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CHAPTER SIX<sup>1</sup>

UNION DEMOCRACY

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That unions *should* be democratic almost everyone agrees. There is almost equal agreement that some unions are far from democratic. At one time there was a considerable debate among American scholars as to how serious a problem this was and how democracy should be defined. Though this issue has been largely ignored in the U.S. in recent years, the time is ripe for a new examination of the issue, especially in the light of substantial research overseas.

The purpose of this chapter is not to assess the extent of democracy in the U.S. or elsewhere, but investigate the conditions under which various forms of democracy are feasible. In so doing, it will explore the major issues raised by the literature and attempt to integrate several major conceptual schemes, especially those of Michels (1962), Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956), James (1981), and Edelstein and Warner (1975).

Our central argument is as follows: Union democracy is desirable, not because democracy is good in itself (as it is) but because *on balance* democracy increases union effectiveness in representing members' interests and in mobilizing these members to support its collective bargaining objectives. Town meeting democracy, in which large numbers of members participate personally is feasible only in small locals and occasionally on the shop floor. The best we can hope for is responsive leadership. But to insure continued responsive leadership requires that members be able to oppose their leaders' policies and to change their leaders if they become irresponsible -- and to do this without great personal cost. Thus a reasonable requirement of democracy is that it allows low-cost opposition.

The vast majority of union members rarely participate in union activities. For democracy to exist at the local level requires an active core of committed volunteers who can serve three functions; (1) check the leaders' power, (2) provide the nucleus of electoral opposition if the leaders become irresponsible, and (3) act as a communications link between the leadership and the rank and file. Among the factors favoring the development of a strong activist core is the existence of an occupational community.

By contrast with some other countries, activist volunteers play a relatively minor role at the national level in the US. Here the paid staff is all important. If that staff is completely subservient to the national leadership, opposition will be extremely difficult. Fortunately there are usually centers of countervailing power, staff roles which are at least somewhat independent to the top leadership. As do local-level activist cores, these national-level centers provide checks on the leadership and potential bases for organized opposition.

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1. To appear in George Strauss, Daniel Gallagher, and Jack Fiorito, eds. The State of the Unions. Madison: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1991.

Thus, for the system to work best we need occupational communities at the local level and constitutionally protected centers of countervailing power at all levels. We also need written and unwritten rules protecting the rights of minorities to oppose the leadership. Finally, as a last resort, if these rules are absent or ignored, public intervention is required to restore basic democratic rights.

This thesis is elaborated in the discussion which follows. The chapter consists of five parts. The first quickly reviews the research history. The second discusses the functions and measures of democracy. The third examines democracy at the local level, emphasizing opportunities for participation by both the activist core and the inactive rank and file. The fourth looks at the national level, stressing centers for countervailing power and the role of opposition groups. The last considers the conditions under which the largely structural factors previously discussed actually lead to an active democratic process.

### Research History

Much of the early US research on union government stressed work-site and social factors -- especially the occupational community -- which contribute to active membership participation. Dominating the field was *Union Democracy*, Lipset, Trow and Coleman's (1956) seminal study of two-party government in the International Typographical Union (ITU). Other early contributions from Rose (1952), Greer (1959), Barbash (1967), and Sayles and Strauss (1953) also focussed on shop and local-level issues. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw a second wave of interest, this time concerned more directly with structural issues (Taft, 1956; Leiserson, 1959; Cook, 1963; and above all the *Trade Union Monograph Series*, edited by Walter Galenson, 1962). This research, inspired in part by the McClellan hearings, dealt primarily with large locals and national unions.

Since the mid-1960s, much of the academic interest in the internal life of US unions has come from sociologists (see especially Edelstein and Warner, 1975). There have been a few case studies of democracy and especially insurgent reform groups, such as the Teamsters for a Democratic Union as well as important work by Anderson (e.g., 1980) on Canadian unions.

Interest in union government has been more continuous in Britain. The Webbs (1920) led the way. Notable surveys appeared during the 1950s and 1960s (Roberts 1956; Turner, 1962). By the late 1960s interest turned to theory with a series of studies examining the nature of union democracy and the conditions under which it was most likely to flourish (Child, Loveridge, and Warner, 1973; Martin, 1968; James, 1981; Hemingway, 1978). To a considerable extent these studies were inspired by Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) and Edelstein and Warner (1975). Three major case studies of unrivaled richness combined interviews, questionnaires and direct observation of shop and branch-level behavior (Batstone, Boraston, and Frenkel, 1977; Nicholson, Ursell and Blyton, 1981; and Edwards and Heery, 1989).

Much has been done in Australia, especially studies by Dickenson (1982), Davis (1987), and Frenkel and Coolican (1984), each of whom examine the internal political dynamics of a variety of unions. Today we know considerably more about British and Australian unions than we do about their North American counterparts. (There appears to be little English-language analytical research on union democracy in non-English speaking countries.)

Recent research has become theoretically sophisticated, making use of political science and sociological concepts. Theories of bureaucracy and social movements are both relevant since the union combines elements of each. Unfortunately little use has been made of the rich literature on other types of voluntary organization.

### **The Function of Democracy and its Measurement**

Democracy is an elusive concept, particularly because it serves so many functions. Rather than adopt one all-embracing definition, we suggest some alternative *measures* of what generally is viewed as democracy. Before doing so, it may be useful to consider *why* union democracy is important in the first place.

Those who would make democracy a high priority goal tend to argue that the purpose of unions is not just to do things for workers but to empower them to help determine the conditions of their employment by *themselves*. Thus for some scholars the test of union effectiveness (not just democracy) is the extent to which members participate *individually*.

The opposing view is that the "end of trade union activity is to protect and improve the general living standards of its members and not to provide workers with an exercise in self-government" (Allen 1954, p. 15). The union's chief contribution to our larger democracy is as a countervailing force to management, not through internal democracy. Further, the low levels of member participation in most unions themselves demonstrate that democracy is little valued by members. Thus, democracy, of the kind implied by the "empowering members" argument can not be achieved.

Finally, if members are unhappy with their union presumably they can quit it (Allen, 1954). And in the US they can vote for another union or for decertification. (But union shops and no-raiding rules make this a limited freedom in the US, while the Bridlington principle and arbitration regulations do the same in Britain and Australia.)

Aside from the fairly absolutist arguments just mentioned, there are those which focus on the relationship between democracy and efficiency. Arguably democracy can increase efficiency. In the first place, leaders of democratic unions may better represent their members, since they are more likely to know what their members want. As described in Chapter 4, officers frequently misjudge their members' preferences, especially in undemocratic unions.

Secondly, paid officers cannot do everything alone. Democracy helps recruit and train unpaid leadership. Additionally it fosters a sense of commitment to the union as a whole. In so doing it helps overcome the free-rider instinct and creates an atmosphere in which members make the sacrifices necessary to win strikes (see Chapter 4). And so it helps mobilize member support, especially in policing the contract and during strikes. Moreover, if members lack orderly procedures to express dissatisfaction with their union, they may become apathetic, engage in wildcat strikes, or vote down contracts (Ghilarducci, 1988).

Third, democracy makes it easier to eliminate inefficient officers or those who fail to represent member interests adequately. Fourth, recognized democratic practices may assist union organizing efforts (Maranto and Fiorito, 1987) through reducing the widespread "big union image" that the "union requires members to go along with decisions they don't like" (Kochan, 1979).

On the other side are those who stress the need for discipline, unity, and administrative efficiency. For some, democracy means factionalism, and factionalism may divide or paralyze the union. "Mutually warring factions are a luxury most unions can not afford" (Taft, 1956, 240). Formalized opposition is seen as "seriously endangering the sense of unity and brotherhood which is the bed-rock of trade union organization" (Roberts, 1956). Factional bickering over trivia may repulse ordinary members who have better things to do with their time. Populist democracy is unlikely to make the hard choices on which union survival may depend. In short, union "members have doubtless suffered far more from inefficient and unimaginative administration than they have ever lost through corruption and undemocratic practices" (Bok and Dunlop, 1970, p. 90).

Thus we face the "democracy dilemma...can unions simultaneously maintain both discipline and democracy?" (Hemingway, 1978). As frequently asserted, the union exists in a socio-political as well as an economic environment. It is part bureaucracy and part social movement, part army and part town meeting (Muste, 1928). It is an army which elects its officers yet has only limited claims on its foot soldiers' time and loyalties. Certainly, there is considerable tension between efficient administration and membership participation/commitment (Child, Loveridge, and Warner, 1973).

My own view is that although democracy may often be disorderly and disruptive, in the long run the main danger is not that unions will be too democratic, but that democracy will be weakened and that they become both inefficient and corrupt. Town-meeting democracy, with high levels of direct participation, may be rarely achieved and may not even be universally desirable. But, orderly, representative democracy can contribute much to union survival and success.

### *The Iron Law of Oligarchy*

While democracy may be desirable, sustaining it may be difficult. No discussion of union democracy can ignore Michels' "iron law of oligarchy", which though originally referring to political parties, has often been applied to unions. "Who says organization, says...oligarchy" Michels (1962, p.365) put it. "[E]verywhere the power of elected leaders over the electing masses is almost unlimited. The oligarchical structure of the building suffocates the basic democratic principle." The pessimistic viewpoint, as articulated by Herberg (1943), Lipset and others, was that even in unions with the most idealistic of leaders, democracy is likely to erode. Among the reasons for this pessimistic view are:

*Expertize.* Leadership in a union requires expertize. Further, the amount of expertize required has increased in recent years. Members lack both the skills to deal with technical issues themselves and the ability to evaluate how effectively their officers handle them.

*Communications.* Officers control both formal and informal channels of communications. Dissenting views are typically denied access to most union newspapers, the main formal channel of communication in most unions. The staff persons who manage most informal communications with the rank-and-file typically are appointed by the top leadership and are under their firm control. The elected leadership and their appointed subordinates can campaign for reelection almost full-time, while their potential opponents have none of these advantages.

*Estrangement.* As the leaders become entrenched in their positions they may lose contact with the rank and file. They adopt a different style of life and different values. They become increasingly sympathetic to management and increasingly intolerant of "trouble-making" dissidents.

*Apathy.* The leadership's monopoly of control is accentuated by membership apathy.

The Michels argument is superficially plausible. But as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, oligarchy is not inevitable. Though Michels points to real problems, apathy is far from universal. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, most unions enjoy an *activist core* of volunteers who can restrain the local level leadership. Further, there are *centers of countervailing power* which can potentially challenge the top leadership. But before examining these questions, let us consider how union democracy is to be measured.

*Measures of union democracy.*

Aside from some purely theoretical approaches, a variety of operational measures of union democracy have been proposed.

One approach is *legalistic*. Does the constitution provide for the regular election of officers? Are members free to run for office? Are they free to express their views? Most unions pass this test. In fact, in the US, UK, and Australia these rights are to various degrees protected by law.

This might be called a "safety valve" theory of democracy: if conditions get *too* bad, if the members become aroused enough, they have the power to change things. But the safety valve is often sticky. One can cite examples of unions which pass the legal test, but in which dissent can be expressed only at high cost and/or is futile. In these unions, elections occur in a coercive atmosphere. Meetings are held at times and locations inconvenient for a majority of the members and those who express dissenting views are likely to face discrimination in job assignment.

This suggests a second test of democracy (Martin, 1968; James 1981): can members in practice exercise their rights at reasonably low cost? Can members run for office and speak in opposition to the leadership without fear of reprisal? Does the leadership in power control all the channels of communication or do opposition candidates have a reasonable opportunity to communicate with those eligible to vote for them? Note that by this *cost* test low meeting attendance and uncontested elections are not, in themselves, signs of lack of democracy. Realistic as this test may be, from a research perspective it presents difficulties since it depends on being able to assess the often quite subjective "cost" of opposition.

A third test is *behavioral*. It focuses on the existence of an institutional opposition (Lipset, Trow and Coleman, 1956), close elections, officer turnover (Edelstein and Warner, 1975), high levels of membership participation in various forms of union activity, or the percentage of minority and female officers. This test presupposes that the *right* to participate is not enough; it must be used.

An advantage of the behavioral test is that it is operational. One can count the number of people who vote in elections and the number of times incumbent officers are defeated. As a consequence, most recent empirical studies of democracy make use of behavioral tests. A disadvantage of these tests is that they

are in some ways as formalistic as the legalistic test and the results are subject to different interpretations. Low monthly meeting attendance ironically may mean that members are satisfied, or only that differences have been ironed out through informal discussion, making attendance superfluous. Similarly the fact that officers are reelected with little opposition may mean that these officers are autocratic or only that they are highly responsive to member preferences. If, as Taft (1956) argues, the democratic process operates chiefly through informal influences which members exert on their officers, then officer turnover may indicate lack of responsiveness and "signifies the inadequacies of lesser sanctions" (Martin, 1968, 208).

A fourth test is that of *responsiveness* and influence. Do officers reflect the values and priorities of their members? Do members feel they have some "say in how things are decided" (Tannenbaum and Kahn, 1958; Dufty, 1979). To what extent can they influence union decisions (Anderson, 1978)? According to this test a union might be classified as democratic even if elections or membership meetings were never held and officers relied heavily on opinion surveys to determine the members' wishes. It might even be enough if the officers knew the members' desires intuitively. Hoffa, it was said, "thinks like a Teamster" and so had no need for the formal trappings of democracy. (But did he also think like the members of the many other occupations that Teamsters organized?)

Responsiveness is difficult to measure. Research can take a variety of forms. We can study organizational decision-making and the *process* of influence, for example through observing member-officer interactions in the shop or through interviews which focus on how officers react to member requests (Batstone, Boraston, and Frenkel, 1977). Or members can be asked how much "say" they feel various levels of the organization have with regard to key decisions (Tannenbaum and Kahn, 1957).

A final test is the union's accessibility to women and minorities (see Chapter 7). Though passing the other tests, the ITU failed this one.

These tests are not equally easy to pass. They may be more appropriate in some situations than in others. My emphasis is on the second test, the conditions under which members can participate and low-cost opposition develop both locally and nationally.

### Democracy at the Local Union Level

Opportunities for democracy vary considerably among local unions. To illustrate this diversity, let us examine five semi-fictional locals, which approximate those we have studied. Two key themes run through our discussion, first the importance of *occupational community* in facilitating participation, and secondly the role of the *activist core* which does much of the union's work and serves both as an intermediary between the paid union leadership and the inactive rank and file and as a possible countervailing power to a union leadership which might otherwise become autocratic. As Van de Vall (1970, 153) puts it "Democracy... is an elite function, owing its existence less to the indifferent many than the interested few...In addition to the powerful leaders and the passive membership, there is a third force, the active participants."

*Local PROF*, only 90 members strong, consists of professionals assigned to a single office. *Here we have both a strong occupational community and a strong activist*

*core.* Well educated and quite comfortable in dealing with technical matters such as contract language, wage comparisons, and fringe benefits, its members also have had considerable experience working in committees. This local comes close to a practicing town meeting democracy. Well attended meetings are held as frequently as once a week during contract negotiations and as infrequently as once every three months at other times. The officers themselves have little power, but almost half the members belong to one committee or another.

*Local MFG* represents 3,000 workers in a manufacturing plant belonging to a large national corporation. The national contract is supplemented by a local agreement. Power within the union is divided. The national staff negotiates the national agreement and controls access to arbitration, while the local itself is under "dual government" (Cook, 1962) in that there are two separate leadership hierarchies: one consisting of stewards and the shop chair, who deal with grievances; the other involving officers, such as the president and secretary-treasurer, who are concerned with the union's internal business. This diffusion of power inhibits one-person rule. Furthermore, the elaborate contract and grievance procedure protects individual members against arbitrary actions by either union or management.

Local meeting attendance averages three percent of the membership and consists chiefly of a small core of activists, some of whom act as unofficial department representatives. Attendance spurts when "important" issues are on the agenda, for instance ratifying a new contract. At the shop level democracy operates through informal discussions.

By contrast with PROF, MFG depends on its small activist groups both for its effectiveness and its democracy. These groups are divided into factions, mostly based on ethnic and occupational differences. Incumbent effectiveness is easy to judge. Members of the opposition have little trouble contacting each other. Politicking is easy. Consequently election battles are frequent, with incumbents often losing.

*Local CON* is in construction. Its 700 members work over a large area, but feel strong craft identification. The local union plays a central role in its members' occupational community. Further, work is allocated through the union hall and collective bargaining occurs locally. The power which in MFG is distributed over a wide range of officers, in CON is concentrated in one person, the Business Agent (BA). The BA negotiates contracts, places people on jobs (a function handled by the company in MFG), handles grievances and calls strikes to enforce the contract. Stewards are appointed by the BA, but generally have little power.

Meeting attendance is higher than in MFG, in part because the meetings serves a social function for members to see friends whom they would not otherwise see on their disbursed jobs. Further, since the union plays such an important role in members' lives, they attend meetings to show their concern.

Locals such as CON vary considerably in democracy. Some construction locals are quite autocratic. Politically CON's BA is in a stronger position than his counterparts in MFG. Since he is constantly travelling members have less opportunity to evaluate his effectiveness. Meanwhile he is in effect campaigning every time he handles a grievance or places a member on a job. Opposition is more difficult to organize than in MFG since members work in widely scattered locations. Further the BA may easily discriminate against opponents in handing out



jobs. On the other hand, in some locals the BA's freedom to exercise his powers arbitrarily is greatly restricted by active rank and file participation (Strauss, 1956).

*Local GEN*, with 10,000 members, consists of chiefly unskilled service workers who are employed by mostly small employers in a variety of industries (for studies of large locals like GEN see Cook, 1963; Rogow, 1968). GEN organizes almost everyone organizable, regardless of jurisdiction; in Britain it would be called a "general union". A high percentage of its members are unskilled women and ethnic minorities. These members' low social status, weak individual bargaining position, and widely scattered work locations all contribute to almost no sense of occupational community.

The Business Manager, an aging ex-Communist, is still a charismatic leader. Being in an almost impregnable political position, he is reelected every four years without opposition. He appoints the BAs. In theory he is subject to an elected Executive Committee, but this is firmly under his control.

Despite his secure position he is acutely aware of the need to develop an activist core. With members spread widely over a broad area and a large number of different contracts policed, paid staff can not do the job alone. It needs the activists' assistance. A particular effort has been made to recruit stewards in every workplace. The local places a heavy emphasis on civil rights and minority activities, and these serve as a vehicle for recruiting potential shop-floor leaders. The local has been divided into industry and area subgroups, with quarterly "mass meetings" being held in each subgroup. Though attended largely by stewards, these meetings serve the purpose of communications, education, indoctrination, and of ratifying the decisions of higher leadership. Mass meetings never make choices among alternatives.

In short, GEN is what Turner (1962, p. 291) called a "popular bossdom" in which there is an "attempt to draw members into union decisions and management - by an emphasis on democratic forms and procedures, by adopting a militant attitude, by devices to increase members' interests.."

*Branch (local) AUK*, with 15,000 members, is either British or Australian. Its membership consists of a mixture of semi-skilled, and unskilled workers (skilled workers have their own unions). Unlike MFG its jurisdiction covers not just a single plant but a number of employers in entire city (in Britain) or a state (in Australia). Its agreements (awards in Australia) are negotiated nationally, but like CON it rarely represents all the workers in any single shop. Instead there are several unions at any one location and the key shop-level unit is the multi-union shop committee. With contracts negotiated nationally and only a rudimentary grievance procedure, the branch's main function is to employ organizers, who like international representatives in US unions, help gather support for national policies, organize the unorganized and assist in the resolution of shop-level disputes when asked for help.

The branch holds a largely ceremonial annual meeting which only a handful of members attend. Key power rests in the 30-person branch committee of management, only a third of which are full-time union officers. By contrast with GEN's rather supine executive board, the "lay" (unpaid) branch committee members are largely independent of the branch leadership and rarely rubber stamp its recommendations. There are several possible explanations of this difference: vigorous shop-level bargaining occurs in many of the plants with frequent

"industrial action" (wildcat strikes, etc.); AUK's rank-and-file is more heavily male, less ethnically diverse, and holds higher status jobs than in GEN; moreover, branch committee members are elected by districts and so have independent bases of support.

The five locals just discussed hardly exhaust the possible local union types, even in the US. For example, public sector locals -- an increasing portion of the labor movement -- seem to have been ignored by US scholars (but see Nicholson, Ursell, and Blyton, 1981, in the UK). In many European countries works councils perform some of the functions of US locals. In Italy there are shop level organizations, such as "comita di cottimo".

Let us now review the roles of occupational communities and activist cores in our five locals. Locals PROF and CON have strong occupational communities; it is weaker in MFG. To the extent it exists in AUK it is at the shop, certainly not branch-wide level. There is almost no sense of community in GEN. All five locals have activist cores of various sizes. In PROF, MFG, and CON these are based on occupational communities. In GEN they have been recruited by the union leadership. In AUK there are a series of shop-level cores, confined to the single shop, and a quite small branch-level core consisting of lay branch committee members.

In terms of the Michels hypothesis, members of PROF are almost as expert as their leaders. Bargaining issues are *relatively* simple in CON; grievances in MFG are handled chiefly at the local level. In both unions rank-and-file members (or at least activists) possess the information necessary to evaluate officer effectiveness. By contrast the expertize gap is considerably greater in GEN and AUK.

Perhaps the same ranking apply to communications, with PROF's leadership having the least communications advantage and GEN's and AUK's having the greatest. With less certainty these ranking may also apply to estrangement, with the social and perception gap between the CON BA's closely knit constituency being far smaller than that between GEN's manager and its polyglot membership. Local union participation may be greatest in PROF and least in GEN and AUK, but there are substantial opportunities for worksite participation in MFG and particularly AUK.

With this discussion in mind let us explore the main channels available for participation. Most of these occur at the local level.

#### *Channels for Local-level Participation*

*Local meetings.* Much of the literature has focussed on the meeting as a test of union democracy. As Chapter 4 discusses, there have been elaborate studies relating self-reported attendance to attitudes and demographic factors. But the meeting itself -- who actually attends, what happens in the meeting, and the meeting's function in local government -- has been largely ignored. The few exceptions are generally out of date (Turner, 1962; Roberts 1956; Sayles and Strauss, 1953, but see Davis 1987).

Forty years ago one might estimate that among U.S. manufacturing unions "except for skilled locals ...and very small locals of less than 200, attendance varies from 2 to 6 per cent." (Sayles and Strauss, 1953, p. 173). At roughly the same time

Roberts (1956, p. 95;) estimated a range in the UK of five-seven per cent (see also James, 1984). Forty years ago, however, unions were still pretty young in the US and TV was in its infancy. Attendance may well have dropped since that time, though sadly we have almost no current evidence.

Generalizing from the from the English language literature, "normal" attendance, as a percent of membership, appears to be higher (a) in smaller locals; (b) when the local represents a single workplace; (c) when collective bargaining is relatively decentralized; and (d) when members enjoy a sense of occupational community. Attendance becomes momentarily higher on the fairly rare occasions when the meeting makes decisions which are directly important to a large portion of the membership. These include strike votes, contract ratification and closely contested elections. Smaller attendance spurts occur when matters of particular interest to specific groups are considered, e.g., seniority disputes.

A high proportion of the attendees at locals like MFG and CON consists of activists, for whom the union is either a hobby or a cause. Yet the topics which concern these activists may have little interest to the ordinary member. Many activists enjoy petty fights, yet Anderson (1978) found that factionalism reduced attendance.

In many locals the conditions for even reasonably moderate attendance rarely occur. In these the local meeting provides almost no opportunity for the development of an opposition. This is the case in many UK and Australian unions and in an increasing number of large US ones.

Kovner and Lahne (1953) argue that low attendance is largely irrelevant, since those who attend meetings act as delegates for their work groups, reflect their views, and report back to their peers after the meeting is over. This viewpoint may be unduly optimistic. Attenders in MFG, for example, come from a relatively small number of chiefly high status departments. Their views may not be representative of their peers. Nevertheless, regular meetings provide a safety value, even if poorly attended. If members become sufficiently dissatisfied, the meeting provide a forum where their dissatisfactions may be expressed and action taken.

Given the inadequacies of regular local meetings as means of communication or democratic decision-making in large locals, some Australian locals call "mass meetings" of the entire local only on special occasions. In the US and elsewhere, locals may be divided into units, each with own meeting (such as in printers' chapels, shop clubs in Sweden, or GEN, in our example). The issues with which these unit meetings deal tend to be of immediate importance to the members and so unit meetings may be better attended than local-wide affairs. In some more militant Australian blue collar unions, "shop meetings" are called either at lunch time or on the job (the latter "stop-work" meetings have the added function of placing pressure on management.)

*Voting.* In democratic countries the ballot box is the primary means through which citizens control their government. Almost all unions give their members some chance to vote, particularly for local officers, sometimes for national officers, and often on whether to ratify contracts. In fact, the ballot may be the only direct way most members can influence what happens at the union's national level.

The method of voting affects the level of voter participation (Roberts, 1956). Votes can be taken at the union meeting (either by show of hands or by secret ballot), by secret ballot at the work place, or by mail ballot. Limited British evidence suggests that mail ballots substantially increase voter turnout as compared to voting at geographically based branch (local) meetings. Compared to voting at work places and work-based branches the picture is much less clear (Undy and Martin, 1984). The highest returns in Australia come from work-place balloting, for instance at pitheads, newspaper plants, and on board ship.

The issue of whether to require mail ballots by law generated much controversy in Britain and Australia (Bray and Davis, 1982). Eventually conservative governments in both Australia and Britain imposed mail balloting for top officers. Despite the hopes and fears on both sides mail ballots have made little difference in practice.

Aside from the impact of postal ballots there has been almost no systematic analysis of voter turnout or the conditions under which it may be high or low. Clearly the range is quite great, in Australian referenda from 6% on an environmental issue to 68% on a strike ballot (Davis, 1987). Obviously more research is needed, especially as to the conditions under which contracts and other leadership proposals are rejected.

Balloting is not the magic key to union democracy. To be sure we rely on it in the governmental sphere, but in elections for US President and other elected officials prospective voters can hear and read about the issues on TV and newspapers. In unions the channels of communication are usually dominated by the faction in power. Thus members may know very little about the candidates' strengths and weaknesses (except, of course, at the local level, when the member knows the candidate personally). In the public sphere, even when voters are unfamiliar with the candidates, they can always vote according to party labels. In unions parties and party labels are quite rare. Yet even in US Presidential elections, after months of campaigning, voter turnout is terribly low. Only half the citizenry participate in US democracy. Many unions do better.

Finally, elections contribute to democracy only if voters have a meaningful choice. Individuals can run for office without organized backing in small locals. In large locals and at the national level this is almost impossible. Meaningful choice requires organized factions or political groups, as we discuss later on.

*Stewards.* In many unions the steward-member relationship may be key for democracy. Indeed for members who never attend meetings the steward may be their only contact with the union. Steward service their grievances, provide information about the union, and when fractional bargaining occurs, they may orchestrate the various forms of self-help. In many unions, stewards are the higher union level's chief source of information as to members' attitudes. Furthermore, steward activity is closely related to a variety of forms of member participation (Nicholson, Ursell, and Blyton, 1981). For example, stewards influence how members vote and whether they attend meetings.

Thus, if stewards are responsive to members' desires the union itself is more responsive. Further, members typically elect their stewards and are in a better position to evaluate their responsiveness than they are officers at higher levels.

Over the years the steward has been the subject of numerous studies (fairly recently Nicholson, Ursell, and Blyton, 1981; Batstone, Boraston, and Frenkel, 1977). The steward is a member of three often conflicting social systems, the union, the departmental work groups, and the company. Much of the literature is concerned with distinguishing among alternative roles which the steward may take in dealing with this conflict. Though there is some debate as to the appropriate typology (Dufty, 1981), a useful distinction is between stewards who are *union oriented* and those who are *work-group oriented*. Union oriented stewards are more ideologically concerned and keep in closer contact with local officers and other stewards, while work-group oriented stewards are more parochial in both their interests and their contacts; they are less inclined to defer to overall union strategy. (Note the above conflicting pressures are felt by union officers generally and, in Germany, by union members of works councils and boards of directors.)

Here again, we see a tradeoff between democracy and efficiency. The work-group oriented steward may more adequately represent members' opinions; however, overall union effectiveness may depend on the coordination and discipline which the union-oriented steward provides. Further, the union-oriented steward, as a member of the activist core, may more effectively represent the work group's interests at higher levels.

British left-wing writers have expressed considerable concern, that as plant-level bargaining becomes more formalized and Americanized, stewards will be "incorporated" into the union-management hierarchy and so less representative (Hyman, 1978). At least two studies agree that this is not a major problem (England, 1981, Edwards and Heery, 1989).

*Shop-level democracy.* Significant forms of participation occur informally at the worksite. Thus, members, who don't participate in local-wide activities, may still be active on the job. Indeed Kovner and Lahne (1953) argue that the existence of a "shop society" is essential as underpinning for union democracy. True, much union business is discussed at *some* worksites and these discussions may influence individual decisions on how to vote, for example, or whether to attend meetings. However, the extent to which this occurs can easily be exaggerated. There is little quantitative research, yet it is fair to assume that union politics rarely take the place of sex or sports as the subjects of workplace schmoozing.

More important, in many industries, especially in the UK and Australia, workers have a long tradition of self-help. Self-help techniques may be used against management to win grievances (whether contractually justified or not), in interunion fights, and against other groups. Ghilarducci (1988), for example, analyses US coalminers' wildcat strikes as a form of protest against an unpopular union leadership. Sayles (1957) describes how production speedups and slowdowns may be utilized in interdepartmental power struggles. (For discussions of how work groups differ in the nature and effectiveness of the influence techniques they employ, see Sayles, 1957; and Batstone, Boraston, and Frenkel, 1977).

The greater use of self-help techniques by UK and Australian unions gives them an arguable claim to be more democratic than those in the US. Whether vigorous self-help activities contribute to democracy may depend on how one defines democracy. Certainly they provide opportunities for individual members to participate. On the other hand, is it democratic for a small group to act in its own self-interest, perhaps defying agreements ratified by the union as a whole?

*Passive participation.* Nicholson, Udell, and Blyton (1981) argue that members can vote through doing nothing. Perhaps the strongest message a member can send top leadership is to refuse to respond to a strike call. For the sensitive union leader other forms of inaction should also have meaning: the failure to elect a steward, low attendance at meetings, low COPE contributions, a fall off in grievances, especially when it is obvious that the contract is being violated.

*Conclusion.* Three generalizations arise from this section: (1) The membership meeting is not the only channel through which members can influence union policy. (2) In most locals there is a group of activists who serve as stewards, dominate the meeting, and can check the leadership. And (3) local union democracy may depend on the extent to which members use these channels and on the size of the activist core.

### **Democracy at the National Union Level**

Though there are some opportunities for direct membership participation at the local level, at the national level representative democracy is the rule. The primary means by which rank-and-file members can participate at the national level is through the ballot. But elections serve democracy only if the voters can make meaningful choices. As we have stressed previously, meaningful choice requires that rival candidates can mount effective campaigns.

Thus, it is here, at the national level, that the Michels hypothesis is most relevant. Compared to the local leadership and especially the rank and file, top national leadership has tremendous advantages in terms of expertise and communications. Indeed as time goes by in some unions the president and the union become inextricably linked in the members' eyes; to oppose the president becomes tantamount to treason to the union itself.

Potential opponents have few of these advantages. *Alone* they can't campaign against the administration. Indeed solo opposition candidates may not be known outside their own locals. To have any chance of victory, opposition candidates require the support of an at least semi-organized group which has widespread links throughout the union.

The key to union democracy under these circumstances, as Edelstein and Warner (1957) argue, is the existence of structural arrangements which permit the development of "independent natural power centers" which can provide a constitutional check on the administration's power or which can offer a secure base around which opposition can safely coalesce. Thus the outcome of electoral struggles "is largely predetermined by the organization of the union" (p. vi).

Edelstein and Warner's analysis is heavily dependent on closeness to officer elections as the primary indicator of union democracy. In our opinion this is an imperfect indicator. Nevertheless we find his concept of countervailing powers extremely useful. Such centers introduce checks and balances into union governance and facilitate the development of opposition groupings. The main forms of countervailing power are discussed below.

*Presidents* US union constitutions give national presidents broad, in some cases almost dictatorial, powers, especially the power to appoint a large portion of the paid national staff, thus reinforcing the advantages described by Michels. Wise presidents use their power with discretion. Nevertheless opportunity for abuse is

always present, and numerous abuses can be detailed. Union chief executives in Britain and Australia (often called secretaries) are generally less powerful.

For Edelstein and Warner electoral battles are key tests of union democracy. In a majority of cases in most countries, presidents are re-elected till they retire. Indeed some UK unions appoint their secretaries for life. Successful election challenges to incumbent officers in the US are rare, but they do occur. Witness recent defeats of incumbents in the Mineworkers, Musicians, Screen Actors, Musicians, Typographers, Maintenance of Way, Rubber Workers and Government Employees. More common are battles between contenders when the incumbent dies or retires. Even this competition is often forestalled by the common practice of the outgoing president retiring in mid-term, thus allowing the Executive Board to appoint his successor, who, as the new incumbent, gains a commanding advantage at the next regular election.

In the US the vast majority of unions elect their president at the union convention rather than by membership ballot (Fiorito and Hendricks, 1987). The reverse is true in Britain. Edelstein and Warner (1975) find that contested elections are closer in the US when the membership votes directly and explain their findings on the ground that on balance individual members are less subject to the administration's influence than are convention delegates. By contrast Fiorito and Hendricks (1987, p. 31) conclude that election by convention may "yield more effective local control (and thus greater democracy.)"

*Executive Boards.* Union executive boards provide a potential check on presidential power, particularly when they have the authority to confirm appointees or control budgets. British boards are more powerful than American (Edelstein and Warner, 1975).

The extent of their actual independence may depend in part on whether board members are elected at large or by districts (Gamm, 1979; Frenkel and Coolican, 1984). At-large election may insure that all those elected belong to the same faction. Election by district increases the chance that minority views will be heard. Gamm concludes "it is almost impossible to mount a significant challenge to an incumbent president ..without the participation of key members of the executive board" (p. 295) and that depends on their ability to retain their job if their candidate is defeated.

The vast majority of US executive board members work full-time for the national union (Fiorito and Hendricks, 1987), perhaps reducing their independence. In theory "lay" board members, who are more common in the UK, Scandinavia and Australia, are less beholden to the leadership and closer to the rank-and-file (England, 1981). On the other hand, like outside company directors, lay board members may lack the time, skill, or knowledge required to make informed, independent judgments. (In practice, many lay members hold full-time jobs as stewards or convenors and so are not truly rank and file.)

Edelstein and Warner (1975) find that election of executive board members by districts and a high proportion of lay membership both contribute to close top-officer races.

*Other officers.* In general democracy is served by having a large number of independently elected officers (such as secretary-treasurer), each free to express his/her point of view and to oppose the administration (Edelstein and Warner,

1975). This is especially the case if these officers have separate budgets and can appoint their own staffs. To the extent they have independent power they can check that of the president. Also they are in a key position to run for presidential office (or in local unions, for business agent). On the other hand, as all systems of checks and balances, such dispersion of power (Undy et al., 1981) may reduce efficiency and accountability and make union government more cumbersome.

"Dual governance" (Cook, 1962), where there are separate sets of officers for collective bargaining and other union business, provides another form of countervailing power.

*Staff unions.* Hypothetically at least some of the countervailing power of having more elected officers can be achieved when the union staff is unionized. To the extent that staff members are protected against arbitrary discharge they are more likely to express their opinions freely. On the other hand, their greater independence and professionalism may make them less responsive to member opinions.

*Conventions.* Conventions (annual conferences in UK and Australia) are viewed as the union's supreme legislative and judicial body and a potential source of countervailing power (Leiserson, 1959). As Barbash (1967, pp. 76-7) puts it, the convention may be "a pageant, a reward for drudgery back home in the local union, and an operation in public relations." It also provides an opportunity for delegates to make contacts with fellow delegates from other parts of the country who might serve the basis of a potential opposition.

Some critics conclude that some conventions are undemocratic since resolutions are regularly passed by unanimous vote with little or no expressed dissent. Further officers dominate the discussion. Nevertheless studies based on published convention proceedings may be misleading. Much of the convention's work takes place in committees, bars, and back rooms. While great solidarity may be expressed in public sessions, seemingly unanimous decisions may be the product of politicking and compromise behind the scenes.

Public unanimity is not the practice in every convention. Particularly in Australia and the UK, differences of opinion are brought to the floor. Even in unions where these differences are normally settled through informal bargaining, the effectiveness of dissidents may depend on their ability to appeal to the convention floor in case bargaining breaks down. Thus convention rules are important: how committees and committee chairs are selected, who controls the agenda, and the ease of obtaining a role-call vote.

British and Australian conventions are considerably smaller than their US counterparts. This may make them more effective deliberative bodies, but at the cost of less opportunity for local-level people to engage in the various forms of participation just discussed. UK conventions meet more frequently than those in the US. Edelstein and Warner (1975) conclude that on balance UK conventions are more democratic than American ones.

*Appeals procedures.* Appeals procedures and independent appeals bodies (the latter more common in the UK) reduce the leadership's power to behave arbitrarily and especially to discriminate against political opponents. The Auto Workers (UAW)'s Public Review Board, almost unique among American unions, appears to have done much to protect procedural due process at the local levels, although



arguably it has avoided politically difficult decisions which might threaten the national leadership. In the US and Australia there are limited appeals to the courts.

*Intermediate bodies.* Intermediate bodies, which are common in large unions, may be structured by geography (the Mid-West Region), employer (the GM Council), occupation (Skilled Trades Council) or function (Fair Employment Department). Intermediate bodies may also vary in their power (do they control their own budget or hire their own staff? do they receive per capita directly? do they have the authority to negotiate or ratify contracts?). Further they differ in whether their top leadership is appointed from above or elected from below. Finally, an intermediate body's real power and independence may depend on varying combinations of constitutional provisions, past practice, the strategic position of the membership it serves, and the political skills of its leadership. (As with so much else in this chapter, this is all conjectural. There has been almost no research.)

There is some debate as to whether strong intermediate bodies facilitate or inhibit democracy (Fiorito and Hendricks, 1987; Edelstein and Warner, 1975). On the one hand, they shield locals from national control. They may be more responsive to rank-and-file members. Further, they can serve as independent power centers for those wishing to contest the national leadership through elections or otherwise. On the other hand, they may reduce local union autonomy. Edelstein and Warner (1975) conclude that intermediate bodies are most effective as a countervailing force when they are fairly large and roughly equal in size.

*Local unions.* Large local unions may themselves serve as centers of countervailing power, particularly when their leaders form alliances with leaders of similar unions. Small locals may be too dependent on the national.

#### *Opposition Groups*

While the institutional arrangements just discussed facilitate the development of centers of countervailing power, the democratic process itself gets expressed through various forms of interest groups which form around these centers (Martin, 1968). Such groups may differ on a number of dimensions: longevity; whether they involve the top leadership alone or various activist groups at various levels as well; whether they are formally organized; and whether they seek to change specific policies or to change top leadership generally. Given the possible combination of variables a large typology of groups might be constructed (Dickenson, 1982; Edelstein and Warner, 1975; Nyden, 1984). In the interests of simplicity, we shall discuss only four type of groups, which we call cliques, factions, insurgent movements, and parties.

*Cliques* are the least formal or permanent. Often they are confined to the governing oligarchy. They may be "furtive and ill defined" (Dickenson, 1982) and their membership shifting and temporary. Cliques may vie over policy decisions or election to office. By themselves, however, cliques don't increase responsiveness to membership desires. For example, there are cliques in the UAW Executive Board and for the last 20 years the Board has split in recommending a new president. But once the recommendation is made the Board closes ranks and its decision is almost routinely ratified by the next convention. In this situation the Board does little to increase union responsiveness to rank-and-file needs.

A *faction* has been defined as an "at least somewhat organized special-purpose political group within a larger organization" (Edelstein and Warner, 1975, p. 188). By contrast with a clique it explicitly organized. Often it has both officers and a name. Typically, too, it works above ground and has explicit publicized objectives. In the US it is often called a "caucus."

There are women's and black caucuses in many unions and also ones for special groups such as skilled trades. Perhaps the most effective factions cut across ethnic and occupational lines. The Communist "fractions" once operating in many US unions were certainly factions, even if they didn't always operate openly. The former Reuther caucus continues to exert a major influence in the UAW. Factions operate openly in many US locals. In many British and Australian unions left-wing and right-wing factions have competed for years. In these countries, by contrast with the US, Communist opposition is still accepted as legitimate.

*Insurgent movements* are reform oriented. Their objectives are normative: not just to change a specific policy or to replace one set of officers with another, but to make wholesale changes in what they view as a corrupt and non-responsive administration. Typically they arise in situations where the leadership is so well entrenched that the ordinary political processes are insufficient to dislodge them. Examples include the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (Friedman, 1982), the Sadlowski movement (Nyden, 1984), the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (Geschwender, 1977), and the British National Seamen's Reform Movement (Hemingway, 1978).

Battles between administration supporters and insurgent groups are frequently bitter, with each side denying the other's legitimacy. Appeals are made not just to activists but to the rank and file generally. Charges like "sell-out artists" or "communist" get traded. Nor do movements confine their activities to electioneering. They make use of wildcat strikes, the courts, and public relations, and look for support from progressives outside the union movement.

The literature (especially, Nyden, 1984; Hemingway, 1978, Friedman, 1982) suggests that movements are most successful under the following circumstances: (1). The union and its industry is in difficulty. (2) The movement is directed against management as well as the union leadership. (3) The movement constitutes itself as a formal, democratically controlled organization and it makes its decisions after discussion and vote. It develops its own activist network (rather than just relying on existing networks as cliques do). And finally (4) the movement appeals to the interests of the entire union and to broad idealistic values. "Get rid of the bums" is not enough.

Movements have many problems. They succumb to inexperienced leadership, personality clashes, splits over principle, and burnout (Geschwender, 1977). If successful they may become parties. Or, as enthusiasm wanes, they degenerate into another faction.

*Parties* are political interest groups whose unabashed purpose is to elect their supporters to office. According to Lipset, Trow, and Coleman, (1956) parties must be permanent, accepted as legitimate, and institutionalized (that is have officers, etc.) By this strict definition only two true-party systems have been identified in the literature, the old ITU in the U.S. and the 13,000-member Port Kembla branch of the Australian Federated Ironworkers' Association (Dickenson, 1982). But a number of UK unions (for example, the Engineering Union) have had long-lasting

factions (Undy, 1979). Further parties have existed for some time at local level in the US. If New Directions persists in the UAW, it may become a national party with a definite policy objective.

A major characteristic of the party system is that each party accepts the legitimacy of the other. Certainly a party system makes it easier for aroused membership to oust incompetents -- and to do so without the disruptive trauma which exist when insurgent movements and incumbent administrations seek to destroy each other. Further, as Dickenson (1982) puts it, a party system may (but not always) give members a clear cut choice as to policy, as perhaps New Directions does in the UAW.

Over the years opposition groups have long been assisted by "outside" agencies, which, to various degrees, have trained dissident leaders and provided them a "home base" as well as ideological, social, and monetary support (Barbash, 1967, p. 132). At various times these have included the Socialist and Communist parties, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and quite significantly by the Association for Union Democracy. Similar functions were once played by the Brookwood Labor College, by Communist and Catholic groups in the UK and Australia (Roberts, 1956; Dickenson, 1982) and more recently by US university labor education centers.

Whatever the form of opposition, once open electoral struggles occur, political leaders on all sides may seek support from local leaders, activists, and even rank-and-file.

### **Factors Facilitating Democracy**

Having examined the major channels of democratic activity, let us now consider the major factors affecting whether these channels are used. Some of these factors may be more relevant at the local level, others at the national level, but all are to some extent relevant at both levels.

*Occupational community.* The existence of an occupational community facilitates the development of an activist core and so democracy. As we saw in Chapter 4, sense of occupational community may be greater when members are proud of their occupation and identify with it, when their work permits them to communicate with each other on the job, when the nature of the home community permits them to socialize after work, and when members are homogeneous in terms of such factors as occupation, age, ethnicity, and sex. If members have few interests in common, they will be less likely to participate or show interest in their union. Consequently opposition to the incumbent union administration may be harder to develop (Martin, 1968) and the paid staff will fill the power vacuum (Cornfield, 1987) In support of this hypothesis Anderson (1978) found that meeting attendance, closeness of elections, and perceived power distribution were all negatively related to the number of bargaining units the local union represented.

*Optimal diversity.* Although homogeneity in terms of jobs, interests, and demographic characteristics may foster occupational community and high levels of participation, whether homogeneity also fosters democracy may depend on how one defines democracy. Homogeneous unions may more easily reach consensus. Their officers may better understand their members' interests and so represent them better. On the other hand, and here lies a paradox, democracy may require that there be issues over which members can disagree and over which election

campaigns can be fought. Diversity enlivens union politics: it fosters disagreement, electoral competition and officer turnover.

Thus by the responsiveness criterion homogeneous unions may be more democratic; by the behavioral criterion diversity may foster democracy. But even by the behavioral definition, if diversity is too great democracy may be inhibited. Issues of interest to subgroup A may be totally irrelevant to subgroup B, and so the parties may have nothing of common importance over which to agree or even disagree. As Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) said, differences within homogeneous unions center over external relations. These differences may be vigorous but they rarely threaten the union's fundamental sense of community. By contrast, political life in heterogeneous unions (such as GEN) tends to be rather apathetic. But when differences occur they may lead to schism (Cornfield, 1987). This suggests that the relationship between diversity and democracy may be curvilinear (Child, Loveridge, and Warner, 1973).

Diversity may hinder the development of opposition. Undy and Martin (1984) argue that homogeneity at the national level promotes democracy, even if homogeneity is confined only to the dominant group. Effective factions cut across occupational lines, but if the lines are really chasms, broad-based factions may be more difficult to establish. "Steelworkers Fight Back", the Sadlowski opposition group in 1977 Steelworkers election, campaigned largely on issues of relevance to basic steel and gained little support among the majority of members who worked outside basic steel (Nyden, 1984). Similarly, the main issues debated at recent UAW conventions relate to the Big Three auto companies. Of what practical interest can this be to newly organized university clerical workers?

*Status.* As a general rule members of high status groups participate more actively than do members of low status ones. They have better jobs and so have more at stake. Usually they have been around longer and consequently have developed more contacts and political savvy. Often, too, they are better educated and more comfortable with parliamentary procedure, grievance procedure, and the like. In terms of the oligarchy hypothesis, the leader-membership expertise gap is relatively low. In Australia, for example, lay members of white-collar union executive boards take a more active part in discussion than their counterparts in blue-collar unions (Davis, 1987).

Consequently, one would expect unions of high status members (such as our Locals PROF and CON) to be more democratic than unions of low status workers, such as GEN. Presumably, for example, members of professional and skilled trades unions are both more able and more willing to handle union business without the assistance of paid officials. Supporting this proposition Turner (1962) found that the proportion of paid officers to members in skilled UK textile unions was relatively lower than in unskilled ones. In skilled unions the paid officers was "regarded as a paid, if respected servant of the local"; in the unskilled "he may assume a role of authoritarian leadership" (pp. 286-87).

Differences in status, one form of diversity, may be particularly harmful to democracy. Even where there is otherwise a considerable sense of occupational community, the existence of status hierarchies may lead to an "internal aristocracy" (Turner, 1962) dominating the union (Sayles and Strauss, 1953; Nicholson, Ursell, and Blyton, 1981). In the UK the Mineworkers union is controlled by face workers; in the US mixed Teamster locals tend to be controlled by truckers. Although only a quarter of the membership of the British Engineering union were craftsmen, they

held 88 percent of the officer positions (Undy and Martin, 1984). Splits between the high-status typographers, who had declining job security, and the lower-status but economically more secure mailers, did much to weaken the ITU's vaunted democracy as well as the union itself.

Not only are officers more likely to come from high-status occupations, they are more likely to be white, male, older, and better educated than the average member (and more likely to be politically liberal). To the extent the interests and perceptions of such high-status officers differ from those of lower status groups they will be less likely to represent or even understand these groups' interests. At one time the IBEW relegated non-craftsmen to Class B status, with fewer rights. Today second-class citizenship is often de facto rather than de jure; nevertheless low status groups are often "apathetic" (Sayles, 1957).

As Lipset (1960) pointed out, in well paid occupations, such as airline pilots, becoming a full-time officer may mean little increase in pay, and election defeat involves no great economic loss. These officers may view union leadership as a temporary service. By contrast, among unskilled workers, becoming a business agent or national officer may mean a wholly new standard of living and way of life. Once elected such officers will fight determinedly to save their jobs, using all means, fair or foul.

*Size.* Size is often seen as inhibiting democracy (e.g., Kochan, 1980), but the real question is size of what? At the local level, size reduces the opportunity for individuals to participate directly in local-wide decision-making. Large locals tend to have proportionately lower meeting attendance rates, but they can make up for this through holding unit meetings. Key positions in larger unions are more likely to be filled by full-time specialists than by volunteers.

Only representative democracy may be feasible in a very large local. Large size and geographical dispersion (as in Local GEN) may make it hard for a effective opposition to develop, but size alone may not inhibit representative democracy as long as the membership is sufficiently concentrated geographically for an opposition to develop.

In the ITU Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) found the relationship between shop size and overall union involvement to be curvilinear. Very small locals were too small to have much of a political life; in very large locals individual members had little say. On the other hand, support for the national opposition was greatest in large locals; small locals were too dependent on the national leadership to adopt an independent stance). Stratton (1989) explained the decline in the ITU's democracy in part by the fact that many small locals were amalgamated.

Since participation at the national level is inevitably representative rather than direct, we are not convinced by the argument that larger national unions are automatically less democratic than smaller ones. After all, the federal government is not necessarily less democratic than the states. Edelstein and Warner (1975) found national-union size to bear a rather inconsistent relationship to various measures of democracy, with some differences between the US and British results. True, in large unions the leadership and professional staff associate chiefly with each other and have little daily contact with the rank and file. However, as national unions get larger they need strong, autonomous intermediate bodies, both for effective administration and to provide representation for subgroup interests.

*Structural alignment.* Three forms of structure are relevant here. First, there is social structure, the occupational community which we just discussed. Secondly there is bargaining structure: with whom and for whom various forms of bargaining occurs. And finally there is union structure, especially the local's jurisdiction. Democracy is more feasible when the three forms of structure coincide.

This occurs in PROF and CON. In both cases union jurisdiction and occupational community coincide. Both negotiate a single contract. In MFG the structural relationship is a bit weaker, since the basic contract is negotiated nationally. Nevertheless it is administered locally and occupational community and union jurisdiction overlap.

The situation in GEN and AUK is quite different. In neither case does the occupational community coincide with union jurisdiction. In GEN there are numerous contracts with a variety of industries, so members have few bargaining issues in common. In AUK, following a common British and Australian practice, the contract (award) is negotiated nationally while grievances and fractional bargaining are handled quite informally at the shop level, often by multi-union shop committees. Thus there is relatively little reason for members to care about what happens at the branch level. In both GEN and AUK diversity of interests may become so great that there are few local (branch)-wide issues about which opposing factions might develop. From a bargaining or occupational-community point of view the relevant organization is the worksite shop-steward committee.

Until it recently shifted to workplace-based structure, the Australian Amalgamated Metal Workers Union provided for members' participation in formal union business through monthly evening branch meetings. These brought members together according to their home addresses, regardless of where they worked. Although the average size of these residentially-based branches was 2000 members, average attendance was six (Davis, 1987).

Though statistics are lacking, the trend in the US today is toward amalgamated locals, such as GEN, which cover a variety of occupations, industries and employers. (In fact, unions with diverse jurisdiction tend to have larger locals, Fiorito and Hendricks, 1987, a double barrier to direct participation.) To the extent amalgamated or general locals become more common, the traditional scholarly focus on the local, as the locus of democratic activity, becomes inappropriate. Under these circumstances democracy might be best achieved through unit meetings, steward-member relations and various forms of work-site activity. By contrast, UK unions may be moving toward work-place based branches (Undy and Martin, 1984).

*Centralization.* Union centralization can be measured in a number of ways (Headly, 1970), for example, in terms of (a) various organizational levels' formal, constitutional powers; (b) bargaining structure, particularly the relative extent to which the various levels become involved in negotiating or ratifying contracts or handling grievances, and (c) the distribution of the dues dollar among various levels.

Common sense suggests that centralization inhibits democracy (e.g., Kochan, 1980, 157). For example, centralization of bargaining structure, such as centrally negotiated agreement in Sweden and Austria, reduce the ability of individuals and work groups to influence their wages. Unfortunately we have almost no hard

evidence supporting this common sense conclusion. Many of the arguments why centralization should inhibit democracy apply as well to size. Possibly, for example, as far as democracy is concerned a centralized small union may be much like a decentralized large union. To the extent that centralization focuses accountability centralized organizations may be more democratic, though this requires the development of effective countervailing power centers.

*Rules.* The role of rules (called "structuring" by Undy et al., 1981) in fostering democracy has been little researched (exception: Donaldson and Warner, 1974). Some rules restrict opposition, for example, rules which restrict who can be candidate for office or the ability of candidates to accept funds from various sources or to communicate with other locals. Other undemocratic rules require officers to submit undated letters of absence to the international president, or require staff people to take unpaid leaves of absence when running for office though permitting incumbents to draw union salaries. Equally undemocratic are open-ended rules, such as those prohibiting "conduct unbecoming a union member" or which restrict the content of campaign literature, particularly when these are unequally enforced.

But rules ("bills of rights") can be designed to foster democracy, for example those which specify how ballots are to be counted, provide equal access to union newspapers, or require Roberts Rules of Order at meetings. Though these rules may be cumbersome and may inhibit spontaneous participation, to the extent they restrict incumbents and their opponents equally, they protect the rights of minorities and inhibit arbitrary action. Much the same can be said for rules which clearly spell out members' job rights. For example, without strict rules governing how jobs are assigned in hiring halls, business agents can easily discriminate against their opponents. Strict seniority rules inhibit the ability of stewards to acquiesce in company moves to bypass senior workers.

*Living by the rules.* Democracy requires that the parties live by the rules. It hardly thrives when people break not just union rules but the law of the land. Democratic convention procedures mean little if those who exercise their rights are later assaulted by goons, denied employment, discriminated against in the handling of grievances, or forced to hire lawyers to defend themselves against union-funded libel suits. Democracy requires a fairly level playing field.

Unfortunately a small but significant portion of the American labor movement suffers from an evil tradition of corruption and even close alliance between union officials and organized crime. Although this problem exists to a lesser extent in Australia and some underdeveloped countries and even to a to some minor degree in Europe, it is peculiarly an American curse. Why corruption is so prevalent in the US is beyond this paper. Certainly it has something to do with the prevailing ethics in the businesses whose workers corrupt unions represent.

Though not all undemocratic unions are corrupt, nor are all democratic unions free from corruption (look at recent scandals in the UAW), nevertheless corruption and autocracy seem to run together. Democratic rules serve to foster democracy (however defined) and reduce corruption. But these rules need to be enforced. And enforcing them may require vigorous government action, particularly since the AFL-CIO's Code of Ethical Practices has become a deadletter. Experience to date suggests the Landrum-Griffin procedures can restore free elections to unions which once were democratic. The court-supervised Teamsters' election may provide a

critical test of what the law can accomplish in a union with no strong democratic tradition.

*History, tradition and ideology.* Strictly enforced rules and constitutional provisions providing for centers of countervailing power alone do not assure democracy. Indeed unions may be democratic without such safeguards and these safeguards by themselves do not promise high levels of membership participation or influence.

Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956, pp. 383-384) ascribe the ITU's democracy to "commitment to democratic values" How such commitment develops is problematic. Part of it may be cultural, for example, we might expect unions dominated by Scandinavians to be especially democratic. Part may be ideological. Old-fashioned socialist unions may have been especially democratic, while left-wing unions of almost any brand place high value on participation and mass action (though old-fashioned communists saw nothing wrong in unscrupulously manipulating the masses or in subjecting themselves to democratic centralism). Sadly, in its death agonies, the ITU lost its commitment to democracy.

History is important. In their early years the UAW appeared more democratic than Steelworkers. This was easy to explain in terms of the fact that the UAW were organized from bottom up and the Steelworkers from top down and further its leadership learned its skills from the not-particularly democratic John L Lewis. History can play us tricks, however, because today at least by the measure of contested elections the Steelworkers are the more democratic.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has stressed the conditions under which members can participate in the union and especially the opportunities for activist cores to materialize at the local level and for centers of countervailing power to give birth to opposition groups at the national level. Constitutional checks and balances and bills of rights (enforced by the government, if necessary) are needed to protect oppositions at both levels and occupational communities play key roles at the local level.

The chapter has also considered the sensitive question of why unions should be democratic in the first place. Our answer is that in the long run democratic unions are more effective. This does not mean that the members should make every decision, only that members can effectively influence the decision-makers and eventually change them if they are irresponsive.

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