescusa, 12/19/2002). Beginning in 2000, union federations like the Federación de Sindicatos de Empresas de Bienes y Servicios (Federation of Goods and Services Unions—FESEBES), the UNT, and even the corporatist CTM started to offer their own courses on women's rights and gender equity to members of their affiliated unions throughout the country.

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING EFFORTS BY THE NATIONAL WORKERS' UNION AND THE FEDERATION OF GOODS AND SERVICES UNIONS

The offices of the Vice President of Equity and Gender of the UNT (established in 2000) and the Secretary of Equity and Gender of FESEBES (established in 2001), as well as individual women from unions belonging to these federations have collaborated with civil organizations to conduct workshops and seminars on gender issues for affiliated unions throughout the country. For example, they have worked with MUTUAC-MAS to put together the materials for a course on women's human rights and labor rights.⁸⁰ This course was typical, beginning with an introduction to the concept of gender. Stressing

⁸⁰ In addition to doing workshops on issues such as women's human and labor rights for members of its affiliated unions, the UNT is also committed to raising awareness of the struggles facing non-unionized women in Mexico. Martha Heredia of the STRM, who is Vice President of Equity and Gender for the UNT, stressed that her office has become involved alongside other civil association in national campaigns surrounding issues pertinent women workers, such as the campaign to end the murders of young working women in Ciudad Juarez. The UNT's involvement in such efforts is aimed at making the campaigns "much stronger, much more determined, much better known" (personal interview with Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003). Moreover, Esperanza Gonzalez of the SIA noted that in the workshops with which she is involved, there is an effort to bring attention to the conditions of non-unionized (women) workers, such as those in the maquila industry, with the hope that people attending the courses will become involved in protests and marches in support of these women workers (personal interview with Esperanza Gonzalez, 2/24/2003). There is definitely an interest on the part of certain members of the UNT and FESEBES in the federations becoming seriously involved in the broader political discourse over women's rights and labor conditions.

that biological differences between men and women do not prevent them from achieving equality, the course goes on to explore the human and labor rights that women hold, as defined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, various conventions of the ILO, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and in Mexican law (MUTUAC 2000).

Several of the women involved with the UNT-FESEBES effort indicated that, unfortunately, their ability to carry out these workshops around the country is limited by a lack of stable funding. The human rights workshop has received funding from the AFL-CIO and some support from the UNT, but they do not have a stable budget for these workshops and must rely on their individual unions to help subsidize the costs of the workshops and of travel (personal interviews with Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003; Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003; and Esperanza Gonzalez, 2/24/2003). The lack of funding has clearly limited the extent of the programs.

Given the short lifespan and limited scope of the UNT/FESEBES programs, the impact of these courses on women in affiliated unions is difficult to measure. Of course, different coordinators have different views of the programs' success: Rosa Maria Hernandez of the Alianza de Tranviarios de México (Alliance of Mexican Trolleyworkers—ATM) thinks that the courses they have given to men and women have been successful even though they are infrequent (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003). Martha Heredia identifies the challenge of making the courses successful in the patriarchal union environment: “We’ve tried to involve more *compañeras*. Unfortunately, the unions that are affiliated with the UNT mostly have male representatives, not female representatives, and this doesn’t help our work on gender....

But it's a question of time, of work, of strength..." (personal interview with Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003). Clearly, the UNT-FESEBES collaboration is not nearly as developed as the programs of the RMS and GEM, so it is not easy to determine what, if any, effect these courses will ultimately have. However, Heredia, Hernandez, and Gonzalez all emphasized the importance of gender workshops as a key strategy for eliminating gender inequality in their own unions and in the federations broadly, and they had confidence in the ultimate success of such a strategy.⁸¹

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING EFFORTS BY THE CONFEDERATION OF MEXICAN WORKERS

Unlike the UNT and FESEBES, which has collaborated with MUTUAC-MAS and other civil organizations to produce its training materials and help facilitate its programs, the CTM's courses on gender issues are developed and facilitated by instructors who work under the federation's Secretary of Education. Even so, there is clear evidence of collaboration between the CTM and civil associations in the development of the federation's gender courses. For example, one of the instructors who facilitates the CTM's gender courses said that her interest in gender was piqued by a seminar on union women's leadership she attended at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Foundation in Mexico City in 1997.⁸² As a result of her interest in gender issues, she has developed courses on gender that have been accepted by the CTM and included in the

⁸¹ None of the women interviewed were able to identify the number of workshops that had been given or the number of participants in them.

⁸² Created in 1925, the FES Foundation is a German non-profit organization that promotes public policy reflecting the values of social democracy through education, research, and international dialogue. The FES foundation has offices in over 90 countries and does work in over 100 countries. In Mexico, the FES foundation carries out a number of activities (seminars, workshops, book launches, training programs) aimed at strengthening union democracy in Mexico. See www.fesmex.org.

federation's catalog of courses available to affiliated unions (personal interview with anonymous CTM instructor, 2/10/2003).

The courses on gender issues that are now offered by the CTM cover women's health and gender equality in unions. The instructor has also presented a section on gender equity in a general course called "Union Identity and Leadership Development" and is developing a course on masculinity. The gender equity course, while not as extensive as those of the RMS or GEM, cover similar themes, including the concept of gender and how a culture of gender has been developed historically, discrimination, and explanations for women's low participation in unions.

As with the UNT-FESEBES human rights workshops, these courses are offered to CTM-affiliated unions throughout Mexico, but unlike the UNT-FESEBES, whose gender equity offices are specifically interested in raising women workers' awareness of their rights, the CTM's gender courses are only a few of the many courses offered by the federation's Secretary of Education. According to the instructor, demand for the gender courses had declined. She had no solid explanation for why, but noted that union leaders often had other priorities for courses to provide their members, such as those on union history and labor legislation. Moreover, the instructor pointed out was that while there was support from the CTM to provide the gender courses, they were not given any more support than the other courses (personal interview with anonymous CTM instructor, 2/10/2003). This indicates that the gender courses were not really part of an ambitious, systemic plan of CTM's Secretary of Education to raise gender consciousness in the union. Rather, they were there should a union decide that they would be worthwhile for members. The consequences of declining interest on the part of union leaders to provide

gender courses to their members is, of course, that fewer unionists will be introduced to issues of women's rights and obstacles to gender equity.

Nevertheless, asked whether the gender courses that did take place had had much effect on changing the situation for women in unions, the instructor said that most of the changes that she had noticed were changes in the women themselves as they developed a new awareness of how gender affects their lives, rather than changes in structures or union/workplace policies. In one rare instance when the women were asked to write their reflections on a course, the instructor said that all of the participants indicated that their ideas about gender had changed. One of these women eventually became a national union leader (personal interview with anonymous CTM instructor, 2/10/2003).

Given the personal impact these courses can have on women and the importance of these introductions to gender equity in sparking political agency, the absence of broader support for these workshops within the CTM—in contrast to the UNT and FESEBES—suggests an interesting cycle: corporatist structures, such as those of the CTM, are more resistant to change and are therefore less concerned with promoting gender equity. This may lead to fewer women having the knowledge and capacity to mobilize for changes within the federation. In contrast, a more democratic organization like the FAT or the UNT places more effort on providing introductions to gender equity, and this may lead to more involvement in support of change. This is further evidence of the importance of consciousness-raising to the construction of citizenship, since even in the corporatist unions, women who have greater awareness of gender issues have become more involved in the institution.

CHALLENGES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE UNION FEDERATIONS' PROGRAMS

The training courses on gender issues offered by the UNT, FESEBES, and the CTM are still in an early stage of development compared to the courses offered by groups like the RMS and GEM. Given that leaders of these two NGOs are tentative in claiming that their courses have had a profound impact on union women's ability to promote women's labor rights, it is unrealistic to expect that the union federations' courses would have yielded a major impact on union women or their labor rights in a shorter period of time. However, Ma. Elisa Villaescusa offers some interesting speculation as to why in-house union or union federation efforts at gender consciousness raising may simply be less effective than similar efforts made by NGOs like the RMS, GEM, or MUTUAC-MAS.

Echoing the thoughts of Jennifer Cooper, Villaescusa commented that in the corporatist and machista Mexican union culture, the support of union leadership is essential for any real change to take place, because absent union democracy, nothing really changes without the secretary general's support. For Villaescusa, this creates a nearly impossible situation for women hoping to advance gender equity and women's labor rights because bringing women into leadership positions or improving women's status in the union would challenge traditional power structures, which most union leaders would not support: "Obviously its not true, it's not true that secretary generals, whether men or women, are interested in promoting women's leadership and the demands of women.... It doesn't interest them because they want to perpetuate their power" (personal interview with Ma. Elisa Villaescusa, 12/9/2002). Villaescusa's suggestion may help explain why more CTM union leaders do not request courses on women's leadership: if the starting point for promoting change is precisely at the level of

consciousness-raising, providing such courses would be part of a challenge to the corporatist structures that allow Mexican union leaders to maintain their power.

Villaescusa's speculation also helps her explain why union leaders tend to be interested in conducting workshops on human rights or labor rights rather than on subjects like women's leadership. She noted that MUTUAC-MAS had turned down an offer from the UNT to conduct human rights and labor rights workshops because they thought it was a waste of time, especially considering that members of UNT-affiliated had considerably more access to information on human and labor rights than other Mexican workers. She speculated that the UNT was not interested in leadership training workshops because these had the potential to empower women, and therefore could pose a threat to union leadership. Similarly, MUTUAC-MAS turned down a request by the UNT to train UNT members to be facilitators of gender workshops because she felt that that the goal of unions training their own personnel to give gender workshops was another way of maintaining control of what goes on in the workshops (personal interview with Ma. Elisa Villaescusa 12/9/2002).

Villaescusa raises two important points about the challenges of raising union women's gender consciousness. First, like Jennifer Cooper, Villaescusa highlights the enormous challenge to constructing women's labor rights posed by a very rigid union environment where union leadership, in the interest of protecting the traditional power structure, often merely pays lip service to the interests and rights of women workers. This challenge underscores the importance of collaborative efforts and alliance building among women in unions and NGO communities. For example, by operating independently of particular unions, the RMS avoids becoming beholden to the wishes of

union leadership insofar as the kind of programs they can facilitate. Moreover, its women's leadership programs have brought together women from different unions, which means that at the same time as these women are becoming more conscious of how gender operates within their unions, they are also building support networks. According to Svenja Blanke, who worked on union programs for the FES in Mexico City, such support networks are critical for union women:

In the world of politics as well as the labor movement, male leaders generally have [a] strong network, work through contacts, influence through networks. Ideally, women develop their own networks, first in order to get connected, distribute information and educate themselves, [and] later [to] enter male networks and make known their interests and policies (personal communication with Svenja Blanke, 1/15/2003).

As Blanke observes, education and network building (the first level of citizenship construction) are part of the process through which union women can begin to advance their interests and promote women's labor rights within unions.

Second, Villaescusa's objection to training union women to be facilitators of workshops and courses on gender ultimately highlights the changing nature of the agents involved in these consciousness raising efforts. Villaescusa argued that training union women as facilitators would be another way in which union leaders could perpetuate their control (by potentially controlling topics and handpicking the facilitators). But Villaescusa was also clearly concerned with maintaining a role for her organization in the consciousness-raising community. She commented that training union women to facilitate courses that MUTUAC-MAS would normally conduct would ultimately result in lost business (personal interview with Ma. Elisa Villaescusa, 12/9/2002). As noted earlier, the "problem" of union women facilitators taking over the role of more traditional NGOs is something that GEM has been confronting as well. There is a certain irony in

that the success of groups like GEM and MUTUAC-MAS in raising union women's gender consciousness may mean a smaller role for these NGOs in the future. However, what this ultimately highlights is that union women are becoming more aware of their rights and needs as women workers and are interested in developing their skills as political agents. To the degree that this is true, the goals of these two NGOs (in addition to the RMS and other civil associations) in helping to implement a gender perspective among union women has been successful.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Despite differences in vision about the role of NGOs, Villaescusa's comments about the effectiveness of gender consciousness raising programs for union women reflects the sentiments of both Jennifer Cooper of the RMS and Cecilia Talamante of GEM, both of whom express guarded opinions about the overall impact of their programs. Nevertheless, in different ways all three highlight importance of consciousness raising efforts as a first step towards challenging the entrenched social roles that leave women in a subordinate position to men at work and in unions, as well as the failure of women's labor rights to be reflected in labor legislation and vigorously enforced.

The importance of raising union women's gender consciousness as a critical first step in promoting women's rights as workers is a result of the deep entrenchment of traditional gender roles in the Mexican labor sphere. Conchita Lopez, an organizer with the FAT, said of the FAT's workshops with women in the state of Chihuahua, "We begin by simply sharing the experiences of being women, and on that foundation we build everything. Because machismo is so ingrained we have to do a lot of work on self-esteem before we can do much more" (quoted in Hathaway 2000: 154).

While the workshops given by the RMS, GEM, MUTUAC-MAS, and even the union federations focus on issues other than self-esteem, they do introduce women to the concept of gender, explore how gender affects their position within unions, the workplace, and society broadly, and discuss the rights women have as workers and citizens to fully participate in unions and the workplace. For many of the union women mentioned here—Eleonora Elwes, Esperanza Gonzalez, Rosa Maria Hernandez, Gloria Olvera, the CTM instructor, and the women of the CNM-FAT—attending a gender-themed course or workshop or learning about gender issues through a coworker was a catalyst to their subsequent work to advance the rights of working women, a clear indication that gender consciousness raising efforts have an effect in promoting union women's political agency.

Moreover, the cases discussed here highlight the way that alliances and collaboration have become increasingly important in the social construction of women's labor rights. Whether the alliance consists of all union women, as in the case of the RMS, represents a collaboration of unions and other civil actors, as in the cases of GEM's work with the CNM-FAT or the UNT's and FESEBES's work with MUTUAC-MAS, these collaborations have been crucial in expanding union women's gender consciousness and to creating a broader support network for union women within Mexican civil society.

As I have argued here, the role of NGOs in the social construction of women's labor rights is changing as more union women become agents for change, and the next two chapters illustrate this change. In Chapter 6, I examine how union women, largely operating without the support of NGOs, have begun to tackle the second level of citizenship construction—working to promote women's labor rights within unions

themselves. In Chapter 7, I explore how collaboration between union women and a wider array of civil actors has played an important role in opening up a real dialogue on women's labor rights at the state level.

6

Constructing Citizenship at the Institutional Level: Promoting Women's Labor Rights within Unions

6.0 INTRODUCTION

The social construction of citizenship is the process by which civil society actors work to create, expand, or redefine conceptions of citizenship at all levels of society, including within institutions below the level of the state. Historically, labor unions have been important actors in the social construction of citizenship, but as politico-economic institutions, they have also mirrored the discriminatory tendencies of society. In Mexico, labor unions have failed to fully incorporate women into organizational structures. They have also largely failed to promote women's labor rights within their governing statutes, in collective contract negotiations, and in political discourses with the state. Unions' commitment to gender equity may be even further off the agenda in the neoliberal economic era, since unions are struggling to retain membership and their powerful political and economic position within society. Nevertheless, because unions are still important actors within civil society that have political influence and a commitment to promoting workers' rights, it is important for the construction of women's labor rights

that unions are transformed into institutions that use their political influence, in conjunction with broader networks of women's organizations, to promote the specific rights of women workers in addition to the rights and interests of workers generally.

Transforming Mexican unions into institutions that promote women's labor rights is a difficult process because they continue to be largely masculine spaces, where women leaders are scarce and women's interests barely represented. Historically, women's leadership within unions had been concentrated in women's offices or secretariats (Lovera 1995: 40-41), and these were largely responsible for planning social events. Today, as the idea that women should have equal rights within the labor sphere becomes more widely acknowledged, women's leadership within unions is slowly becoming more focused on promoting women's labor rights rather than on coordinating social events. Effectively promoting women's rights will depend on the presence of strong women leaders who use tools such as official women's offices and educational programs to foster support for women's labor rights from union leaders and the rank-and-file, cultivate women's participation in the unions, and promote policies and contract clauses enforcing women's labor rights.

As discussed in Chapter 5, there are many examples of union women working in networks with other union women or with NGOs to promote women's labor rights. As this chapter will discuss, the struggle to promote women's labor rights also involves examples of union women acting alone or in small groups to promote women's labor rights within their own unions. More specifically, I examine five unions where women have had varying degrees of success in promoting women's labor rights internally—the Workers' Union of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the Single Serfin

Workers' Union, the Telephone Workers' Union of the Mexican Republic, the Alliance of Mexican Streetcar Workers, and the Independent Aviation Union.

An analysis of union women's agency within these five unions reveals four important points about constructing women's citizenship at the union level. First, women's leadership is vital to the promotion of women's labor rights. Second, women's leadership is insufficient in the absence of support from other union leaders and from the rank-and-file. Third, educational programs aimed at fostering gender consciousness among leaders and the rank-and-file are therefore crucial. Finally, the political and economic context influences the viability of efforts to promote women's labor rights within unions. In an economic context where the power of organized labor is declining, it is crucial not only to transform unions internally, but also to build stronger alliances between existing unions and other civil society actors in order to build a broader, more sustained movement to promote women's labor rights.

6.1 STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN UNIONS

As the examples in this chapter show, women's leadership is necessary in promoting women's labor rights within the union, but speaking out in support of women's rights can be a very difficult task in the Mexican union environment. Unions are very masculine institutions and women leaders remain exceptions to the rule. Not all women leaders will be interested in taking a stand to promote women's labor rights, but even those who want to may find it politically difficult to take on the "boy's club" in order to promote issues that may be viewed as unimportant, or even threatening, to other union leaders. As Svenja Blanke, the former union liaison with the Mexican office of the FES Foundation, noted,

It seems that women in powerful positions within their unions have to also walk carefully and diplomatically in order to push issues....Sometimes women opt for a low profile, sometimes they just become [functionaries]. In general, they lack support and power within their institution...to promote an issue like women's rights (personal communication with Svenja Blanke, 1/15/2003).

Given this situation, it takes a particularly strong woman leader to aggressively promote women's labor rights when she will most likely be working without much support, against the status quo, and at risk to her political future within the union.

When there are women leaders willing to take on issues of women's labor rights within their unions, there are three primary strategies that these women follow. First, they have demanded official spaces within unions, such as offices for gender equity, and used these official offices to promote change. Official responsibilities for these offices are widely varied: some are charged mainly with the task of coordinating social events, while others have the responsibility of developing measures to eliminate gender discrimination in the union and workplace. In all cases, however, they are an important space for women to participate and assume leadership positions on gender issues (Lovera 1995: 40-41). These offices are also spaces where women can discuss the issues and challenges specific to their experience and plan strategies for eliminating gender discrimination. As official spaces for women's agency within unions, these offices are an important tool in promoting women's labor rights.

Second, whether organized in official gender equity offices or not, union women have made efforts to educate their compañeras (and compañeros) about gender issues and women's labor rights. Although awareness raising efforts were discussed in great detail in Chapter 5, the importance of educational efforts in the pursuit of gender equity and the advocacy of women's labor rights *within unions* cannot be underestimated. A study by

the ILO found that “...those unions which undertook to *foster a high degree of awareness of women’s issues among the general membership* found that women’s participation at higher levels has become regarded as unexceptional (ILO 2000: 21, emphasis in original). In a country such as Mexico, where women’s low levels of participation in union leadership positions are both a result of gender discrimination and an obstacle to gender equity, increasing women’s participation in union leadership and activities is crucial to the social construction of women’s labor rights at the union level. Education is an integral part of fostering such participation.

Third, whether through official gender equity offices or through their participation on union negotiating committees, women have promoted changes to union governing statutes and collective contracts so that these acknowledge women’s labor rights. In terms of socially constructing citizenship within unions, clauses in collective contracts and union statutes that promote gender equity and women’s labor rights are important for two reasons. First, such clauses institutionalize women’s equality, and when in collective contract clauses, they do so in a way that is legally binding. Second, because collective contracts reflect negotiations between employers and unions over the rights and responsibilities of workers, the presence of contract clauses promoting gender equity suggests that the union played a role in supporting the clause. As will be noted in section 6.3, the absence of support for such clauses on the part of the union’s negotiating team can effectively eliminate the possibility of a clause making it into the contract.⁸³

⁸³ There is some evidence to suggest that promoting gender equality and women’s labor rights is becoming a more important focus of Latin American unions. A recent study by the International Labour Office (OIT) for Latin America and the Caribbean indicates that in six Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela), collective contracts increasingly reflect gender equity issues, particularly through clauses in the areas of maternity/paternity, family responsibilities, work conditions,

In each of the five unions discussed in the next sections, union women have used all or some of these three strategies, with varying degrees of success, in an effort to promote women's labor rights within their unions and workplaces.

6.2 PROMOTING WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN UNIONS WITH STRONG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Some unions in Mexico, although they continue to be masculine spaces where women's participation is limited and where gender equality is not a specific goal, have had leaders and offices committed to promoting women's labor rights in the union for a relatively long time. In this section, I discuss two cases where women's leadership in the union has led to advancements in gender consciousness and policies promoting women's labor rights despite the masculine atmosphere of the union—the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Workers' Union of the National Autonomous University of Mexico—STUNAM), which has had active women's leadership on the question of women's labor rights since the late 1970s, and the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de Serfin (Single Workers' Union of Serfin—SUTS), which has had an important feminist union activist in charge of its gender equity office since 1988.

and in the promotion of equal opportunities (OIT 2002b: 70-79). In Mexico, however, collective contracts have not been very progressive in promoting women's rights in the labor sphere. A study of collective contracts done for the OIT in Mexico by Ancelmo García Pineda indicates that gender issues, particularly gender equity issues, are not a high priority in collective bargaining. In the 60 collective contracts he analyzed, the vast majority of the clauses explicitly addressing women's labor rights concerned maternity leave, which is guaranteed by the constitution and the LFT. Very few clauses addressed gender equity or non-discrimination. In fact, the analysis revealed six collective contracts that indirectly *punished* women for using their maternity leave benefits by offering pay incentives to women who never use them (García Pineda 2002: Chapter 5).

Promoting Women's Labor Rights in the Workers' Union of the National Autonomous University of Mexico

STUNAM represents about 30,000 administrative and academic staff of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Women constitute a significant and growing percentage of the union's membership. Today, approximately 40% of union members are women, up from nearly 30% in 1987. Despite the large presence of women in the union and the university, they both have remained very masculine spaces. Women rarely hold high positions in the union or university leadership. There is also a degree of occupational segregation, with men holding higher numbers of academic positions and women more concentrated in support positions. And women have faced forms of discrimination, such as pregnancy exams, dismissal because of pregnancy or for taking maternity leave, and sexual harassment (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003; (Gamboa Ortiz 2003: 5-7).

Despite this rather typical environment for women workers, STUNAM has been a strong supporter of women's labor rights by Mexican standards. During the rise of the feminist movement in the late 1970s, STUNAM was involved in organizations such as the Frente Nacional de Lucha por la Liberación y los Derechos de la Mujer (National Front for the Struggle for the Liberation and Rights of Women), which supported women's right to work, the elimination of discrimination of women in the workplace, and equal pay for equal work (Gamboa Ortiz 2003: 3; Rodríguez Bautista 2002: 3). Today, STUNAM is a member of the UNT, and as such is ideologically committed to supporting union democracy and gender equity.

Most of the union's advances in promoting women's labor rights have resulted from work done in the office of the union's Secretaría de Acción Feminil (Secretary for

Women's Action—SAF). Over the years women have used this office as a space for leadership on women's issues, helping them to promote protections and benefits for women workers in the collective contract that go beyond those required by law (Gamboa Ortiz 2003).

The Secretary for Women's Action

The office of the of SAF was established in 1976 after a group of women spent several years lobbying for an official space within the union where women workers could organize in support of social benefits and respect from members of the union.⁸⁴ After the creation of the SAF, women were successful in securing a number of changes to the collective contract that enhanced their rights and benefits. These included eliminating pregnancy testing for female job applicants, triple overtime pay for women, a decrease in the number of years necessary for women to qualify for a pension and retirement, and financial assistance for day care costs (Ravelo Blancas and Sánchez Díaz 2001: 93; Gamboa Ortiz 2003: 7-8). These clauses remain in the collective contract, and over the years other clauses have been added to the contract that also protect women's labor rights. For example, in the 2000-2002 collective contract, clause 20.11 specifies that an employee can be fired for committing sexual assault on the University campus or worksite, and clause 58 guarantees equal remuneration for the same job, regardless of sex (UNAM and STUNAM 2000).⁸⁵

⁸⁴ In 1997, the title of the office was changed to the Secretaría de Acción para la Mujer, which also translates (a bit more literally) to Secretary for Women's Action.

⁸⁵ STUNAM is truly unique in Mexico in terms of the extent to which its collective contract addresses women's labor rights, and the union's success in promoting women's labor rights in contract negotiations cannot be undervalued. However, it is interesting to note certain cases where clauses in the contract reinforce gender roles that prevent women from achieving true equality in the workplace. For example,

Among the factors that have allowed women to successfully push for such important changes in the union's collective contract is the combined effect of the SAF's broad mandate, its relative autonomy within the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional (National Executive Committee—CEN), and its history of strong women leaders.⁸⁶ Columba Quintero, who served as the SAF from 1998 to 2003, stated that while she held the office, the official duties of the SAF were to organize social events, such as activities for Mother's Day and Children's Day, and, broadly speaking, to "address women's issues" (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).⁸⁷ For Quintero, this broad mandate left her with the responsibility of determining the important issues that needed to be handled—a difficult task, but one that also gave her the freedom to develop her own projects:

[As Secretary for Women's Action in STUNAM], you can move autonomously, you have your project, you direct the themes that you want, and nothing depends on anybody else. Clearly...the Secretary General must sign on, because he has to approve everything, but you can really

collective contract clauses 38 and 39 allow women to take paid leave when their children (under 12) are sick. This benefit is also extended to men who are widowed, divorced, or have legal custody of their children, or in the case when their spouse also works for UNAM (UNAM and STUNAM 2000: 34-36). This benefit is a double-edged sword. It is good for women workers in that it allows them to better balance work and family needs, but it also underscores women's primary role in the domestic sphere by restricting *men's* right to take child-care leave to cases where they are a single parent or their wife works for the University. The assumption is that a married man will usually have a wife (or other family member) who will be primarily responsible for child care. As I discuss in Chapter 7, one of the most important issues women identify in promoting women's equality in the labor sphere is that child care be treated as a *social* responsibility rather than simply the responsibility of women alone.

⁸⁶ One of the first Secretaries for Women's Action was Rosario Robles, who would go on to become the first female mayor of Mexico City and a president of the PRD.

⁸⁷ Although in her interview Quintero stated that her contractual responsibilities were to organize social programs and address women's issues broadly, the actual union statutes that entered into effect in 1999, while Quintero still held the position, were a bit more specific. Article 49 of these statutes specifies that among other things, the SAF's responsibilities are to promote activities that increase women's participation in the union and the labor movement, to promote activities in defense of women's rights, to raise gender awareness in the union, and to represent the union to local, national, and international organizations fighting for women's rights (STUNAM 2000). It is not clear why Quintero presented the responsibilities of the SAF in such general terms during the interview, but she is correct insofar as the statutes do not specify exactly what kinds of activities should be carried out or how to defend women's rights within the union.

move in the directions you want and do what you want (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

During her tenure as SAF, Quintero was most proud of two projects she completed that promoted women's labor rights in the union. The first was to successfully push for a union statute clause prohibiting sexual harassment. According to Quintero, over the years some women in the union had been fighting for a statute or collective contract clause penalizing sexual harassment. As SAF, Quintero decided to renew efforts to secure such a clause.

In order to build support for the clause, Quintero began a campaign to raise awareness about sexual harassment by conducting workshops and training sessions for union members and to collect information on cases of sexual harassment of union women. She notes that it was a difficult process for several reasons. First, there was a lot of confusion among men and women about the exact definition of harassment. As she stated, "The theme of sexual harassment is really difficult. It isn't even clear to women, who don't understand that harassment is when you say 'no.' If you want [the attention] and then later want to make an accusation, that's not it" (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003). Education and awareness raising about the issue was thus crucial to gaining support for the clause.

Proving that harassment was really a problem for union women was critical in order for Quintero to gain support for such a clause, so a second challenge in promoting the clause was women's reluctance to discuss their experiences of harassment, especially because of the social stigma or the possible consequences if a husband or relative found out. Although Quintero was not able to conduct a full study of the extent of harassment of union women, she did collect information on individual cases of harassment. Still, despite

promises of confidentiality to the women with whom she spoke, there were women who were afraid to talk because of who might find out. Some women “didn’t want to open their mouth because their husband was working there, because there was a son, because there was a brother, because they would tell other people” (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

Perhaps a bigger obstacle Quintero faced was the fear men had of being accused of harassment. Because men held decision making power within the union, it was crucial to get male leadership on board, but Quintero noted that “there is a lot of resistance, especially on the part of the union officials because they seemed to feel that ‘if we put in the statute, after a while we’ll be accused of harassment and our careers will be over...’” (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

Despite the challenges, Quintero did receive support within the union from women who asked for workshops on sexual harassment for their units, and even from some male union delegates who asked for Quintero’s help investigating cases of harassment that came to their attention. In 2002, after three years of work on the project, the union passed a statute clause penalizing sexual harassment, making STUNAM among the first unions in Mexico to have such a clause in its statutes (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

The second advancement Quintero made in promoting women’s labor rights was the establishment of the Casa de la Mujer Universitaria (University Women’s House), a center providing legal, educational, and physical and mental health services to the University’s women workers. In doing so, it provides a space for women to get important forms of support and to become better educated about how gender affects their lives as

workers and citizens. In the proposal for creating the center, Quintero and her co-author, Magdalena Guerrero Martínez, justified the need for such a space, saying that

...Mexican society has not been inclined to distinguish the needs of women. To highlight and address women's distinct needs is to adopt a gendered perspective. Taking this point of view, we suggest that there is a need for a space for the women of STUNAM...that addresses problems rooted in gender. The Workers' Union of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, a progressive organization within Mexican unionism, can once again be at the cutting edge by establishing that attention to the conditions of women workers is unavoidable. With this understanding, STUNAM's Secretary of Women's Action promotes the creation of the University Women's House, an initiative that will provide women workers with a space for the dissemination of information, collective reflection, and activities for men and women who are interested in social transformation (Quintero Martínez and Guerrero Martínez 2000: 2).

The University Women's House has five different sections providing information and professional services: a media center, a center for legal consultation, a health center, a mental health center, and a documents center where information on women's issues is collected and disseminated within the university community (Quintero Martínez and Guerrero Martínez 2000).

According to Quintero, one of the important functions of the House, in addition to providing women the aforementioned services, is to provide regular workshops on different themes of importance to women in the union. In the first months of the center, these included leadership and empowerment, reproductive rights, and the concept of gender (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003). Other proposed topics for courses included women and neoliberalism, the legal aspects of domestic violence, women's and children's human rights, and the prevention of sexual abuse (Quintero Martínez and Guerrero Martínez 2000: 14-15).

Like the sexual harassment clause, the University Women's House was a project that women in the union had wanted to develop for many years, and it goes far in providing women workers at the university with support and information to help them gain equal footing in the workplace (and in society). Although Quintero did not experience the same obstacles in promoting the House as in the sexual harassment clause, it still required a great deal of effort to secure support for the resources and the space (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

OBSTACLES TO THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN STUNAM

Women's agency through the office of the SAF has been important in promoting women's labor rights within STUNAM. Quintero cautions, however, that there are still certain challenges to continuing the work that she and others have started. One potential problem is a question of turnover in the position of the SAF. While STUNAM has had several active and progressive women in this position, the initiatives promoting women's labor rights in the union have been the work of small groups, or as in Quintero's case, a single woman. Without women willing to take the leadership reigns, there is a possibility that work on women's labor rights within the union will stall. Moreover, because union leaders are elected, there is no official "apprenticeship" program to train women to take over the SAF, and given the flexibility of the SAF's mandate, women have the ability to pick and choose what they want to work on. This means programs developed under one SAF might be neglected under the next. As a case in point, Quintero worried that the future leaders of the SAF would not continue the necessary work to keep the Women's House running (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

The potential absence of strong women's leadership on gender issues is compounded by the fairly low levels of women's participation and interest in union activities that focus on gender. Without a base of support for gender equity, promoting women's labor rights will continue to depend on the prior existence of women leaders who are committed to tackling gender issues, and this will make changes to the union policy and institutions more difficult to achieve. Quintero noted that the interest about gender interest among women in the rank-and-file is still low, stating that the only event to which she was able to draw a sizeable number of women was the event for Mother's Day. For Quintero, the explanation for women's low participation in union activities is rooted in women's domestic responsibilities:

I think it's cultural. I think it's cultural because...if I put on an event in the afternoon, but you work in the morning, you don't stay because you have to go home and fix a meal for your children or husband, or...go to the supermarket, or whatever. There's always something. But there isn't the space to say, 'look, at least one day a week is mine, and we'll figure out what to do' or 'I'm leaving lunch prepared, so tomorrow you come home and feed [the kids] while I go to my meeting.' No, women don't participate because they don't have time (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

Despite women's lack of time to participate in union activities, Quintero is still hopeful that through the activities coordinated by the SAF and the University Women's House, women are slowly gaining a gender consciousness that will lead them to question gender inequality:

There are many women [in the union], but if 100 come and, of these 100, 20 understand what you are talking about, at the very least they are going to start asking questions. And of course this is worth the effort, because these 20 women have sons and daughters, and they have to start reflecting on things (personal interview with Columba Quintero, 2/20/2003).

Ideally, for Quintero and other women leaders of STUNAM, as women become more gender-conscious they will increase their support for women's rights initiatives and

even begin to become more involved in leadership activities. But whether women's rates of participation in union activities and their gender consciousness increase, it goes without question that the women's leadership in the union was critical to the support of women's labor rights in its union statutes and collective contract (although as the example of the sexual harassment clause suggests, the changes would not have been possible without support from the rank-and-file and other leaders as well).

Promoting Women's Labor Rights in the Single Serfin Workers' Union

SUTS, which represented workers of the Mexican bank Serfin, is a second example of a union where women's labor rights were promoted through strong women's leadership. Unlike STUNAM, SUTS was not part of the UNT,⁸⁸ and according to Inés González, there never was a democratic current within the union (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).⁸⁹ However, SUTS has several characteristics in common with STUNAM. First, women formed a significant portion of union membership. Women represented about 50% of Serfin workers, holding the majority of bank teller and customer service positions (González Nicolás 2001). Second, SUTS had an office for women's issues from an early date—the office of the SAF was first established in 1988 (in 1997 the name was changed to the Secretaria de Equidad de Género, or Secretary for

⁸⁸ SUTS belonged to the Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios (National Federation of Banking Unions—FENASIB), which was formed in 1984 after President de la Madrid nationalized the banking sector in 1982. FENASIB is a corporatist federation affiliated with the CT.

⁸⁹ That is to say that there was never a tendency within the union to promote democratic and transparent union leadership that would be more accountable to the (interests of) the rank-and-file.

Gender Equity—SEG).⁹⁰ Finally, the SEG was headed by a woman with a real commitment to promoting women's labor rights.

Of all the women leaders I interviewed, Inés González, who was the SEG for most of the 1988-2002 period, was best able to connect the particular challenges and discrimination faced by women workers to the combined effect of cultural factors and the increasingly difficult economic context. The changing economic context in the banking sector led to what González called “labor terrorism” (*terrorismo laboral*), a situation where work demands are intensified, while salaries and benefits shrink. As González stated, “There is a constant pressure from bosses to meet goals. The work day keeps getting longer. Workers enjoy less and less vacation. [And] they keep earning less, because salaries in the banking sector are really falling” (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

According to González, “labor terrorism” affected women differently than men. Because women are primarily responsible for child care and domestic work, their domestic labor often had to take priority over their paid labor in the bank and union. As a result, women ran greater risks of getting fired if caretaking responsibilities prevented them from taking part in training activities (which often took place outside of work hours) or meeting productivity goals. The inability to meet training or production goals was a major reason why women remained in the lowest paid positions of the company for longer periods of time than their male colleagues. Another problem women faced was being fired when they became pregnant, although these dismissals were often attributed

⁹⁰ The banking union federation, FENASIB, also had an office for the SAF; the name was also changed to the SEG in 1997 as well (González Nicolás n.d.-a).

to the need to downsize or adjust the workforce in response to company restructuring (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

Women faced other common obstacles and forms of discrimination that were more rooted in politics and culture than in the economic context. For example, business and union meetings would often take place in bars, spaces that were culturally inappropriate for women to be, thus preventing them from taking part. Women also faced day care shortages. Unionized women in Mexico are eligible to put their children in day care facilities provided by IMSS, but an informal survey of union women that González conducted revealed that only 20% of women had spaces for their children with IMSS day care centers. The vast majority of women (59%) had to leave their children with other family members. Finally, women also faced sexual harassment. González commented,

One day I did a survey to see what degree of harassment there was at the bank, and I only interviewed 100 women, but eight percent said that they had been sexually harassed. But many didn't know what sexual harassment was. So they thought what the boss does isn't harassment...They believe that it's normal (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

The fact that many women did not have a clear understanding of sexual harassment suggests that a higher percentage of women than eight percent may have experienced harassment. It also suggests there is a need for union leaders to raise awareness of and address the challenges that prevent women participating in the bank on equal terms as men.

As SEG, González took steps to promote women's labor rights within the bank and the union by addressing many of these issues. Her office did not have a budget for major educational programs, but she was able to secure a number of official and unofficial policy changes benefiting women workers. For example, she was able to work

with IMSS to make day care more accessible for women. She was able to obtain scholarships for women who wanted to go to university for a bachelor's degree. She also worked with the union to create a manifesto condemning sexual harassment (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003). Most notably, she intervened in cases where women were fired while they were pregnant in order to hold the company responsible for the pre- and post- natal care benefits they would have provided had the woman still been employed with the Bank. González stated that the Bank resisted this action at first, but through negotiations eventually conceded that there are guaranteed rights for pregnant women. And after all, she noted, "it is easy to prove that the pregnancy occurred while the woman was active with the institution" (González Nicolás n.d.-b). González was also active in conducting surveys about the experiences of union women (such as those on sexual harassment and day care) and speaking up about the needs and rights of women workers at government forums, as when she discussed the work related illnesses caused by stress and violence at a conference sponsored by Inmujeres (González Nicolás 2001).

Through her efforts, González earned the respect of the union secretary general and other male colleagues within the union. This helped her gain decision making authority in her capacity as SEG, but she was adamant that real changes in support of women's labor rights would not occur without the broad support for women's labor rights among the rank-and-file. This is why she also stressed the importance of training and education and arranged workshops, wrote articles, and distributed information within the union "so women begin to understand that they have rights like every person in this society, that they have a right to maternity, that they have the right to have their work in

the bank recognized, that they have the right, like every worker, to earn an equal salary for equal work” (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

Ultimately, it is not clear whether the advances González made within the SUTS will be continued in the future. In 2002, SUTS was dissolved when Serfin Bank merged with a Spanish bank. González, who worked full time for SUTS, lost her job. In losing González, the women of Serfin bank lost a dedicated ally, and whether there will be the same quality of leadership on women’s labor rights in the union into which Serfin workers were absorbed is uncertain.

These two cases illustrate how strong women leaders in unions can effectively promote women’s labor rights. However, González losing her job as the result of a merger and the less dramatic instance of Columba Quintero’s retirement from STUNAM underscore the importance, as González stressed, on having broad support for women’s rights in the leadership of the union, the rank-and-file, and in civil society. Leadership is crucial, but clearly, if only one woman or a small group of women are working to promote women’s labor rights in the union, there is a risk of the work getting disrupted when that woman or group leaves. Moreover, without broad demand from the rank-and-file, there is less pressure on leadership to make changes. Broader support is needed within the union in order for there to be sustained pressure in support of women’s labor rights.

6.3 PROMOTING WOMEN’S LABOR RIGHTS IN UNIONS WITH RESISTANT LEADERSHIP

Women’s leadership in promoting women’s labor rights is crucial, but it is insufficient in the absence of support from union leaders who can use their power within

the union to effectively shut down efforts to promote change. An extreme case is that of the Single Union of Workers for the Federal District Attorney General (Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores de la Procuraduria General de Justicia del Distrito Federal). According to Esther Solano, who served as a spokeswoman for the legislative commission of the union, increasing numbers of women belong to the union, but action on their behalf is very limited, and the union's statutes do not address issues of gender equity. In part, she said, this is because the secretary general is resistant to the development of women's activism within the union. For example, Solano noted that her participation in a new network of union women did not bother the secretary general because she was participating by herself. However, she thought that if she tried to get more women involved, he would create obstacles (personal interview with Ma. Esther Solano, 3/24/2003). In this case, women's efforts to promote change would have a hard time even getting off the ground.

The STRM is a better case to illustrate the role that union leaders can play in resisting efforts to promote women's labor rights because it has much more progressive leadership tendencies. Like STUNAM, the STRM has taken a lead role in the independent union movement and has a strong presence in the leadership of the UNT: Francisco Hernández Juárez, the long-serving secretary general of the STRM, is a co-president of the UNT, and Martha Heredia, the UNT's Vice-president of Equity and Gender, comes from the STRM. Also like STUNAM, women have long been active in the STRM. As noted in Chapter 4, women were an essential force in the union's strikes in the 1970s. Moreover, some women who have served on the CEN have also been active with the RMS. Despite these progressive characteristics, the STRM has often been

resistant to changes that would enforce women's labor rights. The difficulties women in the STRM have had in promoting women's labor rights in the union are well illustrated in two areas: the challenges of promoting changes to the union's policies and collective contracts and the challenges of raising gender awareness within the union. These challenges underscore the importance of union leadership in promoting women's labor rights and, in its absence, the importance of a sustained mobilization from the rank-and-file.

Challenges to Promoting Women's Labor Rights through Union Policy

Women make up about 50% of the membership of the STRM. Although there is nothing overtly discriminatory in the union's collective contract with Telmex or in the union statutes, gender inequality persists. There are charges that women (especially telephone operators) have difficulty getting access to job training and taking the exams that are necessary for promotion and advancement up the salary scale, thus reinforcing occupational segregation. Sexual harassment of women workers has also been a problem (although it may be on the decline as women learn more about it and start reporting it more often). The union leadership is overwhelmingly male, and women generally feel that the union remains a very masculine space (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003; Gloria Olvera, 2/2/2003; and Emma Rodríguez, 2/19/2003).⁹¹

⁹¹ Steve Dubb notes that there is "an informal 'glass ceiling'" at the STRM that has persisted at least since the time of the operator-led strikes in 1976-82 (Dubb 1999: 197 n13). Indeed, at the present time women hold two of 17 positions on the CEN and only five of 39 other positions on national committees (STRM: "Organización" page).

In 1997, Rosario Ortiz and Gloria Olvera, both of whom are also active with the RMS, held positions on the union's CEN. Their perceptions of gender inequality in the STRM led them to establish an informal women's commission within the CEN, and they began to lobby for an official women's office in the union, to organize workshops and conferences on women's issues, and even to organize gender awareness training for other members of the CEN. Although they had support from some women within the union, there was also resistance to their efforts, including from women in national leadership positions who were not convinced about the importance of gender issues (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002 and Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003).⁹²

One of the specific objectives of this informal women's commission was to lobby for a collective contract clause that would prohibit and penalize sexual harassment. The negotiation that followed proved to be an important example of the kind of resistance they faced in promoting women's labor rights. Gloria Olvera, who was part of the union's negotiating committee, said that the informal women's group worked hard to get the issue on the bargaining table. Once there, however, the company's negotiating team denied the problem and went so far as to accuse the women of being crazy. Moreover, members of the *union's* negotiating team also resisted the clause.⁹³ Olvera says that some of the other women on the committee who had given her lots of help in organizing gender-focused workshops and conferences withdrew their support for the clause. But the biggest source of resistance came from the male leadership of the union's negotiating committee. Olvera

⁹² According to Rosario Ortiz, the UNT's Equity and Gender Commission originated with the discussions of this group of women from the STRM and a group of women from FESEBES (personal interview, 12/5/2002).

⁹³ Around this time, Jennifer Cooper offered to conduct a study of sexual harassment to resolve the issue of the extent to which it did or did not exist within Telmex and the STRM, but her offer was never accepted (personal communication with Jennifer Cooper, 2/28/2003).

commented that “there were compañeros who said ‘what’s happening is that the women want to be harassed’...It’s really masculine, the union. And fine, [Secretary General] Hernández Juárez always said that he was in agreement, but he never supported the proposal. In reality he never supported it” (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/6/2003). Rosario Ortiz also felt that there was strong resistance to the sexual harassment clause on the part of men from both the union and the company: “none of the compañeros of the executive committee wanted to negotiate this clause.” Moreover, she says, “there was a gendered alliance between the men from the company and the men from the union that wouldn’t allow this clause to be passed” (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002).

Ultimately, the clause never made it into the contract. However, in the union statutes that were approved in 2004, the union took steps to eradicate the problem of sexual harassment. First, the statutes identify sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. Second, the union created an official Equity and Gender office, the secretary of which has the responsibility of taking steps to eradicate sexual harassment in the union (Telmex and STRM 2004: 27; STRM 2004).

Establishing an official Secretary for Equity and Gender is an incredibly important advancement in women’s struggle to have their labor rights realized within the STRM, but other women’s experiences in promoting gender equity policies within the union are an indication that the Secretary has a lot of work to do. One woman who has served as a departmental delegate to the union⁹⁴ noted that during a set of negotiations she attended, a male colleague earnestly told women on the committee that “we should

⁹⁴ A departmental delegate is elected to represent the workers of a particular section of the company within the union’s governing structure.

buy you a stove so that you can cook lunch while we negotiate” (personal interview with an anonymous STRM member, 2/28/2003).⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, according to the delegate, none of the gender equity proposals that were on the table during these negotiations were approved.

This resistance to calls for gender equality within the ranks of the union’s leadership has extended even to areas less controversial than official union negotiations. The departmental delegate to the union recounted that in one union meeting, there was a big objection, on the part of both men and women, to addressing the union members as “compañeros y compañeras” (instead of simply “compañeros”) in an announcement that was going out to union members. According to this delegate, “they said that in saying “compañeros” it’s understood that you’re referring to everyone.” When asked why there was such an objection, the delegate pinned it on the persistence of a patriarchal atmosphere in the union: “I think that there is still a lot of machismo here. It still exists. It’s diminishing, but it’s still there” (personal interview with an anonymous STRM member, 2/28/2003).

Challenges in Raising Awareness of Women’s Rights and Gender Issues

The *machista* environment in the union that leads to resistance to the implementation of gender equity policies illustrates the union’s need to raise awareness of women’s rights and gender issues, and to help women become more involved in the union. The STRM has made an effort to do so through a series of training courses,

⁹⁵ The representative mentioned that there were gender equity proposals on the table in this round of negotiations, but she was reluctant to discuss any details. I was, therefore, not able to get any specific information on the gender equity proposals discussed in this committee.

seminars, and workshops. These gender awareness workshops were first organized by the informal group that included Rosario Ortiz and Gloria Olvera. More recently, they have been organized by an informal group, the Comité de Mujeres Telefonistas (Women's Committee of the Telephone Workers—CMT) led by Martha Heredia. Since the CMT took the reigns of the women's committee, more funding has become available for gender programs,⁹⁶ and the union has been able to offer courses on themes such as women's leadership, women's labor rights, the World Bank and its economic policies towards women, and domestic violence. The explicit goal of these workshops is "to offer more and better tools for the participation and development of our 'compañeras'" (STRM n.d.: "Acción Social" page).

Despite the work of the group to try to raise women's awareness of women's rights and gender issues, there are critiques that the efforts of this group are not aggressive enough and do not reach enough women (let alone men) in the union to be truly effective. One specific criticism is that the courses are not very dynamic and, consequently, women lose interest in them. Gloria Olvera says that while the themes covered are very important, the CMT does not elevate the level of the courses or break out of the same group of themes (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003). One effect of this stagnation in the kinds of courses that are offered is that women may not continue to attend the programs. And indeed, another STRM member mentioned at a

⁹⁶ Olvera says that while she was working on gender issues as part of the CEN, there was not much financial support for gender programs. She had to pay for a lot out of her own pocket, or get donations from her coworkers. However, since the CMT took over the reigns of the union's gender programs, there is more money coming from the Secretary General (personal interview with Gloria Olvera 2/3/2003). From interviews with Cooper, Olvera, Ortiz, and Heredia, two reasons emerged explaining the increase in funding. One is that the concept of gender is simply more "politically correct" in union environments, so union leaders now feel compelled to sponsor some programs. A second reason may be that Hernández Juárez is more willing to give funding to Heredia, who is part of his leadership team.

meeting of union women in January of 2003 that many women will come to one training or information session, but they do not come back to others. This means that while the union is making efforts to raise women's awareness, it may not be doing enough to maintain their participation in union activities, which is important if the union culture is to become more supportive of women's labor rights.

A second problem of the CMT's gender programming is that they are not reaching union women throughout the company's worksites—even in Mexico City where the union is headquartered. The anonymous delegate stressed that the CMT does not do enough to reach union women in worksites outside of union headquarters. She noted that

As operators, the information [on gender programs] does not get out to our worksites easily. So, when there have been conferences or events, we don't realize it until after the date has passed or until we are at the union offices.... And it is my impression that they don't bring [the information] to the work sites.... I've made the observation many times that all of this [work on gender] remains within the committee; they don't make it very extensive (personal interview with an anonymous STRM member, 2/28/2003).

Considering that many women who belong to the STRM are operators for Telmex, the fact that gender programs are not reaching them means that despite the good intentions of the CMT to solicit women's participation and encourage their development within the union, the union culture is not going to change. And indeed, the delegate said that many of the operators are ill-informed about the work of the CMT: "Look, I've spoken with some of my compañeras, and they don't know that there is a women's committee within the union." Moreover, those who are aware of the activities are reluctant to participate because of apathy, other responsibilities, lack of time, or because they cannot take time off during their shifts to go to CMT workshops (personal interview with an anonymous STRM member, 2/28/2003). More is clearly needed to effectively promote women's

participation in the union and their awareness of women's labor rights in order for the macho STRM culture to change.

The Question of Leadership in the STRM

The highest levels of union leadership in the STRM have had a hand in both promoting women's labor rights (the CMT's workshops) and failing to support them (the sexual harassment clause negotiations). For some telephone workers, this inconsistency is the result of leadership that is willing to superficially support gender (e.g., by sponsoring courses) but does not have a sufficiently aggressive agenda or the political will to promote gender equity throughout the union.

Gloria Olvera notes that Hernández Juárez has done well by the CMT in terms of funding, allowing them to pay a lot for NGOs to conduct training programs and workshops for union members. But the union ends up spending a lot of money on events that, as noted above, are not the most effective (personal interviews with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003). Interestingly, Hernández Juárez and Heredia have not tapped the RMS—some of whose members are telephone workers—to conduct leadership or sexual harassment training programs. The reason for this is not clear, but in failing to work with the RMS, STRM leadership is ignoring a strong network that includes active members of the union who are trained facilitators of gender programs and committed to improving the environment for women in the union.

Another critique of STRM leadership on gender speaks to the difficult task women leaders have in negotiating a path through the male environment of Mexican union leadership. Olvera suggests that Martha Heredia, although she has good intentions, is hampered by union politics. She noted that “Martha belongs to Hernandez Juarez's

team. She's not interested in taking a step if he doesn't tell her to" (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003). The particular politics of the STRM's CEN may thus leave Heredia more constrained in her efforts to promote women's labor rights than women like Columba Quintero and Inés González.

On the other hand, Heredia feels that she and the union have worked hard to get women more involved and to promote attention to women's labor rights, but she emphasizes that there is a difficult struggle against well-entrenched gender roles. As she stated,

Yes, our organization, unlike others, is open to women's participation. We make up 50 percent of the organization and we have practically every possibility to realize our participation. But in this case we encounter a cultural problem where women, because of our personal and family obligations, are not involved in union work... (personal interview with Martha Heredia, 1/15/2003).

There is no question that family responsibilities are one big factor that keep women from participating more in the union. The challenge this poses for women like Heredia who are in a position to promote women's labor rights is to look at what the union can do to work around those social structures and help mitigate their impact on women's ability to participate in unions. But with leadership that may be only superficially committed to promoting women's labor rights and transforming the union's *machista* culture, it is questionable what can really occur without the presence of a mobilized rank-and-file or network of unionists that is active in promoting change within the union.

Despite these obstacles, even the ever critical Gloria Olvera is hopeful about the promotion of gender equity and women's labor rights in the STRM. She sees that women are becoming more and more aware and worried about their role in the workplace and the

union, that women are affected by the union's workshops, and that they are starting to think about equality and the rights they have vis-à-vis their husbands and male colleagues. Moreover, she sees that there is a younger generation that has been trained in a gender perspective that will eventually finish some of the things that her own generation started (personal interview with Gloria Olvera 2/3/2003).

The establishment of an official Secretary for Equity and Gender within the CEN is one measure that reflects Olvera's hopeful outlook. This new office has the potential of being a real step towards the promotion of women's rights in a union that, for all its progressive tendencies, has been slow to promote women's labor rights. What is particularly notable about the Secretariat is that the clauses that established it in the 2004 union statutes explicitly promote women's labor rights. For example, the Secretary is charged with the responsibilities of evaluating the application of anti-discrimination policies, promoting women's participation at all levels of the union, executing leadership training programs for union women, executing gender awareness programs for union members, working to eliminate all types of workplace violence, including sexual harassment, and working to establish mechanisms in the union and in the companies to handle complaints about discrimination and harassment (STRM 2004: 27). If they are carried out, the STRM will be a leader in unions' support for women's labor rights.

At the same time, it is important to underscore that the simple creation of an office dedicated to achieving gender equity is insufficient to yield sustained progress if there is not support from the union's leadership and rank-and-file. But given the history of women's activism within the STRM—from the operator strikes of the 1970s to the telephone workers' presence within the RMS—it is clear that there is an activist

foundation for the new Secretary to draw on in her efforts to promote women's labor rights within the union. Whether the leadership harnesses this agency will be a crucial factor in determining whether the union's efforts to promote and enforce women's labor rights will actually succeed.

6.4 PROMOTING WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN UNIONS WITH FLEDGLING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

In the three previous cases, the women who were working seriously to promote women's labor rights—Columba Quintero of STUNAM, Inés González of SUTS, and Gloria Olvera and Rosario Ortiz of the STRM—entered their positions within the CEN with a previously formed gender consciousness and commitment to supporting women's labor rights.⁹⁷ In the Alianza de Tranviarios de México (Alliance of Mexican Streetcar Workers—ATM) and the Sindicato Independencia de Aviación (Independent Aviation Union—SIA), the women who have been leading efforts to promote women's labor rights developed their gender consciousness and commitment to working on women's labor rights as a result of participation in NGO workshops. Moreover, their unions did not have a history of women's agency, as in the other cases. As such, they offer a unique comparison to the cases discussed above because they represent the strategies of emerging women leaders who began their work on gender in an era when women's rights are more widely acknowledged.

⁹⁷ In interviews with these four women, the only one who indicated that she had developed an awareness of gender issues through the efforts of another person or group, rather than by observation or from personal conviction, was Gloria Olvera, who says that she was introduced to the subject of gender by Rosario Ortiz when they were both members of the STRM. Nevertheless, by the time Olvera became part of the STRM's CEN, she was aware of gender inequalities within the union (personal interview with Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003).

PROMOTING WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN THE ALLIANCE OF MEXICAN STREETCAR WORKERS

The ATM is unique among all the cases discussed in this chapter. It is the oldest of the five unions, with roots dating back to a mutualist society formed in Mexico City in 1911 and a history of progressive labor action dating back to the revolution (Lear 2001). With only about 120 women out of 2800 total members, it has the fewest female members of the unions discussed in this chapter (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003). Finally, it is the one union where women's action in support of their labor rights began as an organic development on the part of women in the rank-and-file. The fact that these women were able to make many changes over a relatively short period of time illustrates that women's mobilization (and supportive leadership) is a crucial factor in promoting change, even in a context where women's labor rights are gaining more attention.

Given the small number of women who belong to the union (less than five percent of its members), the ATM is a truly masculine institution. Rosa Maria Hernandez, who began working for the union in 1995, noted that until 1994, women did not participate in the union and there had not been a single woman delegate or officer in the union. Not surprisingly, Hernandez added that "because we never came to participate, there was nothing [for women in the collective contract]. The contract was made by men for men" (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003). What ultimately sparked women's participation in the union was a young union representative who aggressively harassed the women, giving women better work, for example, when they agreed to go out with him. According to Hernandez, this behavior continued to such a degree that in 1994, a union election year, the women organized their own slate, and the first woman was

elected to a representative position in the union. Hernandez herself took on a union position as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Commission at the end of 1995.

These events were taking place as trends in union women's organizing shifted toward greater emphasis on establishing networks outside of union structures, and women in the ATM were beginning to get involved with NGOs and events that focused on gender issues. In 1995, the ATM had representatives at the second ENMT, including the recently elected secretary general, Benito Bahena Lome, who gave a brief welcome address (CNMT 1995: 24).⁹⁸ In 1996, Hernandez attended a seminar on gender sponsored by the FES Foundation, and she says that although there was an overwhelming amount of information, it prompted her to become involved with other union women's organizations. For a while, she was involved with the RMS, but eventually focused her work within the ATM, FESEBES (the union federation to which the ATM belongs), and the UNT (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003).

In FESEBES Hernandez became involved in an informal group of women, the Comisión de Mujeres de la FESEBES (FESEBES' Women's Commission), that worked on supporting gender issues in the federation and also in the UNT, with which FESEBES is affiliated.⁹⁹ The major achievement of the Women's Commission was the establishment of official women's offices in both federations—the UNT's Vice-

⁹⁸ In his address, Bahena simply stated, "Women workers represent an important part of the productive system of our country. As union leaders, we cannot forget this. I wish you all a fraternal welcome and the best wishes for achieving your objectives, which is very necessary in order to advance and to have a new direction benefiting Mexican women and all of us" (CNMT 1995: 24). Bahena's address was short and fairly generic, but it was notable because at this point in the history of the ATM, gender issues were hardly on the radar. It had been less than a year since the first woman representative had been elected to the union. In speaking at the second ENMT, Bahena, who had been elected himself in 1994, proved to be sympathetic to demands for women's labor rights.

⁹⁹ Many independent unions in the service sector, like the ATM and the STRM, belong to both FESEBES and the UNT. STUNAM, an education sector union, belongs to the UNT but not to FESEBES. SUTS belonged to neither federation.

Presidency of Equity and Gender, established in 2000, and FESEBES' Secretary of Gender Issues, established in 2001. Hernandez, although she had not even attended a seminar on gender until 1996, became Pro-secretary of Gender Issues for FESEBES and served through 2004 (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003).

In the ATM, Hernandez and the other women who became more active in the union were successful in securing several policy changes supporting women's labor rights. Prior to women's involvement with the union, women had not been allowed to operate the company's light trains. In one round of collective contract negotiations, they secured a clause allowing women to operate the trains, despite resistance from men in the union who expressed concerns about work disruption when women had to take pregnancy leave. They also secured a contract clause prohibiting pregnancy testing for women workers. In the union statutes, they were able to secure a clause prohibiting sexual harassment. There have also been educational efforts within the union. Hernandez and other women have organized courses for women workers and other workers' wives about themes such as labor rights, human rights, domestic violence, self-esteem, sexually transmitted diseases, addictions, and menopause (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003).

For Hernandez, the importance of women getting involved in the union, especially at decision making levels, was that in such a masculine institution as the ATM, men were not going to speak out on women's behalf. If the women wanted anything done, they had to initiate it themselves. As a result of the women's efforts to open more spaces for women's involvement, Hernandez has seen women participating more in the union. Even so, she cautioned that women's participation and representation in the union

were still quite low. At the time of our interview, there was only one woman out of nine members of the CEN and only one woman out of 14 members of other committees. As in other cases, Hernandez explained women's failure to become more involved on their domestic responsibilities: "It's a lot of work to get women to participate because of, well, women's problem—children, family. Yes, it's a lot of work to secure women's consistent participation" (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003). But importantly, change in the ATM came rapidly once there was a mobilization of union women, encouraged by the context of union women's networking, and supportive union leadership.

There are still obstacles to securing women's participation and promoting women's rights in the ATM. These include men's resistance to women's demands. For example, Hernandez noted that men in the union have resisted women's efforts to create an official gender equity office (personal interview with Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003). Even Secretary General Bahena has not thrown his weight behind every gender-based proposal, even though he understands the importance of securing women's labor rights. For example, Bahena commented that although some female employees have requested that the company establish its own day care facilities, this proposal was not a top priority for the union because women belonging to the union are eligible to use IMSS day care facilities (personal interview with Benito Bahena Lome, 3/26/2003). While this is true, as noted in the case of SUTS, IMSS day care facilities are not always very accessible. There may not be space in the center, or the assigned IMSS center may be located in a section of the city that is difficult for the worker to reach, or it might not be open on the nights, weekends, and holidays when the employee has to work. Despite

Bahena's good intentions, in this instance he revealed a general lack of awareness of the difficulties facing women workers that prevent them from taking a more active role in the union.

These obstacles aside, what is notable about the case of the ATM is how rapidly conditions and policies changed given the total absence of attention to women's issues, women's participation in the union, or gender consciousness on the part of workers until the mid-1990s. The best explanation for the relative success in promoting women's labor rights in the ATM was a dramatic shift in momentum within the union in 1995—a new secretary general with an open mind about gender issues entered the picture at the same time as women in the rank-and-file began to get involved in the union leadership in an effort to put an end to harassment they had faced from a male union representative. This change took place in a context that saw union women networking within civil society more broadly. Of course, regardless of context, without women's agency and supportive leadership within the ATM, none of the changes would have been possible.

PROMOTING WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN THE INDEPENDENT AVIATION UNION

Formed in October of 1988, the SIA represents technical and customer support staff of AeroMéxico and Sciopsa/Seat, two companies in the airline industry. Like the ATM, leadership on gender equity and women's labor rights is new to the union and results from women leaders having attended workshops on gender issues. Women's participation in the union is low, yet unlike the ATM and the other unions discussed in this section, workplace inequalities rooted in gender are said to be uncommon in the union and the two companies whose workers it represents. This makes the SIA an

interesting example of a union that is taking steps to support women's labor rights out of principle rather than a perceived necessity.

Esperanza González, who became the SIA's first leader for the Comisión de Perspectiva de Género (Gender Perspective Commission—CPG), had been a member of the CEN since 1988, serving previously as the President of the Honor and Justice Commission. In the years before the creation of the CPG in 2000, González began participating in workshops on gender issues sponsored by various union federations and NGOs (including the FES Foundation, the UNT, and FESEBES). These workshops piqued her interest in gender equity and led her to perceive the need for a commission within the union dedicated to promoting gender equity. She discussed the idea with members of the union's CEN, and they agreed to support the creation of the commission (personal interview with Ma. Esperanza González, 2/24/2003).

According to González, and in contrast to the other cases discussed in this chapter, common manifestations of gender discrimination are not very prevalent within the union or the two companies. She said that there are some cases of sexual harassment, but that the cases of harassment include those in which women harass men, so while she treats harassment seriously, it is not a problem solely affecting women. And she did not think that other commonly cited issues, such as occupational segregation, respect for women within committees, salary discrimination, and unequal access to training were problems for women in the union. For González the biggest problem of gender inequity is the absence of women's representation and participation in the union. Women hold very few leadership positions in the union: at the time of our interview there was only one woman on the 12 member CEN, and only four women on the 30 member national union

organization. Not surprisingly, González attributes women's low participation rates to the problem of the difficulty of balancing work and family responsibilities with additional union work. Said González, "There are compañeras who have a lot of interest, but they don't have the time" (personal interview with Ma. Esperanza González, 2/24/2003).

Perhaps because of the lack of women's participation in the union, when González discussed the objectives and programs of the CPG, she really emphasized raising awareness about gender issues as a means of encouraging women's participation. Interestingly, she felt that it was important to conduct workshops raising awareness about the working conditions of non-unionized women as well as about topics like women's rights, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. She noted that,

Another one of the objectives is to give them an understanding of the [murders of young women workers] in Ciudad Juárez, of the conditions of peasant women and of the women [working] in the maquilas—so that there is a bit of a comparison. Not so we appreciate where we are, but so we have a consciousness and participate in marches and protests... (personal interview with Esperanza González, 2/24/2003).

For González, promoting women's labor rights focused on getting women involved in changing their own union and using their organizational strength to promote the labor rights of women who were not unionized.

Yet unlike other unions, where the job of promoting women's labor rights was made more difficult because of men's resistance, González suggested that her job raising women's gender consciousness was made more difficult because of the economic state of the airline industry. Since the airline industry is in such bad economic shape, the companies represented by the SIA are working with minimum levels of staff. Therefore, it is difficult to get permission for workers to leave their jobs in order to attend a workshop or seminar discussing gender issues (personal interview with Esperanza

González, 2/24/2003). This is likely to make González's progress in raising gender awareness slow, though it will most likely not prevent changes to union culture and policies in the way that resistant leadership does.

Still, González claimed that CPG's programs have influenced women to be more active and vocal within the union about their interests and opinions. Before the CPG, she said, men ran the show, but after the union made an official commitment to gender equity, women have been more likely to speak up during meetings, to give their opinions, and even to cause a bit of controversy!

The increased participation of women may also have the effect of bringing to light heretofore unrecognized examples of gender discrimination in the union and affiliated worksites. González did not indicate why she thought that women are not subject to greater degrees of discrimination. Given the prevalence of gender discrimination in other unions and companies, it is unusual (but not unfortunate) that women affiliated with the SIA might work in such a discrimination-free environment. But there are indications that there could be discrimination problems that have simply gone undetected. For example, the specific objectives of the CPG's Plan of Action include promoting policies based on the principles of gender equity, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in the workplace, and promoting changes to law and to collective contracts that reflect the rights of women workers (González Ávila 2000: 5). These suggest that women's labor rights have not been explicitly addressed by the union or the companies and that there is a need for them to be. Also, in a speech on sexual harassment, González defined harassment and outlined the union's procedure for handling harassment claims (González Ávila 2001). Although this speech could have been just a formality, if other union cases

are any indication, there is a good chance that sexual harassment goes undetected or unreported because women (and men) do not fully understand what it is.

Should the actions of the CPG bring “new” discrimination to light, it will have an extremely important influence on the construction of women’s labor rights in the SIA and its affiliated companies, especially because the CPG enjoys support from the union generally. But even if it does nothing more than raise gender awareness among women workers, it will still play an important role in encouraging union women’s political agency within and outside of the union. Based on the experiences of their own women leaders, the ATM and SIA are important examples of how workshops and training courses dedicated to gender issues do lead women to become actively involved in promoting women’s labor rights in their unions.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Although unions in Mexico continue to be overwhelmingly masculine institutions, women are becoming more involved in actions aimed at transforming them into organizations that protect and promote women’s labor rights. These efforts have had mixed degrees of success, but the comparison of the five unions presented in this chapter reveals important insights about the factors necessary to promoting women’s labor rights at the union level.

First, women’s leadership is crucial if union culture and policies are to change. Of course, not all union women will have the interest or inclination to go out on a political limb in support of women’s labor rights, but without women leaders dedicated to promoting women’s labor rights, change is unlikely to occur. To paraphrase Rosa Maria

Hernandez of the ATM, in the absence of women's leadership, union policy will continue to be made by men, for men.

Having an official women's office in the union is not a necessary condition for women leaders to lobby for change—in the ATM, women have made many policy advancements without having an official space—but an official office gives legitimacy to work on women's promoting women's labor rights within the governing structure of the union. This is especially true if the official mandate of the office is to promote women's equality and participation, as is now the case of the STRM.

Second, women's leadership is not sufficient in the absence of support, or at least openness, from male union leaders and from the rank-and-file. Resistance from male union leadership to women's efforts to promote their labor rights can bring to an end attempts to promote policy changes or contract clauses, as illustrated by the efforts to push for a contract clause on sexual harassment in the STRM or by the refusal to push for company day care centers by the leadership of the ATM. Nor are proposals for change in support of women's labor rights likely to be implemented in the absence of support from the rank-and-file. No matter how good a policy proposal is, it has to be approved by a negotiating committee or a union vote, it must have support. This is why it was important for Columba Quintero to conduct a three-year campaign to gain support for her sexual harassment clause in the STUNAM statutes.

Support from the rank-and-file is also important because there is strength in numbers. Leadership is important, but there is a real danger of losing momentum when strong leadership on women's issues is concentrated in the hands of one committed person, rather than existing broadly. As much as Inés González was able to do for SUTS,

she was an irreplaceable force within that organization. On the other hand, collective action on the part of a group of women, such as in the case of the ATM women's mobilization to elect a delegate to the union, can make up for the absence of women's leadership or add strength to existing leadership.

Third, because of the importance of broad support from the rank-and-file for promoting women's labor rights, education and awareness-raising are tremendously important. Women leaders in all five cases stressed that gender consciousness raising programs were an important means of getting women and men to support women's rights initiatives and to get them to participate. In the most successful cases, as illustrated by the examples of Rosa Maria Hernandez of the ATM and Esperanza González of the SIA, gender awareness programs can lead women not just to participate more in their unions, but to actually take on leadership positions in their unions *and* become active within civil associations in an effort to promote women's labor rights. Because gender awareness programs are often conducted by other civil society actors (such as the RMS, GEM, and the FES Foundation), the importance of education also underscores the importance of union women working in conjunction with other civil society associations, such as the RMS and GEM to promote women's labor rights. Work in a broader movement strengthens women's efforts by broadening support within civil society, creating support networks for women leaders, and creating more pressure for change.

Finally, context matters. On the positive side, both Rosa Maria Hernandez and Esperanza González were introduced to issues of gender and labor at a time during the mid-1990s when the Beijing conference was pushing states to focus on questions of gender, when union women began focusing more attention on establishing stronger

networks within civil society to promote women's labor rights, and when the independent union movement became consolidated through the formation of the UNT. These factors provided women with space, support, and a growing sense of legitimacy that allowed them to more easily become involved in promoting women's labor rights.

On the negative side, the bank merger that eliminated SUTS and effectively ended Inés González's work on women's labor rights within the union is a reminder that in the current economic context, buyouts and privatization threaten the stability of unions. This does not mean that efforts of union women and their civil society allies to transform unions into institutions that promote women's labor rights are wasted. Rather, it further underscores the importance of transforming the unions that do exist into institutions that promote women's labor rights, and of building stronger and broader networks between unions, union women, and other civil society actors in an effort to put pressure on the state to pursue policies that promote and enforce women's labor rights—something that will benefit all women workers, whether or not they are part of the unionized workforce. I take this up in the next chapter, in which I analyze union women's efforts to engage with other civil society actors in a project to promote women's labor rights at the state level through changes to the Federal Labor Law.

Constructing Citizenship at the State Level: Promoting Women's Rights in Labor Law

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Because rights of citizenship are formally granted by the state, social groups must ultimately direct their actions to the state if they hope to influence the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship. In Mexico, the state first addressed women's labor rights in the federal constitution of 1917 and in the Federal Labor Law (LFT) of 1931. However, women themselves did not have a role in helping to develop these labor rights, and the particular rights that were granted to women, as well as the intentions behind and interpretations of these rights, have left women open to various forms of discrimination in the labor sphere.

In the 1980s, as increasing numbers of women became engaged in the labor force, the women's movement, and formal politics, women's groups and female legislators began promoting changes to federal law that would expand women's labor rights. Union women became more active in promoting women's labor rights alongside these other

social actors beginning in the mid-1990s, and one of their particular goals was to expand women's labor rights within the LFT.

In this chapter I discuss the history of women's labor rights under Mexican federal law and some efforts by women to promote legal changes that would allow them to participate in the workplace on equal terms with men, free from sex-based discrimination. I focus in particular on one effort of union women to ally with other civil society actors and work with a national political party to promote women's labor rights in the LFT—the Grupo de Trabajo sobre la normatividad laboral con perspectiva de género (Working Group on Labor Norms with a Gendered Perspective—GTNLPG). The case of the GTNLPG illustrates that union women can successfully engage in the social construction of women's labor rights by calling attention to the needs and rights of women workers in the context of a national debate. The case also illustrates the challenges union women face in being more successful in actually pushing forward changes to federal labor law: notably, implementing changes requires union women to be part of a larger movement of women from all sectors of civil society in supporting of women's labor rights. The importance of union women contributing to a broader women's movement highlights the importance of union women's engagement in the first two levels of citizenship construction, first to increase the number of women who are aware of their rights and interested in fighting for them, and second to transform unions into actors that will contribute to the fight for the expansion of women's labor rights. In short, the case of the GTNLPG reveals precisely why the individual and institutional levels of citizenship construction are important if civil society is to successfully promote changes at the level of the state.

7.1 WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS UNDER FEDERAL LAW

As noted in Chapter 3, the federal constitution of 1917 and the LFT of 1931 consolidated a set of strong labor laws for Mexican workers. Both the constitution and LFT provided protections for women workers, but rather than reflecting women's fundamental rights as workers and citizens, these protections reflected social views of women's physical and moral weakness and the hazards that the workplace posed to them. Susie Porter notes that during the period between 1879 to 1931, public concerns about women workers ranged from the dangers to women's "sexual morality and respectability" posed by working with men, at night, or in places that served alcohol, to the ill effects of labor on women's frail constitutions, to the potential hazards of work to women's reproductive capacity. Over time public concerns over women workers shifted from focusing on women's inherent physical and moral weakness to a greater concern for their rights as workers, but "...the close identification of working women with morality and female weakness...continued to mediate the rights of working women even after the Mexican Revolution" (Porter 2003: xix, 159, Chapter 7).

As a means of protecting women's morality and health, the 1917 constitution restricted women from working between ten at night and six in the morning and also restricted women from performing heavy work during the last three months of pregnancy. The constitution also established maternity leave laws, obligating women to rest for one month after the birth of a child and guaranteeing that during this period she would receive

her full salary and benefits without the threat of losing her job (Porter 2003: 175-76).¹⁰⁰

Yet the objective of maternity leave and other protective legislation, as noted in a 1922 speech by Doctor Manuel Olea, was to protect women's health and to protect children from the consequences of having an unhealthy mother:

Women and children, are physically weaker, and the damage done to them as a result of excessive work is much more intense. Women, due to the delicate nature of their sexual development, menstruation, pregnancy, and breast-feeding have a much weaker organism than that of men; and if we add to this the fact that before and after work they have to attend to housework and their children, it is easily understood that among them there are increasing reasons for their physical exhaustion, which also has a noxious influence on their children as well (quoted in Porter 2003: 178).

Not surprisingly, legislation for women workers that was intended to protect women's morals, respectability, and maternity resulted in the discrimination of women in the workforce. First, it restricted the times when women could work without regard for their economic needs.¹⁰¹ Second, it gave employers incentive not to employ women. Lear states that employers "used regulations meant to protect women workers—such as an end to night work for women and requirements for maternity leave and workplace nurseries—to reduce the number of women in many sectors of the workforce..." (Lear 2001: 354). In

¹⁰⁰ Porter notes that maternity leave benefits were not systematically provided despite this legislation. Archival records indicate that employers would justify failing to provide maternity benefits by faulting the workers for such things as not asking for such "special treatment" or for their loose sexual morals. Juan de Beraza, who owned several *tortillerías*, stated, "How is it possible that the factory must give assistance to women who are not legally married? Such assistance would be immoral given that many of the women lead irregular lives..." (Porter 2003: 183). Cultural assumptions about *women* thus trumped their rights as *workers*, something that continues today.

¹⁰¹ For the first three decades of the twentieth century, women in Mexico City (the industrial and economic center of the country) were very active in the labor force, and very frequently sole supporters of their families. Many women workers were single or widowed, and thus could not rely on a man's wage. In 1900, women made up 79% of Mexico City's widowed population, and between 1900 and 1930, the number of widows increased relative to the number of widowers. Married working class women were also active in the labor force during this period as their wages (as well as the wages of daughters) were necessary for their families to make ends meet. For example, a 1913 survey of 300 working class families in Mexico City found that the majority performed wage labor in addition to domestic labor (Porter 2003: 6-7). Restrictions on women's ability to engage in the workforce were therefore not without economic consequences.

a tradition that continues to this day, employers used the perceived costs of employing women—despite their lower wages—as a justification for not hiring them.

The focus on women's weakness and unsuitability for the workforce was also underscored in laws that acknowledged men's role as the primary wage earner. For example, Article 123 of the federal constitution created a minimum wage, but it was based on the "normal subsistence needs of a working man."¹⁰² The assumption that men were primary wages earners had two effects. First, it perpetuated wage discrimination against women. Since women were not viewed as primary earners needing to support their families, employers continued to feel justified in not paying them as much as they paid men. Second, the new minimum wage laws had the effect of forcing women out of the workforce because the minimum became a "family wage." With more men able to sustain their family on their own income, the social ideal of women remaining in the domestic sphere became more of a reality (Porter 2003: 174-75; Lear 2001: 354).¹⁰³

Unlike the constitution, the 1931 LFT did recognize some important rights of women workers, specifying, for example, that married women did not need permission from their husbands to work, participate in unions, or exercise rights established in contracts. The LFT also established important regulations for work done outside of factories (e.g., garment production done at home, a primary source of women's employment), such as mandating employers to pay home workers the same wage as factory workers. However, the LFT maintained limits on the kind of work women could

¹⁰² Like the federal constitution of 1917, the 1939 law creating IMSS assumed that men were primary wage earners, guaranteeing "health care to a worker and *his* dependents, defined as *his* wife and children" (Cravey 1998: 67, *emphasis in original*).

¹⁰³ As noted in Chapter 4, nationwide, women's participation in the labor force was low during these years. However, in Mexico City women worked in greater numbers. In 1879, women represented 32% of the workforce in Mexico City. This percentage increased to 35% in 1910 before falling to 28% in 1921 and 17% in 1930, after the constitution established minimum wage laws (Porter 2003: Chapter 1).

perform, prohibiting them from engaging in night work, working in places that served alcohol for immediate consumption, and conducting work that was considered dangerous or unhealthy, including such things as repairing machinery, working with saws, or working underground. Workman's compensation regulation also disadvantaged women. Workman's compensation was based on wage levels, so women, who earned much less in the first place, would be guaranteed less. But the law also valued men's bodies more than women's. For example, a man who lost a testicle in a work related accident would receive as much as 90 percent of his salary, whereas a woman who lost a breast would receive only 10 to 20 percent of hers (Porter 2003: 184-186)!

The LFT was reformed in 1962 and 1970. While the 1962 reform was an advance for women insofar as it guaranteed women workers access to IMSS daycare facilities, neither of these reforms included substantive changes that addressed other labor rights, including women's fundamental equality as workers. Women's rights under labor law remained primarily centered on maternity. In addition to the aforementioned access to IMSS daycare facilities, which was a right for women only, women workers continued to be guaranteed maternity leave and special protections against performing unhealthy, dangerous, or strenuous labor (including night work) during pregnancy.

It was only in 1974, in advance of Mexico City hosting the 1975 United Nations Conference for International Women's Year, that the government altered Article 4 of the constitution to explicitly recognize women's equality before the law. Similarly, Article 3 of the LFT established that workers could not be distinguished on the basis of sex (and other characteristics such as race, religion, political doctrine, or social condition). Given that these changes were a political move to demonstrate support of women in advance of

a major UN conference, the changes did not reflect a shift in longstanding cultural attitudes about women workers. Nor were they accompanied by legal enforcement mechanisms (GTNLPG 2002: 4-5; CNMT 1995: 85-86; Inmujeres 2002a: 44).

Currently, women's rights under the constitution and the LFT are essentially the same as they were in the 1970s. Women have formally equal status under the law and employers are prohibited from making distinctions between workers or refusing to hire workers based on sex (LFT Articles 3, 56, and 133). Moreover, Title V of the LFT, "Trabajo de Mujeres" (literally, "Women's Work"), establishes a series of rights and protections for pregnant women. In addition to granting women access to IMSS daycare facilities, Title V guarantees that pregnant women have the right to work in safe conditions. It guarantees women six weeks of fully paid maternity leave before and after the birth of a child and two 30 minute breast feeding breaks per day upon their return to work. Finally, it requires employers to have a sufficient number of chairs in areas where women work (PRD 2003; HRW 1996).

The constitution and LFT provide formal guarantees against gender discrimination, which can be interpreted to include things such as sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and gender profiling in determining access to certain jobs, training, or promotions. However, there are no explicit prohibitions of these forms of discrimination. In fact, in a 1998 legal hearing on pregnancy discrimination, the Mexican National Administration Office argued that there was no legal prohibition of pregnancy screening (Stevenson 2004: 84).¹⁰⁴ Nor are there enforcement mechanisms to prevent

¹⁰⁴ The National Administration Offices were created as part of the labor side agreement governing NAFTA. Stevenson notes that unlike the Mexican National Administration Office, the Human Rights Commission for the Federal District (Mexico City) argued that such discrimination was in fact

such forms of discrimination or programs (e.g., affirmative action) that would recognize women's historically disadvantaged status in the labor market and help redress it. One result, as noted in previous chapters, is that these forms of discrimination continue.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Title V of the LFT explicitly places rights associated with child care (e.g., maternity leave and access to state-run day care facilities) under the rubric of "women's work," reinforcing the social role that has prevented women from participating in the work force and in labor unions. It is important to note that the maternity leave and other rights established in Title V are important to Mexican women. As noted further on, legislative proposals promoted by women have often called for extending the maternity leave period or making it more flexible (see Espinosa Torres 2002). What women do find objectionable in Title V is its implication that child care is the sole responsibility of women, rather than a social responsibility, because as long as women have the sole responsibility for child care, their access to employment opportunities and leadership positions will continue to be limited (GTNLPG 2002; CNMT 1995: 91-92; GEM 1995). In short, women's labor rights are not well entrenched or protected in Mexican labor law, despite their formal equality.

unconstitutional (Stevenson 2004: 84). These discrepancies in legal interpretations highlight the importance of explicitly specifying what constitutes discrimination to make it more readily enforceable.

¹⁰⁵ While I was in Mexico doing fieldwork for this dissertation, two small incidents helped me realize the extent to which gender discrimination continues in Mexico despite women's formal equality under the law. In the first, I had a conversation about sexual harassment with a twenty-something man (a friend of a friend) who had been educated in England and worked as a banker in Mexico City. He was adamant that sexual harassment was an acceptable part of Mexican culture and that it was only an issue in the United States because Americans like to sue each other. This was clearly not the view of the many Mexican women I interviewed, but his comments underscored the cultural hurdle that these women are up against. In the second, I once sat on a bus behind a young man who was holding a job advertisement. According to the ad, the company was looking specifically for women to fill secretarial positions and men to fill managerial positions. This kind of gender profiling in job advertising would be technically illegal, since the constitution and LFT prohibit gender discrimination, but clearly companies are not prevented from carrying on the practice.

It is no surprise, given the LFT's failure to reflect women's labor rights, that throughout history women have been absent from discussions about the rights of Mexican workers. Both Porter and Lear note that while organized labor was largely absent from the negotiations leading to the 1917 constitution, women, who did not even have full political citizenship at the time, had even less of a voice. Although organized labor was a more important political factor in the creation of the LFT, women were not (Porter 2003: 174; Lear 2001: 342-43; see also GTNLPG 2002: 4). Similarly, as mentioned in Chapter 4, women's voices were absent during the reforms of the LFT in the 1970s (CNMT 1995: 85-86). Yet as women became more politically engaged in public policy discussions in the late 1980s and 1990s, different groups of women have become active in forming alliances to promote women's labor rights within Mexican labor law.

7.2 EFFORTS TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS IN FEDERAL LAW

When women began getting involved in public policy debates in the late 1980s and 1990s, alliances of legislators, union women, and NGOs focused their attention on advancing women's labor rights, owing in large part to the increasing number of women in the workforce. One of the first efforts to bring about legislation protecting women's labor rights was made by PRI deputy Hilda Anderson, who was also a leader with the CTM. In 1983, Anderson had introduced the first ever legislative proposal to recognize sexual harassment as a crime. While there was broad support for the legislation from the other female deputies (every one of them signed it), Anderson lacked the broad support from civil society, left-wing political parties, and male legislators that could have helped push the proposal forward (Rodríguez 2003: 192-93). The legislation failed.

In 1988, Anderson submitted another proposal to amend the penal code on sex crimes and make sexual harassment a criminal offense. At the same time, President Salinas' administration presented a similar proposal to legislate sex crimes that officially replaced Anderson's proposal in the Chamber of Deputies. Unlike 1983, this time there was broader support for the proposal from women's groups. Moreover, President Salinas' proposal was useful in getting more male legislators on board. Still, there was little movement on the proposal until 1989, when 19 young women came forward with rape charges against members of the judicial police. Public outrage against the corruption and violence of the judicial police force was a catalyst for the legislature to act on the proposal for sex crimes legislation. Despite continued resistance from some male deputies, the Chamber of Deputies passed the legislation unanimously in 1990 (Rodríguez 2003: 192-93; Stevenson 1999; Lovera 1995: 61-62).¹⁰⁶ In addition to creating harsher penalties for rape, the sex crimes legislation made sexual harassment illegal and subject to a fine under the federal penal code.¹⁰⁷

This was an important legal victory for women workers, as well as a victory for the alliance of women legislators and women's groups more generally (although, interestingly, union women were largely absent from this mobilization). However, it is worth noting that although the penal code makes sexual harassment illegal, the nature of the penal code means that it is still incumbent on women who are victims of harassment to bring charges against their harassers. This can be prohibitively costly for women if it

¹⁰⁶ Linda Stevenson suggests that two factors helped the legislation pass in 1990. First, there were more women in elected office than at any prior point in history. Second, there was diverse and non-partisan support for the legislation from both elected representatives and civil society associations (Stevenson 1999: 66-72).

¹⁰⁷ Additionally, sexual harassment is a crime under the penal codes of 15 states, including the Federal District (Mexico City).

means having to hire a lawyer, and it can also have negative consequences for women at their workplace in the event that bringing a harassment suit against an employer or supervisor makes the charges public knowledge. According to Jennifer Cooper of the RMS, a vastly more preferable way to deal with harassment would be to have institutionalized mechanisms within the workplace or the union for dealing with harassment claims internally and confidentially, so that women are not forced to bring criminal charges against a harasser (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002). For this reason, an article in the LFT defining sexual harassment as gender discrimination and prohibiting it in the workplace would offer better protection for women workers because it would make it incumbent on the employer to provide a harassment free environment rather than placing the burden on individual women. However, as Cooper noted in her interview, it is far from the norm in Mexico that unions or businesses have internal mechanisms for dealing with harassment. The fact that the LFT does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment means there is little legal incentive for businesses and unions to take proactive measures to handle harassment claims and eliminate the practice, and makes it more difficult for women to bring a charge of harassment against an accuser.

The importance of promoting women's labor rights within the LFT itself has thus become important for women's groups and union women, and they have been working with women legislators since the mid-1990s in promoting explicit changes to the LFT. In March of 1995, just before the second ENMT, Cecilia Talamante and Malú Valenzuela y Gómez of GEM, made a presentation to female legislators in support of reforming the LFT. Their presentation focused particularly on maternity and work, and argued that by

focusing on women's relationship to work exclusively in terms of protecting maternity, the LFT actually fails to protect women's access to stable employment by providing mechanisms to prevent various forms of sex discrimination. Importantly, they also noted that the situation is even worse for women working in the informal sector, who are completely marginalized from legal protections. The upshot, according to Talamante and Valenzuela y Gómez, was that the labor law needed to provide the foundations for equal opportunities for men and women workers throughout Mexico. Talamante and Valenzuela y Gómez proposed several additions to the LFT, including more explicit definitions of discrimination (such as sexual harassment and pregnancy discrimination), legalization of affirmative action programs as a means to end gender inequality, and recognition of child care as a responsibility of both men and women (GEM 1995).

Similar themes were discussed in October of 1998, when over 300 women representing the three major political parties (the PRI, PRD, and PAN) met in the city of Puebla with women from several union federations (including the CTM, UNT, and the FAT) and other women's groups to prepare a proposal for reforms of the LFT addressing women's labor rights. The proposed reforms, presented by Matilde Arteaga Zaragosa of the FAT, included measures to end forms of discrimination against women, such as sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and unequal remuneration. There were also discussions about measures to increase health, safety, and environmental protections. There was broad agreement on the proposals on the part of both the union and party representatives. Both Victoria Rodríguez and Don Sherman note that the Puebla meeting was critical in uniting women from divergent political perspectives—whether from

different political parties or from ideologically different union federations—in a political struggle for women’s labor rights (Rodríguez 2003: 79-80; Sherman 1998).

Significantly, the increasing communication between women’s groups and women legislators, as well as the proposal from the Puebla meeting, influenced the legislative efforts of women in the 57th Legislature of the Chamber of Deputies, which had begun in 1997. As noted in Chapter 4, the bicameral, multiparty Equity and Gender Commission was created in the national legislature in 1998 with the goals of ensuring that the interests of women were being taken into account in legislative proposals and “...designing public policies that take into account the social economic, cultural, and political conditions of women in order to eliminate discriminatory treatment” (Espinosa Torres 2002: 306). Over the course of the three year term of the 57th Legislature, women representing the Equity and Gender Commission (as well as independent legislators) introduced 27 legislative initiatives addressing women’s rights.¹⁰⁸ Of these, five were proposals for changes to the LFT.

These five proposals dealt mainly with three themes. First, proposals suggested strengthening anti-discrimination legislation to make it illegal for employers to discriminate against workers because of their civil status, age, or because they are pregnant or have children, and to take steps to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. Second, proposals dealt with maternity rights, extending maternity leave and breaks allowed for breastfeeding, making maternity leave more flexible, and providing further protections for pregnant women from strenuous or unhealthy labor. Finally, one proposal

¹⁰⁸ This is notable, considering that in the previous 56 legislative sessions combined, only 31 initiatives supporting women’s rights had been proposed and only three had been passed into law (Espinosa Torres 2002: 306).

was to explicitly recognize the rights of women workers so as to ensure that they could enjoy their rights on equal terms with men (Espinosa Torres 2002: 310-18; *Gaceta Parlamentaria* 1998).

Despite these efforts made by women in the Mexican legislature to promote women's labor rights, none of these proposals were passed. According to Patricia Espinosa Torres, who served as a deputy for the PAN in the 57th Legislature, this was not for the lack of an effort, particularly on the part of the Chamber of Deputies' Equity and Gender Committee, but rather due to the lack of political will on the part of other deputies, corporatist union federations, companies, and other political actors, which did not support the legislative proposals (personal interview with Patricia Espinosa Torres, 2/26/2003). This highlights the importance of having broader political pressure from women's rights advocates in civil society to support policies enhancing women's citizenship rights. A broad demand from civil society could underscore the importance of legislative change and help female legislators overcome the political resistance on the part of other actors.

In the 1990s, union women had begun to take action alongside women's groups and women legislators in an effort to promote women's labor rights, as in the case of their participation at the Puebla meeting in 1998. Still, they had yet to engage with other civil actors in comprehensive action to pressure the government to reform the LFT with respect to women's labor rights. The opportunity for such action arose after Vicente Fox's election to the presidency in 2000.

7.3 THE WORKING GROUP ON LABOR NORMS WITH A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

Reforming the LFT, something that had not been done since the 1970s, was a goal of Vicente Fox's when he took office. The task of drafting the government's proposal for reforming the LFT fell to Fox's Secretary of Labor, Carlos Abascal. In March of 2001, four months before Abascal convened his working group to generate an LFT proposal,¹⁰⁹ one of Abascal's undersecretaries delivered a speech that Abascal had written in commemoration of International Women's Day. The speech stressed that women's primary responsibilities should be motherhood and family life and that women undermined these duties by working outside the home. Women, the speech suggested, "ought to prefer the mission of being the heart of a solid family" (Magally 2001). The speech went on to stress that by undermining these responsibilities, feminist politics were contributing to the spread of homosexuality, abortion, prostitution, and, ultimately, the breakdown of the traditional family (Magally 2001; Rodríguez 2003: 253-54).¹¹⁰

Abascal's sentiments about women's role in society sparked different responses from women in civil society. On May 1, 2001 a group of approximately one hundred women gathered in Mexico City's center square to protest Abascal's comments, some carrying signs saying "Abascal to the kitchen, Women to the office" ("Abascal a la cocina, Mujeres a la oficina"). Another response was the creation of the Working Group on Labor Norms with a Gendered Perspective (GTNLPG), an alliance of union, NGO,

¹⁰⁹ Initially, this working group included representatives of the Consejo Coordinado Empresarial (Business Coordinating Council), the CT, and the UNT. However, substantially different positions on how to reform the LFT led the UNT to withdraw from the working group. As will be discussed further on, the UNT went on to develop an alternative proposal with the left-leaning PRD (Alexander and La Botz 2003).

¹¹⁰ Rafael Estrada Sámano, the undersecretary who actually delivered the speech, did not read all of Abascal's text; however, the media obtained a copy of the entire speech, including Abascal's handwritten notes, and circulated it to all the women in the Chamber of Deputies. Even women from the PAN, Fox and Abascal's own party, were outraged by the comments (Rodríguez 2003: 253-54).

and academic women, who drafted an alternative proposal for LFT reform that was written from a gendered perspective and explicitly promoted women's full equality in the labor sphere. The GTNLPG's members included Inés González of SUTS/FENASIB, Rosario Ortiz of the STRM, Cecelia Talamante and Paula Regueiro Noriega of GEM, Gloria Tello Sánchez of the NGO Service, Development, and Peace, Martha Patricia Vélez of the Domestic Workers' Support Center, and Mercedes Zúñiga Elizalde from the Autonomous Metropolitan University-Xochimilco.¹¹¹ According to Rosario Ortiz, Abascal's comments were "a call to arms" for these seven women, who began meeting in 2001 out of concern for the sentiments Abascal had expressed. Given his explicit disapproval of women working outside the home, there was little hope that any labor legislation he drafted would go far in protecting women's labor rights. And so, according to Ortiz, these comments made the women who formed the group realize the importance of women working together to bring a gendered perspective to the debate on reforming the LFT (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002).

Over the next year, the women worked on a proposal that would thoroughly incorporate principles of gender equity into Mexico's labor law. Ortiz recalled that writing the proposal was a complicated and difficult effort. They went through the LFT article by article, making revisions to address issues such as gender discrimination, affirmative action, and labor violence. They also researched various international frameworks, such as those of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United

¹¹¹ Because both Inés González and Rosario Ortiz are active members of the RMS, the GTNLPG proposal is sometimes assumed to be a proposal from the RMS. This is not the case. In fact, Jennifer Cooper noted that there are members of the RMS who did not support reforming the LFT at all, even to incorporate women's labor rights. For these women, opening the door to any changes would inevitably give reformers an opportunity to weaken some of the LFT's other strong protections and benefits for workers. Women's labor rights would thus function as a Trojan horse (personal interview with Jennifer Cooper, 11/20/2002).

Nations, and the European Union to help identify the legal obligations of employers, workers, and even unions, as established by those bodies. Finally, they consulted labor lawyers to help them translate their proposals into legal language. According to Ortiz and González, this was particularly challenging, because the lawyers resisted a gendered perspective that challenged traditional (i.e., gender “neutral”) legal structures and frameworks (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, Mexico City, 12/5/2002; personal communication with Inés González, 3/14/2003). Ultimately, the project was successful, and in May of 2002 the GTNLPG completed its “Proposal for Labor Reform with a Gendered Perspective.”

THE PROPOSAL FOR LABOR REFORM WITH A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

The points of departure for the GTNLPG’s proposal are two elements of the Mexican socioeconomic context that structure women’s relationship to the labor market: the neoliberal economic context and women’s primary responsibility for child care and domestic labor. Neoliberal economic restructuring, according to the Proposal’s authors, has exacerbated women’s unequal participation in the labor force, such that most women end up working in the lowest paid sectors of the formal economy, work in maquilas or in temporary and part time positions where they receive low pay and minimal benefits, or fill the ranks of the growing informal sector, where they have no benefits or labor protections. Moreover, the authors argue that “the permanent situation of excessive work” created by women’s primary responsibility for child care and domestic labor further limits their ability to participate in the labor market on equal terms as men (GTNLPG 2002: 3-4).

In the face of this socioeconomic context, the authors argue that the LFT in its current form is inadequate for protecting the labor rights of women because

The rights of women are only considered in relation to the exercise of maternity, as can be seen in Title V of the LFT, called “Women’s Work.” This is a clear indication of the current conception of the law, in which women are only considered subjects of the law in terms of their biological function as mothers, and in which it is denoted that reproduction is a “job” for women alone, not a social responsibility as much of the mother as of the father, and of society as a whole (GTNLPG 2002: 5).

In recognizing women’s rights as workers only in terms of maternity, the law implicitly fails to acknowledge women’s fundamental human right to work and to offer protections that allow women to take part in the work force on equal terms as men (GTNLPG 2002: 12).

Importantly, the Proposal’s authors emphasized that laws are not static. Following along the lines of the social construction of citizenship argument, they suggest that laws reflect the needs of societies as they change throughout history: “laws...in theory are legal norms, instruments that define and specify what each society, in its time, considers just...” (GTNLPG 2002: 4). For the GTNLPG, in an age of increasing global attention to the needs and rights of women,¹¹² with an increasingly diverse and precarious workforce,

¹¹² There is no clear causal connection between the rise in international attention to women’s rights and the creation and work of the GTNLPG (or any of the other groups discussed in this dissertation), but as noted, the various declarations, treaties, and conventions on women’s rights that have been promulgated by institutions such as the United Nations and the ILO have influenced the discourse of these groups and have legitimized their demands for gender equality. The GTNLPG proposal emphasizes that in accordance with Article 133° of the Mexican constitution and Articles 6° and 17° of the LFT, international agreements have legal standing in Mexico once they have been signed and ratified by the legislature and that Mexico has signed several international agreements centering on women’s rights, including ILO conventions 100 (equal remuneration) and 111 (non-discrimination in employment), the United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment, and Elimination of Violence Against Women (the Belém do Pará convention). Nevertheless, Mexican law has not been altered to reflect the objectives of these conventions (GTNLPG 2002: 5-6). The failure of the Mexican government to implement and enforce aspects of international law to which it has agreed means that civil society actors, such as the GTNLPG, have a role in taking action in support of them if they are to be incorporated into federal law and subsequently enforced.

it is time to reform the LFT so that it is no longer based on the assumption of the male worker/breadwinner and instead incorporates language and tools to explicitly guarantee gender equity in the workforce. And also in line with the social construction of citizenship argument, they understood the importance of women being involved in promoting a gendered proposal, since they had doubts that the government's proposal would take gender sufficiently into account.

The GTNLPG proposal takes as its foundation the current LFT, but has changed its language, revised or eliminated existing articles, and added new ones to reflect seven principles of gender equity. The first principle is that women must be able to exercise their fundamental liberties. In the labor sphere, this means guaranteeing women the freedom to work in their chosen profession, to receive training, and to have freedoms of expression, association, organization, and reproduction. This first principle is incorporated into the proposal by explicitly recognizing women's right to work in the profession of their own choosing (Article 4°) and mandating that all persons have equal opportunities for employment, training, promotion, and job stability (Articles 56, 132, 153A) (GTNLPG 2002).

The second principle grounding the proposal is that social justice must be based in gender equity. For the authors of the proposal, this means that labor legislation must guarantee women workers (as well as men) safe, equitable, and satisfactory working conditions, protections against unemployment, and an adequate quality of life and health. This principle is most clearly expressed in Article 90 of the proposal, which mandates that "the minimum professional salary must be sufficient to satisfy the basic material, social, and cultural necessities of the male or female worker and his or her dependents,

and to provide for the obligatory education of his or her sons and daughters” (GTNLPG 2002: 19).

Thirdly, the proposal recognizes that work is a *human* right, not simply the right of men, and that labor legislation must be based on the respect and dignity of men and women. This means transcending the classic conception of the male worker and taking into account the experiences and needs of women workers. Currently, Article 3 of the LFT reads

Work is a universal human right and an inalienable, non-transferable social responsibility that cannot be renounced...[and] which requires respect for liberties and dignity and should be carried out in conditions that assure the life, health, and a decent economic standing for the worker (GTNLPG 2002: 13).

To concretize the principle that, as a human right, work must recognize the needs of men and women, the GTNLPG’s proposal modifies this Article to state that there should be a recognition of the differences between men and women and that work “should be carried out in conditions that assure the life, health, and a decent economic standing for the male and female worker and his or her dependents” (GTNLPG 2002: 13).¹¹³

¹¹³ This recognition of the differences between men and women is grounded in the debate about whether equality should be equated with “sameness” or whether equality should take into account the different needs and experiences of social groups, particularly those that have been historically marginalized (e.g., women, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, or the physically or mentally disabled). The equality as sameness school argues that people should be treated as individuals and that rights should be universally applied, regardless of characteristics such as race, sex, ethnicity, or ability. The equality as difference school counters that treating all individuals as equals, with no attention to the historical experiences of their social group, effectively perpetuates the idea that the experiences of the dominant group (which inevitably has the ability to make laws) are neutral, which may in turn perpetuate the structural inequalities that have prevented minority social groups from achieving equal opportunities to participate in social, political, and economic life. The equality as difference school thus argues for acknowledging difference and accounting for the different needs that different groups have in order for them to have truly equal opportunities in a society (e.g., wheel chair ramps in public buildings or affirmative action programs for women and minorities) (see Young 1990: Chapter 6). The GTNLPG operates from the perspective of the equality as difference school, arguing, as mentioned earlier, that the LFT in its current form operates on the assumption of a male worker and breadwinner and that this perpetuates discrimination against women in the labor sphere. By acknowledging the differences between men and women, the authors want to call attention to the different experiences and needs that women have as workers, which will allow the law to address those

Building on this last point, the fourth principle is that the diversity of the workforce should be recognized. The authors argue that to explicitly recognize the labor rights of all workers, the LFT should use gender neutral language to refer to workers rather than the masculine word for worker (“el trabajador”). Throughout their proposal, any time that “el trabajador” does not specifically refer to a male worker, the word has been replaced by the gender-neutral phrase, “the person who works” (“la persona que trabaja”) or by masculine *and* feminine nouns, for example “el trabajador y la trabajadora” (GTNLPG 2002: 11, 33).

The most substantive proposals for changing the LFT are centered around the last three principles of gender equity. The fifth principle stresses non-discrimination of women and equal opportunities and treatment. The subject of non-discrimination is treated extensively throughout the proposal. To Article 3, the authors added definitions of both direct discrimination (differential treatment based on the sex of the worker that is harmful) and indirect discrimination (formally neutral treatment that has unequal and harmful consequences). The authors are careful to stress that temporary preferential treatment intended to bring about real equality between men and women in the long term, such as affirmative action programs, would not be considered discriminatory (GTNLPG 2002: 13). The proposal also makes discrimination on the grounds of characteristics such as sex, age, race, pregnancy and reproductive responsibilities, physical condition, sexual orientation, civil status, and religion or political ideology illegal grounds for firing workers (Article 46), determining working conditions (Article 56), and hiring workers (Article 133). The authors also address the subject of non-discrimination by explicitly

needs and experiences explicitly as a means of guaranteeing women equal opportunities to participate in the work force.

outlawing the use of pregnancy exams for women workers or applicants (Article 133), and they specify that work of equal value should be equally remunerated (Article 86) (GTNLPG 2002).¹¹⁴

Importantly, the GTNLPG's proposal would not simply make discrimination illegal. It also includes mechanisms to ensure that employers, unions, and the government work to establish non-discriminatory environments. Proposed changes to Article 48 would make the employer responsible for proving that discrimination was not a factor in an employee's dismissal. Furthermore, an addition to Article 377 would obligate unions to incorporate into their programs the principles of non-discrimination, equality of treatment and opportunities, and non-violence *and* to create a body or position within the executive committee to generate policies directed at women workers. Finally, Chapter III of the proposal calls for the creation of a special government body, the responsibilities of which would include promoting equality of opportunities and non-discrimination within the labor force (GTNLPG 2002: 16, 28, 29-30).

The sixth principle is that the labor sphere should be free of gender-based violence, including psychological, physical, and sexual violence and harassment. Like the principle of non-discrimination, non-violence is treated throughout the proposal. An

¹¹⁴ The concept of equal pay for work of equal value is different from the common conception of equal pay for equal work. The latter specifies that two people performing the same work should be paid the same wage regardless of sex, race, or some other characteristic. But this does not take into account the reality of occupational segregation, in which women are not likely to hold the same jobs in the first place, or the structural inequalities that have led to traditionally female occupations (e.g., teachers and secretaries) being more poorly remunerated than traditionally male occupations (e.g., lawyers and construction workers), even if the responsibilities, required skills, and demands are comparable. The concept of equal pay for work of equal value requires employers to evaluate the worth of the characteristics of any job (e.g., the level of responsibility, problem solving, stress level, education requirements, working conditions) and base the pay on those, rather than on, in many cases, a gendered conception of the value of the job (RMS 1997: 18). In this way, women will be more likely to receive comparable wages to men even if they are not actually working alongside men and doing the same job.

addition to Article 51 explicitly defines sexual harassment as “insinuations, proposals, or actions of a sexual nature, whether verbal or physical, that are not provoked or accepted, that offend and assail the dignity of the person who endures them, and that provoke a disagreeable and hostile working environment” (GTNLPG 2002: 16). Articles 47 and 51 would make sexual harassment, along with other forms of violence, a justifiable cause for dismissal of an employee. Changes to Article 132 would make the employer responsible for creating a violence- and harassment-free environment in the workplace and to establish internal mechanisms for handling sexual harassment claims. Finally, the proposal calls on unions to work together with employers to create internal bodies to handle sexual harassment complaints, as in proposed additions to Article 504 (GTNLPG 2002: 15-16, 20, 28).

Finally, the seventh principle of the proposal is that human reproduction is an issue of social interest and a collective responsibility. The GTNLPG’s proposal would consequently permit men and women to assume responsibilities for child care rather than implicitly placing the responsibility entirely on women’s shoulders. The authors’ proposed changes are mostly contained in Title V and start with changing the title from “Women’s Work” to “Workers with Family Responsibilities.” Additionally, proposed articles would make both men and women eligible to use IMSS daycare facilities and allow men and women paid leave for taking care of sick children and attending to the death of a relative. Moreover, proposed changes would make a woman’s maternity leave time more flexible and allow her partner to convert a portion of her leave time into a paternity leave. Finally, the proposed changes would make it illegal to fire a woman from

the time that she notifies her employer of her pregnancy through the end of her leave (GTNLPG 2002: 21-22).

The GTNLPG's proposal would dramatically alter the LFT in a way that explicitly recognized the labor rights of women workers and the responsibilities of the government, employers, and unions to protect and enforce those rights. Of course, drafting the proposal was only the beginning of the group's work. The next step—and the most important one, from the social construction of citizenship perspective—was to persuade government actors to take their proposal into consideration.

GTNLPG DIALOGUE WITH THE PRD AND THE UNT

In 2002, the major national political parties were all beginning to engage in a discourse over LFT reform. As a means of injecting their gendered perspective on labor law reform into the national debate, the GTNLPG began lobbying the political parties in support of their proposal (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002). In a 2003 interview, Rosario Ortiz recalled that they had been able to discuss their proposal with women from all the political parties except for the PAN (Valencia Salinas 2003), but ultimately, it was the PRD that was most responsive to the GTNLPG proposal. In fact, the GTNLPG became one of the groups with whom the PRD consulted for its own alternative proposal for reforming the LFT (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; Inés González, 1/8/2003; Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003).

The group's consultation with the PRD began in June of 2002, when Inés González and Cecilia Talamante presented the basic ideas of the GTNLPG proposal at a PRD forum on reforming the LFT in the context of Mexico's democratic transition. Both women stressed the importance of reforming the law in order to promote women's equal

access to the labor sphere in the neoliberal era (PRD 2002: 52-58, 97-105). Talamante went further, citing the expansion of women's labor rights as a necessary condition of Mexico's democratization:

To conclude, I once again call on the unions and parliamentary groups to consider that if gender equity is not taken into account in the law, we will not have a democratic transition, and we will not have a social pact, which our country so urgently needs, if we Mexican women are not included (PRD 2002: 105).

Talamante noted in her presentation at the PRD forum how González felt that simply being able to present the ideas of the proposal meant that the proposal was already having an impact (PRD 2002: 98). However, the GTNLPG continued to consult with the PRD about including a gendered perspective in their alternative proposal for reforming the LFT. Rosario Ortiz noted that three women from the GTNLPG were very active with the PRD, meeting with the party's lawyers and having very fruitful discussions about the language and concepts of the PRD proposal (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002).

However, the women were less effective in promoting the gender agenda with the UNT, with whom the PRD collaborated after the UNT left Abascal's working group and started working on an independent, alternative proposal.¹¹⁵ Ortiz lamented that "everything that was contemplated with the PRD was lost by the UNT" and estimated that despite fruitful discussions with the UNT's political commission, UNT lawyers kept only about 60% of what they had been discussing with the PRD. Ortiz attributes this to

¹¹⁵ According to Saúl Escobar, a researcher with the National Institute of Anthropology and History and former federal deputy for the PRD who also had input into the final PRD-UNT proposal, after leaving Abascal's coalition, the UNT decided that they wanted to have their own proposal for reforming the LFT. There were people who were working on both the UNT and PRD proposals, so it seemed like a natural move to merge the two together, except that the UNT did not want to appear to be an extension of the PRD. Ultimately, however, the UNT's need for political backing for its proposal led to the decision to merge the two proposals (personal interview with Saúl Escobar, 3/13/2003).

the small number of women from the GTNLPG who were participating in the discussions rather than the UNT's rejection of their ideas. The few GTNLPG members who were most actively engaged (Ortiz, Talamante, and González) also held full time jobs. Although they worked very intensely, they did not get the results they wanted because, Ortiz said, they would have needed everyone involved to penetrate the discussions better. Moreover, no one from the GTNLPG was actually present during the writing of the proposal. As Ortiz reflected, the UNT wrote what it thought the GTNLPG meant, but if the group's members had actually been present during the writing, the UNT proposal would have better reflected their own. By the time of our interview in December of 2002, Ortiz said that the women of the GTNLPG were no longer involved in discussions with the PRD or the UNT. Although she thought they should have been, it boiled down to the group members' lack of time (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002). From the social construction of citizenship perspective, this highlights just how important it can be not only to have ideas, but to be actively engaged in promoting them. Being absent from the process, as this case indicates, decreases the chances that a group's interests will be taken into account in the final results.

The GTNLPG's Impact on the PRD-UNT Proposal for LFT Reform

While acknowledging that their negotiations with the PRD and UNT did not yield as much as they would have liked, Ortiz, Talamante, and González were all confident that the GTNLPG proposal had had an impact on the way that gender was incorporated into the PRD and UNT proposal (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; Inés González, 1/8/2003; Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003). This view is echoed by Rosario Tapia, who was a PRD deputy at the time and familiar with the LFT proposal

negotiations. Deputy Tapia noted that in her discussions with women unionists about their demands for LFT reform, their three most important concerns were sexual harassment, pay equity, and equal access to promotions and training. All of these issues are addressed by the joint PRD-UNT proposal, which was officially presented on March 26, 2003. Deputy Tapia added that not all of the proposals made by the union women were incorporated into the final PRD-UNT proposal. Some proposals, she said, were simply implausible, such as one that would dramatically increase the length of paid maternity leave (personal interview with Rosario Tapia, 3/31/2003).¹¹⁶ However the proposal does take significant steps to address women's labor rights, and several of the proposals made by the PRD-UNT reflect the proposals made by the GTNLPG.

A comparison of the two proposals reveals three points where the language in the PRD-UNT proposal is almost exactly the same as that of the GTNLPG. This is the case in Article 3° of the PRD-UNT proposal, which addresses the importance of recognizing women's and men's differences and ensuring that both men and women work in conditions that assure their life, health, and a decent economic standing (PRD 2003: 100). Article 3° of the PRD-UNT proposal also uses almost the exact language as the GTNLPG's to specify that affirmative action programs would not be classified as discriminatory under the law because their objective is to ensure the overall, long term equality between men and women workers (PRD 2003: 100). Finally, Article 84 of the PRD-UNT proposal employs nearly the exact same language as the GTNLPG's to guarantee that single mothers, female heads of household, and men with child care

¹¹⁶ In the GTNLPG proposal, a change to Title V would have given women and men up to one year of paid leave to care for a recently born child (GTNLPG 2002: 23). For Tapia, this change was simply impractical.

responsibilities should have priority in scheduling vacation time so that that their vacations could coincide with the school vacations of their children (PRD 2003: 124).

There are many more examples where the PRD-UNT proposal addresses the same issues and rights as the GTNLPG proposal, even if the wording is not the same. For example, sexual harassment is treated throughout the PRD-UNT proposal. The PRD-UNT proposal defines harassment similarly, and like the GTNLPG's would prohibit workers from sexually harassing others (Article 147, Section XI) and establish it as a cause for dismissal (Articles 50 and 51). Moreover, the PRD-UNT proposal would similarly make employers responsible for creating an environment free of sexual harassment and to establish internal mechanisms charged with preventing sexual harassment in the workplace (Article 144, Section XIX) (PRD 2003: 115-17, 143, 149).

The PRD-UNT proposal also thoroughly treats non-discrimination, one of the seven principles of gender equity in the GTNLPG proposal. Article 3° establishes that women cannot be discriminated against. Article 163 expands on this, specifying that women must have equal opportunities to receive relevant job training. Non-discrimination of pregnant women is also broached in the PRD-UNT proposal in Article 145, which would prohibit the use of pregnancy tests or certification that a woman is not pregnant as a condition of employment, and Article 198, which specifies that women can exercise their reproductive rights at any time and that pregnancy is not legal grounds for dismissal (PRD 2003: 100-101, 145-47, 154-55, 165-66).

Finally, reproduction as a shared responsibility between men and women (the seventh of the GTNLPG's principles of gender equity) is also prominent in the PRD-UNT proposal. Along with changing the title of Title V to "Concerning Reproduction and

Family Responsibilities,” Title V of the PRD-UNT proposal stipulates that this section is intended to “promote the shared responsibility of men and women workers in attention to the family” (PRD 165, Article 197) and makes provisions for men to take paternity leave (Article 200, Section II). The PRD-UNT proposal also extends women’s maternity leave from twelve to sixteen weeks, and makes it more flexible, as does the GTNLPG proposal (Article 200, Section I) (PRD 2003: 165-68).

Despite its attention to women’s labor rights, there are issues present in the GTNLPG proposal that are simply not addressed by the PRD-UNT’s. Two in particular stand out. One is the absence of gender inclusive language in the PRD-UNT proposal. Whereas the GTNLPG uses both the masculine and feminine words for worker or the truly gender neutral expression “the person who works,” the PRD-UNT proposal maintains the masculine word for worker(s) except in cases where it specifically refers to women. The second is the absence of any mention of the obligation of unions or government bodies to promote policies of non-discrimination in the workforce. The GTNLPG proposal is focused on making the issue of preventing discrimination and harassment the obligation not only of the employer, but also of unions and the government. The PRD-UNT proposal would leave this to the employers alone. Still, the PRD-UNT proposal addresses women’s labor rights in ways that go far beyond women’s protections in the current LFT. Although the GTNLPG proposal goes into much more depth, it appears as though the group’s dialogue with the PRD and UNT certainly influenced important aspects of their proposal.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION ON LFT REFORM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GTNLPG

Whether or not the PRD-UNT proposal, or parts of it, will be incorporated into federal labor law is not clear at this time. Deputy Tapia was confident that the PRD-UNT proposal had a great deal of congressional support—even from PRI and PAN deputies (personal interview with Rosario Tapia, 3/31/2003), but whatever the perceived level of support for the proposal, it has not been introduced into the Chamber of Deputies as legislation. In fact, in early December of 2004, PRI and PAN deputies were poised to introduce as legislation the LFT reform proposal written by Secretary Abascal, which has become known as the “Abascal Plan.”

The Abascal Plan has been widely condemned by the independent labor movement for perpetuating the corporatist state-labor relationship, restricting workers’ rights to strike and collective bargaining, and granting employers more flexibility and control over the workforce (Alexander and La Botz 2003; Ochoa Camposeco 2003).¹¹⁷ The independent union movement (the UNT, the FAT, and the FSM) moved quickly to protest the introduction of the Abascal Plan as legislation, including staging a sit-in at the Chamber of Deputies. They were supported by international unions and NGOs (e.g., the

¹¹⁷ None of the women interviewed for this dissertation who commented on the Abascal Plan felt that a proposal conceived by the Fox administration would adequately address women’s labor rights (personal interviews with Anonymous STRM worker, 2/28/2003; Mónica Gama, 12/3/2002; Inés González, 1/8/2003; Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003; Rosa Maria Hernandez, 2/7/2003; Gloria Olvera, 2/3/2003; Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002; Rosario Tapia, 3/31/2003). And indeed, the “Abascal Plan” has been criticized for its failure to protect and extend the rights of women workers. For example, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers—CFO) charges that proposed changes to allow employment based on “special abilities” will perpetuate discrimination against women in hiring, since they are already disadvantaged when it comes to education and training. Moreover, the CFO criticizes the proposal drafted by Abascal for failing to enhance the protections of women workers that are laid out in Title V of the current LFT (De la Rosa Hickerson 2003). In fact, in the Abascal Plan, Title V remains unchanged, thus continuing to underscore the primary responsibility of women for child care, which is one of the two factors the GTNLPG cited as contributing to women’s discrimination in the workforce. It is hardly illogical, however, that a proposal that weakens worker protections generally would not take major steps to improve the labor rights of one specific group of workers.

CAW, UAW, and Human Rights Watch), as well as important national actors such as the PRD. As a result of these protests, the PRI and PAN decided to postpone introducing the Abascal Plan until the new legislative session that began in February of 2005. At this time, the Abascal Plan has still not been introduced into the full legislature. Opposition to the Abascal Plan has also increased. For example, unions from the United States and Canada joined with the non-profit Washington Office on Latin America to file a lawsuit arguing that the Abascal Plan would violate the labor agreements of NAFTA (MLNA 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b).

The final outcome of the Abascal Plan is not clear. Given the success of the independent labor movement in stalling the introduction of the Abascal Plan as legislation, and with a presidential election coming up in 2006, there is a chance that labor law reform will not occur during the Fox *sexenio*. If this is indeed the case, and assuming the new president undertakes labor law reform, the tone of the proposal will likely reflect the interests of the new president's party. A president from the PAN or PRI is likely to attempt a reform that follows along the lines of the Abascal Plan and reflects the needs of the neoliberal economy. In such a situation, there would be little official interest in dramatically expanding any workers rights, let alone women's labor rights. Women's participation in the dialogue about reform would, therefore, be much more challenging and have more limited chances of success. Should the president come from the PRD, there is a better chance that the official proposal for reform would follow along the lines of the current PRD-UNT proposal, in which case there is a better chance for women's labor rights to be reflected in the final outcome. And if the Abascal Plan does get introduced as legislation, there is a possibility that PRD deputies and their civil

society allies (including the GTNLPG) will be able to influence the negotiations in a way that favors women's labor rights. In any case, women's presence in the negotiations over LFT reform is important. Since it is likely that there will eventually be some kind of reform of the LFT, if women are absent from the debate, it is unlikely that their views will be taken into account.

Given this context, what can be said about the success of the GTNLPG and union women in promoting women's labor rights in the national debate about reforming the LFT? The GTNLPG's efforts must be seen first and foremost as a successful attempt on the part of union women to engage in the social construction of women's labor rights. Cecilia Talamante commented that although there have been other proposals from women's groups about reforming the LFT, the GTNLPG's was the most comprehensive (personal interview with Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003). Through the GTNLPG and its discussions with the PRD and UNT, union women were able to engage more directly and thoroughly than they had ever been able in the discourse over women's labor rights. Moreover, they were able to influence the outcome of the principal alternative proposal to the Abascal Plan, which may yet be introduced as legislation or have an influence on final negotiations of LFT reform. The fact that the GTNLPG was able to influence the PRD-UNT proposal underscores the importance of union women taking the lead in public discourse over women's labor rights and illustrates that change in the direction of public policy can result from the organization and action of union women.

Second, the case of the GTNLPG reveals the importance of union women acting as part of an alliance with other actors from civil society. Because the Mexican government has failed to act to promote women's labor rights absent a significant

mobilization from civil society in conjunction with congressional support (e.g., changes to the penal code in 1999), it is clear that for change to occur there must be an effective mobilization from women and their political allies. Through the late-1990s, union women were active in promoting women's labor rights within their unions, but they were only beginning to discuss the importance of broader mobilizations to promote women's labor rights nationally (e.g., at the second ENMT), and with the exception of the 1998 Puebla meeting, they were not very involved in broader alliances with the women's movement and women legislators to promote changes in federal law.

Although it was a small organization, the GTNLPG allowed union women to become intimately involved in an alliance focused on promoting women's labor rights, and the members of the GTNLPG noted that this alliance strengthened the outcome for both the union and non-union women. On one hand, Cecilia Talamante highlighted that a benefit of forming alliances is that different groups bring different specializations and skills to the table. She noted that some of the activities that the group had to do in order to develop the proposal, such as providing legal analysis and lobbying, required skills that many women workers might not have (personal interview with Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003). On the other hand, union women have a unique and firsthand perspective of the challenges and needs of women workers that women from NGOs or political parties may lack. As Inés González commented, the GTNLPG benefited from having the input of women who were directly engaged in the labor process and labor issues (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003). Accordingly, a diverse alliance bringing together groups with complementary skills would increase the odds of successfully mobilizing for change.

Third, the case of the GTNLPG helps to illustrate the need for a broad women's labor movement to support women's labor rights. It is true that the GTNLPG did not achieve everything that they had hoped to in terms of influencing the PRD-UNT proposal or the final outcome of the LFT debate, but this is not a sign of the group's failure, nor does it signify that union women cannot play an important role in mobilizing in support of citizenship rights. Talamante noted that advancing laws requires a broad social movement and that what the GTNLPG was missing was collaboration with more women's groups and a bigger mobilization of women (personal interview with Cecilia Talamante, 1/20/2003). For a group of seven women, who were not all active at every stage of the process, the influence of the GTNLPG on the PRD-UNT proposal was a marked success.

Building a broader movement of women to support women's labor rights is a challenge, but it is clearly one that must be met, and it is important that union women, with their unique position as members of the organized formal sector, become more involved as actors in this movement. Reflecting on the GTNLPG, González noted, that collaborating in the broader women's movement is a means of transforming the way that union women engage in constructing a more equitable labor sphere:

I'm of the opinion, it's my idea, that unionism can't only take place at the union level. Unionism has to go beyond the union to the social. So, in the specific case of work with women, it must go beyond the union space so we can establish alliances and work together with the broader Mexican feminist movement.... And I think that one way that the demands of women workers became more forceful was by allying ourselves with other women who weren't necessarily union women, but who were active in the Mexican women's movement. And I think that it was a very important alliance.... Many women stay in their union working..., but I think that a union woman who is looking to affect and transform the labor sphere has to transcend the union, has to go beyond the union, has to ally with other forces (personal interview with Inés González, 1/8/2003).

As the case of the GTNLPG shows, when union women do go beyond their unions to engage in a broader women's labor movement, they can be successful in promoting women's labor rights.

7.4 CONCLUSION

Mexican federal law established specific rights for women workers at the time the federal constitution was established in 1917. However, neither these rights nor the rights for women workers laid out in the Federal Labor Law of 1931 resulted from the input of women into the legislative process, and women have continued to face various forms of discrimination in the workforce in spite (and perhaps because) of them.

It was not until the 1980s that women began to promote the expansion of legislation to protect the right of women to participate in the workforce free from sex-based discrimination. The first efforts were made by women legislators in the Chamber of Deputies, who were later joined by groups from the women's movement and, eventually, by union women. For example, in 1998 over 300 women from unions, women's groups, and the government convened in the city of Puebla and developed legislative measures that would end such forms of discrimination against women as sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and unequal remuneration. Some of these measures were introduced by women in the 57th legislature of the Chamber of Deputies between 1998 and 2000; however, none of the initiatives on women's labor rights were passed as legislation.

President Vicente Fox's goal of reforming the LFT during his administration served as the catalyst for the creation of the Working Group on Labor Norms with a Gendered Perspective, a collaboration of seven women from an array of social sectors

who wrote a comprehensive proposal for reforming the LFT based on seven principles of gender equity. The GTNLPG was able to consult with the PRD and UNT on their alternative proposals for LFT reform and were ultimately able to influence some of the ways women's labor rights were incorporated into the PRD-UNT proposal. This influence demonstrates the important role that union women can have in the social construction of citizenship at that state level, but it also underscores the importance of union women building alliances with other civil society actors in order help construct a stronger, broader movement in support of expanding and protecting women's labor rights. In this way, the GTNLPG case also underscores the importance of the other two levels of the social construction of citizenship in supporting the third. A strong, broad movement in support of women's labor rights requires that women first have an understanding of their rights (the individual level) and can be strengthened by including unions that are supportive of women's labor rights (the institutional level). Given the success of the GTNLPG in influencing the major alternative proposal to the Abascal Plan, if union women and their allies in civil society continue engaging in these other levels of citizenship construction, the next effort of the GTNLPG, or some similar organization, may be even more effective.

Conclusion: Union Women and the Social Construction of Citizenship in Mexico

8.0 UNION WOMEN AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP

In this dissertation, I have sought to understand whether, and to what extent, union women have a role to play in the social struggle to expand women's labor rights in a cultural and political context where unions have paid little heed to women's labor rights and in an economic context that has seen labor lose its political weight. Women in Mexico, as in many developing countries, face gender-based forms of workplace discrimination that range from occupational segregation and sexual harassment to illegal pregnancy testing. Within unions, women face structural obstacles resulting from the corporatist state-labor relationship that allow union leaders to ignore their needs as workers. They also face cultural barriers that prevent them from speaking out assertively on behalf of women's labor rights, even when they hold leadership positions.

And yet, as I argued in Chapter 2, work is so central to citizenship—in terms of having access to social welfare rights and access to a public sphere where political and economic discourses are formed—that when women are denied access to the labor sphere

on equal terms as men, they are also denied access to fully equal citizenship. Especially because Mexican women are increasingly active in the workforce, it is necessary to expand women's labor rights, and to ensure that they are enforced, in order for women to have equal access to the labor sphere, which is so intimately linked to citizenship.

Because union women are the most organized sector of working women, because they carry political weight as unionists (especially in Mexico where union membership can be a springboard into formal politics), and because they are members of organizations that are—in principle—dedicated to defending workers' rights, we should expect that union women will be involved in promoting women's labor rights. And yet, I argue that the fact that Mexican unions have never been completely inclusive of women, combined with the difficulties that unions have had retaining their political power in the neoliberal era, suggests that union women will have to work outside the union environment in order to advance their goals.

I use the social construction of citizenship approach to develop a framework to explain the role that union women might play in promoting women's labor rights in Mexican society. As I have argued, the social construction of citizenship is a three-level process in which agents within civil society act to expand citizenship rights at the individual level (working with individuals to make them more rights-conscious), within social institutions (working to ensure that policies within social institutions actually reflect the rights of individuals), and at the level of the state (contributing to the construction of new citizenship discourses). It follows that in order for Mexican union women and their allies within civil society to maximize their chances of successfully promoting women's labor rights, they must be active at all three of these levels in an

effort to raise union women's gender-consciousness, transform unions into institutions that respect and promote the rights women hold as workers, and lobby the state to expand, and more effectively enforce, women's labor rights.

8.1 FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

In Mexico, union women have been active in promoting their rights as workers since the time of the revolution, but their actions have never amounted to a broad, sustained, and well-organized women's labor movement. Before the 1980s, some union women brought attention to the need to protect women's equal right to employment, such as those working in the railroad industry in the 1920s and those working for UNAM in the 1970s. But by and large, most union women threw their collective weight behind union movements that did not involve explicitly gendered demands, such as the telephone workers' strikes that began in the late-1970s.

Beginning in the 1980s, union women's agency began to revolve more and more around the concerns they had as women. The period of popular feminism, which grew out of the 1975 UN World Conference for International Women's Year, the 1982 debt crisis, and the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, sparked a shift in the women's movement from one in which women's issues and class issues were handled separately, by separate organizations, to one that recognized the intersections of class and gender. In this changing environment, women unionists began to focus on promoting women's rights within their unions, while feminist groups began working with union women to help them understand their rights as women.

In effect, the period of popular feminism gave rise to work at the individual and institutional levels of citizenship construction. Work at the individual level began in

earnest in the early 1980s when groups like GEM and MAS began gender consciousness-raising work with union women. GEM and MAS continue their work today, but they have been joined by other organizations that conduct consciousness-raising activities with union women. These groups include organizations of union women such as the RMS, a network committed to fostering women's leadership within unions, and women's groups within union federations like the UNT and FESEBES, which conduct workshops on issues such as women's rights. As the cases I have discussed in this dissertation have shown, consciousness-raising activities have prompted women to become more involved as leaders who advocate women's rights within their unions and communities and have helped union women form important networks with civil society actors, which is an important step in building a broader women's labor movement.

In the 1980s, as popular feminism began to gain strength, and as more union women began to develop a stronger gender consciousness, union women began to get more involved in promoting gender within their own unions. This work took several forms. First, it involved organizational efforts to establish official women's offices within the union governing structures. For example, women in the electricians' union, the banking sector, and the state services sector began organizing women's offices to promote gender issues such as pay equity and an end to discrimination of women. In one extremely symbolic case, the garment workers' union, organized in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake, became the first Mexican union with entirely female leadership and feminist advisors and became explicitly involved in the women's movement.

Second, women began to organize within their unions in order to promote changes to the union statutes that outline the union's structure and governing principles

and the collective contracts that dictate the rights and responsibilities of workers vis-à-vis the company. Union women are now making important advances in these areas. For example, in the FAT and the STRM, union statutes now call for the inclusion of women within all parts of the union. In STUNAM and the STRM, the statutes call for an end to discriminatory practices against women, including sexual harassment. In the ATM, women's agency forced a change in the collective contract to allow women to operate light trains. In sum, women's agency within unions has led to policy changes that allow women better opportunities to participate in the union and workplace on equal terms as men.

Still, during the 1980s union women were not very active in promoting women's labor rights in a political discourse with the state.¹¹⁸ Union women's interest in taking up a dialogue with the state emerged more concretely in the mid- to late-1980s, as union women meeting throughout the country began dialogues about the effects of the changing economic model on women workers and the policies that needed to be enacted to protect women's legal right to participate in the paid labor force on equal terms as men. Discussions of women workers' rights among union women and their allies in political parties and civil society continued to pick up steam. This was particularly the case after

¹¹⁸ Union women's failure to participate earlier in the third level of citizenship construction more early on is likely due to a combination of four factors. First, many union women, even those who were mobilizing in major union strike actions, lacked a gender consciousness. The NSGWU is an atypical example of union women's organizing at the time. The STRM strikes and the democratic teachers' movement, where women were active but were not driven by gender demands, are perhaps more representative of union women's participation in union mobilizations. Second, there were few female union leaders at the time, and consequently, a real absence of leadership for a union women's movement that would mobilize against the state. Third, there was no significant network of union women or women's labor movement in the 1980s. According to Rosario Ortiz, one of the major obstacles to empowering Mexican workers generally is the historic lack of union solidarity in Mexico (personal interview with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002). If there has been no history of unity in the workers' movement, one can deduce that women within unions have traditionally been isolated from one another, thus reducing their ability to mount a stronger mobilization to defend issues of concern to them. And finally, even if the prior factors were not a problem, the severe economic recession in the 1980s made it difficult for labor to make any demands on the state.

the 1995 UN Beijing conference, which stressed the importance of eliminating gender discrimination and fostering women's participation in civil society and politics. Such discussions are exemplified by the second ENMT, which also took place in 1995, where participants stressed the necessity of women becoming involved in public policy debates if the rights and needs of women workers were ever to be addressed in law.

Although union women were still slow to become involved collectively in political discussions over women's labor rights, they were involved in the 1998 Puebla conference, where representatives from the three main political parties, women's groups, and unions developed proposals for reforming the LFT. In 2002, union women were an integral part of the GTNLPG, a group that developed a comprehensive proposal for labor law reform that explicitly takes into account the needs and rights of women and that had some influence in the discussions over labor law reform. Finally, the independent union federations are also becoming more public about support for women's labor rights in the LFT. Information on the websites of the both the UNT and the FAT highlights the importance of reforming the LFT with respect to women's rights (UNT n.d.; FAT n.d.-b).

Importantly, NGOs and unions are also taking steps to build a broader base of political support for women's labor rights. For example, union women and federations are lending their support to organizations fighting for labor fairness in the northern maquila industry and have taken a stand against the murders of young working women in the border city of Ciudad Juárez (personal interviews with Rosario Ortiz, 12/5/2002 and Martha Heredia, 1/14/2003).¹¹⁹ Labor organizations like the FAT have joined forces with

¹¹⁹ For example, Rosario Ortiz also works for the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, an organization that campaigns for improved working conditions, wages, and labor rights for maquila workers and conducts various kinds of training for these workers.

women's and human rights groups to protest sex discrimination and pregnancy discrimination in the maquila sector and to help unionization drives of maquila workers (Stevenson 2004; Hathaway 2000). Members of the RMS have taken their leadership training program to the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, where the maquila industry is expanding, in an effort to form networks to support women's labor rights with unions and NGOs there (Valencia Salinas 2003). Members of the RMS have also collaborated on programs to promote women worker's rights with the Mexico City Women's Institute (personal interview with Norma Malagón, 2/21/2003).

In short, since the 1980s, union women and their allies in civil society have been increasingly active at all three levels of citizenship construction, with varying levels of success. Union women are also an important part of a growing movement supporting women's labor rights in Mexico. This confirms my argument that union women can play an important role in the social construction of women's labor rights, despite the declining power of organized labor in the neoliberal era.

Women's engagement in the three levels of citizenship construction highlights the importance of exploring the relationship between organized labor and citizenship construction from a gendered perspective, something that has been largely ignored to date. When women's rights are not a high priority for unions, as is the case in Mexico, there are consequences for union women's involvement in the social construction of women's labor rights. In such cases, union women cannot rely easily on traditional union actions like strikes and walkouts to promote their goals. In fact, one of the most important insights of a gendered analysis of organized labor and the social construction of citizenship is that in the construction of women's labor rights, unions become as much

targets of union women's agency as they are the source of the agents. In the construction of *women's* labor rights, this research shows that union women must go beyond traditional union actions by working to build a broader base of support through consciousness raising activities, struggling to transform their unions from within, and engaging in their own dialogue with the state.

A second important reason to examine the labor-citizenship relationship from a gendered perspective is that women's rights and organizational capacity can advance even when workers' rights and organizational capacity are being restricted in general. Without question, organized labor has lost political and organizational power in Mexico since the neoliberal transition. At the same time, the women's labor movement—comprised of actors in the maquila industry, national and international NGOs, and formal sector unionists—is becoming more organized. Moreover, although it is difficult to analyze advances for women's right in labor law in the absence of federal labor law reform, we can still see that women are making some advances in terms of rights and benefits within union statutes and collective contracts, even in an era when union leaders may be more concerned with maintaining membership, falling wages, and combating business demands for flexible employment practices.

A final insight derived from this examination of union women's engagement in the social construction of citizenship is that it is insufficient to examine the struggle for the creation, expansion, or redefinition of citizenship rights solely in terms of the discourse between civil associations and the state. It is also insightful to examine the steps that enable this struggle to come about, including the way that individuals become rights-conscious and the way that the civil associations engaging with the state come to

expand their own ideas about citizenship. I now turn to a closer examination of the insights derived from an examination of these other levels of citizenship construction.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE THREE-LEVEL FRAMEWORK

The political agency of union women and their allies has resulted in varying degrees of success at each level of citizenship construction. The examination of the different experiences, successes, and failures of women's engagement in citizenship construction at each level has led to several insights about the three level model.

The Importance of Consciousness-Raising Efforts

Despite the presence of a women's movement in Mexico, of women in elected office, in the workforce, in civil society, and in academia, it remains the case that Mexico is a very traditional and conservative society. Cultural notions of women's proper role in society are deeply rooted. None other than President Fox's Secretary of Labor, Carlos Abascal, wrote in a 2002 speech that women ought to prefer their role in the family to participation in the paid workforce. Not surprisingly, work and leadership spheres are still considered men's domain, even though over one-third of Mexican women work outside the home and many women are heads of household.

The idea of consciousness-raising may hearken back to the "women's liberation" movement in the 1970s, but what comes through in this exploration of union women in Mexico is that in such a *machista* context as Mexico's there is still a profound need to help women (and men) better understand the rights that women have as workers, the ways that social constructions of gender have helped to erect barriers to women's participation in public life, and the importance of women's political agency and

leadership in challenging these barriers. The fact that many interviewed for this study became involved in the social construction of women's labor rights after attending some sort of consciousness-raising activity is a testament to the fact that these activities can work.

The Importance of Union Democracy

Especially since the late-1980s, women have been working within their own unions to transform them into organizations where women's labor rights are promoted and enforced. Often, though not always, this work has been done by the leaders of official women's offices, who use their position to gather information on women's experiences, raise awareness about gender-based issues, and promote changes to union policy. The women I have discussed in these cases have been responsible for a number of formal and informal advances for women workers within their unions.

As some of my cases have shown, there are men in leadership positions who are supportive of women's rights; however, women have been the ones responsible for pushing gender issues onto the union agenda. As a case in point, at a small round table discussion I attended in Mexico City, a representative from one of the petroleum industry unions commented that his union was involved in a project aimed at bringing more attention to the rights and needs of women workers. When I approached him afterward to ask about the program, he chuckled and suggested that I speak to one of the women involved in the project, as it was really a women's thing and he did not know much about it. This underscores the importance of having women committed to promoting women's labor rights within unions. Absent women's support, it would seem, women's labor rights will not be a high priority for male union leaders.

But it also appears to be the case that the transformation of unions into organizations that promote and enforce women's rights will depend to a great extent on the presence or absence of union democracy. Women can work diligently within the union to support women's labor rights, but in a corporatist environment, where there is no political incentive for labor leaders to listen to the rank-and-file and no guarantee that free and fair union elections will allow different political currents an equal chance at attaining leadership, altering the power structure is incredibly difficult. This does not mean that it is useless for women to try to challenge corporatist structures by promoting women's labor rights, only that effecting change is very difficult when decision making power is highly concentrated in the hands of the secretary general and a small, loyal group of leaders.

Union democracy will not necessarily lead to ideal outcomes in terms of expanding and enforcing women's labor rights, but in an environment where labor leaders are forced to be more responsive and accountable to the rank-and-file, there is a better opportunity for women's demands to be addressed. There is also the potential for women in leadership positions to be able to advocate women's labor rights more freely, without risking a backlash from other union leaders.

The Importance of a Women's Movement Supporting Labor Law Reform

Women workers have much to gain or lose from a reform of the LFT. A reform along the lines of the PRD-UNT proposal takes steps to democratize unions, protect basic workers' rights, and pays specific attention to the rights of women workers. Such a reform has obvious benefits for women. Conversely, a labor law reform that aims to make the workforce more flexible in response to business needs and that does not go far

in expanding women's labor rights, which is more in line with the Abascal Plan, can hurt women. This is the case not only because women's labor rights would not be taken into account as explicitly, but also because it would reinforce an economic structure in which women have been the biggest losers.

Achieving the kind of labor law reform represented by the PRD-UNT proposal will require union women and their allies in civil society to be among the social groups pressuring the government for reform. Union women have joined in calls for reforms of the LFT since the 1980s, but if the LFT is to ever be reformed in a way that explicitly addresses women's labor rights, women workers and their allies will need to form a much stronger, united, and more vocal movement to engage in social dialogue with the government, labor unions, and political parties. If women are not involved in broad, highly mobilized, and vocal movement, it is much less likely that labor law reform will address their needs and rights as workers.

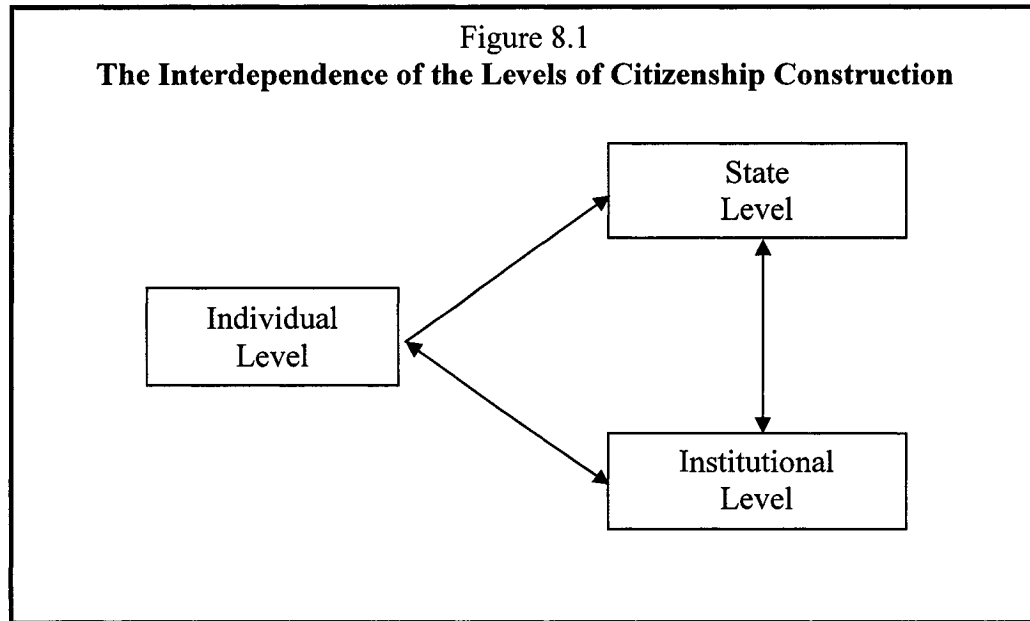
The Interdependence of the Three Levels of Citizenship Construction

A final observation concerns the relationship between the three levels of citizenship construction. Throughout this dissertation, I have treated them as separate levels of activity that can take place concurrently. In retrospect it is clear that the three levels are much more interdependent than originally suggested. For example, women will not be active at the state level, promoting changes to labor law, if they are unaware of the rights they have as workers. The work that groups like GEM, the RMS, MUTUAC-MAS, and the union federations are doing to raise women's gender consciousness is a critical first step in building a stronger movement to support the expansion of women's labor rights. Similarly, the work of union women to transform their own unions into spaces that

respect women's labor rights is also important in helping transform those unions into organizations that will throw their weight behind women's labor rights in discourse with the state. Finally, if union democracy is critical to transforming unions into spaces that reflect and promote women's labor rights, then the work of the GTNLPG is critical not only for promoting labor law reform that strengthens women's labor rights, but also for promoting a reform that eliminates the foundations of the corporatist union structure.

While the three levels are still useful for analytical purposes, the relationship between the levels is more complex than suggested in Chapter 2. The examination of women in the social construction of citizenship in Mexico presented here suggests that this relationship can be summarized as follows: the process of the social construction of citizenship begins with civil society actors working at the individual level to raise people's awareness of their rights. Subsequently, individuals with a sense of their rights can direct their agency in two different directions—either toward the state, as part of civil society's struggle to change citizenship rights in federal law, or toward institutions, where individuals and civil society actors can work within institutions to transform them into spaces where the rights of citizens are realized. As institutions change to become more respectful of citizenship rights, actors within them can become involved in consciousness-raising activities directed at individuals. Moreover, these institutions may join in the social struggle to promote citizenship rights vis-à-vis the state. Another relationship exists between the institutional and state levels. Should the state create, expand, or redefine citizenship rights, new laws may force institutions to respect the

citizenship rights of individuals where they previously had not done so. This relationship is depicted in Figure 8.1.



Recognizing the interdependent relationship between the three levels of citizenship construction can improve our understanding of the ways that citizenship construction takes place by providing a framework with which to examine how the idea of rights is transferred through and between different social levels. With an improved understanding of the interdependence of the three levels of citizenship construction, we are better equipped to analyze civil society's efforts to construct citizenship rights at each level, in light of the ways these efforts will affect efforts of citizenship construction at other levels.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings presented here raise some interesting questions for future research on the factors that contribute to the success or failure of civil society actors' engagement at each separate level of citizenship construction. I conclude by focusing on the ways that future research can refine the analysis of each level of citizenship construction in order to give us better tools for understanding the successes and failures of union women's engagement in the social construction of women's labor rights.

With regard to the individual level, I have shown that consciousness raising activities have been an important catalyst for union women's agency in the struggle to expand women's labor rights. The next important step is to examine more closely the ways that different factors can alter the effectiveness of consciousness-raising activities. For example, no matter how good the intentions of the group conducting these activities, it may be difficult to secure women's participation and/or continued interest—especially when they have domestic responsibilities. The type of activities may also lead to different outcomes. A general course on women's rights may not have the same effect as a more focused course on sexual harassment or a week-long leadership training program. Future research can refine our understanding of the individual level of citizenship construction by examining how variables such as scheduling and type/length of activity influence the outcome of consciousness-raising activities.

At the institutional level, future research can help us understand how union democracy affects women's ability to advocate women's labor rights within their unions. Union democracy has the potential to improve the situation for women, especially in cases where women make up a substantial percentage of a union's membership. But we know from literature on democratic transition and consolidation that democracy does not

automatically translate into increased representation of women in elected office and other positions of political power (see Waylen 1994).¹²⁰ As/if more Mexican unions begin to democratize, future research can begin to examine the factors that permit or prevent union leadership from addressing women's rights. For example, will cultural ideas about women's (un)suitability for leadership positions lead women to vote for male candidates or for women who do not have a women's rights platform? Future research can also examine what kinds of representation levels are necessary to promote women's rights. For example, are a critical mass of women or quotas for women's representation necessary? Such questions will allow us to examine the importance that union democracy will have in transforming unions into institutions within which women's labor rights are realized.

As I argued in Chapter 7, there is what could be called the beginnings of a women's labor movement in Mexico, comprised of union women's networks, NGOs, activists in the maquila sector, international allies working through legal channels to protest violations of the NAFTA labor agreements, and even some Mexican union federations, like the UNT and the FAT. However, the activities of these groups tend to be examined in isolation, and it is rare for studies to look at the intersections between the activism of unionized and non-unionized women workers in support of women's labor rights.¹²¹ It is clear from the discussions throughout this dissertation that union women

¹²⁰ The reasoning behind this argument is that during democratic transitions, women tend to play an active role in the mobilization of civil society organizations against the authoritarian regime. However, with a return to formal democratic politics, traditionally male-dominated political parties tend to become the central political players. Political parties may take steps to court women voters, such as appointing some women to leadership positions or supporting the creation of a women's office, but this does not guarantee that women's overall representation in important political positions will increase or that the women's office will have a clear mandate and sufficient resources and autonomy to allow it to effect change.

¹²¹ A recent exception is Stevenson (2004).

can be successful in promoting change when they act collectively, including in discourses with government actors. Future research can refine our understanding of the women's engagement at the state level of citizenship construction by exploring the development of the women's labor movement—especially alliance building between unionized and non-unionized workers—and how it interacts with the state and other civil society actors in an effort to support the expansion of women's labor rights through a reform of the LFT.

This study has revealed that in Mexico, union women and their allies in civil society are playing an important role in the social construction of women's labor rights. Refining the theoretical framework through future research will help us better understand the ways in which the burgeoning women's labor movement is engaging in the struggle for women's labor rights in this challenging context.



People in Detroit, where I grew up, like to say that there are two seasons in Michigan—winter and construction. And indeed, road work seems never ending: more than six years after I stopped commuting every day through the construction at the I-94/I-75 junction downtown, there is still work being done to repair it. Fortunately for construction-weary Detroiters, there is at least a break that begins each November. There is no such break for Mexican women seeking to redress the discrimination they face as workers and unionists. Given the political, economic, and cultural context in Mexico, for union women and their allies, engagement in the social construction of women's labor rights will be a long and difficult struggle, even if it is a necessary one. But what was clear from my many interviews with union women about their role in transforming

attitudes, unions, the LFT, and Mexican society was that they have as much hope and energy as they have frustration and cynicism. This brings to mind a quote from Victor Quiroga (in Hathaway 2000: 159), a lawyer with the FAT, who stated at the FAT's 1997 National Congress,

We take two steps toward our utopia and see that it is four steps farther off. So we take four steps and see that it is eight steps farther off. If we take eight steps, it's sixteen steps farther away. So what good is our vision of utopia? It keeps us walking.

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**ETHICS REVIEW
ANNUAL STATUS REPORT/RENEWAL REQUEST/FINAL REPORT**

Continuing review of human subjects research requires, at a minimum, the submission of an annual status report to the REB. This form must be completed to request renewal of ethics approval. If a renewal is not received before the expiry date, the project is considered no longer approved and no further research activity may be conducted. When a project has been completed, this form can also be used as a Final Report, which is required to properly close a file. To avoid expired approvals and, in the case of funded projects, the freezing of funds, this form should be returned at least 1 month before the current approval expires.

REB File #: 89-0602

Project Title: "Economic Transitions and Democratic Deepening: The Changing Significance of Organized Labor and Its Impact on the Development of Women's Citizenship in Mexico"

Principal Investigator: Rachel K. Brickner

Department/Phone/Email: rachel.brickner@mail.mcgill.ca

Faculty Supervisor (for student PI): Philip Oxhorn

1. Were there any significant changes made to this research project that have any ethical implications? ___ Yes ___X___ No
If yes, describe these changes and append any relevant documents that have been revised.
2. Are there any ethical concerns that arose during the course of this research? ___ Yes ___X___ No. If yes, please describe.
3. Have any subjects experienced any adverse events in connection with this research project? ___ Yes ___X___ No
If yes, please describe.
4. ___X___ This is a request for renewal of ethics approval.
5. ___ This project is no longer active and ethics approval is no longer required.
6. List all current funding sources for this project and the corresponding project titles if not exactly the same as the project title above. Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.

All of the current funding for this project is from personal sources and Philip Oxhorn's (supervisor) research grants.

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ Date: May 5, 2004

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: May 7, 2004
(for student PI)

For Administrative Use	REB: <input type="checkbox"/> AGR <input type="checkbox"/> EDU <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REB-I <input type="checkbox"/> REB-II
<input type="checkbox"/> The closing report of this terminated project has been reviewed and accepted	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The continuing review for this project has been reviewed and approved	
<input type="checkbox"/> Expedited Review	<input type="checkbox"/> Full Review
Signature of REB Chair or designate: _____	Date: <u>May 12, 2004</u>
Approval Period: <u>June 13, 2004</u> to <u>June 12, 2005</u>	

Submit to Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, James Administration Bldg., rm 429, fax: 398-4853