

Local Union Democracy: In Search of Criteria

Un essai d'analyse de la démocratie syndicale

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Article abstract

A vast number of criteria have been proposed as indicators of union democracy. Unfortunately, little agreement exists on the relative importance of those criteria. This article examines the interrelationships between several major components of union democracy: participation, electoral control, leadership responsiveness, and union control structure. Based on the results an integrated approach to union democracy is proposed.

Local Union Democracy

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A vast number of criteria have been proposed as indicators of union democracy. Unfortunately, little agreement exists on the relative importance of those criteria. This article examines the interrelationships between several major components of union democracy: participation, electoral control, leadership responsiveness, and union control structure. Based on the results an integrated approach to union democracy is proposed.

Despite the extensive interest of practitioners, academics, and policy makers in the democratic government and administration of labor unions, to date little agreement exists on the definition of democracy and its components¹. As Cook emphasized "the questions of union democracy whether raised in Congress or by students of unionism have all to rarely included precise discussion of the content of democracy in unions"². With this lack

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** This research is part of a series of investigations by the author on union democracy. It examines the intercorrelation of members' perceptions of the major dimensions of democracy and presents a new theoretical framework based on the results. For a study which examines the environmental and organizational determinants of three criteria of local union democracy across a sample of 95 unions, see John C. Anderson, "A Comparative Analysis of Local Union Democracy", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 3, October, 1978, pp. 258-259. The determinants of democracy in a union convention are examined in, John C. Anderson, "The Union Convention: An Examination of Limitations on Democratic Decision Making", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1977, pp. 379-398. Finally, the determinants of participation in local unions are investigated in, John C. Anderson, "Local Union Participation: A Re-examination", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Winter, 1979, pp. 18-31.

¹ The research reported here is taken from the author's Masters thesis. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the union. Computer funds were provided by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Lawrence K. Williams and Thomas A. Kochan provided support and assistance throughout the project.

² COOK, Alice, *Union Democracy: Practice and Ideal*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University, 1963, p. 9.

of agreement, it becomes apparent that unions may be considered democratic or undemocratic depending upon the choice of defining criteria. For example, Seidman *et. al* state that:

...if it (democracy) is defined to mean active participation by members in forming policy, there is relatively little democracy in the labor movement. If the test is responsiveness of leaders to the desires of members, an opposite conclusion is reached: most unions are democratic at both the national and local levels.³

Moreover, if the various dimensions of the political process were delineated as additional criteria, each would represent a separate standard from which to evaluate the extent of democracy in unions.

The present paper reviews previous empirical studies in order to identify the major components of local union democracy. Those criteria are then operationalized and measured in four local unions. The objective of the analysis is to examine the interrelationships of the various criteria and their importance in explaining the variance in an overall measure of union democracy.

REVIEW OF PAST RESEARCH

Although a multitude of criteria of local union democracy have been proposed, the majority appear to emphasize the town meeting model of democracy which assumes that all individuals are free to participate actively in the decision making processes of the governmental unit⁴. Thus, the level or extent of *participation* in union activities has been the most frequent criterion used to assess the extent of union democracy.

Participation has been stressed because it reflects the existence of majority rule at union meetings, a check on oligarchic or autocratic tendencies of union leadership, and a means of sensitizing leaders to the problems of the membership⁵. Moreover, the focus of the research on the organiza-

³ SEIDMAN, Joel, J. LONDON, B. KARSH, and D. TAGLIACCOZZO, *The Worker Views his Union*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 185.

⁴ WHYTE, W.F., "Building Better Organizational Models", in G. Somers (ed.), *Essays in Industrial Relations Theory*, Iowa, Iowa State University Press, 1969, pp. 109-121.

⁵ COOK, *op. cit.*, p. 10; G. Strauss and L. Sayles, "Patterns of Participation in Local Unions", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, October 1952, pp. 31-43.

tional, social, and individual correlates of member participation in union activities reveals the interest in finding ways in which to decrease member apathy⁶.

Despite its research popularity, participation has been severely criticized as an ultimate indicator of democratic government in local unions. Although participation has been studied with scales containing from one to twelve items, in most cases attendance at meetings and voting in elections have been considered indicative of participation. This raises the question of whether or not the measures adequately reflect the underlying construct of participation. Involvement of members in decision-making appears to have been displaced by behavioral involvement in union activities. With the exception of one item in the Tannenbaum and Kahn index⁷ (What things do you usually do at meetings?), there is a conspicuous lack of evaluation of the union members' behavior or impact on the decision making process of the local union. There seems to be an assumption that leaders will react to pressure and their power will be checked through the mere presence of a group of members.

As local unions grow in size, the total membership may not feasibly be able to participate in union activities. Kovner and Lahne suggest that measures of formal participation fail to explain the total amount of membership involvement because general membership meetings in many unions have been transformed into "delegate assemblies"⁸. Under this system the informal "shop society" is the basic unit from which members both gain information and provide input into the formal decision making process. Issues are discussed among members of the shop society after which a representative (member or steward) attends formal union meetings, registers the group's vote and then reports back to his constituents. Only under exceptional circumstances would all members attend the formal meetings or activities.

Thus, although research on participation may have been successful in identifying the factors influencing levels of member involvement in union

6 For a review of the determinants of individual participation in unions see: W. SPINRAD, "Correlates of Trade Union Participation: A Summary of the Literature", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, April 1960, pp. 237-244 and M. PERLINE and V. LORENZ, "Factors Influencing Participation in Trade Union Activities", the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1970, pp. 425-437.

7 TANNENBAUM, A., and R. KAHN, *Participation in Union Locals*, White Plains, New York, Row, Peterson and Co., 1958.

8 KOVNER, J., and H. LAHNE, "Shop Society and the Union", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, October 1953, pp. 3-14.

activities, there is some question as to whether the construct has been validly operationalized. Future research should attempt to tap the participation of members in the decision-making process of the union through both informal and formal channels⁹.

A second criterion potentially useful as an indicator of local union democracy deals with the *electoral process*. However, little systematic empirical research has focused on the electoral process within local unions. Possibly this is because the legislative function is carried out at local union meetings and as such studies of participation have encompassed the electoral process. The majority of participation research has included individual voting behavior in their scales, but little else about that process has been examined¹⁰.

Investigations which have been examined elections at the local level have considered variables similar to those examined at the national level: closeness of elections, tenure of leadership, and whether or not elections were contested. For example, Strauss and Sayles found that active competition existed for top local positions but that it was significantly lower for steward and other minor positions¹¹. Frequent changes in local officers and delegates to national conventions were also discovered in a study of the American Flint Glass Workers Union¹². Lipset *et. al.* reported vigorous campaigns involving three or more candidates in the New York local of the ITU, with elections usually being extremely close¹³. Finally, Faunce found substantial competition for delegate positions to the UAW convention; with forty-five percent of the delegates being elected for the first time¹⁴.

In addition to those criteria directly associated with the actual election results, other dimensions of the political process have been delineated as im-

9 For a broader view of participation see J. ANDERSON, "Local Union Participation: A Re-examination", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, February 1979.

10 The majority of the research on the political process in unions has focused on the national level. See for instance, J.D. EDELSTEIN and M. WARNER, *Comparative Union Democracy*, New York: Wiley, 1976; E. GINSBERG, "American Labor Leaders: Time in Office", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April 1948, pp. 282-293; P. TAFT, "Opposition to Union Officers in Elections", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 1944, pp. 246-264.

11 STRAUSS, G., and L. SAYLES, "Occupation and the Selection of Local Union Officers", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 58, No. 6, December 1953, pp. 585-591.

12 STEEL, H., "Tenure of Leadership in the American Flint Glass Workers' Union", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 65, No. 1, 1951, pp. 130-137.

13 LIPSET, S., M. TROW, and J. COLEMAN, *Union Democracy*, Garden City, New York, Anchor Books, 1956.

14 FAUNCE, W., "Size of Locals and Union Democracy", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 67, No. 2, April 1962, pp. 291-298.

portant. The availability of individuals to the nomination procedure, freedom to campaign, openness of communication channels and honesty of elections have all been mentioned as criteria of electoral democracy in local unions.

The third major criterion to be reviewed is *leadership responsiveness to membership demands*. Responsiveness as a criterion of democracy reflects the responsibility and accountability of the leaders to the members¹⁵. Even a union which has all of the procedural trapping of internal democracy may not be democratic if the elected officials ignore the suggestions and demands of their constituents. Moreover, the fact that the union hierarchy meets the goals of members without their formal participation, no matter how their interests were determined may not be considered democratic¹⁶. Michels has argued that over time the leadership become more and more concerned with maintaining their own positions and control over the organization, and less concerned with the interests of the membership. Inevitably, the union is then controlled by a few leaders pursuing their self interests. Thus, responsiveness of the leadership is a key condition which may reduce the likelihood of the "iron law of oligarchy"¹⁷.

The responsiveness criterion has been criticized as inadequate because "it is impossible to assess the responsiveness of union leaders to their constituents except through the electoral process, for elections provide the only means of discovering majority opinion"¹⁸. Furthermore, Marcus points out that it is relatively easy for the leaders to manipulate the perception of the membership so that responsiveness measures may assess no more than the effective influence of union officials¹⁹.

Others feel that either the membership are an uneducated mass²⁰ or that it is not "clear that demands pressed by the general membership are sounder economically or socially than those sponsored by the union officials who have had an opportunity to become acquainted with the employer's pro-

15 MAGRATH, C.P., "Democracy in Overalls: The Futile Quest for Union Democracy", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, July 1959, pp. 503-525.

16 For a similar approach by management see the following discussion of bouwarism, W.F. WHYTE, *Men at Work*, Homewood, Illinois, Dorsey Press, 1961.

17 MICHELS, R., *Political Parties*, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1949.

18 MARTIN, R., "Union Democracy: An Explanatory Framework", *Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 3, September 1968, p. 206.

19 MARCUS, P., "Union Conventions and Executive Boards: A Formal Analysis of Organizational Structure", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1, February 1966, pp. 61-70.

20 HOXIE, R., *Trade Unionism in the United States*, New York, Appleton, 1923.

blems”²¹. Both views see leaders in a much better position in terms of both the education and experience required to make intelligent decisions, and hence, both participation and responsiveness become important (presumably this accentuates the need for electoral democracy).

No literature was found which was related directly to the responsiveness of officials. However, research on contract rejections;²² leader predictions of member pay and benefit preferences;²³ or preferences for intrinsic versus extrinsic job characteristics;²⁴ and leaders’ attitudes towards members²⁵ all tend to argue for the gap between members and leaders described by Michels as the “iron law of oligarchy”²⁶. The existence of such a gap may limit the ability of union leaders to be responsive to the demands of the local union’s membership.

A final indicator of local union democracy is the “control graph” developed by Tannenbaum and Kahn²⁷. This general criterion evaluates the relative amount of say and influence each of the significant groups in the union hierarchy (eg. members, stewards, leadership) have over the way the local union is run. Control is defined as “the capacity to manipulate available means for the satisfaction of needs”²⁸. Four models of control are presented based on which group or groups have the major influence in decision making: democratic, autocratic or oligarchic, laissez-faire or anarchic, and polyarchic. The four fold typology is based not only on the distribution of control but also on the total amount of control held by all groups. That is, anarchic control refers to a relatively equal distribution of control among

21 STEELE, H., “Membership Participation in the American Flint Glass Workers Union”, *The Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 18, July 1951, p. 83.

22 BURKE, D., and L. RUBIN, “Is Contract Rejection a Major Collective Bargaining Problem?” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, January 1973, pp. 820-833.

23 LAWLER, E., and E. LEVIN, “Union Officers’ Perceptions of Members’ Pay Preferences”, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1968, pp. 509-517; J. HOWELLS and P. BROSANAN, “The Ability to Predict Workers’ Preferences: A Research Exercise”, *Human Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1972, pp. 265-281.

24 GLUSKINOS, U., and B. KESTELMAN, “Management and Labor Leaders’ Perception of Worker Needs as Compared with Self-Report and Needs”, *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer, 1971, pp. 239-246.

25 LANDSBERGER, H., and C. HULIN, “A Problem for Union Democracy: Officers’ Attitudes Toward Union Members”, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, April 1961, pp. 419-431; R. MILES and J. RITCHIE, “Leadership Attitudes Among Union Officials”, *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 1968, pp. 108-117.

26 MICHELS, *op. cit.*

27 TANNENBAUM and KAHN, *op. cit.*

28 Ibid, p. 127.

groups with a low total control, while polyarchic is also equal distribution but with a high level of total control.

The control graph has been found to be highly reliable technique for assessing the overall level of democratic organization in local unions. Moreover, it was found to be related to several other measures of union democracy. The authors discovered that: (i) the level of membership participation is correlated with the existence of a democratic control structure; (ii) democratic control is related to member interest in broad social goals while no relationship was discovered to immediate or specific goals; and (iii) total control is related to the amount of union-management conflict and effectiveness of the union²⁹.

A single caveat was added, however, concerning the interpretation of the control graph; "although the membership as a whole ranks high on control curves (democratic control), this does not imply that each member individually has more influence than each officer individually"³⁰. Moreover, Perrow finds that no effort has been made to determine how official policy or actual behavior are correlated with attitudes about "say and influence"³¹. The results may also vary if different levels and numbers of organizations (or groups) are rated³². Thus, research in the future will need to be aware of the limitations of the control graph as a measure of local union democracy.

A discussion of the above four major sets of criteria of local union democracy alone illustrates the need to consider interrelational approaches to the union democracy construct. Each of the criteria are inherently related to the others and although each provides a separate standard on which to assess the extent of union democracy, no single measure can adequately represent the democratic process.

²⁹ Ibid. See also C. SMITH and R. TANNENBAUM, "Organizational Control Structure; A Comparative Analysis", *Human Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 4, April 1963, pp. 299-316.

³⁰ TANNENBAUM and KAHN, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

³¹ PERROW, C., "Control and Bureaucracy", Paper presented at New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations mini-conference on power, Cornell University, December 6, 1974.

³² PENNING, J., "A Note on the Measurement of Power in Organizations", Working Paper No. 43-73-74, Carnegie-Mellon University, 1974.

METHOD

Sample

Questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of union members in each of four locals of a public sector union in one city in western Canada. The locals were chosen to provide a representative range of occupational groups (manual to professional) represented by the union. The overall response rate was approximately 40 percent³³.

Local 1 was the largest local studied with approximately 2,500 members. The vast majority of the membership work in manual or semi-skilled jobs in government health and mental institutions. About half of the members have had prior exposure to unions. Membership meetings in the local are attended mainly by stewards (over ten percent of the membership hold this position) and as such the meetings etc. as delegate bodies.

Local 2 has a membership of 500 professional workers in the area of social, health, and dietary services. Few of the members had any association with the labor movement previously although most had belonged to professional associations. Meetings are well attended by the general membership and the local holds separate steward meetings.

Local 3 has a membership of approximately 350 individuals, the majority of which are involved in either manual labor or the operation of trucks or heavy equipment. Between 50 and 75 percent have had prior experience with unions. Meetings are attended mainly by stewards (80 percent) who are elected on a regional basis.

Local 4 has a membership of approximately 500 individuals who engage in engineering, technical, and inspectional occupations. Only the inspectors have had any past union affiliations, mainly with craft unions. Meetings are also attended primarily by stewards.

For purposes of the present analysis respondents for all locals were combined into a single sample ($n = 169$). All locals were governed by the same constitution and thus, they tend to have similar leadership and administrative structures. All leaders are part-time and unpaid. Collective bargaining occurs at the provincial level resulting in a master collective

³³ The lower response rates reported here are less of a problem than in representative surveys as the non respondents appear to be the less informed and inactive members of the union. Since the concept examined here may be more familiar to activist's their responses are probably more accurate than would be those of the inactive member.

agreement with wage supplements at the occupational (province wide) level. Thus, it is totally removed from the local union level, except that the local president is involved, with other local presidents representing the same occupations, in negotiating wage supplements. The local union is mainly responsible for administering the collective agreement. The unions also operate in the same geographic area under the same economic, legal and political environments. These facts, along with an analysis of variance which revealed few significant differences on item responses across locals justify the combination of responses across locals. It should be noted that generalizations of the results to other types of unions, especially larger or smaller, industrial, or private sector may be inappropriate. Moreover, the results apply to local unions, and the relationship of the local to its national union (ie., the amount of autonomy granted the local) may be an important influence on local union democracy.

Measures

Participation in union activities: Respondents were asked to complete a series of items related to this form of participation which were combined into two indices. Meeting attendance which was a total of the number of regular and special meetings attended during the past year, and other behavioral participation which was comprised of responses to activity at union meetings, union committee membership, union office, years in office, voting and campaigning in local elections, and reading the union newspaper regularly.

Informal participation: In order to crudely operationalize Kovner and Lahne's notions,³⁴ respondents were asked to check in which of the following ways they would take action when they had a suggestion or complaint to make: 1) go to a local meeting, 2) find a leader at work and tell him, 3) get a steward to tell the leaders, 4) contact a staff representative, 5) get a friend to bring it up at a local meeting, 6) write a letter to the union and 7) nothing. In order to determine the relative importance of informal methods (all except number 1) a ratio of informal approaches to formal methods of participation was computed by totaling the number of informal techniques used and dividing that by whether or not the individual used the formal method of participation (going to a meeting).

Participation in decision-making: In order to more directly address the participation construct individuals were asked whether they took part in

³⁴ KOVNER and LAHNE, *op. cit.*

decisions over eleven issues and how much influence they had over each decision. The latter was measured on a four point scale ranging from little or no influence to very strong influence. Two indices were computed: 1) total number of decisions participated in (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$) and 2) total influence over decisions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). The eleven decision areas were: contract proposals, electing local, component, and national leaders, constitutional changes, autonomy, union policy, use of union funds, hiring union staff, discipline of members and accepting and rejecting contracts.

Electoral process democracy: Individuals were asked to respond to five items on a six point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. An index was calculated by summing responses to the items which examined: (1) perceived openness of the nomination procedure; (2) perceived chances of winning; (3) perceived favoritism by union executives for particular candidates; (4) perceived availability of good candidates for elections; and (5) perceived closeness of elections (Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$).

Leadership responsiveness: Individuals were asked to indicate how responsive leaders were to their demands on each of twelve issues (the eleven in participation plus grievance processing). A four point scale was used ranging from very unresponsive to very responsive. An index was computed by summing across issues (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

Union control structure: A more general measure of union democracy, control structure was also included to be used as a dependent variable in the correlation and regression analyses. This measure is adapted from the work of Tannenbaum and Kahn³⁵. The scale asks how much "say and influence" each of six groups have over the way the union is run, on a four point scale ranging from little or no to very strong. An index was computed by dividing the response about the influence of the membership group by the total control of the other five groups. This ratio was chosen as it best reflects the relative control of members; the essence of democracy.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The means, standard deviations, and possible range of values for each of the democracy criterion scales are presented in Table 1. An examination of the results illustrates that depending on the criterion chosen, a local

³⁵ TANNENBAUM and KAHN, *op. cit.*

union may actually be considered more or less democratic. For instance, measures of meeting attendance, other behavioral participation, informal participation, number of decisions in which members are involved, members' influence over decisions, and union control structure all suggest that the locals are basically undemocratic. That is, on average members attended only four of eighteen meetings; were involved in only a few more than two of seven other activities; used few informal channels; and on average only participated in three of eleven decisions. On the other hand, the leadership appears to be perceived as being moderately responsive to members' wishes and members seem to have some degree of control over the electoral process of the local unions. However, in an absolute sense the majority of the criteria fail to even reach the midpoint on the scale which suggests that overall the union may be relatively low on democracy³⁶.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviation and Minimum and Maximum Values
for Democracy Criterion Scales

| <i>Democracy Criterion Scales</i> | <i>Number of items</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Standard Deviation</i> | <i>Range of Values</i> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Meeting attendance | 2 | 4.04 | 5.13 | 0 to 18 |
| Other behavioral participation | 7 | 2.44 | 1.35 | 0 to 7 |
| Informal participation (ratio) | 6 | 0.34 | 0.90 | 0 to 6 |
| Number of decisions | 11 | 3.15 | 2.80 | 0 to 11 |
| Influence over decisions | 11 | 16.45 | 5.92 | 11 to 44 |
| Electoral control (R) | 6 | 14.92 | 4.10 | 5 to 30 |
| Leadership responsiveness | 12 | 34.66 | 7.78 | 12 to 48 |
| Union control structure (ratio) | 6 | 0.13 | 0.10 | 0.05 to 0.80 |

Note: R indicates reverse scoring, a low value indicates a great deal of electoral control.

A supplementary analysis of the response frequencies to the items comprising each of the scales provided some interesting information about members' conception of democracy. A large proportion of respondents reported being involved in union activities; union decision making processes; having more influence over decisions; and having responsive leaders under conditions where little initiative or action was required on the part of

³⁶ ETZIONI, A., "Two Approaches to Organizational Analysis: A Critique and Suggestion", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1960, pp. 257-278 argues that we have to be cautious in labelling an organization ineffective (or this case undemocratic) when comparing its performance to an ideal state as it is always likely to look bad. The more important question is under what conditions are unions more or less democratic.

the member. That is, while almost one hundred percent of the respondents read the union newspaper and voted in elections, few campaigned in elections or served on union committees. Moreover, members reported participating in decisions, having influence over them, or seeing leaders as responsive on issues where structural mechanisms existed for obtaining input - contract proposals, elections, general union policy, and accepting or rejecting contracts. Thus, it appears that although a large majority of the membership may exercise their inalienable right to inactivity, where little action is required or where structural mechanisms exist democracy is likely to be greater.

Zero-Order Correlation Analysis

Given that different criteria produce varying predictions concerning local union democracy, it is important to examine the relationships among criteria. The correlations are presented in Table 2. Each criterion will be discussed separately.

TABLE 2
Intercorrelation Matrix of Democracy Criterion Scales

| <i>Democracy Criterion Scale</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Meeting attendance | | | | | | | |
| 2. Other behavioral participation | .60** | | | | | | |
| 3. Informal participation | .20** | .28** | | | | | |
| 4. Number of decisions | .41** | .53** | .26** | | | | |
| 5. Influence over decisions | .43** | .41** | .03 | .45** | | | |
| 6. Electoral control (R) | -.23** | -.31** | -.03 | -.23** | -.29** | | |
| 7. Leadership responsiveness | .16 | .09 | .03 | .11 | .39** | -.41** | |
| 8. Union control structure | .12 | .04 | .01 | .16* | .19* | -.15 | .29** |

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01

Note: Significance levels vary because of missing data.

Note: R indicates reverse scoring, a low value indicates a great deal of electoral control.

The pattern of correlations of participation measures suggest the possibility of a three stage model. The three behavioral participation measures (meetings, other participation, and informal participation) are positively and significantly related. The more meetings that members attend, the more involved members are in other union activities, and the more informal methods of participation used by members, the greater the number of decisions participated in by the members. Moreover, attending meetings, involvement in other activities and participating in union decisions all

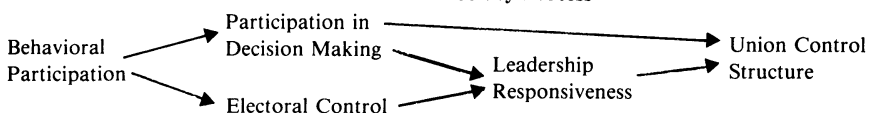
significantly increase the influence of members over decisions. It is interesting that although informal participation increases the number of decisions in which members participate, it has no effect on influence over decisions. This supports the notion that the shop society may help members provide input into the democratic decision making processes but only may increase the influence of the representative actually involved in the formal process (eg. steward). Finally, the greater the number of decisions participated in and the greater the members' influence over decisions, the more democratic the union control structure.

The extent of democracy in the electoral process of the local union is also significantly related to the various participation measures (with the exception of informal participation). It appears that the more active a member is in both behavioral activities and the decision making process, the more likely he is to perceive the union's political process as accessible and vital. Interestingly, the electoral control criterion is not significantly related to the control structure of the union. However, the correlation is in the predicted direction and approaches significance ($p < .10$).

The results related to leadership responsiveness support the contentions of previous industrial relations theorists. Measures of behavioral participation and decisions participated in are not related to responsiveness. However, under conditions where members have influence over decisions and electoral control, union leadership are more likely to be responsive. Thus, as others have proposed leaders will be responsive when they are forced to by influential members or where the probability of re-election is questioned by the vitality of the electoral process. Leadership responsiveness also has the strongest association with union control structure; the more responsive the leadership, the more democratic the control structure of the local union.

The overall pattern of results suggest that the union democracy construct may be represented as a multistage process as depicted in Figure 1. This conceptual framework is necessarily a simplified representation as it does not include all subdimensions of the variables. However, it does illustrate the relationships found in the correlational analysis and also suggests some of the direct and indirect effects of the variables on each set of criteria.

FIGURE 1
The Union Democracy Process



Regression Analysis

Unfortunately the above model can not be directly tested in this research as it is impossible to meet the recursive assumptions necessary to perform path analysis. That is, many of the relationships may be reciprocal rather than causal in nature (e.g., members may have more influence because leaders are more responsive or vice versa). Therefore, in order to examine the combined and independent effects of the democracy criterion scales on union control structure multiple regression analysis was employed. Furthermore, as no *a priori* theoretical basis existed to determine the order of entry of variables into the regression equation (the model above was data based), stepwise regression was used. In order to once again check for an effect of the combination of locals in the analysis, a series of dummy variables representing each local were entered last. Listwise deletion of data was used³⁷.

Entering six independent variables (criteria of local union democracy) and three dummy variables in the regression equation explained approximately fifty-one percent of the variance in union control structure. However, an examination of the adjusted R^2 indicates the optimal model (the highest adjusted R^2) is found after the entry of the fifth variable. Also, only the first four variables significantly add to the variance explained in the dependent variable³⁸.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the members' influence over decisions is the most important predictor of union control structure when other criteria are held constant. That is, the more influence that members have over important local union decisions, the more democratic the distribution of control among levels in the union hierarchy. The next variable, informal participation accounts for an additional seven percent of the variance and indicates that the more informal methods available to the member, the greater the relative influence of the membership in the way the union is run.

³⁷ Before attempting the regression analysis three checks were made on the data. Multicollinearity did not appear to be a problem as all correlations were at .60 or below. However, the use of listwise rather than pairwise deletion resulted in reduction in the size of the sample. To check for differences in the resulting sample, t-tests were computed between the means on the scales as calculated with listwise and pairwise deletion of data. The listwise resulted in a sample of members attending significantly more meetings, participating more in other activities and a greater number of decisions. No other variables were significantly different.

³⁸ The formula for significant addition to variance explained of a variable added to a regression equation was taken from F. KERLINGER and E. PEDHAZUR, *Multiple Regression in Behavioral Research*, New York, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1973.

However, the beta coefficient only approaches significance at the ten percent level. The other behavioral activities index enters third and significantly adds to the explanation of union control structure. Interestingly, the beta weight indicates the relationship is negative. That is, holding other criteria constant, an increase in participation on other types of behavioral activities such as holding office or serving on committees results in a decrease in relative member influence. This finding may be due to the fact that individuals tend to overestimate the influence of their own group (e.g., steward, local executive, etc.) and thus the decrease in relative member influence reported here may be due to the fact that stewards and leaders are more likely to have high scores on this scale. Leadership responsiveness is the final variable to add significantly to the equation although the standardized regression coefficient only approaches significance at the ten percent level. Thus, the more responsive local union leaders are to the interest of the membership on important issues, the more democratic the local union control structure.

TABLE 3
Stepwise Regression of Union Control Structure on
Democracy Criterion Scales

| <i>Democracy Criterion Scales</i> | <i>Standardized Beta</i> | <i>Adjusted R²</i> | <i>Change in Adjusted R²</i> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Influence over decisions | .447** | .26 | .26** |
| Informal participation | .218 | .31 | .05** |
| Other behavioral participation | -.433** | .36 | .05** |
| Leadership responsiveness | .256 | .38 | .02* |
| Number of decisions | .214 | .40 | .02 |
| Meeting attendance | .122 | .40 | .00 |
| Electoral control | -.001 | .38 | -.02 |
| Local 3 | .168 | .37 | -.01 |
| Local 2 | .159 | .36 | -.01 |
| Local 1 | .069 | .35 | -.01 |
| Degrees of Freedom | 10,158 | | |
| Overall F Value | 2.88** | | |
| R ² | .51(.35) | | |

Note: *p < .10
 **p < .05
 ***p < .01

The number of decisions in which members participate, meeting attendance, electoral control and the local union dummy variables do not make a significant addition to explanation of the dependent variable. Thus, when the variance due to the first four variables is controlled, others are not important.

The regression analysis provides only partial support for the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. According to that model influence in decision making and leadership responsiveness should have been important predictors of union control structure with other variables having less importance. Both were significant in the analysis. However, neither significant participation measure (i.e., behavioral and informal) would have been predicted. The negative relationship of the other behavioral activities can possibly be explained as a measurement artifact but the interesting result is the importance of informal methods of participation in the democratic nature of union control structure.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A multitude of definitions have been proposed for the union democracy construct. At the local union level, participation in union activities; informal participation through the shop society; leadership responsiveness to union members' demands; electoral control and a plethora of more specific indicators have been delineated as criteria for evaluating the extent of democracy. These criteria as well as some of their subdimensions were examined in this research. The results provide some interesting implications for theory and research on union democracy.

First, past research on union democracy has conceived of the construct in structural terms. Even Tannenbaum and Kahn,³⁹ rather than talking about the dynamics of the influence process, name their ultimate measure the "control graph", a structural depiction of an organization. In addition, measurement of the various criteria has been accomplished by collecting outcome measures. That is, meeting attendance figures are considered indicative of participation (which started off as participation in decision making via a town meeting model of democracy and ended up as involvement in various activities); votes, tenure, turnover, and opposition are all considered indicative of electoral control and the political process; and contract rejections or defeat of union officials are supposed to be representative of the responsiveness of leaders to the membership of the local union.

Although all of these criteria and their operational measures may set out a series of limiting conditions for the existence of democracy, there is the possibility that they miss the essence of the union democracy construct. Attendance figures may tell us little more than how many friends the leaders

³⁹ TANNENBAUM and KAHN, *op. cit.*

have and fail to indicate the extent to which the meeting acts as a forum for debate and democratic decision-making. Despite the fact that attendance appears to rise and fall depending on the issue or climate, no indication is provided of how tightly agendas are controlled; how the floor is manipulated by the chair; or the directionality of information and decision flow in local union meetings. The same analysis or criticism is true for each of the criteria.

Turnover of union officials may tell us about organizational mobility, retirement, or death but not necessarily about the challenges to top leadership, the struggle in campaigns or the ability of members to factionalize and develop a viable candidate; nor does opposition or lack of it in elections necessarily provide this information. Even the closeness of elections may be dependent on other unmeasured aspect of the political process; for example, the status of the candidates (incumbent versus new candidates) or the voting system used.

The same set of questions can be raised about contract rejections and leadership responsiveness. Thus, it appears that in the search for convenient measures, past research has not overwhelmingly succeeded in assessing the construct of local union democracy. However, the above critiques and the present research suggest one possible framework for the conceptualization of the construct.

First, rather than conceiving of democracy in structural terms, it may be more appropriate to think of it as a dynamic *process*: the process by which members, individually or collectively make their interests, desires, and demands known to the leadership and subsequently have them acted upon (responsiveness). The results of the present research suggest that influence over important union decisions and the manner in which influence is obtained and exercised may be the core of the democratic process in labor unions.

From the theoretical and empirical research in the field of organizational behavior, we know that a member's ability to influence organizational functioning may derive from: the formal structure of the union; the ability of the individual to reward or sanction other's behavior; the characteristics of the individual; or the knowledge and expertise of the member⁴⁰. Thus, the development of a model of the union democracy con-

⁴⁰ ETZIONI, A., *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations*, New York, The Free Press, 1961; J. FRENCH and B. RAVEN, "The Bases of Social Power", in D. CARTWRIGHT and A. ZANDER (eds.), *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory*, 2nd edition, Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1960, pp. 607-623.

struct must be expanded beyond the formal authority attributed to actors because of their position in the union hierarchy to include other sources of influence (power).

The action channels available to the members have also been stressed as important to the decision making process. That is, influence may be exercised or attempted within, either or both, the formal and informal channels of decision making. Past research on local union democracy has focused almost solely upon the role of formal channels. Influence has been characterized as being used within the confines of union meetings or union elections. Moreover, the influence has been represented by votes on motions at the union meeting, for candidates in elections, on new collective agreements. Little, if any, research has been addressed to the informal channels; e.g., informal member meetings at work, telephone calls, cornering stewards, officers or staff representatives, use of petitions, internal boycotts or wildcats against the unions, formation of interest groups or caucuses and so on. However, the results of correlation and regression analyses reported here emphasize the importance of the use of methods of informal participation in local union democracy.

In short, the ultimate test of the extent of union democracy is whether individual members within the union are able to influence decisions that they perceive to affect their vital interests, goals or welfare. Are members able to mobilize enough influence or power to participate in and affect the decisions that are of greatest concern to them, or is power so concentrated within the hands of the leadership or some minority faction so as to preclude effective participation and conflict resolution through the "democratic" process? Such an approach requires more emphasis on the way in which conflicting interests or goals are resolved within the policy making process of unions. The structural characteristics and perhaps behavioral participation variables might be seen as conditions which facilitate or hinder the functioning of a democratic process within unions, however, they should not be accepted by themselves as *measures* of the phenomenon called union democracy. Thus, future research on union democracy will need to focus directly on the decision making process, as difficult as that may be.

Therefore, the critical challenge for future research on union democracy lies in measuring the decision making processes within unions in a way that can effectively tap this important construct. Only then can we confidently begin to understand the factors shaping democracy in unions and perhaps even begin to explore the ultimate policy issue, namely the con-

sequences of more or less union democracy on the goals of the individual member, the effectiveness of the union as a total organization and on other dependent variables of interest in industrial relations.

Un essai d'analyse de la démocratie syndicale

Les recherches et les études théoriques dans le domaine des relations de travail ont proposé de nombreux critères pour mesurer le degré de vie démocratique à l'intérieur d'un syndicat. Malheureusement, il n'y a guère d'accord sur la pertinence ou l'importance de ces différents critères. Résultat: un syndicat peut être dit démocratique ou non selon les critères choisis. L'objet de l'article est d'examiner les interrelations entre quatre catégories de critères d'évaluation du degré de démocratie syndicale.

Un critère important utilisé dans le passé pour mesurer le caractère démocratique d'un syndicat était le degré d'engagement des membres dans l'activité syndicale. On s'est demandé, cependant, si l'engagement dans l'activité syndicale correspond véritablement à la vraie notion de participation. En conséquence, dans la présente recherche, on tient compte, non seulement de l'engagement dans l'activité syndicale, mais aussi de la mesure de participation des membres dans les décisions importantes du syndicat et de leur influence sur la prise des décisions. Kovner et Lahne ont aussi critiqué les mesures de participation parce qu'elles se concentrent uniquement sur les moyens d'engagement, c'est-à-dire les assemblées syndicales. Ils laissent entendre que souvent se forment des «groupes d'usines» où les membres discutent des questions syndicales, alors qu'un seul délégué assiste aux assemblées, enregistre le vote du groupe pour ensuite lui faire rapport. C'est pourquoi il a semblé bon d'inclure dans la recherche cette forme de participation informelle.

Une deuxième catégorie de critères utilisés pour mesurer le degré de démocratie syndicale a trait au processus des élections. De ce point de vue, la recherche s'intéresse aux modalités de vote, au roulement des dirigeants, aux lettres électorales et à l'institutionnalisation d'une opposition. Plus le processus électoral est vivant, plus le syndicat apparaît démocratique.

Un troisième critère important de la démocratie au sein d'un syndicat repose sur le degré de sensibilisation des dirigeants à l'égard des intérêts des membres. Même si les membres participent à la vie du syndicat et exercent une influence grâce au processus d'élections, si les dirigeants se désintéressent des membres, le syndicat n'est pas vraiment démocratique. Plus les dirigeants sont intéressés aux intérêts des membres quand il s'agit de prendre les décisions majeures qui concernent le syndicat, plus ce dernier est démocratique.

Selon Tannenbaum et Kahn la structure du syndicat constitue un indice du degré de démocratie que l'on y trouve. Cette mesure examine l'étendue de la liberté d'expression et de l'influence que les groupes principaux à l'intérieur du syndicat (membres, délégués d'usine, comités divers et bureau de direction) ont sur la façon

dont il est dirigé. Quatre types de structures de contrôle sont proposés, fondés selon la distribution et la somme totale de contrôle qui sera démocratique, oligarchique, anarchique ou polyarchique. Une structure de contrôle démocratique est celle où les membres du syndicat ont beaucoup d'influence sur la façon dont le syndicat est dirigé par rapport aux autres groupes de la hiérarchie syndicale. La mesure de Tannenbaum et de Kahn est aussi incluse dans cette étude en tant que critère de démocratie syndicale.

À ces fins, des questionnaires ont été distribués à quatre syndicats du secteur public d'une ville dans l'Ouest canadien. Ces syndicats furent choisis parce qu'ils représentaient les principaux groupes tant manuel, administratif, technique que professionnel. Pour l'analyse, les quatre syndicats furent regroupés parce que leurs structures administratives et hiérarchiques étaient les mêmes, que tous étaient assujettis à la même convention collective de base, qu'ils se trouvaient dans le même milieu juridique, économique et politique et qu'il n'y avait pas de différences marquées dans leur fonctionnement. Les mesures comprenaient l'assistance aux assemblées, l'engagement dans d'autres activités du syndicat, la participation informelle, la participation aux décisions portant sur 11 questions, l'influence sur ces questions, le contrôle électoral, le degré de sensibilisation des dirigeants aux intérêts des membres sur 12 questions et, enfin, l'appréciation de la structure de contrôle du syndicat.

Les résultats démontrent, on peut le voir par le tableau 1, que, selon le critère choisi, les syndicats peuvent être considérés comme plus ou moins démocratiques. Les membres assistent très peu aux assemblées, participent à peu d'activités, s'engagent peu dans la prise de décision et n'y exercent guère d'influence. Ils ne semblent pas non plus recourir aux méthodes informelles de participation. Seules les variables qui ont trait au contrôle électoral et au degré de sensibilisation des dirigeants se rapprochent du milieu de l'échelle. Un examen plus attentif des mesures

individuelle révèle que les membres estimaient qu'il y avait plus de démocratie, soit là où elle n'exigeait que peu d'initiative de leur part: participation aux élections, lecture du journal et soit là où des mécanismes formels existaient pour obtenir l'action des membres: participation aux décisions relatives aux projets de conventions collectives, votes de grève, acceptation ou rejet des contrats, détermination de la politique du syndicat.

Les corrélations entre les différents critères de la démocratie syndicale sont exposées dans le deuxième tableau. En règle générale, ils sont reliés l'un à l'autre d'une façon positive. Ainsi, plus les membres participent à l'activité syndicale, d'une manière formelle ou informelle, plus il y a de décisions auxquelles ils participent. Par ailleurs, la participation à la prise des décisions augmente en retour l'importance de l'influence sur les décisions. Les membres ressentent que les dirigeants sont plus sensibilisés là où le processus d'élections est dynamique et démocratique et les membres participent et ont davantage d'influence sur les décisions du syndicat. Enfin, plus les membres ont d'influence sur les décisions majeures du syndicat plus le degré de sensibilisation des dirigeants envers leurs intérêts est marqué, plus démocratique apparaît la structure de contrôle du syndicat. Le premier graphique présente ces constatations d'une façon schématique.

Pour établir la contribution des échelles du critère de démocratie à la structure de contrôle du syndicat, on a estimé une équation de régression multiple dont les résultats apparaissent au troisième tableau. Quatre variables apportent des additions

significatives aux variances expliquées dans la structure de contrôle du syndicat. Plus les membres ont d'influence sur la prise des décisions, plus la structure de contrôle du syndicat est démocratique. Plus les membres recourent aux méthodes informelles de participation, plus est marquée l'influence relative des membres sur la façon dont le syndicat est dirigé. Chose intéressante, la troisième variable qui apporte une addition significative à la variance expliquée, soit la participation à d'autres activités syndicales (poste de direction, membre de comité, vote dans les élections) réduit l'influence relative des membres. Il en ressort que les membres, qui sont actifs dans ces types d'activités syndicales, occupent un rang plus élevé dans la hiérarchie syndicale et considèrent que les membres sont moins engagés dans la direction du syndicat. Enfin, plus les dirigeants se sentent responsables envers les membres, plus est démocratique la structure de contrôle du syndicat. Les autres critères de la démocratie à l'intérieur du syndicat n'ont pas de signification.

Les résultats de cette étude font voir la nécessité de considérer la démocratie syndicale, non pas en tant qu'une suite de critères isolés mais plutôt comme un processus, grâce auquel les membres sont capables d'influencer les résultats des problèmes majeurs qui les touchent. Aussi, la recherche, à l'avenir, devrait-elle s'attacher plus directement au processus décisionnel à l'intérieur des syndicats.

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