Tasmanian Trade Unions
and Women's Issues 1960 - 2000:
Experiences of Women in Senior Positions

Karin Dowling

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

the Degree of

Master of Commerce

University of Tasmania

March 2009

Morris
Thesis
DOWLING
MCom
2009

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

K. Dal.

Karin Dowling

20 . 03 . 09

Date

i

Statement of Authority of Access

This thesis may be reproduced, archived, and communicated in any material form in whole or in part by the University of Tasmania or its agents, and may be made available for loan and copying in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Karin Dowling

20·03·09

Date

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people who have supported me through to the completion of this study. I extend heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Professor Michael Hess, for his guidance and good humour as I developed this work. Thanks also to my family for their unwavering support; the completion of thesis is a significant personal achievement for me and their encouragement has been invaluable. Finally, I wish to thank, and express my deep admiration for, the Tasmanian union women who participated in this study.

Abstract

In the 1990s, Australian trade unions faced an unprecedented battle for survival. Traditional union heartlands were rapidly diminishing and potential union members were now located among previously marginalised, and underrepresented, groups of workers. A key challenge confronting unions was to maintain relevance and increase membership in the new Australian industrial landscape.

In the 1990s, the labour movement at large acknowledged that, in order to appeal to traditionally non-unionised groups of workers such as women, formal union structures must be more representative at senior levels. This was especially the case with women who, as workers and as union members, would require unions' commitment to major structural and cultural change. However, trade unions were traditionally male-oriented, paternalistic hierarchies that have long consigned women and women's issues to the margins of union activity. Firmly entrenched gender relations presented a significant strategic barrier to effective structural and cultural change. Unions were therefore confronted with a dual challenge: firstly, to effect a major transformation in union attitudes towards women and women's issues, and secondly, to reform traditional, hierarchical union structures as female-friendly organisations that would appeal to women activists.

In Tasmania, a historically socially and politically conservative state, there have been a number of significant 'breakthroughs' by women into positions of influence in the union movement. A review of the literature identifies a gap in

the historical record of female union activism in Tasmania in the late 20th Century. This thesis records and analyses the experiences of three Tasmanian women who played significant roles in unions in this period. It adds valuable personal narratives to Tasmania's recorded labour history and makes an original contribution to the literature on women in unions. Analysis and interpretation of the lived experiences of three pioneering Tasmanian union women enables this thesis to offer a historically specific perspective on the Australian trade union movement's campaign to promote women as leaders within the movement.

Glossary

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACOA	Administrative and Clerical Officers Association
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ALP	Australian Labor Party
APSA	Australian Public Service Association
CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
FMWU	Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union
LHMU	Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union
MOA	Municipal Officers Association
NCC	National Civic Council
PSA	Public Service Association
TTLC	Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research aim

The aims of this thesis are twofold; firstly, to record the experiences and personal reflections of three 'breakthrough' women employed in senior positions in Tasmania unions since 1960, and secondly, to site these women's experiences in the context of the broader Australian union movement's strategy to promote women to positions of formal authority. This thesis does not attempt to extrapolate its findings as generalisations about all senior women in Australian unions. It simply aims to identify the key themes underpinning these particular women's experiences, fully acknowledging their specific historical context. This thesis may offer some insight into various aspects of the national labour movement's campaign to promote women within trade unions. However, this study is acknowledged as just one component of a more comprehensive research project that could be undertaken in future.

1.2 Research method

The research approach consists of a review of the existing literature, including case studies, historical records, theoretical analyses and personal records. Complementing the literature review, primary data was gathered from interviews with three pioneering Tasmanian union women; Austra Maddox, Pauline Shelley and Lynne Fitzgerald. The lived experiences of these women are recorded and analysed to identify their personal characteristics, motivations and perspectives on the prospects for women unionists. Although positioned in the Tasmanian context,

this thesis nonetheless develops a discussion of the broader emergent themes, potentially offering new perspectives on strategies to promote women within unions.

1.3 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 provides a historical review of the characteristics of Australian trade unions after the 1960s. This period is considered significant because it encompasses the peak of union density and influence in Australian industrial relations, and also the most recent period of significant membership decline. The historical review then narrows in focus to the 1980s and 1990s, decades when many unions began to publicly acknowledge the unsustainable nature of their traditional, male-dominated structures and agendas. Finally, the chapter reviews existing literature to identify the relationship between feminism and unionism in Australia; this section describes the influence of the women's movement on trade union policy since the 1960s.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology; this includes an overview of issues in interpretive research, interview techniques and issues of validity and reliability. The selection of Austra Maddox, Pauline Shelley and Lynne Fitzgerald to participate in this study is explained in this chapter. The first section of chapter 4 sites the case studies in the Tasmanian context. This section reviews the political and social characteristics of Tasmania from 1960 to 2000 and proposes that a form of Tasmanian historical exceptionalism makes Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences unique among Australian union women officials. The general and

specific background literature reviews underpin the interview analyses that form the second section of chapter 4.

Chapter 5 is a more detailed analysis of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's personal narratives. Their stories are referenced to the existing literature, and their own interpretation of significant events is emphasised. The thesis concludes with a comparison of the experiences and reflections of the three pioneering labour women interviewed in relation to the strategic aims of the union movement to become more female-friendly and actively promote women as senior officials.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

To understand the emergence of 'femme-friendly' policies within Australian unions in the 1980s and 1990s, it is necessary to contextualise that policy formation historically. The organisational characteristics of trade unions, their membership coverage and industrial strategies were, and some argue still are, undergoing a challenging process of change (Griffin, 1992; Griffin & Moors, 2002). Labour analysts suggest that a number of external and internal pressures on the labour movement continue to drive the process of trade union reform (Peetz, Pocock & Houghton, 2007: 152ff.). They argue that historical experience inevitably informs union strategy, because history influences contemporary expectations of unions and informs decisions about future policy direction (Griffin & Svensen, 1996: 533). This chapter reviews the existing literature to site the experiences of three pioneering Tasmanian union women in the context of Australian labour history and politics.

The literature review commences with a description of union characteristics from 1960-2000. This section provides a broad overview of Australia's labour movement composition in the 1900s, with particular emphasis on the factors affecting union density since 1960. Changes to Australia's industrial relations system since 1960 are reviewed, and the impact of those changes on trade union membership and activity are discussed. This section identifies what Australian unions looked like and the wide-ranging challenges facing them in the period

1960-2000. The second section of the literature review focuses on union responses to the various challenges confronting them, specifically in relation to membership levels and female activism. The final section of the review considers the relationship between the women's and labour movements in Australia after 1960. This section investigates the impact of gender politics on trade union policy and women's promotion to senior positions within the labour movement.

2.2 Trade union characteristics 1960-2000

Organised Australian trade unionism took root in the 1850s (Martin, 1975: 23). Increased immigration and economic prosperity encouraged the emergence of stable union organisation, first among skilled town workers and soon after among rural mining workers and pastoral workers. By the 1880s, white collar workers such as public servants and teachers were also organised across much of the country (Martin, 1975: 24). There followed decades of cyclical rise and fall in union membership across various industries. This has been comprehensively recorded and evaluated by labour analysts with a particular interest in causation (see for example Dabscheck & Niland, 1981; Griffin & Svensen, 1996; Peetz, 1997).

A range of factors have been espoused as the key drivers for declining union density since 1960. These include labour and economic market changes, regulatory and legislative changes, worker attitudes and employer strategies (Cooper & Patmore, 2002; Watson, Buchanan, Campbell & Briggs, 2003). Most agree that the membership levels of unions are strongly influenced by industry shifts from

traditional manufacturing to an information technology base. Buchanan and Briggs (2005: 9) described the move from 'traditional' to 'new' union heartlands:

> The former are primarily comprised of skilled and unskilled blue-collar males working in the private sector. By contrast, the new heartlands are unions that represent white-collar workers, especially professionals, who are often women and work in the public sector.

Coinciding with changes in the composition of the labour market has been an increase in casual and part-time employment, both of which have tended to have lower unionisation rates (Buchanan & Briggs, 2005: 5). Existing trade union membership has also decreased within individual industries and occupations, and within full-time and part-time employment groups (ABS, 2005: 5). Hose (2003) researched structural change within unions from 1969-96 and identified a link between shifting labour market characteristics and union membership levels and types. Examining statistical data relating to union formations and dissolutions during the period, Hose (2003: 189) reported:

> [The] changes to workforce composition are reflected in the formations and dissolutions of the period, with the majority of newly formed unions being white-collar, and blue-collar unions constituting the bulk of those dissolved.

As well as a shifting industrial landscape, the Australian industrial relations environment changed dramatically after the mid-1980s and this too contributed to the general decline in union membership (Cooper & Patmore, 2002; Dabscheck, 1995). Research examining the impact of external regulation and anti-union legislation upon unions' ability to recruit and organise members reveals that the implementation in Australia of formal restrictions on union activity has followed international trends. This is reflected in the shift in academic discourse focusing on

unions from traditional industrial relations theory to human resource management within organisations (see for example Peetz, 1997; Van den Broek, 1997; Weiler, 1990). While industrial relations places unions as central players in employment relations, human resource management sees them as more marginal and less legitimate actors.

In 1996, the election of a conservative Coalition Federal Government saw the introduction of legislation in Australia that stymied union activity within workplaces (Cooper & Patmore, 2002: 5). A significant consequence of this was that union officials were limited in their capacity to interact directly with potential members at their place of work; this rendered many traditional workplace-based recruitment methods ineffectual (Ellem, 1999: 139). New legislation also confirmed the place of individual bargaining in workplace relations, specifically excluding unions from the bargaining process. Hostile employers were increasingly encouraged, politically and legislatively, in their anti-union behaviour (Cooper & Patmore, 2002; Dabscheck, 1995; Ellem, 1999). Other significant changes included the restriction of Federal Awards to a maximum number of allowable matters and the exclusion of union preference clauses from Awards. Statistical data since 1996 seems to support the argument that ideological and legislative changes contributed strongly to a negative shift in employer and employee attitudes towards trade unions and their role in workplace relations (ABS, 2004; Ellem, 1999).

As labour movements worldwide sought to respond to changing membership demographics and the reformation of the industrial landscape, a new subject of debate among labour historians and analysts gained momentum - the classification of unions (Hall & Harley, 1997: 2ff.). The use of typologies is a popular method of categorising unions; however the classical union typology of craft, industrial and general unions was clearly no longer relevant if considered literally (Hall & Harley, 1997: 37). In 1981 Dabscheck and Niland included house unions and occupational unions and later Deery and Plowman (1991, cited in Hall & Harley, 1997: 3) broadened the classifications to encompass 'craft, occupational, industry and general' unions. Others elected to categorise unions by reference to the external structural environment in which they operate, for example by registration arrangements (state and federal unions) or their affiliation to the Australian Labour Party (ALP) and state Trades and Labour Councils (see for example Blain, 1985; Dufty & Fells, 1989; Martin, 1989).

Despite the variations, there was consensus among labour commentators about the magnitude of the challenge confronting traditional union typologies and structures (see for example Bramble, 1995; Buchanan & Briggs, 2005; Griffin & Svensen, 1996; Peetz, Webb & Jones, 2002). Buchanan and Briggs (2005: 6) assert that in the decades since 1960, Australian unionism has changed so significantly that 'classical union ideologies and modes of calculation are no longer adequate for making sense of the current situation and devising effective responses to it'.

The challenges for unions arising from the political and industrial upheavals of the late twentieth century appeared to be many (Cooper & Patmore, 2002; Pocock, 1998). Among other things, they included issues of recruitment, representation, structure and classification. Unions also continued to face an ideological battle for the hearts and minds of the new wave of Australian workers (Buchanan & Briggs, 2005: 11). In the late 1990s, Pocock (1998: 139-140) summarised a number of unresolved threats to unions' long-term survival:

> [S]ome of the long-term challenges facing unions remain unchanged and urgent: how to protect, recruit and represent the growing population of precarious, contingent workers; how to establish and support effective union organisation in the workplace as bargaining and employer strategy become more localised; and how to manage union institutions as their resources shrink.

The second section of this literature review examines labour movement responses to these challenges. Contemporary sources are reviewed to establish the success or failure of unions to reverse declining membership levels. The literature review also considers unions' ability to increase their relevance to previously marginalised, but rapidly growing, groups of workers such as women.

2.3 Union responses to key challenges

The first section of this literature review identifies that the characteristics of Australian trade unions, and the industrial environment in which they operate, have changed dramatically since 1960 (see for example Buchanan & Briggs, 2005; Griffin & Svensen, 1996; Hose, 2003; Peetz, 1997; Pocock, 1998). Major changes include new industry foci and changed job characteristics, the political push to decentralise bargaining and eliminate the influence of unions in the workplace, and

the simultaneous increase in part-time and casual labour. Some commentary goes as far as to claim that these factors have all contributed to the emergence of a new type of Australian unionist in the 21st Century (Peetz *et al.*, 2002: 104f.).

Union responses to the significant challenges facing them are particularly relevant in the context of female union activism. The next section of the literature review identifies just how unions chose to respond to declining membership levels, both in general and more specifically in relation to women. The review considers union strategies in terms of how they supported or inhibited the promotion of women to senior positions. This is a preliminary exploration of changing gender relations within unions, providing a broad historical context for this chapter's subsequent discussion about the role of the women's movement in Australian labour movement politics.

From the 1980s, unions found themselves operating in a much-altered political and economic environment. This had considerable influence on industrial and organisational policies, particularly those that targeted the recruitment of new members (Griffin, 2002: 211). Recognising the substantial transformation within the labour force, and consequently the changed expectations and needs of potential union members, unions were faced with a stark reality: traditional methods of recruitment and organising were simply no longer relevant (Griffin, 2002; Peetz, 1997). There loomed the daunting prospect of engaging with potential members in an increasingly hostile and more individualistic industrial environment, where many employers were well-resourced in their quest to undermine union influence

in workplace relations (Dabscheck, 1995; Ellem, 1999). The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and some progressive union leaders consequently looked for innovative strategies to arrest, and they hoped reverse, the catastrophic trend of declining membership (Hall & Harley, 1997; Peetz, 1997).

Peetz (1997: 184) suggests that individual unions responded to declining density levels in much the same way that the broader labour movement responded to structural change in labour market changes. He emphasised that in the late 20th century the Australian union movement confronted critical decisions about future policy: While external changes may have been most threatening to union membership levels, 'how they translate into effects on union membership depends on the response of unions to those changes' (Peetz, 1997: 184). In 1994, unions, led by the ACTU, responded to the decline in membership levels with strategies including targeted recruitment programmes such as the Organising Works approach (ACTU, 2001; Griffin, 2002). This programme involved the employment of specialised member recruitment officers within unions and the expansion of benefits to non-traditional services such as discounts and insurances (Griffin, 2002). Organising Works was described as a hands-on educational programme designed to introduce young workers to the benefits of unionism and to the idea of work for a union (Griffin, 2002). The programme was launched by the ACTU as the centrepiece in a broad range of initiatives addressing recruitment methods and weakening activism within Australian unions. It provided a strategy document for Australian unions that focused on increasing workplace union activity and organisation at a grass-roots level (Bramble, 1995). There was recognition that the

short-term recruitment projects of years past would no longer be sufficient to halt and reverse the decline in membership levels (Peetz, 1997).

Mirroring the Australian experience, UK researchers also recognised the serious challenges to recruitment facing unions in the 1990s; a large amount of contemporary commentary centred on the contrasting models of servicing and organising (see for example Hall & Harley 1997; Mason & Bain, 1991; Peetz 1997). In the 1980s, a servicing model dominated Australian unions (ACTU, 2001: 1). Peetz *et al.* (2002:86) describe this model as one which involves the union establishing

> ...a transactional relationship with its members: the union provides certain services in return for the payment of membership fees. [It] is thus a third party to the employment relationship. Paid union officials take responsibility for recruitment of members and for 'solving' members' problems.

The services offered included advocacy, negotiation and non-industrial benefits such as discounts, insurances and legal referrals (Peetz *et al.*, 2002). Proponents of this model claimed that service provision was the most appropriate role for unions in an individualistic, fragmented social and work situation with the argument that 'those unions that can assess and meet their members' special needs specifically will arrest or reverse membership decline and remain viable' (Hall & Harley, 1997:1). Others argued that this model of unionism placed too much emphasis on members as customers as opposed to encouraging them as active industrial participants (Bramble, 1995). The service provision approach was further criticised by some as a betrayal of fundamental union ideology and as an

abandonment of the true class struggle for workers rights in favour of bureaucratisation (see for example Bramble, 1995; Hall & Harley, 1997; Peetz *et al.,* 2002).

The continuing decline in union membership levels across most sectors of the labour force indicated significant flaws in the servicing model (ABS 1982, 2005; Ellem, 1999). The ACTU subsequently developed a strategy for the reinvigoration of unions based on the promotion of workplace-based activists, and the organising model of unionism rose to prominence in the early 1990s. Buchanan and Briggs (2005: 5) describe this model as a practical, albeit belated, response to 'the atrophy in union infrastructure, campaign capacity and workplace activism'. Oxenbridge (1998, cited in Peetz *et al.,* 2002: 86f.) summarised the fundamental shift in approach that the organising model represented, directly contrasting it with the servicing model in that the relationship was viewed not as transactional, but as transformational. Under the organising model:

> [M]embers change as they become involved in union activities to the point where they assume leadership roles, and in the process transform union structures. The union, in turn, begins to better reflect its membership.

At the core of organising unionism is the question of workplace activism and empowerment of members (Griffin, 2002). The development of effective workplace delegate networks was a particular focus of the Organising Works programme. Peetz *et al.*'s (2000) survey of Finance Sector Union delegates examined several issues directly relating to workplace delegate structures. They identified specific factors that increased the effectiveness of delegates in recruiting

13

and representing members at the workplace level (Peetz *et al.*, 2002). Among the

factors identified, Peetz *et al.* (2002: 99f.) found that delegates needed to embody

the principles of organising to be successful in encouraging long-term commitment

to the union:

> [S]uccessful recruitment depends on more than having the confidence to
> walk up to a new employee and asking them to join, it depends on
> confidence in undertaking a broader set of 'organising' behaviours.

ACTU (2001) literature supports these findings; the Organising Works authors

argued that developing organising behaviour among union delegates was at the

heart of the organising model. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that

improved industry networks and higher levels of delegate activism would translate

to increased membership for those unions that adopted the approach (Griffin &

Moors, 2002). This appears not to have occurred. In the UK, Mason and Bain

(1991) conducted a research project examining the strategies of unions who sought

to arrest declining membership. Mason and Bain (1991: 44) reported a clear gap

between 'theoretical commitment and existing practice' in terms of unions'

commitment to recruitment. Crucially, they identified that:

> A more complex problem appears to be prevalent within union structures,
> related to their organisational 'culture'... if individual unions are to
> translate recruitment potential into actual membership, then identifying and
> dismantling internal attitudinal and organisational barriers should
> constitute the starting-point (Mason & Bain, 1991: 44).

One proposed resolution to the problem of union culture centred on redefining

unions into new categories based on the characteristics of the workers that they

represented, thereby replacing traditional craft and industry union typologies

(Buchanan & Briggs, 2005: 13). Buchanan and Briggs (2005:13ff.) proposed that by using member characteristics, such as employment status and gender, unions could focus on developing new structures and cultures that were more cohesive and responsive to members. In 1983 the peak union body, the ACTU, embraced the prospect of redefining the union movement by overseeing a policy of strategic unionism (ACTU, 2001; Griffin, 1992). There followed the amalgamation of some 300 unions into 20 'super unions' (Department of Trade, 1987: 191). The amalgamation period marked a significant shift in the structure, direction and strategy of unions and also heralded a new era of union participation in Australian industrial relations (Griffin, 1992, 2002).

Contemporary labour researchers identify the importance of union mergers as a method of labour movement renewal. The wave of Australian union mergers from the late 1980s to early 1990s is attributed to three main events (Hose, 1993: 179ff.). Firstly, the pro-amalgamation policy of the ACTU and key union leaders is most widely recognised as a driver of the process (Hose, 1993: 179). Adding impetus to the public campaign was the Federal Government's push to decentralise bargaining. This prompted many unions to seek security in the new super unions (Griffin, 1992; Tomkins, 1999). Thirdly, the rapid decline in union membership across all sectors caused some unions to adopt defensive mergers (Griffin, 1992). As a means of survival, particularly for smaller unions, defensive mergers had 'the second largest impact on the probability of participation in an amalgamation after ACTU leadership' (Tomkins, 1999: 70). Whatever individual unions' reasons for amalgamation, it appears that the ACTU-led restructure of the union movement

inexorably altered the Australian political and industrial landscape (Cooper, 2002; Dufty & Fells, 1989).

Notwithstanding the movement's major restructure, the consensus among union leaders in the 1990s was that complementary strategic action at the workplace level was required to support the amalgamation process. It was hoped that while the ACTU's amalgamation strategy would counter broad political and economic challenges, individual unions would embrace cultural and structural renewal to address issues of recruitment, retention and gender imbalance (Mason, 1991; Parker, 2003). Simultaneous with amalgamations and the shift away from servicing-style unionism, many unions elected to confront internal organisational problems by focussing their attention on the recruitment of recent university graduates to salaried expert positions (Bramble, 1995). Bramble (1995: 401) reported the growth of expert officer appointments in unions and considered the effect of those appointments on member activism and internal union democracy:

> [A]necdotal evidence suggests that many of the current generation of union officials hold first degrees, if not postgraduate degrees, and media attention on the ACTU's 'Organizing Works' [sic] training programme has highlighted the youth and educational qualifications of what is expected to be the union movement's next generation of senior union officials.

In 1994 fifty-eight organisers were recruited to the Organising Works programme, two-thirds of them under the age of twenty-six and at least 60 per cent holding university degrees (Anonymous, 1994: 30). Callus (1986: 412) observed that the increase in expert, appointed, officers challenged the traditional composition of union officialdom and constituted a new stage in the development of the union

16

official labour market. In the early 1980s, union officials traditionally recruited directly from the membership, and elected by democratic process to their position, still constituted a large proportion of union officials (Callus, 1986: 424). Callus (1986: 426) suggested that later in that decade the growth of salaried positions requiring expertise, such as advocacy, research, training and administration, resulted in a distinct shift towards 'outside appointments - younger, better educated [and] more mobile'.

Despite this shift, embedded and inflexible union culture was continually identified by many researchers as an impediment to genuine union renewal (see for example Griffin, 2002; Mason & Bain, 1991; Peetz *et al.,* 2002; Pocock, 1995b). The ACTU's Organising Works programme apparently underestimated the depth of the cultural problems within the labour movement (Griffin, 2002). Internal union restructuring was intended to promote a new type of union activist and official, seemingly more representative of the new, non-traditional workforce unions sought to represent (Bramble, 1995; Griffin, 2002). The important issue of the changing nature of union heartlands was ostensibly being considered seriously in structural terms. Recognition that unions needed to better represent marginalised groups of workers within their hierarchies precipitated much internal restructuring, and in the 1990s women's activism was identified as potentially crucial to widespread union revitalisation (Callus, 1986; Nightingale, 1991; Pocock, 1995b). Callus (1986: 415) observed that in the 1980s women were conspicuously absent from senior positions within the majority of unions:

17

> [Women] remain grossly under-represented in full-time official
> positions...although they make up over 30 per cent of the workforce [they
> hold] only 12.4 per cent of full-time official positions. Even in unions that
> had a majority of women members, male full-time officials far outweighed
> female officials.

The focus of the strategies adopted by the ACTU and unions from the late 1980s was predominantly on general membership recruitment and retention, as opposed to specifically targeting under-represented segments of the workforce such as women (Nightingale, 1991: 3). For example, by 1991 women still accounted for only 13 per cent of branch secretaries of unions in Victoria, despite comprising approximately 40 per cent of the unionised workforce in that state (Nightingale, 1991: 7). Census data from 1991 (ABS Census, 1991, cited in Bramble, 1995: 407) confirmed the gender segregation within unions at that time:

> Despite comprising less than one-half of total union staff, men account for
> two-thirds of all trade union officials, while women account for nearly 90
> per cent of all clerical employees. Nearly 80 per cent of all men employed
> in trade unions are officials, as against just over one-third of all women.

It seems that the significant cultural and organisational change required to promote women within unions was not encompassed in the major union strategies implemented during the late 1980s (Pocock, 1995b: 22). Griffin and Moors (2002) provide an overview of the history and development of the Organising Works programme, including an assessment of the challenges to implementing organising principles in practice. They describe the programme as 'the vanguard for an organising-based philosophy aimed at stemming the decline of union membership' (Griffin & Moors, 2002: 2), but also note that a major drawback of the programme was that the general focus remained on recruiting new members per se, as opposed

18

to empowering under-represented groups of members to participate in formal union structures. Reviewing the progress of change almost a decade after its inception, Griffin and Moors (2002: 5) acknowledge the enormity of the challenge that confronted unions:

> [C]hanging an organisation's culture is a major task, a task that, arguably, neither OW [Organising Works] nor the union movement was ready for, or committed to in 1994.

Feminist commentators assert that from a gendered perspective, the failure of the union movement to meet head-on the challenge of cultural change has had lasting and far-reaching effects (see for example Cobble, 1993; Franzway, 2000; Pocock, 1995a). Just twelve months after the ACTU launched Organising Works, Pocock (1995a: 377) reported that '[w]omen's under-representation in union organisation is severe and extends to all levels of unions, especially the most senior ranks'. She examined barriers to female participation in union structures and noted in particular the negative perception of union representatives as

> ... overworked, isolated people who must deal with (and often project) aggression. A masculine culture and style is unattractive to many potential women activists... [e]ncouraging these women into sustained union involvement hinges on a significant change in the internal practices, climate and culture of unions (Pocock, 1995a: 396f.).

The various responses to the specific problem of women's under-representation in Australian unions remain largely unevaluated. However, it is clear that while targeted strategies were implemented to address the overall problem of union membership decline, most unions failed to translate rhetoric into action by devoting significant resources to women workers, activists and officials (Pocock,

1995a, 1998; Yates, 1996). Even when attempting to take action to improve

women's participation, many unions still restricted their actions to the 'adoption of

policy and low cost initiatives often initiated outside the union' (Pocock, 1995b:

22). Some unions certainly improved training for women members and activists,

and some deliberately strategised to accommodate women in their policies,

programmes and structures. However in the 1990s, the increasing participation of

women in the Australian workforce reinforced the need for definitive action to

improve women's representation and entrench women at senior levels within

unions. Pocock (1995b: 22) pressed the case for decisive union action on the issue:

> [M]ere policy and positive statement will not suffice. The long overlooked
> wealth of female experience and leadership potential, and the pressing need
> to demonstrate to current and prospective union members unions' real
> capacity to represent women, make stronger action an imperative.

Herein lay the problem for many unions. How were the largely male cadre of

union officials going to decide just what issues were of concern to working women

and what strategies could unions adopt to make formal union employment a more

appealing prospect for women? The point of this section has been to establish the

gap between growing feminisation of the workforce and continued male

dominance of union officialdom, despite ACTU efforts to make unions more

relevant to changing workforce structures. The final section of this chapter is an

investigation of the historically close relationship between feminism and labour

politics. Identifying the specific gender issues confronting contemporary trade

unions in their quest for relevance, a review of the literature reveals the many

barriers to career progression faced by female activists operating within traditional union structures.

2.4 The women's movement and labour politics

Since the 1960s the relationship between organised labour and the women's movement in Australia has resulted in considerable changes to union agendas, policies and internal structures (Franzway, 2000; Trebilcock, 1991). This section considers the significance of that relationship in terms of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences. A review of the literature determines when and how the different perspectives of the women's and labour movements collided, and investigates how this prompted the push for gender equality within union structures.

In the 1970s the Australian women's movement, like those in most Western countries, campaigned on issues of relevance to working women at the time, most notably equal pay and reduced working hours (Franzway, 2000). Franzway (2000: 31) notes the divisions among feminist commentators about the potential for the labour movement to prioritise women's issues socially and politically:

> [S]ome see labour movement politics as (irredeemably?) male dominated; others see it is materially important to women's interests; for others again, it is simply irrelevant.

The view that women's issues and the politics of class and labour have long been inter-related is widely supported (Bradley, 1999; Cook, Lorwin & Daniels, 1992; Franzway, 2000; Ryan 1984). Characteristic of this approach is Ryan's view (1984:

41) that union practice has, regrettably, tended to reflect social stereotypes and negative attitudes towards women workers: 'Unions concentrate[d] on men at the expense of women. Social attitudes put women down and trade union practices helped to keep them down'.

Nonetheless, in the late 20th century the growth of feminist influence within trade unions was strong, as feminists capitalised on the opportunity to resource political and social campaigns through the labour movement. Grieve and Burns (1994: 166) documented the rise of 'social feminists' within the movement. These were women activists who 'focussed on class oppression and capitalism, [and] therefore generally regarded trade unions as an important site of feminist struggle'. This first wave of feminists operating within organised labour institutions challenged the very foundations of traditional, male-dominated and hierarchical unions (Ryan, 1984: 38ff.). In the 1960s, reacting to the dominant masculine ideology of labour politics, the women's liberation movement organised around providing working women in Australia with an opportunity to influence the policies of the trade unions purportedly representing their interests (Francis, 2003; Pocock, 1995a). Female activists in the trade union movement united to 'reject the masculine hierarchical way of organisation…to overthrow existing political and social structures' (Francis, 2003: 64).

Francis (2003) investigated the rise of a feminist agenda within a Victorian trade union where men occupied the vast majority of senior positions. Francis' (2003: 70) findings support the general consensus that 'the women's liberation movement

provided the female activists with the ideological basis for challenging the

entrenched attitudes and privilege of the [union] leadership' (see for example,

Franzway, 2000; McKnight, 1986; Pocock, 1998).

In the 1980s and 1990s the level of union activism among working women was

increasing, irrespective of their personal sympathies with feminist values (Pocock,

1998: 141). Cobble (1993: 9) reported women's growing interest in union activism

during the period:

> Countering the conventional wisdom that women are less 'organisable'
> than men, research in the last decade consistently has shown that women
> workers are more interested in unions than men.

Since that time, the argument has matured that women are potentially strong

workplace advocates with broad social justice agendas, agendas that are highly

compatible with traditional union values (Booth, 1986; Cobble, 1993; Leigh &

Hills, 1989). From the available evidence, the 1980s and 1990s appear to mark a

significant point in Australian labour history; the changing relationship between

the women's movement and trade unions might be viewed as the inevitable

convergence of two key interest groups in labour movement politics. While trade

unions represented the political, social and economic agendas of working-class

Australians, the organised women's movement became increasingly active in the

pursuit of issues being raised by women, and on behalf of women, within those

organisations (Cobble, 1993; Parker, 2003).

In the early 1980s many feminists and union leaders began to recognise the potential benefits to both women and unions in promoting women's issues as central features of future agendas (Bradley, 1999: 157). Rapidly changing workforce demographics challenged union relevance and undermined traditional collective values; unions were confronted by a much-altered Australian industrial landscape comprising larger numbers of women occupying part-time and casual positions in traditionally non-unionised areas (Callus, 1986; Nightingale, 1991). Bradley (1999:164) observed the reinvigorated relationship between women, and women's issues, and union politics:

> Over the past decades feminism has posed a challenge to the marginalisation of women in unions, while unions themselves have grasped the importance of appealing to women as members in the context of feminisation and industrial decline.

Unions reeling from declining membership and a slumping public image clearly faced a major challenge: they could choose to embrace the opportunities offered by feminism, and possibly benefit from the associated renewal, or they could continue their decline by further entrenching male values within exclusive, patriarchal hierarchies (Callus, 1986; Pocock, 1998; Simms, 1987). Simms (1987: 76) recognised the enormous potential for those organisations adopting the former approach: '[in] restructuring unions to accept women as equals, is it not possible that women's culture may prove useful not only to women but to unions as well?'.

While unions grappled with the challenge of cultural change, feminist values were carried resolutely into the union arena and women's issues were gradually embedded in industrial agendas (Bradley, 1999: 177). However, the far-reaching

24

structural change required to promote women to formal positions of power within unions did not occur simultaneously. Bradley (1999: 187) viewed this as evidence that union strategy had failed genuinely embrace gender equality:

> The setters of rules and the primary definers are still largely male. Until more women become firmly established as holders of positional power this is unlikely to change.

Internationally, there was evidence that principles of gender equality were being enshrined in union organisational structures. A range of long-term measures were adopted by many unions to promote the active involvement of women at all levels (Trebilcock, 1991: 410ff.). These included the establishment of Women's Leagues and Committees, the allocation of seats for women on union committees and boards, an increase in union education about women's issues and a formal recognition of women's issues in broad policy terms (Bradley, 1999; Henry, 1971; Trebilcock, 1991).

In Australia, Pocock (1995a) and Nightingale (1991) evaluated the response of trade unions to the problem of women's activism. Their research aimed to determine the influences upon, and barriers to, female participation in union structures. Pocock (1995a) and Nightingale (1991) subsequently challenged the prevailing orthodoxy that 'women's personal characteristics... and/or factors relating to women's location in the labour market' were responsible for poor levels of female union activism (Pocock, 1995a: 383). They argued that unions were acting on implicit, incorrect, beliefs about women's activism, especially the definition of women as problems to be solved. This was repeatedly reinforced

because 'unions most commonly take action that addresses the personal deficiencies of women rather than deficiencies in the way unions work' (Pocock, 1995a: 383). Cook *et al.* (1992: 51) agrees that the focus on women, instead of unions, was unjustified and counterproductive in the long-term:

> Because of women's intermittent working life and the consequent turnover in female union membership, men saw them as undependable and unorganisable. Consequently, the union put less and less staff and energy into recruiting them to union membership, and into training them for union leadership.

Cook *et al.* (1992: 67) found that a combination of societal, union, job-related and personal factors combined to inhibit women's activism. Concurring, Pocock (1995a: 397f.) suggested that the solution lay in a significant shift in both the perception of women and levels of female activism at senior levels. This would depend largely upon more supportive and representative organising methods, proactive union policies and improved support structures. Pocock (1995a: 399) warned that '[a]ny lesser shift will see a continuing decline in what many women already view as an anachronistic and male bastion'.

Since the late 1990s there has been much debate about the efficacy of union responses to the needs and aspirations of female members (see for example Franzway, 2000; Manning, 1994; Nolan & Ryan, 2003; Parker, 2003; Pocock, 1997). Some expressed doubts about the ability of contemporary union strategy to increase the number of women in leadership positions and to empower women to exert genuine influence on union policy (Pocock, 1997, 1998; Trebilcock, 1991). A review of the literature reveals that, far from heralding a gender revolution

within trade unions, the decision to address gender representation was informed primarily by pressure to implement a rapid solution to declining union membership per se (Bradley, 1999: 161). Bradley (1999: 163) asserts that in the 1990s it was the realisation that women were potentially the core of any future membership base, not a gender revolution that spurred the efforts of some unions to increase the number of senior female officials:

> [There was] the realisation by trade unions that union revival depends upon recruiting members whose interests were not sufficiently catered for in the past: women, part-time workers, minority ethnic groups, young people.

In terms of translating this realisation into practice, Trebilcock (1991: 409ff.) suggests that unions typically progress through distinct stages of change. From a starting point of adopting a policy statement encouraging women to seek leadership posts, unions move through a period of self-analysis in which they seek to identify barriers to women attaining leadership positions. If these first phases are successful, there should logically follow the implementation of change in structures and working methods to help female activists overcome barriers to promotion. Critically, Trebilcock (1991: 409) highlighted that the most important stage, the practical transition from policy to structural change, was not in fact inevitable:

> [F]or many years, declarations on paper remained both the starting – and the ending-point of action in many trade union organisations... only when other elements in the strategy to promote women union leaders have come into play has change begun to occur.

Bradley (1999: 199) and Simms (1987) agree with the view that trade union policy rarely, if ever, translated into certain action without added impetus from women

activists within the organisations. They assert that traditional union hierarchies rarely initiated steps to improve the status of women members. Simms (1987: 110) found that 'action when it has occurred has been conceded, at times grudgingly, and the push has come from women's ginger groups within the unions or from those few individual women in key union positions'. This echoes Martin's (1980) earlier suggestion that most unions were slow to deal with women's issues formally; a problem compounded by many unions' inability – or reluctance – to adequately resource broader social and political campaigns. Martin (1980, cited in Cook, Lorwin & Daniels, 1987: 110) identified that 'Australian unions have primarily been reactors to issues rather than initiators of change'. Pocock (1995b: 23) reported that by the 1990s this situation was not much changed, and unions continued to respond to major ideological challenges with inadequate, ad hoc policy responses that rarely translated to action.

The purpose of this section was to investigate the convergence of feminism and labour politics in Australia since the 1980s. A review of the literature has identified the various barriers to women's trade union activism since the 1980, establishing the broader labour movement context in which the study's interviews will be sited.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review has described the general characteristics of Australian trade unions from 1960-2000, their membership coverage and varying approaches to

gender relations. The review identified the key drivers for structural change within unions after the 1980s. Externally, a rapidly shifting industrial landscape resulted in a significant decline in membership levels across traditional union heartlands. Internally, these changes were magnified as women's interest in union activism increased. Women, historically peripheral to traditional blue-collar union activism, became the core memberships of increasingly influential white-collar unions. At the same time, trade unions faced new challenges presented by the emergence of feminist agendas within masculine, male-dominated organisations.

Franzway (2000), Pocock (1995a) and Simms (1987) present compelling evidence that Australian trade union women are charged with the ultimate responsibility for effecting deep-seated cultural change within fundamentally female-unfriendly organisations; unions persist with the anachronistic view that issues of gender are 'problems to be solved' for women, by women (Pocock, 1995a: 383). These authors argued that if structural change continued to be ad hoc and developed as a short-term response to the labour movement's long-term crisis of relevance, then unions were highly likely to continue undervaluing the potential of women as union leaders (Franzway, 2000; Pocock, 1997).

This thesis takes up these points by articulating the narratives of the experience of three women union officials during this period of change in the role of women in Australian unions. An analysis of these contemporary union women's narratives will offer a historically specific perspective on the points raised in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This thesis has two main aims. Firstly, recording personal narratives will add to the historical record of Tasmanian trade unionism. Secondly, the thesis evaluates the experiences of three women who occupied senior union positions during the period when the labour movement sought to actively promote women as officials. This will offer a unique, historically specific, perspective on the contemporary debate about union strategy and gender relations. This thesis therefore adopts a case study approach to record the lived experiences of three pioneering Tasmanian trade union women. Particular emphasis is placed on their experiences from 1990 onwards as this is the period in which the trade union movement began to formally implement new strategies to recruit, retain and promote women within unions. The case study approach is validated by contemporary studies of female union activism (see for example Kirton, 2005; Nightingale, 1991), which find that personal narratives offer valuable insight into female labour movement activism, at the same time providing rich data to underpin an exercise in exploratory and interpretive research.

Chapter 1 provided a review of available literature to help contextualise this study's interviews. Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 46) emphasise the importance of context in any historical study. They propose that to establish an understanding of a social or historical context necessitates the collection of qualitative data: 'The

most useful ways of gathering these forms of data are participant observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and the collection of relevant documents'. The challenge for this study is to elicit rich, highly-personalised data from the interviewees, without compromising rigour. To enhance research rigour, interview data are triangulated with secondary source data from trade union and ACTU records, media reports and published works by female trade unionists and commentators. Seidman (1991: 10) endorses this multiple-methods approach as one delivering rigorous and topical research outcomes, finding that 'people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them'.

Chapter 1 provided a historical context in which to site this study's interviews. This chapter establishes the methodological framework that guides the analysis and discussion. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section establishes the theoretical background to interviewing as a qualitative research method. The second section explains the selection of in-depth interviewing for this study; this includes a description of interview techniques and their role in the interview process. The third section identifies issues potential challenges to validity and reliability in a qualitative research project of this nature.

3.2 Theoretical background

Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1995: 3ff.) identify a link between in-depth interviewing as a research method and the theoretical and methodological assumptions that are the foundations of the research approach. By choosing the

31

method of in-depth interviewing, Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 3f.) assert that the researcher is 'making a theoretical and methodological choice…the theoretical antecedents of in-depth interviewing coalesce in what is known as the interpretive tradition'. The interpretive approach to historical and social phenomena has a long history, having its roots in the works of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century German intellectuals (Steiner, 1994: 3). Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 4) assert that interpretivism contradicts the view that 'the study of social phenomena should employ the same scientific techniques as the natural sciences'; they suggest instead that reality is subjectively constructed rather than objectively determined.

Proponents of interpretive research argue that recording human experience, rather than raw data in isolation, and building theory from analysis of that lived experience, is a distinct benefit of the method (see for example Berry, 1999; Denzin, 1992; Dick, 1999; Minichiello *et al.,* 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Berry (1999: 3) defines the central concern of interpretive research as 'understanding human experiences at a holistic level'. Denzin (1992: 18) describes interpretivist theory building in the social sciences as utilising rich description to probe the motives, meanings, contexts and circumstances of action. Dick (1999: 2f.) suggests that in practice, the interpretive research approach involves the researcher, and often the participants, actively contributing to the process to identify phenomena and reach some understanding of underlying meaning:

> Deeper involvement of participants can further increase the diversity of data, and eventually therefore of understanding. Participants are [still] informants, but can also become interpreters and research designers.

32

In-depth interviewing is one process in the interpretivist tradition; eliciting high-quality data in an informal, flexible manner, then interpreting that data to supplement existing knowledge. Seidman (1991: 72) suggests that much of the value of in-depth interviewing as a research method lies in the close relationship between the participants and researcher, claiming that the resultant exchange is:

> ... a reflection of the personalities of the participant and the interviewer · and the ways they interact. [A] reflection of the purpose, structure, and method of in-depth interviewing [where] the social forces of class, race and gender, as well as other social identities, impose themselves.

Seidman (1991: 3ff.) also proposes that the depth of information and exploration of ideas is very much dependent on successful research design, technique and implementation. He supports Berry's (1999: 5) position that researchers must plan to overcome a number of potential problems, including interviewer bias, unreliable or distorted responses and the problem of distance between the interviewer and participant's own frame of reference. Schutz (1967, cited in Seidman, 1991: 3) identified an equally challenging problem with interpreting interview data; there are internal and external influences on the interview process that result from the gap in knowledge and experience that is present between two people by virtue of their very existence as separate entities. Therefore '[It] is never possible to understand another perfectly, because to do so would mean that we had entered into the other's stream of consciousness and experienced what he or she had'. Healey and Rawlinson (1994: 131) resolve this issue by recommending that researchers identify the participants' frame of reference within which particular events occurred, while concurrently limiting the factors which have the potential to distort the research findings.

To understand interviewing and its relationship to interpretivist research, Healey and Rawlinson (1994: 127) suggest that researchers must 'be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of both standardized and non-standardized interview techniques, and to know in what circumstances each is most appropriate'. This chapter therefore provides detail about commonly used interview methods, identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each, and finally explains the choice of in-depth interviewing and individual participants for this study.

Contemporary authors suggest that qualitative interview models lie along a continuum, with structured interviews at one end, semi-structured interviews in between and unstructured interviews at the other end (see for example Babbie, 2002; Bailey, 1989; Drever, 1995; Kidder & Judd, 1986; Patton, 1990; Strauss, 1987). The decision about which interview method to adopt for this study was made after considering the characteristics and research orientation of the most common forms of interview; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 12) and Oppenheim (1992: 41) describe structured interviews as standardised interviews, predominantly used in surveys or opinion polls. Each participant is asked an identical set of questions in the same order, to ensure comparability and to reduce potential bias (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995). The interview schedule, or list of pre-determined questions, usually consists of closed-ended questions and multiple choice answer options. Dick (1989: 13) acknowledges that while closed-ended questions are inflexible, they do in fact enable easier coding of responses and deliver 'data which are easily analysed, replicable and economical'. Perhaps the most significant criticism of structured

34

interviews is the limited amount of information the participant can provide to give insight into their responses; their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations cannot be expressed (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 61). Kidder and Judd (1986: 29) suggest that open-ended questions may sometimes be included in structured interviews, but they concede that the information subsequently provided can be difficult to decode and often leads to increased research costs.

Structured interviews are generally used in projects with larger sample sizes, where the aim is to identify patterns and make generalisations (Healey & Rawlinson, 1994: 125). Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 64) contend:

> ...this model of interviewing assumes that the researcher controls the flow of the conversation...the social interaction between the participants is formalised and highly structured... [and] the underlying assumption is that objectivity is both desirable and achievable.

Babbie (2002: 12) and Roberts (1981: 34) concur, describing the interview situation as a one-way process, with the interviewer acting as facilitator to collect primarily quantitative data. Some qualitative researchers have criticised the absence of meaningful interaction, resulting in constrained information exchange, as being impersonal and unable to reflect the social reality of qualitative interviewing (see for example Minichiello *et al.*, 1995; Oakley, 1988; Roberts, 1981). Dick (1999: 2ff.) emphasises that structured interviews are not an appropriate choice of method for most interpretivist research primarily because there is insufficient scope in the research design for identification of, and elaboration on, key themes during the process. High quality interpretivist research is responsive and participative; structured interviews simply do not offer the

researcher an opportunity to adapt to the interview dynamic or develop the research direction flexibly (Dick, 1999; Roberts, 1981). Because of their quantitative focus and inflexible design, structured interviews are not considered appropriate for case study research such as this.

Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 77) describe semi-structured interviews as those used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. This usually involves the use of an interview schedule which includes key topics for the interview, without specifying questions or their order. There is greater flexibility in questioning, and some divergence is possible to explore issues as they arise (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 78). Although this might reduce the comparability of responses, this model is expected to elicit more detailed information about the participant's perceptions. Semi-structured interviews are closer in process to the unstructured model of interviewing as both allow for more in-depth examinations of people and issues (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 77f.).

Healey and Rawlinson (1994: 133) identify semi-structured interviews as often adopting a two-tiered approach to the interviews. A semi-structured interview may include a common set of factual questions asked of all participants, and an informal conversation to enable participants to elaborate on topics of interest. Patton (1990: 112) noted the appeal of this style of interview to some interpretive researchers with an interest in also recording quantitative data: '[a]lthough this method provides less flexibility for questions...probing is still possible, depending on the nature of the interview and the skills of the interviewers'.

This study relies heavily on the voluntary participation of the interviewees, and on their willingness to disclose and discuss potentially sensitive information. To achieve interview conditions conducive to such disclosure, it is important that the researcher establishes good rapport (Berry, 1999: 8). Semi-structured interviews retain a reasonably high level of formality, and the scope for participant interpretation can be restricted by a pre-determined interview schedule and research scope (Berry, 1999; Patton, 1990). This thesis aims to identify the key themes underpinning the experiences of three senior women union officials. It was anticipated that each interview phase would direct and redefine the research focus to elicit the best possible data. Semi-structured interviews were therefore considered inadequate for use in this in-depth study.

Interviews with no formal interview schedule that proceed essentially as a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee are known as unstructured interviews (Babbie, 2002; Bailey, 1989; Minichiello *et al.*, 1995). Burgess (1982: 107) characterises unstructured interviews as those where minimal control is exerted by the interviewer; using a variety of techniques, the interview is subtly directed towards the research topic or area to ensure the interviewee is 'relating experiences and attitudes that are relevant to the problem'.

Healey and Rawlinson (1994: 123) observe that because the model of interview selected for a research project 'is linked to the research design and philosophical framework adopted', there appears to be a growing trend for greater use of unstructured interviewing in business and social research. Dick (1999: 4f.)

37

contends that this trend is growing for two main reasons: firstly, a large amount of

data can potentially be gathered on a multitude of topics in each interview and this

is therefore an efficient use of resources. Similarly, if access to participants is

limited or the researcher intends to interview a large sample, unstructured

interviews are potential opportunities to elicit maximum data with minimum

intrusion. Secondly, Berry (1999: 11) and Dick (1999: 5) identify unstructured

interviews as allowing the participant to place events in their own personal context.

This involves capturing respondents' perceptions in their own words. Maykut and

Morehouse (1994: 50ff.) assert that effective interpretive research requires

understanding the emotions and behaviours of people in the relevant context, as

opposed to viewing events from an observer's viewpoint only. Insight into past

events is therefore made possible through unstructured interviews because the

participants themselves can describe the meaningfulness of events from their

unique personal perspective.

As an extension of unstructured interviews, in-depth interviews offer perhaps the

greatest opportunity to elicit high-quality interpretive data (Dexter, 1970; Dick,

1999). Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 77) define in-depth interviewing as:

> Repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants
> directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives,
> experiences or situations as expressed in their own words.

Several assumptions appear to underpin this definition: that the interviews are

repeated; that there is an equal exchange between interviewer and interviewee; that

it is the interviewee's viewpoint that is sought and highly valued; and that the

information is sought in the interviewee's own language. These assumptions

characterise an unstructured, conversational style of interviewing where

information is freely exchanged and language is purposely informal and relevant

to the interviewee, so the interview becomes a dialogue, as opposed to an

interrogation (Berry, 1999; Dick, 1999; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Trouillot (1995, cited in Rose, 2003: 21) asserts that in-depth interviewing is well-

suited to historical study, because history refers to 'both the facts of the matter and

a narrative of those facts, both "what happened", and what is said to "have

happened"'. Swepson (2000: 2) concurs; because it is not always possible for the

researcher to observe the interviewee in his or her daily life, nor can we re-visit

times past, interviewing remains for many purposes one of the best sources of

insight that we have. However, like all research methods, in-depth interviewing

poses questions about process, data collection, analysis, reliability and validity.

Noting the dangers of making assumptions without sufficient critique of the

interview process itself, Dexter (1970: 157) cautions:

> Until that process is itself viewed as problematic, something to be analysed
> and explored, we will not be ready to determine what it records and
> measures, let alone how it can be used to draw valid inferences.

It is therefore important to continually clarify the research orientation of this

project and identify any possible challenges to validity and reliability when

selecting the interview method.

3.3 The choice of in-depth interviewing

In-depth interviewing was selected for this project because of its design flexibility, interpretivist research orientation and appropriateness to the historical review aspect of the study. As previously explained, Seidman (1991: 4f.) identifies a link between the researcher's theoretical orientation and the decision to use in-depth interviewing as a research or data collection method. Bilton, Bradbury, Stayner and Stephens (2002: 4) argue that different ontological and epistemological positions generate different methodologies. In other words, different models of reality lead to different views about what reality is. Bilton *et al.* (2002: 6) further argue that this necessitates different ways of validating or justifying data and data collection methods. Most qualitative research is underpinned by a firm belief that social reality exists in the form of significant relationships between people (Berry, 1999; Dick, 1999, Minichiello *et al.*, 1995). Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 73) claim that because of this, reality 'can only be known through understanding others' points of view, interpretations and meanings'. In-depth interviews allow access to these varying perspectives and interpretations that have a significant influence on people's actions.

The selection of in-depth interviews for this thesis was a decision informed largely by the historical and social aspects of the study. Bryman (1988: 87) contends that in-depth interviewing is utilised when a particular research question dictates it as the most appropriate form of data-collection; case-study research is one such situation. This thesis records and analyses the subjective experiences of three senior Tasmanian trade union women. In-depth interviews offered the opportunity

for an unencumbered, responsive exchange of information between participants and the researcher. It was concluded that this approach would allow the participants to self-identify key themes from their experiences and that as these emerged, the researcher would be able to compare existing theory with personal narratives.

The next section explains the specific interview techniques employed in the in-depth interviews and the reasons for their selection. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 10) argue that the choice of interview techniques is critical for interpretive research, because the nature and quality of data elicited is significantly influenced by the interviewer's approach to the process. Perhaps the most obvious element of all models of interview is the verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. A number of authors (see for example Benney & Hughes, 1956; Dexter, 1970; Dick, 1989; Drever, 1995; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Minichiello *et al.,* 1995) identify language usage and questioning technique as central to the success of an interview. Questioning techniques will vary depending on the model of interview employed. However, there are some aspects of interview technique consistently identified as relevant to in-depth interviewing (see for example Berry, 1999; Dexter, 1970; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990). These techniques are relevant to this study because they facilitate qualitative data collection without restricting the participants' ability to interpret and emphasise events from their own perspective. They include establishing rapport with the participants; clarifying research objectives; using probing techniques; recursive interviewing; and convergent interviewing techniques.

In the in-depth interview approach, the first task for an interviewer is to establish rapport with the participants. Berry (1999: 8) describes establishing rapport, or a productive interpersonal climate, as a matter of understanding another's view of the world and communicating your understanding appropriately. It is regarded as an important interview technique because the dynamic between interviewer and participant can significantly affect the interview process (Berry, 1999: 10). Berry (1999: 9f.) and Kvale (1996: 124) suggest that rapport can be established in a number of ways, including visibly respecting the informants' opinions, supporting their feelings, and acknowledging their responses. Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 80) also advocate reflecting participant behaviour during an interview; rapport can be achieved by 'matching the perceptual language, the images of the world, the speech patterns, pitch, tone, speed, the overall posture and the breathing patterns of the informant'. Kvale (1996: 128-148) concurs:

> A good contact is established by attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding, and respect for what the subjects say...[a good interviewer] allows subjects to finish what they are saying, lets them proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking.

Proponents of in-depth interviewing (see for example Dexter, 1970; Dick, 1999; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) recommend that the interviewer sets the tone of the relationship with the interviewee by appearing willing to learn from them, receptive to their ideas and sensitive to emotional cues. In the interviews for this study, rapport was initially established by encouraging the participants to determine the interview locations and scheduling to suit their personal commitments. Allowing interviewees a sense of control, or ownership of the

42

interview process, was a clear signal to each participant that this study was in many ways a vehicle for their personal story to be recounted in their own words. I identified my own background as a labour activist and union official before the first interview commenced. By providing some context for my research, my personal motivations and union background, I was able to establish relationships of mutual respect from the outset. During the interviews, I sought to empathise with participant perspectives, but without making judgements. I repeated during each interview that I was keen to learn from the women and saw value in their personal and professional contributions to the Tasmanian union movement. By conveying a sense of personal interest in their individual histories, I hoped to build greater rapport and elicit information that might otherwise have been withheld.

The second important technique for in-depth interviewing is clarification. Unstructured interviews require attention to the areas intended for discussion to avoid vagueness and a drift away from the key themes. Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 78) explain that the interview process reflects conversational norms: '[t]he reality of the social experience is that the conversation process, while not formally structured, is controlled to a certain degree'. In other words, an unstructured interview does not equate to one totally devoid of direction or purpose. Kvale (1996: 138) contends that many of the meanings which are clear to the interviewer may not be obvious to the interviewee, and it is therefore important to use language that is sensitive to the interviewee's context and world view. Dexter (1970: 159) suggests that to enhance their comprehensibility to the interviewees,

any specific questions should be easy to understand, single-barrelled (i.e. one idea or purpose per question), in a logical sequence and devoid of jargon.

To describe this study's purpose and structure clearly, the written invitation to each participant contained a description of the multiple-stage interview process and this was reiterated at the commencement of each interview. During the interviews, questions were brief and designed to elicit additional information about key themes as they arose. For example, during one interview a participant identified a lack of mentor support as a barrier to women reaching senior positions. To develop the discussion about mentor support as an influence on female career progression, the participant was prompted to elaborate on her own experiences with a simple question: 'Did you have a particular mentor in the movement?' Her response opened up a more detailed analysis of the issue and she offered her own perspective on mentoring.

A third technique is the use of probes, or exploration techniques. Berry (1999: 13) and Patton (1990: 80f.) suggest that these are designed to increase the richness of the data being obtained and to give cues to the interviewee about the intensity of response desired. Stewart and Cash (1988, cited in Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 90) describe probing as a technique to expose meaning from raw data: '[it is about] clarifying, and gaining more detail, especially when you are trying to understand the meanings that informants attach to original or primary questions'. Patton (1990: 83ff.) identifies three types of probes: detail-oriented, elaboration and clarification. Detail-oriented probes include specific types of questions which elicit more detail

from the interviewee about their response. In this study, detail-oriented probes included questions designed to reveal interpretation, such as 'How did you find the transition into the union, from an honorary position to a paid organiser?' Similarly, a participant described the negative prevailing attitudes towards women in her union at the time of her appointment to a senior position. To elicit more detail she was asked, 'How do you think you survived in such a hostile environment?' Probes such as these extracted more detail about otherwise generalised responses.

Patton (1990: 89f.) explains elaboration probes as verbal or non-verbal cues that prompt the interviewee to give more information. These can include nodding to indicate agreement or understanding, using facial expressions to prompt clarification, and quiet verbal cues to encourage more information without asking a direct question. Clarification probes are considered useful when the interviewer does not fully comprehend a response and might include prompts such as 'Could you talk a little more about that?' (Berry, 1999; Minichiello et al., 1995; Patton, 1990). Kvale (1996: 133) suggests that it can be useful for the interviewer to prompt further conversation on a topic by repeating some of the response back to the interviewee to elicit greater detail or a personal opinion: 'repeating significant words of an answer can lead to further elaboration'. This study employed each type of probe at various times during the interviews, to elicit the most comprehensive and personalised data. For example, one participant was asked:

> You mentioned working in a 'male' type of union. I'm interested in that
> idea and what it means to you. Could we talk a little more about that?

This question highlights a key theme raised by the participant themselves, demonstrates that the interviewer is really listening, and acknowledges that the idea is relevant to the research aim. In this way, more detail is extracted from the interview and the direction of enquiry is focused as the interview proceeds.

To prevent the conversation drifting away from the researcher's key themes, some researchers recommend that interviewers use transitions, or convergent interviewing techniques to refocus on the desired topic (Abrahamson, 1983, cited in Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 81; Dick, 1999). Dick (1999: 2) describes convergent interviewing as a series of interview 'cycles' that become increasingly focused as they are shaped by the issues arising from the preceding interviews. The interviews are analysed as they occur and the interviewer is able to focus greater attention on the key themes as they emerge. Dick (1999: 4) and Swepson (2000: 3) claim that this is a more efficient approach to data collection than many other methods of qualitative research, methods that collect large amounts of data without necessarily responding thoughtfully to the interview dynamics. This technique encourages the participants to make judgements about past events, volunteer suggestions for future action and interpret meaning as a legitimate part of the research programme. Schwartz and Jacobs (1979: 45) concur that the interpretive approach to research, concerned with exploration of meaning and perception, is well-served by techniques such as convergent interviewing because the interviewer is able to 'treat people as unique and to alter the research technique in light of information fed back during the research process itself'. In this study, the use of convergent interviewing enabled Austra, Pauline and Lynne to offer their

own interpretations of their union experiences, while at the same time providing a rich source of data about more generalised themes.

3.4 Issues of validity and reliability

Having selected the in-depth interviewing research method because of it's suitability to this type of study, it was then necessary to clearly define the parameters so as to establish the scope and any limitations of the study. This included selecting an appropriate sample of interviewees and addressing issues of reliability and validity. Burgess (1982: 98) and Thompson (1992: 45) acknowledge that it is often impractical for a researcher to interview an entire group of people about whom it is hoped to make generalisations. Once the researcher defines the target population, and if it is indeed impractical to interview each member, a representative sample will usually be identified for interview (Burgess, 1982; Thompson, 1992). For this study, the target population was women occupying senior positions within the Tasmanian trade union movement during the early 1990s. The women selected for interview were nominated in discussions with contemporary union leaders. They were identified as pioneering female activists widely regarded within the Tasmanian labour movement as initiators of significant cultural change within their respective organisations. Although local union records of employment are patchy, pre-study discussions with Tasmanian labour movement leaders confirmed that there were very few women occupying senior union positions in the early 1990s. Therefore, the selection of these three individuals would mean that the study encompassed the experiences of almost the entire target population. In this case, the determination to interview only three

women was also made based on the practical considerations of access to interviewees for multiple interviews, and time available to the researcher. Eisenhardt (1989: 533) and Linn (1983: 226) observe that the most effective sampling methods are those designed for use in the specific situation in which they will be used; they claim that there is no single preferable method of sampling. Stephan (1950: 372) concurs that sampling methods should be 'designed to achieve the specific purposes of the study as effectively as possible under the limitations set by the funds, personnel, time, and other resources that are available'.

Because of the historical specificity of this study, interviewees were deliberately selected because they occupied senior positions in the Tasmanian trade union movement during the period 1960-2000. This approach to sampling is advocated by other case-study researchers (see for example Burgess, 1982; Drever, 1995; Eisenhardt, 1989; Neuman, 2000). In-depth interviews are most frequently undertaken with participants purposely selected on the basis of some unique characteristic, or because they are members of a distinct and difficult to access group. Neuman (2000: 36) asserts that in qualitative research the focus is not so much on the representativeness of a sample or the technical aspects of sampling techniques, but on how the sample illuminates social life. In this study, the primary purpose of sampling is therefore to gather specific cases, events, or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding.

Babbie (2002: 67) contends that in-depth interviewing elicits information the researcher can use to build on existing theory and knowledge. Drever (1995: 6)

and Neuman (2000: 168) agree that this approach allows the researcher to select cases cumulatively and without the compulsion to generalise to a larger population. Linn (1983: 226) cautions that it is critical for the researcher to properly identify the study's objectives and any constraints, being careful to determine 'the sample size necessary to permit valid generalisations and [to limit] the inferences made from their study'. This thesis' in-depth interviews were conducted as part of a small-scale study and the size of the population was such that formal sampling was considered unnecessary. Drever (1995: 8) asserts that provided the limitations are acknowledged, the absence of sampling is not a serious restriction for a study such as this because its primary aim is to elicit reliable data and form an understanding about local context. This study deliberately avoids generalising to the broader Australian trade union movement. Analysing female trade union officials' experiences in the Tasmanian context simply reveals common themes that might form the basis for future exploration at a wider level.

The selection of a research method and study participants, however, does not in itself guarantee a valid or reliable study. The concepts of validity and reliability are central to any discussion about rigour in research (Eisenhardt, 1989; McDougall, 2000). Burgess (1991: 109) describes validity as whether the methods, techniques and approaches used in the research relate to and measure the data appropriately. Burgess (1991: 111) and Eisenhardt (1989: 541) explain the twofold problem of validity often confronting in-depth interviewers: firstly the potential influence of the interviewer on the interviewee's response (internal validity); and secondly whether the data obtained can be generalised (external validity). To

address this, many researchers adopt the use of triangulation (see for example

Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Dick, 1999; Minichiello *et al.*, 1995; Neuman, 2000).

Swepson (2000: 3) defines triangulation as the amalgamation of different methods

of collecting data in the study of the same phenomenon. Triangulation essentially

aims to overcome problems of bias and validity by mitigating the deficiencies of

one method with the strengths of another (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Dick, 1999;

Swepson, 2000). Research validity is enhanced in this study by a high level of

interviewee participation and feedback, and by reference to secondary source

material such as personal documents, trade union records and media commentaries.

The second potential problem confronting researchers is that of reliability, or the

credibility of the research method itself (McDougall, 2000: 724). Neuman (2000:

170-171) identifies a potentially significant problem confronting qualitative

researchers in this regard:

> Qualitative researchers consider a range of data sources and employ
> multiple measurement methods. Data collection [is] an interactive process
> in which particular researchers operate in an evolving setting and the
> setting's context dictates using a unique mix of measures that cannot be
> repeated.

This is particularly true in terms of in-depth interviewing, where checking the

strength of the data can be challenging. Neuman (2000: 175) acknowledges that

the researcher is never likely to replicate the interview in all, or any, of its aspects.

However, Minichiello *et al.* (1995: 178) identify some key steps that can be taken

by the researcher to reasonably assess reliability, including:

> [Documenting] how and why the researcher made certain decisions in the
> research process; their perceived impact on researcher and informant/s;

how the data were collected (interviews only or personal documents in addition to in-depth interviews or multi-method use); and how they were analysed.

A further challenge to research rigour can be found in how researchers analyse the data gathered. Data analysis is essentially the process of finding meaning in the information collected (Babbie, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989). Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 68ff.) identify three stages of data analysis – coding the data (discovering themes and developing propositions); refining those themes and propositions; and reporting the findings. They concur with Dick (1999: 1f.) that data analysis in qualitative research should not be viewed as a distinct phase that occurs after data collection; it is an ongoing process that occurs while the data are collected. The constant process of analysis requires the researcher to detect the conceptual issues as the interview unfolds, adapting probes and subject themes accordingly (Dick, 1999; Neuman, 2000; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

3.5 Conclusion

This study adopts key aspects of convergent interviewing because the primary aims were to elicit high-quality data and reveal the interviewees' interpretations of their own experiences. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for emerging themes after the initial interview. Once the significant themes were identified, these became the focus of the following interviews. During all the interviews, new themes were identified and a decision was made about their relevance to this study's specific context. Consequently, the focus of the study responded to, and was ultimately determined by, key themes as they were revealed by the

participants. The study meets the criteria for reliability and flexibility suggested by

Dick (1999). He claims that emergent research methods, such as convergent

interviewing, may offer a more reliable approach to qualitative data collection

because they allow the researcher to 'fine [tune] their actions moment by moment

as their understanding of the situation grows' (Dick, 1999: 3). Similarly, Berry

(1999: 1) proposes that in-depth unstructured interview can be simultaneously

responsive, participant-directed and reliable:

> [It is] a type of interview which researchers use to elicit information in
> order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view
> or situation; it can also be used to explore interesting areas for further
> investigation.

This thesis addresses the issues of validity and reliability through triangulation

with secondary source material and the adoption of responsive, participant-

directed interview techniques to elicit high-quality data. In-depth interviews have

been selected so that the researcher can attribute meaning to the experiences of

three pioneering Tasmanian union women. Seidman (1991: 4) emphasises the

value of contextualising those experiences:

> Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behaviour and
> thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that
> behaviour. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the
> meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out
> that experience.

The research meets this necessity of contextualising by employing interview

techniques specifically designed to elicit meaning and interpretation.

Chapter 4: Interviews

4.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the experiences of three women who occupied senior positions in the Tasmanian labour movement during the period 1960-2000. Austra Maddox, Pauline Shelley and Lynne Fitzgerald were not only successful union movement leaders in their own right; they were also instrumental in breaking down barriers to activism that confronted other female union activists. In many respects they can be viewed as 'breakthrough' women because their seniority challenged the status quo and heralded a new era of female participation at senior levels in Tasmanian unions. These women began their careers during a time of critical change in Tasmania and their experiences are inexorably linked to the political, economic and social environment in which they operated. To contextualise the experiences of Austra, Pauline and Lynne, it is necessary to review the characteristics of the Tasmanian state and its people leading to, and during this period.

This chapter reviews relevant literature on Tasmanian history and gives an account of the political, social and labour history of the state after 1900. The difficulties associated with such a review are identified and explained, highlighting a significant gap in the historical record of Tasmania's labour movement. The stories of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences as senior trade union officials are recorded in this chapter, and the key themes arising from their interviews are identified and discussed. This leads to a more detailed discussion of the main

themes of their experiences in chapter 4, and an analysis of them in the broader

context of gender politics in the Australian union movement.

4.2 The Tasmanian context - Tasmanian labour history 1900-2000

Contextualising any aspects of Tasmanian history is difficult because of the lack of

authoritative, or indeed, any, studies. There are a number of reasons why the

state's labour history remains at best patchy, and often completely untold.

Explanations include the enduringly conservative, very 'British' character of the

state's institutions (Robson, 1983, 1991); the anti-intellectualism that consequently

pervaded Tasmanian politics in the 1900s (Robson, 1997); the national focus of

Australian labour historians to the detriment of the states (see for example Garton,

1994; McKibbin, 1994); and the impact of the broader debate among labour

historians about the relative merits of classical and social historiography (see for

example Irving, 1967; Patmore, 1994)

Because of this lack of attention from labour historians, the context of the

relatively contemporary labour history in this study needs to be drawn from more

general Tasmanian historical studies. Here too, however, there are similar

problems affecting the quantity and quality of literature available for review. A

reasonably comprehensive collection of literature portrays Tasmania's very early

colonial history (see for example Fenton & Backhouse Walker, 1884; Goodrick,

1977; West, 1852). Convict personal histories dominate this literature but analyses

of work and the role of labour are difficult to draw from the primary sources such

as diaries, letters and public documents. W. A. Townsley (1951, 1976, 1994)

contributed much to the recorded history of Tasmania's government, and an abundance of personal histories offer insight into the lives of individuals and events that shaped Tasmania post-colonisation (see for example Bennett, 1975; Green, 1956; Lake, 1975; Norman, 1987).

Historian Lloyd Robson compiled possibly the most comprehensive written histories and analyses of Tasmania, including the two-volume *History of Tasmania* (Robson, 1983, 1991) and *A Short History of Tasmania* (Robson, 1985). Relying mainly on primary sources, he comprehensively traced the Tasmanian experience from 1856 to the 1980s; this section consequently draws heavily on Robson's work as a basis for the historical review.

A review of available sources reveals a scarcity of literature objectively analysing Tasmania's general political and social growth post-1900, a problem compounded by the mid-1900s' dominance of a national social history movement. Unfortunately this means that the distinctiveness of Tasmania's general and labour history, and consequently many significant personal histories, were unrecorded. Australia's national historical context appears to contain many elements similar to the Tasmanian experience (Robson, 1997: 125ff.). This might reasonably lead to the conclusion that Tasmanian history, including labour history, is derivative of the mainland experience. However, Robson (1997: 128) finds, on the contrary, that following colonisation Tasmanians gradually developed 'a number of regional differences, economies and outlooks'. These differences existed not only across the state, but also between Tasmania and mainland states. Colonialism therefore

delivered a state steeped in British patriotism but paradoxically imbued with distinctly Tasmanian characteristics (Robson, 1997: 132). Far from being an offshoot of the mainland experience, Tasmania's early colonial history laid the foundations for a unique and influential labour movement. This thesis argues that there exists a 'Tasmanian exceptionalism' that has been neglected by labour historians in the national literature.

Firstly, the fundamentally conservative character of Tasmanians and their institutions explains in part the dearth of state-specific labour history records. Robson (1997: 133ff.) identified some key themes underpinning Tasmania's political and social development in the mid-1900s that help explain the impact of Tasmania's formative years on the approach of contemporary historians. The most significant theme is the traditionally conservative nature of the Tasmanian people and their institutions. Robson (1997: 70) emphasised Tasmania's particularly 'British' character and credited this with entrenching a traditionalist perspective on politics and social issues. The geographical isolation of the island was mitigated by maintaining close association with Britain; while other states operated with increasing autonomy, 'deep loyalty to the Empire in the case of Tasmania continued to flourish' (Robson, 1997: 71). As a consequence, recorded history was consigned to a role of record-keeping and academic discourse largely reflected the colony/ Empire relationship.

Tasmania's response to significant world events in the early 1900s provides valuable insight into the situation. When World War I was declared, Tasmanians

joined their mainland counterparts with renewed and fervent declarations of loyalty to the Empire (Robson, 1997: 89). This reflected the broader struggle for state identity, so although Tasmania was showing gradual signs of determination to develop independently, the state remained fiercely socially and politically conservative. Recorded history remained predominantly institutional and individual and there is no deeper analysis or record of debate among contemporary labour historians (Robson, 1997: 100). By late 1919 survivors of the war had returned to Tasmania in significant numbers, their heroism elevating them in status to a new form of social elite (Robson, 1997: 90). In 1919 Tasmanians confirmed their intrinsic colonialism and inflicted upon the Labor Party a crushing, and unexpected, electoral defeat. Of the labour movement's changed fortunes following the war, Robson (1997: 89-91) wrote:

> Loyalty to England and the Empire was never so high... the Labor Party was disheartened by what appeared to be the collapse of reason among the working classes of the world.

Labour history might have enjoyed a modicum of legitimacy were it not for the war which brought to the fore Tasmania's conservatism and bolstered public dependence on the British Empire and an anti-labour conservatism (Robson, 1997: 92). A particularly irony is that the Labor Party, avowed champion of social liberalism, administered much of the immediate post-war period and working-class traditionalism ultimately contributed to the lack of labour history as much as any conservatives might have (Lake, 1975; Robson, 1997).

A second driver for the suppression of labour history as an area of academic interest and public debate was the anti-intellectualism that grew as a fundamental tenet of populist working-class politics post-1900 (Robson, 1997: 111ff.). This effectively censored contemporary historical writing and stifled public debate both nationally and in Tasmania. If the Great War had compounded the rising anti-intellectual sentiment in Tasmania in the early 1900s, the situation was unimproved in the second half of the century. Negativity towards scholarship and academic institutions stemmed predominantly from the class-based politics of labourists who became increasingly active in Tasmanian politics in the period. As the Tasmanian labour movement grew in influence, the prevailing public mood reflected its labourist traditions; this included opposition to all things bourgeois, and intellectualism consequently suffered by its associations with middle class values (Robson, 1997: 110ff.).

A significant example of the impact of labour movement events on the writing of labour history was the 1955 national split in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) (for a more detailed explanation and analysis of the ALP split see for example Curthoys & Merritt, 1984; Ormonde, 1972; Sheppard, 1950). The newly-formed Democratic Labor Party (DLP) contested many local polls and bitter and often public displays of discord became commonplace between Leftist ALP powerbrokers and Catholic-backed DLP activists (Robson, 1997: 115). In Tasmania 'The Split', as it was called, transformed the state's political environment and impacted greatly on contemporary historians. Labor powerbrokers of both Left and Right discouraged the recording of dissenting

views on historical events. They, like British loyalists, sought to document their particular, often idealised, version of Tasmanian history in the records. Consequently, the available literature on Tasmania's 20th century political history is largely subjective and often incomplete.

A third explanation for the lack of objectively recorded labour history in Tasmania is that the Australian historical landscape has long been dominated by a national focus (McKibbin, 1994: 34ff.). Those historians who have been concerned with state labour histories have been most prolific in larger, more industrially active states than Tasmania, such as New South Wales and Victoria. What limited records there are from nineteenth century Tasmania are mainly concerned with recording statistical data and have a governmental institutional focus (see for example Townsley, 1951, 1976). Records improved little in the early twentieth century and are an inadequate reflection of the important role of the labour movement in Tasmania's political history (McKibbin, 1994: 36f.).

The national focus of Australian labour history was entrenched during the 1950s when a new topic of debate among historians took centre stage; this debate related specifically to historical methodology (Garton, 1994: 42ff.). During the 1950s and 1960s, 'radical' historians advocated an alternative 'social history' (Garton, 1994: 52). Social history was championed as the means by which marginalised groups such as workers, women, children, Aborigines and rural communities would find their place in historical narrative. Under this approach their stories would be told without the affectations traditionally attributed to formal, elitist, political and

historical records (Garton, 1994: 50f.). Garton (1994: 52) identified the new

methodologies:

> Social history spawned a number of related concerns – black history,
> family history and women's history to name but a few. Social historians
> also pioneered the use of new sources – such as oral history. Some also
> developed sustained critiques of professional history – preferring to
> pioneer local community histories of popular memory, disdaining [formal]
> and elitist scholarship.

However even this new approach to history did not open the way automatically for

subjects such as those covered in this study of women union officials. The

'professional history' to which Garton refers was generally regarded as a history of

male working-class organisations and occupation, McKibbin (1994: 34) concurs:

> It [labour history] tended to be about trade unions (or occupations that
> could be unionised) and industrial relations, which often meant industrial
> conflict, and political parties either founded by trade unions or in some
> way dependent upon them or upon the industrial working class that
> belonged to them.

During the 1960s labour historians faced the challenges of social historiography by

expanding the scope of labour history. They began to analyse not only workplace

issues but wider community relationships with organised labour (Garton, 1994;

Patmore, 1994). Patmore (1994: 169) observed that social historians and feminists

'argued that labour history's traditional menu of unions and political parties was

too narrow to represent the rich fare of working-class experience'. This debate had

a significant effect on the recording of labour history in Australia, shifting the

focus from historical narrative concerned with institutions to a nationally-focused

sociological record of the times (see for example Irving, 1967; Patmore, 1994).

Garton (1994: 60) suggested that increasingly, writers and students of history were reflecting the shift in focus:

> [They were] turning away from traditional labour history themes and exploring social history projects on work, leisure, women, Aborigines, the family and other groups excluded from established labour history narratives.

In summary, contextualising any aspects of Tasmanian history is clearly problematic. The lack of both general and labour history can be largely explained by the intrinsically 'British' character of the state's institutions; the anti-labour conservatism of the 1900s; the national focus of Australian labour historians and the contemporary debate about recording labour history (Garton, 1994; Patmore, 1994; Robson, 1983, 1997).

There is no obvious literary context in which to place the stories of women in the Tasmanian labour movement post-1960. The national focus of labour historians in the 20th century and the deficiencies in specifically Tasmanian historical analyses means that Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories are a unique contribution to recorded Australian labour history. This thesis examines whether their experiences as pioneering Tasmanian labour women transcend their historical specificity and proffer any lessons for current trade unions, union leaders and labour historians.

4.3 Austra's Story

As already mentioned, much of the narrative material is based on interviews with three senior Tasmanian union women. Austra Maddox was interviewed on two occasions and provided supplementary written information following the

interviews. Austra's personal story illustrates many of the challenges faced by women in official positions within a male-dominated Tasmanian trade union movement. In 1985 Austra was elected Tasmanian Branch Secretary of the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association (ACOA); over the following ten years she was re-elected as Branch Secretary for consecutive terms until her resignation in 1996 due to ill health. The noteworthy themes in Austra's union career that effectively illustrate points familiar from the literature reviews are her high level of personal commitment to traditional union values; the influence of union amalgamation on her career; her pursuit of affirmative action policies to counter prevailing attitudes to women within the Union; and her fundamental belief in the principles of industrial democracy.

Born in Germany of Latvian parents, Austra Maddox arrived in Australia at the age of five as a refugee. She lived first in Queensland, but her family moved south to Tasmania when Austra was nine years old. Completing secondary school at Hobart High School, Austra went on to university in Tasmania after a short break. In the context of the late 1960s era of student rebellion, she was extremely well suited to university life, describing herself as 'active in student politics... pretty academic and intellectual...always a real rebel' (Maddox, 2008). After completing a Bachelor degree, Austra was accepted to study for a Master of Philosophy. However, she instead elected to join the State public service in 1969 as a Graduate Clerk in the Department of Social Security.

In 1970 Austra resigned from her position when she became a new mother, and subsequently rejoined the public service in 1972. This was her entry to working life in government. She then became a workplace delegate in the Department of Social Security, observing that she did not seek out the role but was compelled to take it by her innate sense of justice:

> I didn't have any intention of going into the union movement. Obviously I became a union member straight away because I was politically aware... I think it came back to fairness and all that (Maddox, 2008).

A critical industrial dispute with the Assistant Director of Management in 1984 was a turning point in her career. The dispute centred on allegations that senior managers were promoting staff based on personal relationships and without a transparent process. Austra was instrumental in organising union members to take industrial action, and a lengthy campaign of work bans ensued. The Department finally conceded to the demand for an independent audit of staff selection processes, problems were identified and processes addressed, and the dispute was ended. Austra describes the local implications of the dispute:

> This was a really significant dispute. No-one had ever done anything like that [before]. Management and all the departments were watching very closely... a precedent had been set, management were no longer going to be doing backroom deals (Maddox, 2008).

She was soon after approached by the ACOA to take up an honorary position. She recalls the subsequent 'vitriol' dispensed by 'NCC [National Civic Council], right-wing, old-fashioned Catholic blokes' (Maddox, 2008) who resented the incursion of members from the left, particularly women.

NSW General Secretary of the PSA John Cahill recalls a similar factionalism in the late 1970s when the Association comprised four divisions, each influenced by a different political doctrine and each sending delegates to the Association's dysfunctional and unproductive Central Council (Cahill, 1993). Factional politics in these unions' state branches also undermined effective decision-making, and the industrial and social debates of importance to the broader membership were subsumed by personal agendas and internal ideological battles (Cahill, 1993; Maddox, 2008). In the early 1980s members and some Left officials began to seriously challenge existing factional arrangements in the Association. This group soon gained the majority of positions on the Central Council (Cahill, 1993). It was as part of this current of change that Austra stood as Vice-President of the Tasmanian ACOA Branch. In a hard-fought contest, Austra was defeated by an effective personality-based campaign, sponsored primarily by the NCC which warned members she was a 'radical feminist lesbian Marxist' (Maddox, 2008).

In 1985 Austra successfully contested the position of Branch Secretary, albeit somewhat reluctantly. She recalls that:

> I really didn't know if I wanted to do that. Obviously I was very supportive of the union but I still had in mind these other things I wanted to do. I did stand and got elected reasonably handsomely despite a bit of the vitriol again, but not quite to the same extent (Maddox, 2008).

A review of the literature in chapter 1 demonstrates that the hostility Austra encountered within the Union was not unprecedented, with a number of researchers asserting that, despite women playing a significant role in the early development of trade unions, waged work and organising have long been

symbolised in male terms (Bradley, 1999; Cockburn, 1991; Ryan & Prendergast, 1982). The origins of these patriarchal attitudes have been identified in male political dominance in the nineteenth century, and the subordination of women's work to that of men. This reinforced the view that unions were male institutions. Consequently, 'women have been relegated to marginal roles; they have been under-represented in positions of leadership' (Cockburn, 1983 in Bradley, 1999: 164). Austra's election to senior office challenged the prevailing attitudes towards women's capacity to effectively hold senior positions within unions. In this respect she was clearly a pioneer within the Tasmanian labour movement.

The first theme to emerge from Austra's interviews is that a significant factor affecting her approach to union work was a high level of personal commitment to the Union organisation, as well as to traditional union values (Maddox, 2008). Her dedication had a particularly gendered aspect, most notably when she was elected the first female Tasmanian Branch Secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), Public Sector Division. Her approach accorded with the view that women unionists approach their union work as a vocation rather than a livelihood (Kirton & Healy, 1999: 33). Researchers have also noted that female officials align their union work with their identity as women (Cockburn, 1991; Kirton & Healy, 1999). Feminist ideology has clearly contributed to the work of women such as Austra who have successfully pursued a 'female friendly' union environment by reconciling the 'dual nature of their strategic orientations, to women and to the union' (Kirton & Healy, 1999: 44). Austra's personal commitment to fairness and

social justice shaped her approach to unionism and this supports Kirton and

Healy's (1999: 43) proposition that:

> [Women] start by empathising with the needs of the membership, then
> become active agents in translating this empathy onto union agendas and in
> the process raise gender consciousness among other women.

Austra considers that her focus on issues of a broadly political nature was a

defining aspect of her strategy as a union official (Maddox, 2008). She also felt it

was important for her credibility as a woman unionist that she supported her

passion for industrial and social democracy with successful issues-based

organising strategies. This was in stark contrast to the dominant 'personality

politics' within the amalgamating unions at the time. Focusing on strategy and

industrial campaigns was both a deliberate and instinctive approach for Austra.

She reiterates:

> I'm very much about issues; I'm not so much into personality politics. I've
> always been a strategic thinker. So I think it would be fair to say I was
> always well regarded, well respected, but there was always a bit of a
> distance about me because I wasn't one of those people who'd get sucked
> into being one of the boys (Maddox, 2008).

She identifies this distance from the union elite as both a positive and negative in

her career. Colleagues were unable to dismiss her influence at the industrial level

because of her continued and very public campaign successes. She was, for

example, a key player in the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research

Organisation (CSIRO) - Public Service Association (PSA) amalgamation and she

was instrumental in the industrial campaign to protect regional jobs at the

Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) in Tasmania. Consequently,

relationships with the CSIRO and ABC members were cemented and Austra's

credibility as a grassroots industrial operative was strengthened. Austra observes

that '[it] made it very difficult for people to categorise me' (Maddox, 2008) but at the same time acknowledges that her non-conformity and focus on local union campaigning undoubtedly limited her career progression:

> I would have been offered things if I had been part of a ruling clique...a lot of meetings themselves were just window dressing and set speeches and all the deals and decision making went on behind the scenes. A lot of old men, I'm talking old in terms of like seventy, who'd been involved forever and still being treated like they were some sort of gurus. And I found that model totally anathema to me. I suppose had I been willing, able and prepared to fit in more with the way things worked then I think I would have been promoted very much (Maddox, 2008).

It is therefore not surprising to find that Austra's experience and interpretation of gender issues within unions is consistent with the work of contemporary feminist labour historians. These historians identify an 'institutionalised' discrimination against women, and proffer numerous examples of male officials openly intolerant of or disrespectful to, women (see for example Cook *et al.*, 1992; Feldberg, 1987; Franzway, 2000; Pocock, 1995a, 1997).

The second theme to emerge from Austra's interviews is that much of her union was influenced by the turbulent period of trade union amalgamations. Austra (Maddox, 2008) recalls feeling the resultant political, social and organisational upheaval keenly, and identifies the union amalgamations as one of the most influential events in her career. In the broader context, this period of amalgamations took place after the election of a Federal Labor Government in 1983 ushered in a period of renewed union influence and progressive industrial relations policy (Michelson, 2000: 118).

The Accord between the ALP and ACTU initiated tripartite processes in which

unions achieved significant Award improvements in key areas with gender

implications such as maternity leave, superannuation and, later, family leave

entitlements (Peetz, 1997). It was, however, not only the content but also the form

of union action which was changing in this period. The Accord period coincided

with the introduction of a national policy of 'strategic unionism', resulting in the

unparalleled structural reorganisation of some 300 unions into twenty 'super'

unions between 1983 and 1999 (Hose, 2003; Michelson, 2000). A number of

writers consider in detail various union mergers and the motivations and forms

these took (Buchanan, 1981; Chaison, 1983; Davis, 1987; Waddington, 1992). As

late as 2000, however, Michelson (2000: 120) suggests that 'there exists very little

empirical research which attempts to measure the effect of merger on union

members'. Furthermore, there is scant record of the effects of union amalgamation

on female activists.

Pocock's (1995) survey of female representation in South Australian unions in

1992 does provide a relatively contemporary insight into the effects of

amalgamations on women's representation. She hypothesised that the

amalgamation process was likely to have 'a significant impact on women's

representation in union leadership' (Pocock, 1995a: 20) but her analysis revealed

that there was in fact no extensive activity to improve female representation.

Pocock (1995a: 20) reported:

> Forty-five unions (80 per cent) … were in the process of amalgamation.
> However, only eleven (25 per cent) were adopting measures to improve
> women's representation in the new union. Four were identifying positions

specifically for women and two were adopting affirmative action plans as they amalgamated.

Pocock's (1995a: 20) research identified the 'scramble to accommodate the expectations of incumbent officials and those men in the (often unspoken) queue for positions' as a significant factor in cementing male union hierarchies during the amalgamation period. Austra's experience of union amalgamation provides a contemporary illustration of these findings from the perspective of a senior female union official in Tasmania.

In August 1989 the Australian Public Sector & Broadcasting Union, Australian Government Employment was established following an amalgamation of the ACOA, the Australian Public Service Association (APSA) and the ABC Staff Union. By July 1994 the union had further amalgamated with a range of other smaller unions to become the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). The amalgamation process was extremely fraught for many unions, posing political, industrial and administrative challenges (Michelson, 2000; Peetz, 1997). In particular, established union officials were challenged with organising the new union around public sector employee groupings. This required a redefinition of established structure, roles and attitudes within the union (Anderson, Griffin & Teicher, 2002: 13ff.).

Austra identifies the attitude of many colleagues to women working within unions as a factor requiring deliberate attention during the amalgamation process:

> In terms of mindset generally, it was okay. We had a reasonable culture within the union before the amalgamation because as I say we were a progressive new union emerging after big fights with the right. But then after amalgamation of course the various unions came together with their own mindsets and their own problems, including sometimes the [different approaches to] roles of women in the unions. So we had to pay a lot of attention then to creating a new mindset as it were (Maddox, 2008).

Austra describes the dominant male characteristics of senior union officials and organisational structures at the time, noting the striking similarities to her experience of the Tasmanian Public Service as a graduate recruit:

> There was that totally inbuilt thing about, you know, the traditional role of women...[t]hey weren't overtly blokey, not saying crude things or anything by any stretch, but on the other hand they were pretty tough, pretty clever, smart operators. I respected their intellect and so on but I didn't like them all that much at the individual level. It wasn't overtly discriminatory, although I don't think there was much encouragement for women as such. It was very much more that *particular* women were encouraged (Maddox, 2008).

The third theme identified from interviews with Austra is that she was committed to the development and implementation of affirmative action policies within the Union. Her observations of the Union's gender politics are particularly interesting because they relate to the late 1980s and early 1990s. These decades saw affirmative action programmes introduced by many unions, ostensibly to address the very problem of institutionalised gender bias. Such programmes were designed to promote women within trade unions through targeted recruitment and retention strategies (Griffin, 2002; Kirton & Greene, 2002; Nolan & Ryan, 2003). They were, in the main, devised and championed by women already active within unions, to promote women's progression through union structures and in many

70

cases to force reluctant all-male leaderships into the process of cultural change (Kirton & Greene, 2002; Nolan & Ryan, 2003; Trebilcock, 1991).

Austra (Maddox, 2008) identifies one of her successes as the introduction of an affirmative action plan at the CPSU. The consequent recruitment and promotion of women as paid officials was, Austra says, a significant organisational reform that could be credited in large part to her own tenacity.

As previously discussed, most trade unions developed as hierarchical in structure and traditionally male-dominated in composition. Because women are more comfortable with networks (Cook *et al.,* 1992; Feldberg, 1987; Ferrier, 2000), unions are, by design, distinctly 'female unfriendly'. In the 1980s the level of action required to establish female activists within the organisation and then promote them to positions of authority presented major challenges for existing union officialdoms. Austra says:

> [We] had to keep it on the agenda, keep talking about it and keep making an issue about it when people didn't meet targets, keeping on and on about it (Maddox, 2008).

The Tasmanian Branch of the CPSU, with Austra as Secretary, introduced an affirmative action policy and implemented specific projects to identify women members who could be trained and encouraged into positions within the Union. Austra highlights the historically strong emphasis of that union on training and development for workplace delegates, and the particular success of the Tasmanian campaign to involve women members. As she recalls:

We'd often find that the delegate as a male and the deputy delegate was a female. So that was one of the areas we targeted and that worked well. For instance, targeting women who were deputy delegates and encouraging them to run, for instance, for Branch Executive at the Branch level. So that was, I think, a hidden success factor. But it worked, it really paid off. It took a whole lot of work, looking at people on a case by case basis, talking to them one on one (Maddox, 2008).

Austra's strategy in the CPSU in the late 1980s was supported by the contemporary view of some union researchers that internal union resistance is one of the most significant impediments to union development at all levels (Nightingale, 1991: 6). A body of commentary in this period argued that there was a propensity to categorise affirmative action as 'women's business' and therefore not a central issue on the internal union agenda (Nightingale, 1991; Trebilcock, 1991; Yates, 1996). Austra's personal experience of resistance to women's involvement at official levels within the union confirms that in the 1990s such attitudes remained prevalent both in Tasmania and nationally. She recalls this as a frustrating experience:

The problem with a lot of passive resistance is that there's nothing to fight... And there's a tendency to say 'oh that's Austra's domain'. The difficult thing was to make sure they didn't just see it as your task, to make sure this was something the union as a whole had to address and take seriously (Maddox, 2008).

By sidelining women's issues, and consequently many articulate and passionate women, unions had become segregated along gender lines by entrenched passive resistance (Ferrier, 2000; Fray, 1993; Kirton, 2005). Trebilcock's (1991: 418) review of union strategy to promote women as leaders expressed concern at the

continued segregation of women's issues from mainstream union agendas by the

establishment of separate women's committees/ departments:

> [There is a] danger of marginalizing women's issues and reinforcing
> discrimination. Establishing separate structures may make it easier for male
> trade unionists to pass off most women trade unionists' problems as
> something for the women's unit to handle. The existence of women's
> department may also predetermine the brief of a woman leader whose
> talents might be better utilized in another department of the union.

The creation of parallel structures was seen by Trebilcock (1991: 420f.) as having

the real potential to move women further from the heart of power in the union

movement. Other commentators have expressed doubt about how seriously male

officials regard women's structures and have concluded that it is consequently

critical that unions make direct and legitimate links between such structures and

senior decision-making bodies (see for example Beale, 1982; Feldberg, 1987;

Kirton & Healy 1999; Nolan & Ryan, 2003).

Austra's experience supports the proposition that male officials strategically

excluded female aspirants (Kirton & Healy 1999; Nolan & Ryan, 2003, Trebilcock,

1991). She recalls the few women who were active at senior levels within

Tasmanian unions in the 1990s, including Lynne Fitzgerald from the Trades and

Labour Council. Austra describes these leading union women as being part of a

'mixed experience'- highly successful but often with unfulfilled potential. For

instance:

> Lynne [Fitzgerald] had built up a fair bit of credibility, a really good
> woman, hard working, not too extreme politically, personable. I think Jim[1]

---

[1] Jim Bacon, then Secretary of the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council was elected a Member of
the House of Assembly in 1996 and became Premier of Tasmania in 1998.

perceived her as a potential future threat in the parliament and therefore gave her the TTLC with his blessing, which she probably would have got anyway. But it was a good way of sidelining her. So we ended up with a female Secretary which was good, but it was also bad because it was like at the tail end of the real influence of the Trades and Labour Council, it really didn't have the influence it used to (Maddox, 2008).

The final theme to emerge is Austra's strong focus on industrial democracy and participative workplace processes. She found a direct outlet for her sense of justice and fairness for women in the contemporary debate on industrial democracy. In Europe in the 1950s, the widespread introduction of industrial co-determination had signalled a new era in labour-capital relations (Cook *et al.,* 1992: 25). The reconceptualisation of the employment relationship effectively had legitimised labour organisations and for the first time conditions existed whereby '[management and labour] entered into agreements affecting areas wider than wages, hours and working conditions' (Cook *et al.,* 1992: 26).

However, Australia's political and industrial development has been markedly different to the European experience. In 1986, compelled by a rapidly deteriorating domestic economic situation, the Australian Trade Development Council sponsored a fact-finding Mission to Western Europe by senior officers of the ACTU. The ACTU Mission (Department of Trade, 1987: xi) sought to 'examine those countries which had grappled with problems similar to those being experienced by Australia'. In doing so, the ACTU Mission hoped to introduce progressive alternatives into the contemporary debate about how to solve

Australia's economic problems. The Mission (Department of Trade, 1987: xi)

acknowledged that this was a contentious political issue:

> While there is broad agreement as to the *nature and extent* [sic] of our
> balance of payments problems, there is considerable debate in Australia as
> to the best way to solve them. The experience of other countries shows that
> there is a range of policy responses that can be adopted to tackle balance of
> payments constraints and their underlying causes.

Bray, Waring, Macdonald and Le Queux (2001: 26) suggested that one policy

response would be to institutionalise the principles of industrial democracy. To

this end, they proposed that European-style works councils would be the most

beneficial model for increasing employee decision-making and participation in

Australian workplaces (Bray *et al.*, 2001: 29). However, because of Australia's

unique historiography, such calls for European-style models of employee

participation were consistently rejected by employers and governments of all

persuasions (Department of Trade, 1987). The ACTU/ TDC Mission Report (1987:

xi) acknowledged that Australia's unique social and political historiography

presented distinct barriers to cultural change:

> Mission members have been mindful of the need to view each country's
> development in the context of its own culture and history, and not to seek
> to simply 'transplant' successful institutions or policies into the Australian
> situation. Instead, the aim is to… *adapt* [sic] these to the Australian context.

Nonetheless, the enduringly 'British' nature of Australia's labour history (Robson,

1991: 80ff.) proved too great an obstacle; trade unions here failed to adapt the

European experience to become genuine partners in the regulation of the labour

market and its institutions. Most obviously, the Australian labour movement never

truly achieved institutionalised industrial democracy for its members. Instead,

there has developed a complex debate about the merits of 'employee participation' versus 'industrial democracy' in the Australian context (Davis & Lansbury, 1996: 8). There are in fact fundamentally different principles at issue in this debate, a situation subsequently reflected in the use of different terminology. Lansbury and Davis (1992: 231) distinguished between the two positions:

> In general, the term 'employee participation'... has been associated with employer-initiated programmes, which stress the advantages to both the individual and to the enterprise when workers become more involved in decisions related to their work...The Australian Labor Party (ALP), on the other hand, as well as the unions... have preferred the term 'industrial democracy'. For them this expresses an extension of the political rights of workers, through which they can exercise greater influence over decisions affecting their lives at work.

In the 1980s, the ACTU attempted to ameliorate hostile employers and the Government by arguing that trade unions could contribute positively to economic and trade development if only governments and employers would acknowledge unions' role and the rights of workers to be involved in decision-making at the enterprise level (Department of Trade, 1987: xi). Union activists such as Austra promoted the view that, far from a threat to productivity and industrial harmony, industrial democracy would primarily assist employers achieve maximum possible productivity with minimum industrial unrest.

As unions entered the critical period of amalgamations in the 1990s, some identified large-scale restructuring as a critical opportunity for the union movement to make gains in terms of industrial democracy (Botsman, 1989; Drago & Wooden 1993; Lansbury & Davis, 1992). Lansbury and Davis (1992: 247)

76

warned of the long-term consequences if the amalgamation process was unsuccessful:

> If current initiatives for union rationalisation and amalgamation fail, with the result that many Australian workers remain served by a mixture of poorly resourced and declining unions, then unions will be handicapped in their efforts to promote worker participation in decision-making.

However, this warning proved spectacularly unsuccessful. Union restructuring failed to halt declining membership and the ACTU was consequently unable to maintain any position of influence in the debate (Lansbury & Davis, 1992: 245).

Coats (2006: 262) asserts that the fundamental objective of industrial democracy is 'to improve the quality of employment and the experience of work'. Proponents argue that to achieve social cohesion, employment quality must be improved. This in turn requires recognition of the inherent inequalities of power in the employment relationship and an analysis of the factors driving employees' need for fulfilment at a collective and individual level (Budd, 2004; Coats 2006; Maslow, 1954). Reinvigorated by the union amalgamation process, the defence of industrial democracy was further supported by the requirement for all federal departments to introduce an industrial democracy plan from 1985 (Anderson *et al.*, 2002: 9). Austra was a strong advocate of workplace democracy and encouraged members to pursue change through involvement at the workplace level:

> I was really, really keen on industrial democracy...I always had a lot of ability to look further than some other people and I didn't like coming up against that 'don't change things' attitude (Maddox, 2008).

77

The academic and political discussion about industrial democracy was renewed in the 1980s, in a period of intense debate about Australian industrial relations reform and the need for employee consultation and participation at the workplace level (Coats, 2006; Davis & Lansbury, 1996). Writing in the mid-1990s, Davis and Lansbury (1996) reviewed the Australian experience of workplace decision-making and the issues influencing employers, unions and government. They specifically acknowledged the key role of the Accords between the ALP and ACTU in promoting industrial democracy and employee participation. They also observed a marked shift in focus over time:

> During the mid 1980s the term "industrial democracy" was common currency in both political and academic discourse... Yet it was rarely favoured by employers who indicated that it smacked of a challenge to managerial prerogative. Their preference was for "employee participation"... In the 1990s there has been less reference to industrial democracy and more to employee participation and consultation (Davis & Lansbury, 1996: 5).

From the late 1990s there was a renewed push for a more 'developed notion of industrial democracy, linked to a reconceptualisation of the objectives of the employment relationship' (Coats, 2006: 262). Unionists like Austra championed the pursuit of industrial democracy prior to and during this period. As a consequence, industrial democracy and participatory management became a principal feature of the employment landscape. Again, Austra's commitment to workers' rights and industrial democracy in Tasmania identifies her as a 'breakthrough' female trade union leader.

In 1996 Austra resigned from her position as Tasmanian Branch Secretary of the CPSU (PSU) due to ill health, but remains active in local Tasmanian politics. Her significant contribution to the CPSU was recognised with the award of Life Membership in 2004. She has recently re-activated the UnionsTas Women's Committee and is cautiously optimistic that the union movement can develop effective strategies to recruit and retain new members, particularly women. Her view of the obstacles facing unions in respect of women's participation accords with the findings of researchers exploring the evolution of union organisations (Cook *et al.,* 1992; Bradley, 1999). Austra agrees that the changing nature of employment, particularly the casualisation of the female workforce, is one of the most significant threats to union membership.

In agreement with the other subjects of this study, Pauline Shelley and Lynne Fitzgerald, Austra identifies the importance of a strong public education campaign about unions, underpinned by a significant change in the internal approach of unions to women's issues and female leaders. Austra concludes:

> I don't think there's much incentive for young women [to be involved in unions] right now. The role of unions has really changed. I think we need women who are prepared to be seen more up front as women but who don't fall into that trap of trying to be one of the boys. I'm hoping there will be resurgence in unionism, but I think it will take a big education programme for younger workers in particular, women in particular, and I think the union movement needs to recast a lot of its thinking (Maddox, 2008).

The next section of this chapter records Pauline Shelley's lived experiences as a female union official in Tasmania, a decade later than Austra. The key themes

from her interviews are identified and discussed, providing the framework for more detailed analysis in chapter 4.

4.4 Pauline's Story

At the time that this research was conducted, Pauline Shelley was Deputy President of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. She was appointed a Commissioner in 1999 and prior to that, from 1996-2000, was President of the Tasmanian Division of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU). She has an impressive history in the Tasmanian labour movement, contributing to one of the most significant campaigns in LHMU history, the campaign for childcare workers' rights and for an industry Award for these mostly women workers. Three key themes arise from Pauline's interview. Firstly, she makes strong links between her experiences as an activist in the women's movement and her experience as a union official. Secondly, she identifies the critical impact of union amalgamation on her own career and the general progression of women through the union ranks. Finally, Pauline recalls her experiences of the Organising Works programme and considers the disappointing impact of the programme on levels and quality of female union activism in Tasmania.

Pauline first became an active unionist in the Municipal Officers' Association (MOA) while employed as coordinator of the Kingborough Family Day Care Scheme. In the mid-1980s her first role in the union was an honorary one, followed in 1988 by appointment as an Organiser. She attributes her appointment

to this position to a policy of tokenism towards women in that union and also the

push for affirmative action occurring at the time. She recalls:

> [It] was a very male-dominated union and I'm sure I was there as a token
> woman. I think there were two things: I think they needed a woman and
> they thought I could do the trick. There were some affirmative action
> programmes so I benefited from those programmes...I don't think for a
> minute I would have got there without that (Shelley, 2008).

The first theme to emerge from the interviews is that Pauline's personal experience

of the relationship between organised women and organised labour is reflective of

the broader convergence of the two movements in Australia since the 1960s. This

was identified as a theme in the national labour movement in chapter 1. Pauline

identifies within this tradition most strongly as a 'social feminist' (Bradley, 1999:

160; Grieve & Burns, 1994; Ledwith. Colgan, Joyce & Hayes, 1990) and views

the union movement as a legitimate and effective crucible for social and industrial

change. Her individual identification as both a labour activist and a feminist

reflects the contemporary shift by unions towards incorporating women's issues as

an integral part of, rather than an appendage to, their operations (Bradley, 1999:

158; Francis, 2003; Franzway, 2000).

Pauline's commitment to workers in the childcare industry was resolute and she

became a pivotal player in the campaign to establish an industry Award. In the

later-1980s she attended a two week intensive child care meeting at Clyde

Cameron College, Victoria, the national residential training college of the Trade

Union Training Authority. A number of strategies were developed at the meeting

to further the union child care campaign nationally. The campaign eventually

culminated in the making of the Child Care and Children's Services Award 1989.

At Clyde Cameron College Pauline was introduced to Kerry O'Brien, then

Tasmanian Branch Secretary of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union

(FMWU) and a short time later she accepted his offer of a position as Organiser

with 'the Missos' in Tasmania.

Pauline (Shelley, 2008) describes her transition into the union as 'very difficult',

largely because she was the first woman employed in a non-clerical position. She

also recalls the sense of distrust that characterised her male colleagues' response to

her appointment. Specifically, she recalls senior colleagues being wary of her

tertiary education:

> There was resistance... suspicion on the part of Leo Brown[2]... Leo had
> reservations; not so much that I was a woman although that was a part of it,
> but because I was University educated. He had this resistance because I
> had a degree (Shelley, 2008).

Higher education was then, and some argue, still is, an indication of upper middle-

class position (see for example Franzway, 2000; Griffin, 2002). The view assumes

that such activists taking up paid union positions are unable to identify with the

union's membership and are limited by their class backgrounds. Research

demonstrates that higher education continues to be viewed by many in the labour

movement with suspicion. This is particularly true of older males who represent

workers in blue-collar industries, whose own careers began as workplace delegates

and who themselves have limited formal education (Bramble, 1995; Franzway,

---

[2] Leo Brown, President of the Tasmanian Division of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous
Workers Union, had been a leading Left union official since 1959.

2000; Griffin 2002). This was certainly the case with union leaders such as Leo Brown with a background as a waterfront worker.

Pauline's experience supports research findings that male, many of them older, union officials considered a shift in class situation, whether through education or opportunity, a betrayal of 'true' union values (Bramble, 1995; Griffin & Moors, 2002; Winter, 1994). Election to union office has traditionally been viewed as an opportunity for social and economic advancement for working-class activists (Bramble, 1995). This was demonstrated when the ACTU Organising Works programme suffered setbacks in implementation in traditional blue-collar unions in large part because the programme was considered to undermine the inherent 'right' of male organisers to move through the union's ranks based on length of service. The Organising Works programme's targeted recruitment of graduates presented these conservative unionists with a new threat in the form of academics who pursued non-traditional methods of organising and promoting marginalised groups such as women and casual workers (Griffin & Moors, 2002). The suspicion attached to educated activists clearly stemmed from the embedded stereotype that real trade unionists were male, blue-collar workers with a basic education and a strong family history of unionism (Callus, 1986; Cobble, 1993; Cockburn, 1991; Griffin & Moors, 2002; Mason & Bain, 1991).

Directly contrasting with this stereotype, Pauline's experience is consistent with the recorded experiences of other union women taking up paid official positions (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Franzway, 1997; Gray, 1993). Considered a threat

within male institutions of power because of their gendered approach to unionism, these women also contended with suspicion and mistrust because they did not fit the traditional blue-collar class profile (Briskin, 2006: 361).

Researchers observe that, to overcome this suspicion, many women felt that they needed to 'earn their stripes' (i.e. the respect of male colleagues) by either working first on the job in the relevant union industry, or by demonstrating evidence of a blue-collar family background (Kirton & Healy, 1994; Lawrence, 1994). In her collective portrait of female Canadian activists, political commentator Judy Rebick (2005: 28ff.) identified the issue of class background as central to activists' experiences within the women's and labour movements. The oral histories she recorded highlight the peculiar form of discrimination encountered by working-class women such as Pauline, who achieved higher levels of education and occupied more senior positions in their industry workplaces than did their male union counterparts.

Kirton (2005: 391ff.) also considered the influence of family background and class orientation on women's decision to join and become active in a union. Despite her own position as a tertiary educated, full-time manager, Pauline identifies her family background as quintessentially working class. Her uncle was a waterside worker in New Zealand and her father an abattoir worker. This self-identification as 'working class' is a contemporary illustration of Kirton and Rebick's (2005: 393) conclusions that:

Women from union-minded backgrounds had internalised union values and had a strong prior ideological commitment to trade unionism. They all emphasised that joining a trade union was the 'right' and 'natural' thing to do. All the women from union-minded families described their background as working class. Even though some women had through their education and occupation shifted their own class position, they retained their affiliation to and self-identification with their working class origins.

The combination of blue-collar family background, work experience and a feminist approach to political issues is shared by Lynne, Austra and Pauline. All three attribute the decision to join and become active in a union to their belief that unions have an inherent connection with class and social justice. For example, Pauline insists that she became active in the union movement on the basis of general principles and not because of a specific workplace issue. She recalls:

My motivation in belonging to a union in the first place when I had no issues was because unions are good, of course they're good! They're for the little person, they're for redressing imbalance. Then after that came the issue of family day care and from there the real activism. But the joining was because it's the right thing to do (Shelley, 2008).

Reflecting on her capacity as a union official to empathise with the union's blue-collar membership, Pauline reiterates the importance of her identity as a working-class activist. She says of her family background:

I come from a very, very working class background and I initially left school when I was 15 and we lived in a housing commission area so I certainly wasn't any different to the membership. We'd always been a labour family and my politics have always been very 'left' (2008).

Pauline says that, in her experience, attitudes towards her changed as she became more involved in campaigns and recruiting. She took on a greater role as an industrial advocate and was heavily involved in the development of accredited union training programmes. She was, in effect, 'earning her stripes' by immersing herself in the industrial role of organiser, as opposed to developing a professional

identity based on gender. Pauline's determination to succeed in her role as an

organiser illustrates Kirton's (2005: 392) conclusion that many female union

delegates and officials identify the broad political and industrial struggles facing

them as incentives to become active in the union, more so than specific gender-

based grievances.

The second theme to emerge from the interviews is Pauline's view that structural

events within the broader union movement impacted greatly on her career and,

more generally, improved the range of opportunities for women to advance in

unions (Shelley, 2008). The national process of union amalgamation has been

comprehensively discussed in chapter 1. The Federated Miscellaneous Union

(FMWU) and Liquor Trades Union (LTU) amalgamated in 1992 to form the

LHMU. The new union had 200,000 members in a wide range of occupations

including hospitality, property services, health, manufacturing and community

services. Pauline became full-time paid President of the LHMU in Tasmania at

this time and was later also elected President of the Tasmanian Trades and Labour

Council (TTLC).

The amalgamation process mentioned above appears to have been problematic for

many women in the trade union movement. This is a view supported by Austra

Maddox's (2008) recollection of experiences at the CPSU. Pauline remembers the

LHMU's culture immediately post-amalgamation as marked by conflict and

distinctly hostile towards women:

> It wasn't female-friendly at all. The amalgamation in Tasmania was
> particularly bad, [it] became very female unfriendly and the position
> towards the women that they were trying to get rid of became even worse
> after the amalgamation. There was an anti-female, anti-women attitude
> (Shelley, 2008).

Both Austra and Pauline attribute many of the general problems with the union

merger process to personality clashes within organisations and differences in

political and industrial methods (Maddox, 2008; Shelley, 2008). Following a wave

of US union mergers in the late 1970s, researchers forewarned of precisely these

problems presented by amalgamation (Bodman, 1998: 22; Janus, 1978). The same

problems were subsequently identified by Tasmanian union women active in the

amalgamation period of the 1990s. In the US, the transition of amalgamation from

theory to practice was identified as raising major personality and operational

problems for unions:

> Typically, mergers do not result in the instantaneous melding of all the
> functions and organisational units of the parties involved. Officers and staff
> must become accustomed to different personalities and modes of operation.
> Deciding on new officers may become difficult [and] if prior dealings had
> been characterised by intense union rivalry, distrust may seriously impair
> [the merger] (Janus, 1978: 14)

There is in fact little empirical research about the effect of amalgamations on

union members and officials in Australia (Bodman, 1998: 18; Griffin, 1996). Some

of those who have assessed the issues associated with union mergers (Michelson,

2000; Waddington & Whitston, 1997) have concluded the determinative factors as

the interaction between internal factors (membership demographics, officials'

political preferences and personal relationships) and external factors (technology,

industrial relations and legislative framework). Michelson (2000: 126) and

Waddington (1992: 109) suggest that the internal characteristics of traditional trade union structures – male-dominated, hierarchical, inflexible – are a potential hindrance to the successful reformation of union organisations through amalgamation. The internal political climate of a union is also a significant factor influencing officials' and members' responses to amalgamation (Nolan & Ryan, 2003: 92). Pauline recalls the internal union mood during the amalgamation period:

> [T]here was absolute hatred between the Liquor Trades and Miscellaneous Workers Divisions…there was absolute palpable hatred there and it never ever really got better. At the time I left there was still that division (Shelley, 2008).

To combat the political pressures of amalgamation, Pauline maintains that she focused instead on cementing her credentials as an effective organiser and campaigner. Like Austra, Pauline describes herself as an issues-based activist, averse to personal politicking. She says of the amalgamation period:

> I worked very hard and had quite a high profile in terms of organising, winning cases and running campaigns. I became quite high profile. And I tended to try to avoid all of the negativity…avoiding all that manoeuvring and stuff over amalgamation (Shelley, 2008).

She also emphasises her aversion to what she considered political 'games' within the organisation at the time:

> In terms of the political manoeuvrings at the state level I was very effective… but in terms of the internal workings of my own union I'd say I was an unsuccessful player and very uncomfortable with the structure. I think in unions sometimes this 'trench warfare' goes on, a siege mentality (Shelley, 2008).

The analogy of trade union politics as 'a game' is consistently used by commentators to describe the actuality of tactical conflict frequently described by activists and officials (Manning, 1994; Nolan & Ryan, 2003). Tactical manoeuvring within unions is not unusual, occurring with varying degrees of intensity and usually at times of heightened industrial or political activity – for example, during internal union election periods (Davis, 1987; Kirton, 2006; Pocock, 1997). Pauline's view of herself as an 'unsuccessful player' (Shelley, 2008) in that environment seems to reflect both her personal preference for issues-based unionism and the broader alienation of women activists by the personality-driven internal union environment.

The third theme from the interviews, directly related to personal and political relationships within unions, is reflected in Pauline's experience of the Organising Works programme. As mentioned in chapter 2, Organising Works was the ACTU's campaign in response to changing workforce demographics and rapidly declining union density. It was characterised by a focus on developing workplace activists and networks across industries (Griffin, 2002). Pauline was President of the LHMU in Tasmania when Organising Works was first introduced and she had significant concerns about the application of the organising model in local workplaces:

> I did question some of the orthodoxies... particularly the application of the organising model, which some people interpreted as the union refusing to go into the workplaces because the members had to do it all themselves. Whereas I always thought it was essential to keep up the visits and be a visible presence (Shelley, 2008).

This anecdote reveals Pauline's personal preference for workplace-based

organising and industrial democracy. She is quick to affirm her personal

commitment to the principles of organising, however continues to express

reservations about the implementation of the programme in some areas. For

example, she recalls:

> The basis of all this was that you develop activists, which of course I agree
> with and that's all fine. But there was just a prescriptive model of how this
> was to work. [There were] organisers who were going to the membership
> patently saying "well the union's not here to fix your problems, you've got
> to fix them yourselves". And that's how the Organising model was being
> interpreted. So it was a bastardisation [of the principles of organising], an
> absolute bastardisation (Shelley, 2008).

This provides an interesting insight into the challenges faced by an outspoken,

active female official within a union structure that responds to debate aggressively

and by marginalising dissenters (for further examples see Dorgan & Grieco, 1993;

Pocock, 1995a). Pauline's experience reflects the observations of researchers who

have analysed the views and experiences of other women in the union movement

(Franzway, 2000; Ledwith *et al.,* 1990; Pocock, 1995a). Pocock, for instance

(1995a: 383), in a piece contemporary with these events, objects to the prevailing

strategy that sees unions acting to '[address] the personal deficiencies of women

rather than deficiencies in the way unions work'. She confirms that a significant

barrier to female activism is the prevailing masculine culture within unions, a

culture that largely ignores the structural and operational inadequacies of unions

(Pocock, 1995a: 396ff.). Nightingale (1991: 5ff.) and Pocock (1995a: 397) also

point to the hostility and aggression expressed towards those women who

challenge prevailing orthodoxies, ultimately discouraging other women from entering the organisation:

> Some [women] are put off union activism by their perceptions of a confrontational and critical union culture and politics...Encouraging these women into sustained union involvement hinges on a significant change in the internal practices, climate and culture of unions.

Reflecting on the future of women in the Australian trade union movement, Pauline's thoughts reflect the distance between the traditional ways of operating, even in their new forms, and the way women activists saw unions. She observes the continuing divergence between union rhetoric and needs action on women's issues, particularly in respect of union structures:

> I think women should be in senior positions in the union movement but I think it should be a different union movement. There were just as many struggles inside as there were outside. And it seems to be ever so, it is endemic, and that's because they're male structures. It's always war, you know (Shelley, 2008).

It is evident that some of the key themes to emerge from Austra (Maddox, 2008) and Pauline's (Shelley, 2008) interviews are consistent. The next section of this chapter records and analyses Lynne Fitzgerald's experiences as Secretary of the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council. The main themes to emerge from her interviews are identified and discussed, leading to a more detailed analysis of all three women's' experiences in chapter 4.

4.5 Lynne's Story

The experience of Lynne Fitzgerald differs from Austra Maddox and Pauline

Shelley, but there are similar themes arising from interviews with her that appear

to have characterised her experience as a woman union official. These themes are

the relationship between her family background and political activism; a strong

commitment to industrial democracy and employee empowerment; and a belief

that strong leadership within unions is critical to reviving unions' relevance to

Australian workers.

Lynne Fitzgerald was born and raised in Sydney and moved to Tasmania with her

husband and young daughter in the early 1980s. In 1995 she became Secretary of

the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council (TTLC) and, at the time this research

was conducted, was Labour and Employment Director with the Department of

Economic Development in Tasmania. Lynne acknowledges the unusual and

politically progressive home life she shared with her two younger brothers:

> What at the time I didn't think was a different family really was a different
> family [was] quite an egalitarian household, quite a democratic household.
> We were always encouraged to have a view and lots of discussion. I was
> politically aware at a very early age (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Her early politicisation is a characteristic shared with Austra Maddox and Pauline

Shelley. Lynne's father was an engineer and her mother a clerical and

administrative worker. She recognises the link between stories of her parents'

work experiences and the high level of political discussion in the home. She says

that this home environment contributed to the keen sense of fairness she developed

as a child. It seems then that Lynne's activism in the labour movement was driven

by a pre-existing personal commitment to promoting social justice and fair

working conditions for others. This is consistent with findings from case study

research conducted in the UK, US and Australia, investigating the factors

triggering female union activism to identify 'types' of women who become

activists and officials (Kirton, 2005; Ledwith *et al.*, 1990; Sinclair, 1996).

Much of this research focuses on gendered trade union practices, family influences

on membership and the historical impact of the feminist movement on female

activism. Kirton (2005: 397) acknowledges that the drivers for female union

activism may differ:

> Some women had no personal grievances which had a major impact on
> their becoming actively involved in their unions. However, they had a
> strong sense of general injustice and, therefore, collective grievances.

It is suggested that these women developed a unique perspective on unionism as

'socialist feminists' (Ledwith *et al.*, 1990: 118). Drawing on their general political

and industrial backgrounds, they tended to remain focused throughout their careers

on the basic principles of democracy and social justice. Uncomfortable operating

in 'traditional' male-oriented union structures, they preferred to use their position

to redefine the role of women through industrial strategy and an issues-based

approach to leadership (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Kirton, 2005; Ledwith *et al.*,

1990).

The first theme to emerge from Lynne's review of her own experiences is her strong support of industrial democracy and empowerment in the workplace. She attributes much responsibility for the failure of unions to genuinely empower and organise workers to poor union leaderships that have become dependent on 'servicing' members (Fitzgerald, 2008). Consistent with contemporary research findings (Carter & Cooper, 1991; Cook *et al.*, 1992), Lynne identifies a significant contributor to this dependency in the propensity for older, male union officials to lose sight of their fundamental motivations. She contends that many take on paid employment in a union to fulfil a genuine desire to help others, an ambition she claims is ultimately misguided:

> You've got a lot of people who've gone in [to work for unions] because they want to help someone and they feel better about doing that. And that's reasonable, of course, but it's not what unionism's about. It's actually about giving people what they need to be able to ensure their rights and entitlements. Not "let me fix that for you"; I actually find that quite patronising and condescending (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Gray (1993: 18) and Lawrence (1994: 98) assert that a focus on 'servicing' as opposed to 'organising' members in turn promotes unresponsive leaderships that entrench stereotypical, hierarchical and inflexible union operations. This consequently inhibits the recruitment and promotion of women to positions of power, because traditional, male-oriented methods of operation are more firmly entrenched by the servicing model (Cobble, 1993; Cook *et al.*, 1992; Gray, 1993; Lawrence, 1994; Yates, 1996). Concurring with Austra and Pauline, Lynne emphasises her view that more responsive, female-friendly leadership within unions is essential for the success of organising strategies:

> You've got to have really strong leadership, ethical leadership. And leadership with integrity which means you don't lose sight of what you want to achieve. They [union officials] maintain their positions without any management by their leaderships. I don't think we've seen much of the organising model, it's been by exception. I don't think unions have done enough of that for it to be embedded in union culture. Really there's been lip service paid to it (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Lynne's view is possibly influenced by her coordinating role in a Peak Council. In a climate of apparent indifference towards women's promotion within unions, Lynne's election as TTLC Secretary is quite remarkable. Although she possessed a strong personal interest in the principles of organising and empowerment, Lynne's rise through the labour movement was unusual. Unlike Austra and Pauline she did not begin her career in a highly unionised workplace which presented opportunities to take up a paid or elected union position. She completed a Bachelor of Education degree and worked for a short period as a relief teacher in Tasmanian government schools. Seeking opportunities to pursue a social justice agenda, Lynne obtained a position at the TTLC, training workplace safety delegates; this was her entry to formal employment in the union movement. A passive union member for some time, she says that the opportunity to interact closely with active union members and officials was an extremely challenging and exciting experience.

Of the women interviewed, Lynne is the only one who was elected to a position outside an individual union. It is likely that, removed from individual union politics by virtue of her position at a peak union council, she was uniquely positioned to develop and implement cross-union strategies that would promote

grassroots organising and focus resources on women's agendas. In strategic terms

she rates the work of UnionsTas highly, but she points to the entrenched masculine

culture of unions at all levels as a significant impediment to successful

implementation:

> We were trying to push [the idea] that women are unionists, are active
> unionists. I think what we tried to do was to ensure that there were issues
> that unions were campaigning on that might attract women. [We] focused
> on issues that might have been important to women and these gave a public
> image of UnionsTas and therefore all unions (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Lynne argues that strong, progressive leadership on issues that matter to workers,

including women, is crucial to the success of union resurgence. This is the third

theme to arise from her interviews. She suggests that union leaders should be at

the forefront of cultural and structural change within unions. In the 1990s the

medium for achieving such change was the ACTU Organising Works programme.

As discussed in chapter 2, the programme trained university graduates and

shopfloor workers to take on roles within unions with a view to breaking the

pattern of servicing members by encouraging grassroots organising and delegate

empowerment (Griffin, 2002). At UnionsTas, Lynne played a significant role in

supporting the programme and she actively encouraged Tasmanian unions to

participate. Despite Peak Council support, however, she notes that very few

Tasmanian Organising Works trainees were employed (Fitzgerald, 2008). Lynne

proposes that unions resisted the programme and its message for a variety of

reasons, citing poor leadership as one of the most significant problems:

> [Some felt] it was a bit subversive; it was the 'left' agenda. Some of it was
> a financial, logistical issue, but there was also some reluctance by

96

particular unions to focus on organising. You know, that's not what their members wanted, they just wanted servicing. This is what the agenda had been and they weren't going to change (Fitzgerald, 2008).

The major organisational and cultural change proposed by the Organising Works programme undoubtedly presented challenges to many unions. The ACTU's international research had identified the need for a large influx of trainees into union positions, trainees who supported the organising philosophy and possessed the skills to transform policy into practice (Griffin, 2002). The ACTU strategy was developed on the premise that dedication and enthusiasm, coupled with the sheer weight of trainee numbers, would initiate cultural change within unions.

Reviewing the impact of the first round of Organising Works on cultural change, commentators and senior ACTU officials acknowledged the naivety of this approach:

> Although Organising Works achieved a lot of credibility in the early years through recruiting new members, it did not, and could not, achieve effective union cultural change. By late 1994 it had become clear to OW officials that promoting change through this 'bottom-up' method was likely to be stymied by the traditional layers of union organisational hierarchy; in short, this was an ineffective and inefficient way of trying to produce organisational change (Griffin, 2002: 16-17).

Lynne's experience in Tasmania accords with the analysis of union participation in the Organising Works programme elsewhere. Her view that there was no pressure from union leaderships for established union practices to change was also recognised by the ACTU as a major impediment to the programme's early success. Some commentators reflect that, in hindsight, change management that focused on

higher levels within unions may have realised the programme's goals more effectively (Carter & Cooper, 2001; Griffin, 2002). Like Lynne, ACTU officials reflecting on the programme's achievements after 1994 acknowledged the crucial role of leadership in promoting organisational change. They also recognised that the contemporary political environment presented some impediment to change:

> In practice, OW was asking union officials… to change their whole way of operating, a method that, among other things, had delivered these officials their current positions. Further, branches were being asked to change at the very time many of them were undergoing major structural change through mergers and were also faced with the major challenge of moving away from the centralised arbitral model towards a system of enterprise bargaining (Griffin, 2002: 17).

Griffin's (2002) analysis suggests that while progressive strategic direction was provided by the ACTU at a national level, a range of factors, including the entrenched power of officials, hindered the process of union cultural change at the state and local level in the 1990s. For women activists and officials this was particularly problematic because the existing structures reflected the dominance of male officials and a 'blokey' way of operating.

Lynne perceived that union transformation failed in Tasmania at this time because unions were predominantly hostile towards the organising philosophy. She also suggests that senior officials, who because they were mostly men, saw the possibility of Organising Works increasing women's roles as particularly threatening. This experience at the State level accords with the national analysis that responsibility for change ultimately rests with individual unions changing their methods of operation at the branch level (Griffin, 2002). Lynne describes her

frustration at the inability of the ACTU, and its local representative the TTLC, to

enforce such change within individual unions:

> I think ACTU leadership has been pretty spectacular over the past ten years
> or so. Greg Combet did his damnedest to try to get unions to
> organise...Sharran Burrow has and some other national union leaders have.
> But they just don't have the power or the authority to compel it. So it's up
> to individual unions to make those decisions and there's just not enough of
> it. That makes me very angry, actually. To think that they know the reasons
> why they should change, but they've been able not to (Fitzgerald, 2008).

A consequence of the patchy commitment to the Organising Works programme

was the failure of unions to capitalise on the climate of cultural change by

pursuing the promotion of women within the ranks of officials (Pocock, 1995b:

20). At the time of its launch, Organising Works commanded much of the ACTU

and member unions' attention, reflecting the movement's overwhelming

preoccupation with declining membership and density (Carter & Cooper, 2001;

Griffin, 2002). Organising Works presented a potentially valuable opportunity to

integrate policies that promoted woman as officials into cross-union strategy. This

opportunity was overlooked because individual unions did not have the political

will to change in this or, indeed, many other ways (Pocock, 1995b: 21f.).

The Organising Works campaign also overlooked what is known from

commentary and reflected in these women's experience of why women become

active in unions. A growing body of research examines the reasons why women

join unions and subsequently become activists and officials (Griffin & Svensen,

1999; Heery & Kelly, 1988; Peetz, 2002; Sinclair, 1996; Watson, 1988). This

research is predominantly in the form of case study analyses on behalf of specific

unions which have identified the promotion of women as an issue of relevance.

These case studies reveal that the women's progress through unions from

workplace delegate to paid official occurs in various stages. Ledwith *et al.* (1990:

113) summarise these stages:

> The making of union leaders... involves the solving of three 'problems'.
> First there is the problem of the individual gaining entry into positions of
> leadership. Secondly, there is the problem of how the individual
> consolidates [her] power base. And, finally, there is the problem of how the
> individual develops a directive role within union leadership.

The first stage of the process, entry into an official position, presents an immediate

challenge for women. The entrenched hierarchical nature of unions sits

particularly uncomfortably with female activists and is not reflective of their

preferred methods of operation (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Franzway, 1997;

Kirton, 2006). In addition, the historical process of incumbent union leaders

'anointing' new officials has resulted in the perpetuation of male dominance

(Jackson, 1998: 2). Ledwith *et al.* (1990: 113) observe:

> Processes of entry... may be more problematic for women than for men.
> For it is often argued that patriarchal cultures and structures place barriers
> in the way of women taking on leadership roles. On the other had... there
> may be occasions when women are seen by established trade union leaders
> as particularly suitable for encouragement and sponsorship

This is born out by both Lynne and Austra's descriptions of their experiences in

Tasmanian unions. Lynne's transition from a paid officer's role to elected

Secretary of the TTLC is a clear illustration of the key role that traditional leaders

continued to play in the selection and promotion of others within the movement

(Jackson, 1998; Ledwith *et al.*, 1990). Lynne describes the circumstances

surrounding her election to Secretary of the TTLC as 'very fortunate' and she

100

acknowledges the political significance of support from outgoing Secretary Jim

Bacon:

> I think when Jim Bacon decided he would go [he] thought I was someone
> he could recommend. I think he also thought it might be a nice thing for
> him to do. [At] that time I was the first woman to lead a peak Council in
> the country. For a whole host of reasons he made that very easy for me by
> saying I would have his support if I stood. I know some of the blokes were
> really pissed off because it was where they wanted to go... that was their
> pathway and I think a number of them were pissed off that he [Bacon] did
> that (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Similarly, Austra Maddox (2008) identifies that 'very much particular women

were encouraged' to stand for elected positions, benefiting from the patronage of

male union leaders. Recalling the attitude of the National Secretary of her union in

the early 1990s, she observes:

> He would actively encourage the women he thought were more in a mould
> he would prefer. There was very much that patronage...some people fitted
> in better than others so they got the nod for whatever was going on
> (Maddox, 2008).

A number of contemporary researchers have pointed to encouragement from

senior union officials as an important factor in the career progression of women

within unions (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Kirton, 2005; Pocock, 1997; Watson,

1988). They also observe that this path of recruitment and promotion for women is

likely to reinforce existing male hierarchical structures and rewards conformity

over merit. There remains strong pressure on women to progress through union

ranks by 'earning their stripes' - the respect and support of male superiors (Kirton

& Healy, 1994; Lawrence, 1994). It is unsurprising that many women reject the

prospect of standing for election to an official position when the alternative to

male patronage is to 'go it alone' in an election campaign.

Lynne confirms Trebilcock's (1991: 407ff.) contention that women face

significant political and logistical barriers to leadership. She contends:

> It's hard for women... you've virtually got to fund your own campaign,
> you're competing against other members in your own organisation and
> how do you do that? You don't necessarily have the resources behind you
> to do that. I think it was fortuitous that I started off in occupational health
> and safety. That meant I had contact with union leaders across the
> spectrum... they got to know me and what I could do. So I earned my
> stripes with Jim [Bacon] as well as with others (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Once elected, Lynne was uniquely positioned at the TTLC to implement grassroots

strategies in support of her values. When she became Secretary, she describes the

realisation that the position carried with it significant power and authority,

including the capacity to realise innovative strategic goals:

> I think it's being in a position to be able to act. I know at UnionsTas I
> certainly had opportunities to take that step and to encourage others to do
> things...mostly I think it's about being in a position of being able to
> achieve something (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Lynne's experience suggests that in order to realise their ambition to 'make a

difference' on a broader social level, women need access to positions of power

within workplace-based activist organisations such as trade unions. This adds

weight to contemporary research that has identified women officials' desire to set

transformative agendas within unions (Parker, 2003: 178f.). Lynne's experience

appears to echo the view that women interpret the role of unions as more than

workplace-based institutions; for many female activists and officials there is a

strong focus on building community relationships and pursuing broader social agendas (Ledwith *et al.,* 1990; Parker, 2003).

4.6 Conclusion

Interviews with Austra Maddox, Pauline Shelley and Lynne Fitzgerald reveal that a number of common factors influenced their initial activism, and subsequent promotion, within the union movement. All three women identify the political and structural importance to unions of women's ascension to senior positions, and all advocate a radical redefining of unionism for the future. This chapter's preliminary analysis suggests that as long as the status quo remains, and union structures are hierarchical and paternalistic, formal positions of power will provide the most effective vehicle for effecting cultural change that favour women's agendas. To transform unions into organisations that are genuinely inclusive, activist and based on principles of equality, it seems imperative that women occupy significant positions of power within them.

Austra, Pauline and Lynne's recorded experiences of the trade union movement appear to support this thesis' proposition that the Tasmanian union experience is exceptional in many ways. The underlying themes from each interview can be broadly categorised as personal characteristics, motivations and lived experiences of trade union officialdom. An analysis of the research suggests that these themes consistently arise in the experiences of women who occupy senior positions of authority. More specifically, Austra, Pauline and Lynne's narratives offer a unique

insight into the impact of Tasmania's historical specificity on the development and promotion of women within unions.

Chapter 5 will provide a more detailed discussion of these key themes, identifying where this analysis supplements the existing literature and where it adds new knowledge by recording and analysing senior Tasmanian union women's experiences for the first time. The discussion will more comprehensively analyse the interviews with Austra, Pauline and Lynne to record their lived experiences, and also to offer some insight into potential strategies for unions seeking to promote women to positions of power.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study utilises in-depth and convergent interviewing techniques as part of an interpretivist research approach, analysing the lived experiences of three senior female Tasmanian trade union officials from 1960-2000. Research rigour is enhanced by reference to secondary source material, a high level of informant participation and frequent meta-reflection (Dick, 1999: 3f.). Each of the two or three interview 'cycles' (Dick, 1999: 2) with Austra, Pauline and Lynne is increasingly focused and is informed by the issues arising from the preceding interviews; the key themes become focal points for subsequent interviews. Because the interviews are analysed as they occur, this thesis is able to focus greater attention on the key themes as they emerge. This is a more streamlined approach to data collection than many other methods of qualitative research, methods that simply collect large amounts of data without necessarily responding thoughtfully to the interview dynamics (Dick, 1999: 4). Despite the inherent limitations of this study, such as a limited population sample, this research approach allows Austra, Pauline and Lynne to offer their own insights into, and interpretations of, their union experiences.

This thesis adds to the existing literature by providing contemporary evidence that particular personal characteristics and underlying motivations contribute significantly to women reaching senior positions in trade unions, and that traditional structures and methods of operation present significant barriers

(Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Kirton, 2005; Ledwith *et al.,* 1990). Interviews with Austra, Pauline and Lynne also record the previously untold stories of three senior Tasmanian women unionists. This chapter's analysis consequently offers a unique and historically specific perspective on a significant aspect of Tasmanian labour history.

5.2 Personal characteristics

Data from the interviews has been broadly interpreted in chapter 4, identifying the framework for a more detailed discussion in this chapter. The preliminary analysis shows that Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories reinforce key findings from contemporary case study analyses (see for example Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Kirton, 2005; Ledwith *et al.,* 1990). All three women appear to share similar personal characteristics and motivations, and all report common experiences as trade officials and as female activists.

The first identifiable group of factors to emerge from the interviews can be described as personal characteristics; they include family background, educational qualifications and self-identification as feminists. As well as exhibiting similar personal characteristics, all three women identify similar underlying motivations as drivers for their long-term formal union commitment. The second group of factors are experiential observations; Austra, Pauline and Lynne describe comparable lived experiences of trade union activism. An initial examination of the interview data indicates that these women categorise these work experiences distinctly: firstly in terms of their roles as officials in general, and secondly, more

specifically from a gendered perspective, as women officials operating within male-oriented union organisations. This chapter further develops the preliminary discussion of the personal characteristics, motivations and experiences of Austra, Pauline and Lynne.

The first theme to emerge from the interviews is that Austra, Pauline and Lynne appear to possess similar personal characteristics. Most notably, all three self-identify as working-class, all are tertiary educated and, to varying degrees, all describe themselves as feminists. Their distinctive characteristics mirror evidence from existing case study research, that finds there is a recognisable type of woman who is likely to progress to a leadership position within traditional trade union structures (Griffin & Svensen, 1999; Heery & Kelly, 1988; Peetz, 2002; Watson, 1988). Contemporary commentators recognise a strong link between personal characteristics and the propensity to unionise in general (Healy, Bradley & Mukherjee, 2004; Waddington & Whitston, 1997; Waddington & Kerr, 2002). Dorgan and Grieco (1993: 152) suggest that methods of entry to union leadership positions differ greatly for women, however other studies have consistently identified that family influences, level of education and gendered perspectives on unionism are common factors influencing women's propensity to join, and be promoted within, unions (see for example Heery & Kelly, 1988; Kirton, 2005; Ledwith et al., 1990; Watson, 1988). These studies also argue that personal characteristics and pre-existing attitudes to unionism significantly affect women's progression to senior trade union positions; this thesis provides contemporary evidence in a Tasmanian context to support these findings.

The first personal characteristic that Austra, Pauline and Lynne share is their strongly class-oriented upbringing and family history of unionism. Kirton (2005: 388) reported a strong link between family background and union activism when she gathered qualitative evidence from female activists in two large, male-dominated UK trade unions. Kirton's (2005: 388) study found that self-identification as working class was highly influential in the decision by women to join and become active in unions. Supporting this finding, Austra, Pauline and Lynne share common family experiences of unionism and labour politics, experiences that subsequently shaped their own political careers. Although Austra's Latvian parents were fiercely averse to political activism in any form, her experience as a refugee was nonetheless such that class-based politics played a significant – albeit indirect – role in her upbringing. Austra remembers:

> [My family] background has had a lot of influence on me. From a very young age I saw the impact of politics [on] those living close with me. I realised that political power meant power and I was very strong on justice and fairness (Maddox, 2008).

Pauline (Shelley, 2008) describes her family background as quintessentially working class, with generational politics influential in her early life: 'We'd always been a labour family and my politics have always been very left'. Although not stereotypically blue-collar unionists, Lynne also recalls her family's strong working-class convictions as influential in her upbringing. She remembers participating in political discussion within her family from an early age:

> [It was] quite an egalitarian household, quite a democratic household. We were always encouraged to have a view and lots of discussion. I was politically aware at a very early age (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Austra, Pauline and Lynne appear to self-identify as working class because of the family environment of their formative years. This is contemporary evidence of Kirton (2005: 390) and Colgan and Ledwith's (1996: 154ff.) proposition that pro-union sentiment is passed down through social and family networks.

The second personal characteristic shared by the interviewees is that they are all tertiary educated. Pauline (Shelley, 2008) recalls a high degree of 'suspicion' surrounding her appointment, not so much because of her gender but because of her university education. Austra (Maddox, 2008) says that she encountered internal union resistance because, by virtue of her qualification as a university graduate, she 'came in [to the public service] at a higher level than others'. Lynne was also a university graduate when she was first employed by the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council (TTLC). She says that the response to her appointment was far less hostile. This may be attributed to the fact that she was engaged as a TTLC trainer and not a union official per se. Lynne says that an educational role was relatively uncontroversial for a woman and her appointment would not have threatened existing male powerbrokers within their own unions. It is also possible that the organisational structure and role of the TTLC itself influenced the response to Lynne's appointment. As a peak union body, the TTLC played an indirect role in member unions' affairs. Although its officers interacted with union members during training and education courses, individual union leaders would have considered this marginal interaction in terms of contact with internal union politics. Lynne suggests that because of the TTLC's perceived distance from

individual unions, her tertiary education was unlikely to present any serious threat to the existing political order within those unions.

Austra and Pauline describe quite different experiences of union responses to their formal education. They report that the suspicion aroused by their level of education came mainly from older male union officials who themselves had limited formal education. This reflects the recorded experiences of other female union officials (see for example Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Franzway, 1997). Many have reported feeling pressured to fit into existing structures by playing down their own educational qualifications while more stereotypical unionists (usually male) are elevated to senior positions by virtue of their longevity as members (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Franzway, 1997; Gray, 1993; Winter, 1994). That Austra, Pauline and Lynne are at pains to identify their higher education as an important attribute is telling; formal education is evidently highly valued by these women and it formed a basis for their authority as union officials.

However, while their high level of education might reasonably have been viewed as an asset for their respective unions, Austra, Pauline and Lynne instead describe having to 'prove themselves' (Shelley, 2008) as effective industrial operators to gain credibility with their male colleagues. Callus' (1986) study of trade union officials in New South Wales revealed some of the reasons behind the hostility towards higher education within traditional unions. He identified significant changes in the social background and educational qualifications of officials since the 1980s. The study found that 'most union officials [had] traditionally been men

who left school at the earliest age...most such union officials had worked "at the tools" for the majority of their early life' (cited in Bramble, 1995: 410). In 1995, writing just a decade after Callus, Bramble (1995: 410) observed that '[u]nion officials now tend to be significantly better educated and to possess higher qualifications than the workforce'. Austra, Pauline and Lynne were therefore pioneering trade union women not only because they progressed rapidly through the ranks of traditional male unions; they were also at the forefront of the new wave of articulate, qualified, 'union professionals' (Bramble, 1995: 411), challenging the notion that higher education was anathema to grassroots trade unionism.

The third personal characteristic shared by these women is that each identifies to varying degrees as a feminist; they share a strong recognition of the role of the women's movement in their success as labour movement activists. Of the three, Pauline identifies most readily as a traditional feminist. She acknowledges that early experiences of the women's movement significantly impacted on her entry into, and method of operation within, unions. Pauline recounts:

> Since reading *The Female Eunuch* in the late 1960s, early 1970s, I've been very passionately involved in issues around gender. I marched the marches and so on. I went to Bathurst and started women's groups and organised women's festivals and it was a huge part of my life. From the first moment I joined the union and became active I was involved in the women's movement and women's caucuses. And by the time I got to a senior position in the union movement I don't know that it was so much obvious but it as always there, internalised, it became apart of my being (Shelley, 2008).

Pauline says that she values her role as an activist for women's rights and considers that feminism has a rightful and logical place in trade union activity. This view is strongly echoed in academic commentary. For instance, Franzway (1997: 128ff.) asserts that unions are appropriate vehicles for promoting feminist ideology and other progressive principles of social justice. Pauline's response to sexual politics within the union seems to have been shaped by her underlying commitment to feminist principles. She recalls the pressure that her commitment to women's rights placed on her during industrial campaigns, and says that she sensed her performance as an organiser being scrutinised and judged in gendered terms:

> I felt I couldn't crack, no matter what happened. Maybe there's much more of an imperative to win a campaign for a woman than there may be for a man (Shelley, 2008).

Pauline's impression that women officials face more scrutiny in their work and are under pressure to prove themselves to male colleagues is also supported in the literature (Dorgan & Grieco, 1993; Franzway, 1997; Kirton, 2005; Thornthwaite, 1993). Austra's experience reiterates this view. She identifies with feminist ideology but considers her focus to have been 'more practical than political' (Maddox, 2008). Unlike Pauline, Austra is tentative about labelling herself a feminist, however she does admit:

> I consider that I have been a feminist in real terms, but I never particularly took on the label of "feminist". I suppose I attributed whatever success I had to being smart and rather tough and working quite hard, rather than to being actively feminist (Maddox, 2008).

By her own admission, Austra's feminism was evident in her advocacy for affirmative action policies within the union; most notably, she successfully argued for the establishment and ongoing role of the Women's Committee in union decision-making and debate. In doing so, Austra was in fact adopting a common feminist approach to union politics; by establishing specific organising strategies based on gender, she promoted a feminist agenda as part of the union's broader political programme (Franzway, 1997: 130). It seems that Austra's deliberate incorporation of women's issues into the union's structure and political agenda was a pioneering approach to gender politics in the Tasmanian union movement.

Similarly, Lynne was keen to focus her energies on campaigns of importance to women workers. She is more reluctant than either Pauline or Austra to define her own position in the debate about feminism in the labour movement. The issues she identifies as important to her are best described as traditional concerns of the women's movement. Interestingly, Lynne identifies issues of gender difference within unions as being 'men's problems with women'. She suggests that women are unnecessarily distracted from their union work by male insecurities about gender roles. Recollecting her experiences with male colleagues at the TTLC, Lynne emphasises her gender neutrality at work and insists that she always maintained a clear focus on industrial issues as opposed to sexual politics:

> I would have chosen to ignore it [discrimination] anyway and to deal with the issue rather than my gender. Some of the relations that those blokes [male union officials] had with me were difficult because of my gender, difficult for them more so than for me. I'm not really conscious of having a difficulty because I was a woman (Fitzgerald, 2008).

113

Austra and Lynne clearly adopted quite different strategies to address gender

issues within their respective organisations. These experiences find echoes in

academic work such as Bacchi's (1990: 265), which identifies a range of tactics

that women use to deal with the struggle they face within traditional union

organisational structures. Bacchi (1990: 265f.) says that these strategies are largely

informed by the prevailing internal political conditions; some women choose to

operate on the basis that they are equals with their male colleagues, while others

emphasise women's differences and strategise accordingly. Bacchi's (1990) view

is supported by Franzway (1997: 132), who develops the hypothesis and adds that:

> [m]en's responses to women's strategies are critical to the outcomes of
> women's struggles. Women do not fail in their efforts to change sexual
> politics because of the limitations of their strategy. Relations of domination
> consist of unequal power and the domination of one side by the other. This
> is turn affects the likelihood of success of strategies of liberation.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Lynne's experience at the TTLC was different

in some respects to Austra and Pauline's experiences of traditional unions. For

example, Lynne was not confronted by the traditional male hierarchy or methods

of operation that characterise individual trade unions. Lynne states that she was

fortunate to work with men who encouraged her career development. Although

conscious of her own gendered outlook on unionism, she claims that she was

sufficiently supported in a professional capacity because she was focussed

primarily on industrial matters. Lynne interprets her own approach to gender

relations at the TTLC:

> I always knew that I'd work differently and I guess that was partly about
> the way I work but partly [about] being a woman as well. I knew that from
> the outset I would do things differently. I chose in some ways to ignore

114

[my] different way of working and just assumed that... people would accept that that's the way I want[ed] to work (Fitzgerald, 2008).

It seems that although Lynne was relatively sheltered from the internal gender politics of individual unions, she nonetheless recognised the issues confronting other female activists operating within the Tasmanian labour movement. That she was able to largely overlook potential issues arising from gender relations supports the views of commentators such as Bacchi (1990: 267f.) and Franzway's (1997: 129ff.), that some women adopt strategies for working within unions based on their equivalence with men; they position themselves primarily as workers and union activists, before identifying as *women* unionists. Lynne's experience bears out Franzway's (1997: 133) hypothesis that if women are supported in their careers by men in positions of authority, they are more likely to rise to senior union positions with a relatively neutral position in the gender debate.

5.3 Motivations

The second main theme to emerge from the interviews is that all three women described similar motivational factors as driving their careers in the union movement. Austra, Pauline and Lynne identify that fairness, justice and a desire to promote industrial democracy strongly influenced their union activism. These themes are reflected in the existing literature (Cunnison & Stageman, 1993; Kirton, 2005; Parker, 1993). Cunnison and Stageman (1993: 25) argue that women become, and remain, active in trade unions for two main reasons: they are influenced by events in the workplace, such as individual grievances or conflict

115

with an employer, or else they desire to pursue broader social agendas and view trade unions as an appropriate vehicle for doing so.

The first motivational factors apparent from the interviews are fairness and justice. Austra describes her own basic commitment to fairness and justice, suggesting that she views these as prerequisites for the development of progressive social policy:

> I was always very strong on justice and fairness and that sort of stuff. I wanted to do something about injustice. I was about issues and not about politicking...I was always aiming for the union to be more progressive (Maddox, 2008).

Austra's approach to her union work seems best described in the literature as a commitment to 'traditional union principles' (Snape, Redman & Chan, 2000: 207). Similarly, Pauline and Lynne also identify a strong desire to 'make a difference' and they seem to measure their own activism in terms of their contribution to broader social justice campaigns. For example, Lynne is critical of what she describes as the labour movement's failure to raise collective working-class consciousness about unions' relevance to contemporary social and political issues:

> A civilising role, that's the approach unions need to take. Particularly in regard to relatively well-educated, well paid people who have good conditions of employment- what else do [unions] do? Where is the bigger picture stuff? I don't see that happening and I don't know why. I think it has in the past [but] I don't know what happened (Fitzgerald, 2008).

There is a corresponding link in the existing literature between ideological commitment and the propensity to unionise (Kirton, 2005; Snape *et al.,* 2000; Waddington & Kerr, 2002). Sverke and Sjoberg (1995: 233) hypothesise that 'value rationality-based commitment to the union' is motivated by a sense of

shared values and pride in the union and is likely to be ideologically based and held long-term. Snape *et al.* (2000) agree that activists motivated by deeply held values and broader social agendas are likely to remain more active in, and be more inclined to work formally for, unions. In gendered terms, Parker's (2003: 178) quantitative study of women's relationship to the trade union movement in the US found that for females, 'participation in union activity was positively related to ... believing in the principles of trade unionism'. Kirton (2005: 397) and Briskin (1996: 362ff.) also reported a correlation between belief in trade union values and women's propensity to take up formal positions within unions.

Austra's (Maddox, 2008) assertion that she 'had the bigger picture and [did] not get distracted' reflects a loyalty to the general ideals of unionism and suggests that she too viewed the role of the union primarily as a champion of social justice and fairness. Lynne also related much of her experience to the broader social agenda she pursued during her tenure as TTLC Secretary. Pauline's interpretation of her role in the union's broader agenda is that she consciously manipulated existing structures to encourage progressive social and political agendas. Pauline (Shelley, 2008) describes this as 'using the system' to promote long-term change in gender politics. She reinforces her class-based perspective when she asserts that unions are a legitimate and powerful medium for justice: '[U]nions are good. Of course they're good! They're for the little person; they're for redressing imbalance' (Shelley, 2008). In particular, all three women view this in terms of restoring the balance between capital and labour, but also of rebalancing gender relations in both the workplace and in union organisations themselves.

Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences provide further evidence to support hypotheses about activist motivation, in which traditional union values such as fairness and justice are posited as likely indicators for women's long-term activism and progression through the ranks of union officialdom (Parker, 1993; Briskin, 1996; Kirton, 2005). The view that unions have an important, and legitimate, role to play in redressing society's inequities through industrial influence is espoused by many industrial relations commentators (Burgess, Lewer & Waring, 2006; Cook *et al.*, 1992; Franzway, 1997; Kirton, 2005).

Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experience also demonstrates support for this in terms of their commitment to industrial democracy at the local level. This personal commitment of three individuals on the late 20th century in Tasmania may be seen as a logical outcome of decades of labour relations history. In academic terms, industrial democracy encapsulates the notion that labour rights are human rights and that work structures and employment conditions should be based upon this fundamental tenet (Davis & Lansbury, 1996; Coats, 2006).

As discussed further in chapter 2, Australian unions did in fact fail to be effectively rehabilitated during the critical period in which they adopted industrial democracy as a policy (Davis & Lansbury, 1996). Those unions that did consider the pursuit of employee participation mechanisms important, regrettably continued to frame their arguments in terms of employer productivity and competitiveness; even today, little attention is paid to the intrinsic social merits of industrial democracy (Drago & Wooden, 1993: 575). Coats (2006: 263) acknowledges that

118

industrial democracy remains a particularly difficult subject to broach in current political and economic times, when Western government policy generally reflects the conservative view that 'worker voice [is] only important to the extent that it contribut[es] to productivity-enhancing innovations'. Coats (2006: 262) advocates the development of a more refined notion of industrial democracy, but acknowledges that this proposal poses major challenges to contemporary employer-union relationships:

> [T]his is an eminently social democratic enterprise in that it reflects the fundamental inequalities of power in the employment relationship, recognises the necessity of collective action and links this analysis to a desire to widen the life chances of individuals.

Austra, Pauline and Lynne, however, identify the pursuit of industrial power, social justice and workplace democracy as key drivers of their activism. In contrast to the contemporary view of the ALP and ACTU (see for example ACTU, 1987) these women appear to have developed their own interpretations of industrial democracy and employee participation in the Tasmanian context. What seems to be distinctive about their construction of industrial democracy is that they consider it to be primarily about was exerting influence over the decisions that affect *all* the major aspects of their lives. For Austra, Pauline and Lynne, the relevance of industrial democracy is not confined to the workplace. The interviews reveal that all three women drew heavily on their guiding values of fairness and justice to inform their perceptions of industrial democracy. For example, the linking of labour rights with universal human rights is clearly reflected in Austra's (Maddox, 2008) description of unions' 'big picture' role. Similarly, Lynne argues that to fulfil their potential, unions need to adopt a 'civilising role' that

encompasses all forms of social and political activism. The proposition that a broader role for trade unions is desirable emerges in the narratives of all three of these breakthrough women activists. It does so because they link union activism with gender issues and see the two as inexorably linked.

This thesis supports contemporary findings that, despite a range of strategic problems and inbuilt gender-bias, unions are still considered by many women as an appropriate place for them to organise collectively and operate to pursue socially transformative agendas (Bacchi, 1990: 260ff.; Franzway, 1997: 131ff.). Commentators have posited that in the absence of any other forums for women to organise and exert political influence, trade unions may actually present the only realistic opportunity to access mainstream resources and support for issues of concern to women (Cook *et al.,* 1992; Kirton, 2005). Austra, Pauline and Lynne are indicative of those women who have, consciously or otherwise, seized the opportunity to manipulate existing union structures to ensure that issues of broad significance are not relegated to the fringes of industrial and social debate. All three women self-identify as union activists with comprehensive social and industrial agendas of their own. Their interviews reveal that these agendas are driven by a fundamental belief in the inherent relationship between unions, class politics and the pursuit of social justice. Similar to Colgan & Ledwith (1996: 161) and Kirton (2005: 386ff.), an analysis of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's distinctive personal characteristics exposes common underlying ideological motivations that emerge as significant influences on their careers and methods of operation.

5.4 Lived experiences

The final theme to emerge from the interviews is the actual character of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's lived experiences of trade union activism on a daily basis. The interviews provide evidence that these women themselves interpret their experiences from two distinct perspectives: firstly in terms of their general roles as union officials; and secondly, as women operating inside traditional, male-dominated organisations. The analysis of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's lived experiences adds new narratives to the existing case study literature. This thesis records their oral histories and interprets their stories in the context of contemporary Australian labour history.

Austra, Pauline and Lynne describe similar personal orientations towards, and experiences of, union work in general. All three self-identify as issues-focused activists and say they were uncomfortable with the negative aspects internal politics within their respective trade unions. Austra acknowledges that her focus on industrial work may have negatively impacted on her career progression:

> [One] of my failings in all the roles I've had is that I'm very much about issues; I'm not so much into personality politics. And I think I would have gone a lot better had I been more involved in the personality politics and so on. I tend to be very much more about the issues and a strategic thinker. I think it would be fair to say I was always well regarded, well respected, but there was always a bit of a distance about me (Maddox, 2008).

This position is supported by Pauline, who recounts the story of her public support for a female colleague, compelling her to actively participate in internal politicking. She tells the story:

121

> There was a woman who worked as an organiser who I was very close to.
> She was the victim of attempts to get rid of her and the National Secretary
> was involved and came down [to Tasmania]. I stood up to that and she
> didn't get sacked. But she upset the boys, she was not very good in the way
> that she dealt with the men, they hated her. She was a very tall woman, a
> very confronting woman, didn't take their bullshit and they wanted her
> gone. So on that occasion I did take part in the politicking and played the
> games and they kept her on. But that was very unpleasant. I think in unions
> sometimes this trench warfare goes on, a siege mentality (Shelley, 2008).

Pauline's perception that the internal politics of trade unions can be analogous to warfare is echoed in the stories of other contemporary activists, especially women. Experiences of officialdom as a continuing battle to direct attention away from personality differences and towards critical union issues is a recurrent theme in the literature (see for example Franzway, 1997; Kirton, 2005; Manning, 1994; Nolan & Ryan, 2003). Similarly, Lynne identifies personal values and principles as critical factors in developing credibility as an issued-based activist. She says she was always wary of, but not influenced by, those in the labour movement who 'played political games' (Fitzgerald, 2008). Lynne expresses the view that maintaining a commitment to fundamental values and a broad agenda was strategically important for her as a TTLC official. Behaving, and being seen to behave, in a highly principled manner was essential to her personal credibility:

> I don't apologise for not playing the game. I won't make those
> compromises. There's a point where I'm uncompromising and I found that
> within the union movement. I was not prepared to compromise my
> principles in the way in which [some union leaders] wanted to work. It's a
> bit about an effect that you want, but also about how you behave...it's
> about your values (Fitzgerald, 2008).

That Austra, Pauline and Lynne are at pains to identify their contempt for negative internal union politicking adds weight to the literature that suggests senior women

officials eschew the style of personal relationships typical of male dominated

unionism and seek to establish credibility as organisers and leaders in their own

right (Kirton, 2005: 387f.). Dorgan and Grieco (1993: 156) claim that pioneering

labour women have historically faced the challenge of 'proving' themselves as

equals with men in their work as industrial advocates, organisers, managers and

strategists. It seems that many other women who have reflected on this aspect of

their union experience have viewed earning the respect of male colleagues as a

significant obstacle to gaining access to positions of authority and establishing

long-term credibility in their organisation (see for example Dorgan & Grieco, 1993;

Sinclair, 1996). Early 1990s case-study research in the UK reported the views of

one female General Secretary:

> 'Total equality' with men [has] a lot to do with personal respect, not
> whether you are male or female. [You] have to gain respect in what you do
> and [it is] something that builds up over the years (Dorgan & Grieco, 1993:
> 157).

Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses in more detail the idea that female activists must

establish a dual credibility, both as officials and as *women* officials. Austra,

Pauline and Lynne recall their experiences as newly-elected or appointed officials

in precisely these terms. Pauline says:

> I think I did have to get 'runs on the board'. I think that I would agree that
> successful industrial campaigns are really, really important (Shelley, 2008).

Austra credits her repeated re-election as Branch Secretary to a high degree of

credibility with the membership, establishing herself as an effective industrial

advocate and campaigner:

When I got re-elected the members must have found I was okay. Obviously I did a pretty good job and was very committed and so on. Even those who had concerns about me being too political, in the end I think that didn't matter too much because I ran things much more industrially (Maddox, 2008).

From the interview data, Austra, Pauline and Lynne appear to possess a heightened sensitivity to the potential impact of internal union politics and public perception on their personal and professional credibility. The question that arises is whether these women's personal attitudes to gender relations had as much of an influence on their career development as any extraneous factors. Feminist labour history commentators assert that in developing identities as union activists and officials, women are extensively directed by their highly personalised, and intrinsically gender-related, perspectives on unionism (Ferrier, 2000; Franzway, 1997, 2000; Pocock, 1995b). It seems that Austra, Pauline and Lynne did in fact experience the reality of being activists in trade unions in distinctly gendered terms. All three women express the view that their career successes were first and foremost the product of their high-level skills as union officials. Embedded in their stories, however, are personal attitudes and inevitably gendered interpretations of their own experiences as women in male-dominated institutions.

These findings concur with Franzway (2000) and Pocock (1995b) and reinforce the view that it is appropriate to analyse Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories in part from a gender-specific perspective. Theirs are clearly narratives of women operating *as* women within traditional, male-oriented union structures. Firstly, the interviews provide contemporary anecdotal evidence of the observation of the

labour movement's failure to identify and adequately respond to the challenge of recruiting and promoting women within unions (see for example Pocock, 1995b, 1998; Ledwith *et al.*, 1990; Kirton, 2006). Secondly, the interviews add impetus to the argument that, like labour movements worldwide, Australian unions must radically redefine and reposition themselves if they are to remain relevant (see for example Frege & Kelly, 2004; Levesque & Murray, 2006; Ryland & Sadler, 2008).

5.5 Perspectives on the future of Australian unionism

Among the findings to emerge from this study is a line of thinking relevant to the future of Australian unionism which draws on the specific experiences of these senior women officials. The view that the Australian trade union movement has failed to identify and respond to the needs of women workers, both industrially and within union organisations, is widely held and has been discussed in detail in chapter 2 (see for example Callus, 1986; Griffin & Moors, 2002; Kirton, 2006; Pocock, 1995b). In this research, three prominent Tasmanian female officials expressed strong support for targeted women's programmes within unions. They described their own commitment to promoting other women through the ranks of officialdom and to opening up opportunities for activism that might otherwise be missed. Pauline in particular identified the value of affirmative action programmes that were implemented following lengthy campaigns by female labour activists throughout the 1960s:

> I benefited from those [affirmative action] programmes…I don't think for a minute I would have got there without that, but it was as a result of the work that the wave in the 1960s had done to bring about change (Shelley, 2008).

Similarly, Austra identified her own pursuit of affirmative action targets within the union as a defining achievement of her career and an important advance for contemporary female activists:

> We had quite a few fights and difficulties within the union on affirmative action but we did end up with a pretty good policy which we then subsequently used as a model at the state Labour Council. Gradually more and more women came on board and we didn't need an affirmative action plan any more because it just happened (Maddox, 2008).

Austra, Pauline and Lynne recounted many positive experiences of affirmative action and feminist campaigning within their respective unions. However, all three women regarded these as insufficiently embraced to counter the union movement's broader strategic failures. Austra supported the view of contemporary commentators that unions have failed to adequately respond to changing workforce demographics (Cooper & Patmore, 2002; Peetz, 1997). She said:

> One thing I think has made a very big difference is the casualisation of the workforce. In particular that impacted more on women in the workforce. A lot of the key unions with women members tended to only really organise in the large workplaces where they had almost a captive membership. So to a large extent I think they ended up ignoring and neglecting the smaller workplaces Maddox, 2008).

Lynne suggested that unions have compounded the problem of demographic change by reducing their visibility in the workplace. Her view is supported by researchers who have investigated unions' responses to the new wave of workers comprising their potential membership base (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of demographic change. See also Buchanan & Briggs, 2005; Cooper & Patmore, 2002). Lynne had first hand experience as both an official and, more

recently, as an ordinary union member in the Tasmanian Public Service. She said

that in her experience, unions today have a minimal presence in the workplace and

there is little or no emphasis on the labour movement's broader role as an agent of

social change:

> I don't think the union movement has done well to address women's issues
> in the past 10 years. In many respects I think they've gone backwards, you
> know. And yet many of the young women I work with would be really
> sympathetic and would be extremely vulnerable to someone approaching
> them saying 'we do this for others, how could you contribute? What sort of
> role might you like to play, active or passive?' Finding out what they're
> interested in and at what level, I don't see that happening at all (Fitzgerald,
> 2008).

Because trade unions have apparently failed to meet the wide-ranging challenges

of shifting workforce demographics and ideological opposition since the 1980s,

women's position within the movement also appears little improved (Buchanan &

Briggs, 2005; Pocock 1995b, 1996). Pocock (1995b) asserts that in their

enthusiasm to formulate rapid policy responses to the challenges confronting them,

most unions have failed to connect with women members or to restructure their

organisations to promote women as equal political and industrial partners. She

offers compelling evidence to suggest that, despite public recognition of gender

inequity within union hierarchies, strategies employed by unions to address their

structural deficiencies have been manifestly ineffectual (see chapter 2 for a

detailed discussion of union responses to declining membership. See also Hall &

Harley, 1997; Peetz, 1997). From the narratives of the Tasmanian women officials

in this research, the general experience has been that union rhetoric has rarely, if

ever, translated into long-term structural or cultural change. Any significant

change that has occurred in terms of gender relations can be largely attributed to the activism of pioneering union women such as Austra, Pauline and Lynne.

One of the benefits of in-depth and convergent interviewing techniques is that interview participants are able to engage at a deeper level with the process (Dick, 1999: 4f.). Interviewees are able to actively interpret their experiences as the interviews progress, adding another perspective to the analysis and encouraging research themes to emerge (Berry, 1999; Dick, 1999). Reflecting on their own experiences, Austra, Pauline and Lynne lamented the progress of women in the Australian union movement since 2000. They asserted that radical structural change is required to reform the Australian union movement. This accords with the position argued by many labour researchers that such reform is required across labour movements worldwide (Frege & Kelly, 2004; Levesque & Murray, 2006; Ryland & Sadler, 2008). In terms of just how this structural and cultural change might be effected, Austra, Pauline and Lynne's views differed. Perhaps most contentiously, Lynne questioned the fundamental relevance of trade-based unions to Australian workers, workers who operate in an increasingly non-traditional industrial landscape (Buchanan & Briggs, 2005: 5). Lynne pointed to the failure of influential unions to embrace the organising culture, and she suggested that the alternative – service-model unions – are irrelevant to workers in an individualistic and fragmented industrial setting:

> I don't know what's happened. I think [unions are] struggling for relevance.
> I think the economic climate is different and makes it difficult for unions. I
> don't think we've seen much of the organising model, it's been by
> exception. I don't think unions have done enough of that for it to be

128

embedded in union culture. Really there's been lip service paid to it. Some [unions] might survive, perhaps as part of the international union movement, not locally based. But for the others who operate on the basis that 'we provide you some insurance and some associated benefits', I don't think they'll survive (Fitzgerald, 2008).

However, Lynne shared Austra's view that the most recent generations of workers carry with them little or no union legacy. The rituals and stories that formed an important part of generational unionism apparently no longer flow through mainstream Australian families. Lynne hypothesises that unions who fail to understand the characteristics of contemporary workers, and who continue to reflect traditional stereotypes, are doomed to failure. She proposes a radical shift in thinking about what unions do and how they relate to younger workers:

If you think about the generation that doesn't have any history, then what is the best approach to them? What about virtual unions? It's really appropriate and you have to think about that (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Lynne is also highly critical of the role of contemporary union leaders in effecting cultural and industrial change. Entrenched union officials unwilling to relinquish their personal power bases have, Lynne suggests, been left unchecked, to the detriment of progressive unionism in Australia:

Whilst I'm really complimentary about the leadership of the ACTU at a national level, I'm not complementary about the leaderships of individual unions at all. That makes me very angry, actually. To think, they know the reasons why they should change but they've been able not to. I can't see that [unions will] continue. I can only see that they won't exist (Fitzgerald, 2008).

In contrast, Austra (Maddox, 2008) advocates a strategic, movement-wide education campaign specifically targeting young women and emphasising the

129

relevance of 'enduring' union values. Austra does not agree that unions in their current form are irrelevant; rather she speculates that their focus has been lost in the minutiae of the daily struggle for survival. Austra interprets this loss of focus as a challenge for unions to return to grassroots industrial campaigning:

> I think [many unions] lost the role of the union and got the balance wrong between the politics of it all and the industrial side. I always thought that it was really important to get the industrial side right, even though there were times of being really political. But I thought the basic thing had to be to get it right industrially; if you didn't get it right industrially that undermined everything else (Maddox, 2008).

Pauline's view about the future of unionism appears to be more ideologically-driven. She contends that the fundamental issues historically confronting workers still exist, albeit possibly in different forms. Pauline identifies the continuing exploitation of labour and the marginalisation of women in society as unresolved major challenges facing the labour movement. Like Austra, she advocates 'grassroots' unionism that adapts traditional principles to new environments. For her this is a principled position arising from her more general social views. She argues that:

> You cannot ever let the grassroots unionism go. It's actually what happens in people's everyday working life that's important. Yes the world is changing but it is also staying the same as well. If people can exploit people to make a buck they will do it. We have to make [unionism] inclusive; I know that the manufacturing base is going and all that, but we are moving into the service industries and it can happen there too. I think the notion that you ditch [traditional values] because it's become harder is wrong. If you don't have that you don't have unions (Shelley, 2008).

Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences as union officials and as female activists revealed strikingly similar themes, as does an analysis of their motivations and personal characteristics. Their perspectives on the future of unionism are also

130

closely aligned. All three consider that, in some form or another, a radical

restructuring and repositioning of Australian unionism is necessary for unions to

remain relevant in the future. This chapter has identified the common themes that

appear to have shaped Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories. The final section offers

concluding observations about their lived experiences and the possible

implications of these narratives for trade unions in the future.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis reveals that Austra, Pauline and Lynne's personal narratives reflect at a

micro level the broader quandary confronting the entire Australian labour

movement. It can be stated as a question: how to effect the necessary

organisational and cultural transformations required to recruit women and promote

them to senior union positions? This research is based on the narratives of a small

number of women officials. It contributes to an understanding of this question

because, despite its limited scope, the narratives are significant. Qualitative

researchers (see for example Drever, 1995; Linn, 1983; Neuman, 2000) point out

that case study research such as this poses potential challenges in terms of

generalisation to a broader population. However, Dorgan and Grieco (1993: 153)

stress the value of interview-based research as a vehicle for recording and

analysing the experiences of marginalised groups whose stories might otherwise

be lost to history:

> Clearly, researching and analysing the leadership experience of a small
> number of female leaders contains the danger of raising the 'anecdotal' to
> the status of science, however, we would argue that leaving the experience
> of female trade union leaders unexamined simply because there is such a
> small number of candidates for research contains even greater dangers.

131

Similarly, Dick (1999: 4) and Swepson (2000: 4) assert that a conventional view of generalisability implies independent observation and quantification of findings but argue that this approach does not sufficiently credit qualitative description in circumstances where concepts are abstract and interpretation central to the research context. Precisely because it is flexible and responsive to interpretation, a quantitative research method based on in-depth and convergent interviewing techniques was deemed the most appropriate for this study. In particular, it has offered the opportunity to record a comprehensive and vividly descriptive representation of Austra, Pauline and Lynne's experiences.

This thesis aimed to identify the common themes in Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories. Chapters 3 and 4 describe the characteristics of these three women, women who broke through structural and gender barriers to reach senior positions of authority in Tasmanian trade unions. Austra, Pauline and Lynne's underlying motivations were revealed, and this in turn offered some lessons for unions seeking to recruit women but who struggle to embrace the aspirations of contemporary female activists. This thesis also aimed to record Austra, Pauline and Lynne's perspectives on the future of the Australian labour movement. Chapter 4 documents their views about potential union strategies to manage gender relationships, and records their thoughts about the relevance of unions to working women in Australia today.

This thesis identified that in the 1990s, many Australian trade unions were aware that existing union structures were not conducive to achieving the cultural change necessary to increase female representation at senior levels of office. As part of this gendered awakening, influential union leaders acknowledged that female officials are critical to the success of any cultural or structural change within the labour movement. Despite this acknowledgement, the interviews with Austra, Pauline and Lynne revealed situations in which existing union leaders, mostly male, appeared resistant to implementing programmes of change within their own unions. Operating within traditional, female-unfriendly structures had entrenched these union leaders and they maintained the status quo by advocating, but not practising, the politics of gender equality.

This study provides contemporary evidence that women in senior Tasmanian union positions share similar personal characteristics, motivations and experiences. Austra, Pauline and Lynne's stories are valuable in themselves, as additions to recorded Tasmanian labour history. Further, they lend a unique and historically specific perspective to contemporary labour movement debate. Analysis of their stories supports the view that, despite specific circumstances, Tasmanian unions share with the Australian union movement a need to engage the strengths and motivations of women activists in order to maximise the prospects of any renewal, or indeed survival, strategy.

5.7 Research implications

Within the limitations of scope and historical context, this thesis has recorded the personal histories of three pioneering Tasmanian union women. Further, it has revealed and analysed common themes that characterise their experiences as senior trade union officials. Arising from this are two distinct future research directions. Firstly, the study foreshadows a larger research project to record Australian women union officials' experiences on a national scale. As an exercise in oral history, such a project would contribute to the Australian historical record of trade union activism, particularly the personal narratives of female labour activists.

Secondly, this thesis points to the need for continued analysis of union gender relations in Australia. For example, a future research project could record evidence of the effect of post-1990 union policies on women's activism and levels of promotion. Such a project could focus on evaluating the extent, and success, of any structural and cultural reform within unions since the late 1990s. This in turn could lead to new research into innovative recruitment and industrial strategies for trade unions in 21st Century Australia.

References

Anderson, E., Griffin, G. and Teicher, J. 2002. *The changing roles of public sector unionism*. Melbourne, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Monash University: Working paper no. 83.

Anonymous. 1994. The New Breed. *Bulletin*: 28-32.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1982. *Trade Union Members*. Cat. 6325.0, Canberra: ABS.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2005. *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*. Cat. 6310.0, Canberra: ABS.

Australian Council of Trade Unions. 2001. Union Membership Increases for First Time in Ten Years; http://www.actu.asn.au/Campaigns/PastACTUCampaigns, 19 November 2007.

Babbie, E. 2002. *The basics of social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

Bacchi, C. 1990. *Same difference: feminism and sexual difference*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Bailey, K. 1989. *Methods of Social Research*. New York: The Free Press.

Beale, J. 1982. *Getting it Together: Women as Trade Unionists*. London: Pluto.

Bennett, S. 1975. *Federation*. Melbourne: Cassell.

Benney, M. & Hughes, E. 1956. Of Sociology and the Interview: Editorial Preface. *The American Journal of Sociology*, LXII (2): 137-142.

Berry, R. S. 1999. *Collecting data by in-depth interviewing*. University of Sussex, UK: British Educational Research Association Annual Conference.

Bilton, T., Bradbury, L., Stayner, J. & Stephens, P. 2002. *Introductory Sociology*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Blain, N. 1985. Federal and State Unions in Western Australia. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27(2): 207-232.

Bodman, P. 1998. Trade Union Amalgamations, Openness and the Decline in Australian Union Membership. *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 24(1): 18-45.

Botsman, P. 1989. Rethinking the Class Struggle: Industrial Democracy and the Politics of Production. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 10(1): 123-143.

Bradley, H. 1999. *Gender and Power in the Workplace: Analysing the Impact of Economic Change*. London, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Bramble, T. 1995. Deterring Democracy? Australia's New Generation of Union Officials. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(3): 401-26.

Bray, M., Waring, P., Macdonald, D. & Le Queux, S. 2001. The 'Representation Gap' in Australia. *Labour & Industry*, 12: 1-31.

Briskin, L. 2006. Victimisation and Agency: The Social Construction of Union Women's Leadership. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 37(4): 359-378.

Bryman, A. 1988. *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Buchanan, J. & Briggs, C. 2005. Unions and the Restructuring of Work: Contrasting Experiences in the Old and New Heartlands. *Labour & Industry*, 16(1): 5-22.

Buchanan, R. T. 1981. Mergers in British Trade Unions 1949-79. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 12(3): 40-49.

Budd, J. W. 2004. *Employment with a Human Face*. London: Cornell University Press.

Burgess, J., Lewer, J. & Waring, P. 2006. Protecting Employee Entitlements: Corporate Governance and Industrial Democracy in Australia. *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 34(2): 365-380.

Burgess, R. (Ed.). 1982. *Field research: a sourcebook and field manual*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Burgess, R. 1991. *In the field: an introduction to field research*. London: Routledge.

Cahill, J. 1993. Maurie O'Sullivan's Era: speech at Maurie O'Sullivan's farewell dinner; http://www.psa.labor.net.au/about/1058097210_13056.html, 19 November 2007.

Callus, R. 1986. Employment Characteristics of Full-Time Trade Union Officials in New South Wales. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28(3): 410-427.

Carter, B. and Cooper, R. 2001. *The Organising Model and the Management of Change: A Comparative Study of Unions in Australia and Britain*. Paper presented at the Canadian Industrial Relations Association Conference, International Symposium on Union Renewal, University of Laval, Quebec.

Chaison, G. N. 1983. Local Union Mergers: Frequency, Forms, and National Union Policy. *Journal of Labor Research*, 4(4): 325-338.

Coats, D. 2006. No going back to the 1970s? The case for a revival of industrial democracy. *Public Policy Research*, 13(4): 262-271.

Cobble, D. 1993. *Women and unions: Forging a Partnership*. New York: ILR Press.

Cockburn, C. 1991. *In the Way of Women*. London: Macmillan.

Colgan, F. & Ledwith, S. 1996. Sisters Organising - Women and Their Trade Unions. In S. Ledwith & F. Colgan (Eds.), *Women in Organisations*: 152-185. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Cook, A. H., Lorwin, V. & Daniels, A. (Eds.). 1984. *Women and trade unions in eleven industrialized countries*. Philadelphia: Temple.

Cook, A. H., Lorwin, V. & Daniels, A. 1992. *The Most Difficult Revolution: Women and Trade Unions*. US: Cornell University Press.

Cooper, R. & Patmore, G. 2002. Trade Union Organising and Labour History. *Labour History*, 83: 3-18.

Cunnison, S. & Stageman, J. 1993. *Feminizing the Unions: Challenging the culture of masculinity*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

Curthoys, A. & Merritt, J. (Eds.). 1984. *Australia's first Cold War, 1945-1959*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Dabscheck, B. 1995. *The Struggle for Australian Industrial Relations*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Dabscheck, B. & Niland, J. 1981. *Industrial Relations in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Davis, E. M. 1987. *Democracy in Australian Unions: A Comparative Study of Six Unions*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Davis, E. M. & Lansbury, R. D. 1996. Employee involvement and industrial relations reform: reviewing a decade of experience in Australia. *Employee Relations*, 18(5): 5-24.

Denzin, N. 1992. *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Department of Trade. 1987. *Australia Reconstructed: A Report by the mission Members to the ACTU and the TDC*. Canberra: ACTU/ TDC.

Dexter, L. A. 1970. *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Dick, B. 1989. *Rigour Without Numbers: the potential of dialectical processes as qualitative research tools*. Paper presented at the XVIIIth Annual Meeting of Australian Social Psychologists, Queensland.

Dick, B. 1999. *Sources of rigour in action research: addressing the issues of trustworthiness and credibility*. Paper presented at the Association for Qualitative Research Conference, Melbourne.

Dorgan, T. & Grieco, M. 1993. Battling against the odds: the emergence of senior women trade unionists. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 24(2): 151-164.

Drago, R. & Wooden, M. 1993. Do union voice and worker participation coincide? A study of Australian managers' perceptions. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 14(4): 573-589.

Drever, E. 1995. *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research*. Glasgow: SCRE.

Dufty, N. & Fells, R. 1989. *Dynamics of Industrial Relations in Australia*. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Eisenhardt, K. 1989. Building Theories from Case Study Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550.

Ellem, B. 1999. Trade Unionism in 1998. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41(1): 127-151.

Feldberg, R. 1987. Women and trade unions: Are we asking the right questions? In C. Bose, R. Feldberg & N. Sokoloff (Eds.), *Hidden Aspects of Women's Work*: 299-322. New York: Praeger.

Fenton, J. & Backhouse Walker, J. 1884. *Tasmania*. Tasmania: J. Walch & Sons.

Ferrier, C. 2000. Sexual Politics and Trade Unions. *Hecate*, 26(2): 4.

Francis, R. 2003. Challenging masculine privilege: the women's movement and the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, 1974-1995. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 78: 59-70.

Franzway, S. 1997. Sexual Politics in Trade Unions. In B. Pocock (Ed.), *Strife! Sex and Politics in Labor Unions*: 128-148. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Franzway, S. 2000. Sisters and sisters? Labour movements and women's movements in (English) Canada and Australia. *Hecate*, 26(2): 31-48.

Garton, S. 1990. From labour history to social history. In G. Patmore (Ed.), *History and Industrial Relations*: 16-29. Sydney: ACCIRT.

Garton, S. 1994. What have we done? Labour history, social history, cultural history. In T. Irving (Ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*: 42-62. Sydney: University of New South Wales Publishing.

Goodrick, J. 1977. *Life in Old Van Diemen's Land*. Adelaide: Rigby.

Gray, L. 1993. The Route to the Top: Female Union Leaders and Union Policy. In D. S. Cobble (Ed.), *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership*. Ithaca: ILR Press.

Green, F. 1956. *A Century of Responsible Government 1856-1956*. Tasmania: L.G. Shea, Government Printer.

Grieve, N. & Burns, A. (Eds.). 1994. *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Griffin, G. 1992. Changing Union Structure. In B. Dabscheck, G. Griffin & J. Teicher (Eds.), *Contemporary Industrial Relations*: 211-222. Sydney: Longman Cheshire.

Griffin, G. & Moors, R. 2002. *Organising Works: Objectives, Evolution, Outcomes*. Working Paper Series No. 78, Melbourne, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations.

Griffin, G. & Svensen, S. 1996. The Decline of Australian Union Density - A Survey of the Literature. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38(4): 505-547.

Hall, R. & Harley, B. 1997. *Towards a New Classification System for Australian Unions, ACIRRT Working Paper 46*. Sydney, ACIRRT.

Healey, M. & Rawlinson, M. 1994. Interviewing Techniques in Business and Management Research. In V. W. Wass, (Ed.), *Principles and Practice in Business and Management Research*: 123-145. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Healy, G., Bradley, H. & Mukherjee, N. 2004. Individualism and Collectivism Revisited: A Study of Black and Minority Ethnic Women. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 35(5): 451-466.

Heery, E. & Kelly, J. 1988. *Union Women: a study of women Trade Union Officers*. London University: Imperial College of Science and Technology and LSE.

Henry, A. 1971. *Women and the Labour Movement*. New York: Arno Press Inc.

Hitchcock, G. & Hughes, D. 1995. *Research and the Teacher: A Qualitative Introduction to School-based Research*. London: Routledge.

Hose, K. 2003. Structural Change in Australian Trade Unionism, 1969-1996: A Structural Events Approach. *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 29(2): 177-193.

Jackson, M. 1988. *Trade Unions*. London: Longman.

Kidder, L. & Judd, C. 1986. *Research Methods in Social Relations*. Tokyo: CBS Publishing Japan.

Kirton, G. 2005. The influences on women joining and participating in unions. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 36(5): 386-401.

Kirton, G. 2006. Alternative and parallel career paths for women: the case of trade union participation. *Work, Employment & Society*, 20(1): 47.

Kirton, G. & Greene, A. 2002. The dynamics of positive action in UK trade unions: the case of women and black members. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(2): 157-172.

Kirton, G. & Healy, G. 1999. Transforming union women: the role of women trade union officials in union renewal. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 30(1): 31-45.

Kvale, S. 1996. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications.

Lake, M. 1975. *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War I*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Lansbury, R. & Davis, E. 1992. Employee Participation: Some Australian cases. *International Labour Review*, 131(2): 231-248.

Lawrence, E. 1994. *Gender and Trade Unions*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Ledwith, S., Colgan, F., Joyce, P. & Hayes, M. 1990. The making of women trade union leaders. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 21(2): 112-126.

Levesque, C. & Murray, G. 2006. How Do Unions Renew? Paths to Union Renewal. *Labor Studies Journal*, 21(3): 1-13.

Linn, M. 1983. Informant Selection in Dialectology. *American Speech*, 58(3): 225-243.

Manning, H. 1994. Women and Union Politics in Australia. *Policy Organisation and Society*, 9): 38-52.

Martin, R. 1975. *Trade Unions in Australia*. Ringwood: Penguin Books.

Martin, R. 1989. *Trade Unionism: Purposes and Forms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Maslow, A. 1954. *Motivation and Personality*. London: Harper and Row.

Mason, B. & Bain, P. 1991. Trade union recruitment strategies: facing the 1990s. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 22(1): 36-45.

Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. 1994. *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide*. London: The Falmer Press.

McDougall, P. 2000. In-depth interviewing: The key issues of reliability and validity. *Community Practitioner*, 73(8): 722-725.

McKibbin, R. 1994. Is it still possible to write labour history? In T. Irving (Ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*: 34-41. Sydney: University of New South Wales Publishing.

143

McKnight, D. E. 1986. *Moving left - the future of socialism in Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press.

Michelson, G. 2000. Trade Union Mergers: A Survey of the Literature. *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 26(2): 107-127.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E. & Alexander, L. 1995. *In-depth Interviewing: Principles, Techniques, Analysis*. Melbourne: Longman.

Neuman, W. L. 2000. *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Nightingale, M. 1991. *Facing the challenge: women in Victorian unions: the results of the first major survey into the representation of women in trade unions and progress on action for women members: a report / produced by Martina Nightingale*. Melbourne: Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Nolan, M. & Ryan, S. 2003. Transforming Unionism by Organising? An Examination of the 'Gender Revolution' in New Zealand Trade Unionism Since 1975. *Labour History*, 84: 89-111.

Norman, D. 1987. *A Tasmanian Life*. Tasmania: D. Norman.

Oakley, A. 1981. Interviewing women; a contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*. London: Routledge.

Oppenheim, A. N. 1992. *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Pinter Publishers.

Ormonde, P. 1972. *The Movement*. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson.

Parker, J. 2003. We're on a road to somewhere: women's groups in unions. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 34(2): 164-184.

Patmore, G. 1994. Community and Australian labour history. In T. Irving (Ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*: 169-188. Sydney: University of New South Wales Publishing.

Patton, M. Q. 1990. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. California: Sage Publications.

Peetz, D. 1997. *The Accord, Compulsory Unionism and the Paradigm Shift in Australian Union Membership*. Discussion Paper No. 358, Australian National University, Canberra.

Peetz, D., Pocock, B. & Houghton, C. 2007. Organizers' roles transformed? Australian union organizers and changing union strategy. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 49(2): 151-166.

Peetz, D., Webb, C. & Jones, M. 2002. Activism Amongst Workplace Union Delegates. *International Journal of Employment Studies*, 10(2): 83-108.

Pocock, B. 1995a. Gender and Activism in Australian Unions. *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(3): 377-399.

Pocock, B. 1995b. Women in Unions: What Progress in South Australia? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(1): 3-23.

Pocock, B. (Ed.). 1997. *Strife! Sex and Politics in Labor Unions*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Pocock, B. 1998. Trade Unionism in 1997. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 40(1): 139-156.

Rebick, J. 2005. *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Canada: Penguin.

Roberts, H. (Ed.). 1981. *Doing Feminist Research*. London: Routledge.

Robson, L. L. 1983. *A History of Tasmania: Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855*. Melbourne: Oxford.

Robson, L. L. 1985. *A Short History of Tasmania*. Melbourne: Oxford.

Robson, L. L. 1991. *A History of Tasmania: Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*. Melbourne: Oxford.

Robson, L. L. 1997. *A Short History of Tasmania: updated by Michael Roe*. Melbourne: Oxford.

Rose, S. 2003. Community Studies: The Pedagogical Uses of Ethnography, Oral History and Memoir. *Transformations*, XIX (2): 21.

Ryan, E. 1984. *Two-Thirds of a Man: Women and Arbitration in New South Wales 1902-08.* Sydney, Australia: Hale & Ironmonger Pty Ltd.

Ryan, E. & Prendergast, H. 1982. Unions are for Women Too! In K. Cole (Ed.), *Power, Conflict & Control in Australian Trade Unions*: 261-278. Australia: Penguin Books.

Ryland, R. & Sadler, D. 2008. Revitalising the trade union movement through internationalism; the grassroots perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 21(4): 471-481.

Schwartz, H. & Jacobs, H. 1979. *Qualitative sociology: a method to the madness*. New York: Free Press.

Seidman, I. 1991. *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sheppard, A. W. (Ed.). 1950. *Catholic action and Australian Labor: a frank commentary on some of the methods by which Catholic Action is subverting the true cause of Labor*. Sydney: Morgan's Publications.

Simms, M. 1987. *Militant Public Servants: Politicisation, Feminisation and Selected Public Service Unions*. Melbourne, Australia: The Macmillan Company of Australian Pty Ltd.

Sinclair, D. 1996. The importance of gender for participation in and attitudes to trade unionism. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 27(3): 239-252.

Snape, E., Redman, T. & Chan, A. W. 2000. Commitment to the union: a survey of research and the implications for industrial relations and trade unions. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 2(3): 205-230.

Steiner, G. 1994. Trusting in Reason. *Times Literary Supplement*, June: 3-4.

Stephan, F. 1950. Sampling. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 55(4): 371-375.

Strauss, A. 1987. *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sverke, M. & Sjoberg, A. 1995. Union membership behavior: the influence of instrumental and value-based commitment. In E. Tetrick &J. Barling (Eds.), *Changing Employment Relations: Behavioral and Social Perspectives*: 229-254. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Swepson, P. 2000. *Reconciling action research and science*. Paper presented to the Action Research World Congress, Victoria.

Taylor, S. & Bogdan, R. 1984. *Introduction to qualitative research methods: the search for meanings*. New York: Wiley.

Thompson, S. 1992. *Sampling*. New York: Wiley.

Thornthwaite, L. 1993. The relationship between union commitment and gender: Some qualifying factors. *Relations Industrielles*, 48(4): 762.

Tomkins, M. 1999. Trade Union Amalgamations: Explaining the Recent Spate of Mergers in Australia. *Labour & Industry*, 9(3): 61-77.

Townsley, W. A. 1951. *The Struggle for Self-Government in Tasmania 1842-1856*. Tasmania: L.G. Shea, Government Printer.

Townsley, W. A. 1976. *The Government of Tasmania*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

Townsley, W. A. 1994. *Tasmania: Microcosm of the Federation or Vassal State?* Hobart: St David's Park Publishing.

Trebilcock, A. 1991. Strategies for strengthening women's participation in trade union leadership. *International Labour Review*, 130(4): 407-426.

Van den Broek, D. 1997. Human Resource Management, Cultural Control and Union Avoidance: an Australian Case Study. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39(3): 332-348.

Waddington, J. 1992. Trade Union Mergers. In D. Cox (Ed.), *Facing the Future*: 105-146. Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press.

Waddington, J. & Kerr, A. 2002. Unions Fit for Young Workers? *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(4): 298-315.

Waddington, J. & Whitston, C. 1997. Why Do People Join Trade Unions in a Period of Membership Decline? *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 35(4): 515-546.

Watson, D. 1988. *Managers of discontent: trade union officers and industrial relations managers*. London: Routledge.

Watson, I., Buchanan, J., Campbell, I. & Briggs, C. 2003. *Fragmented Futures. New Challenges in Working Life*. Sydney: Federation Press.

Weiler, P. C. 1990. *Governing the Workplace: the Future of Labour and Employment Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

West, J. 1852. *The History of Tasmania*. Launceston: H. Dowling.

Yates, C. 1996. Neo-liberalism and the working girl: The dilemmas of women and the Australian union movement. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 17(4): 627.