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Labor Education for Women Workers

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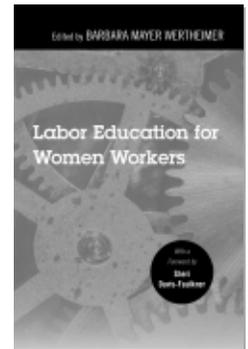
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Preface

By WALTER G. DAVIS

Women workers in unions are a growing force in society. The leadership potential of union women can make the difference not only in the maintenance of a strong labor movement and the protection of the interests of all workers, but in determining how much and how fast the labor movement will grow. Already there are more than 44 million women workers, but only some 7 million belong to labor unions or associations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, the rate of women entering the labor force has already exceeded that of men.

Recognizing that increased participation of workers, particularly women workers, in their trade unions and in organizing efforts, is key to building the labor movement, unions have put new priority on strengthening their ranks and supporting the development of education programs that will facilitate this effort. Moreover, there is a heightened awareness that, until recently, women workers have not been represented in proportion to their numbers as union members among those taking part in labor education programs.

The AFL-CIO's Department of Education, for example, provides films on labor and women's issues, and educational materials that we supply on such subjects as the Equal Rights Amendment, women and the work force, child care, and pregnancy disability, to name a few, for use in university extension programs and in education conferences at the state, regional, and national levels. The department also extends its cooperation to the summer schools for union women, sponsored by the University and College Labor Education Association's Committee on Programs for Union Women.

Labor education is expanding to meet the challenges and new demands of workers in a complex society. New problems face men and women in

their unions, on the job, and as citizens involved in the political fabric of their communities.

Increasingly, unions are demonstrating through their education programs that they are concerned with issues that affect the quality of life of members and their families. It is also reflected in their legislative and collective bargaining activities. For example, these may be the impact of stress, of environmental and job-related hazards, or the need for child care. It is important to us to sensitize all stewards to the nature of grievances rooted in job discrimination.

Unions understand the need for coping skills to facilitate adaptation to rapid change. Equally important, the labor movement seeks to strengthen the abilities of men and women to take part in decision making at all levels of society.

For a long time, university labor extension programs have been partners in our efforts. It is no surprise that, together, we have developed innovative programs in the education of union and other working women. *Labor Education for Women Workers* pulls together a rich sample of these programs, illustrating not only subjects that lend themselves to such efforts, but methods that have been successful and materials that are useful. In addition, we keep abreast of the sources of funding experimental efforts, because neither unions nor universities always have the resources in this era of tightened budgets and rising costs.

I am therefore pleased that educators interested in adults as workers as well as students will have this useful resource to draw on.