

were also assigned the right to their children's services and earnings. Two factors intervened during the nineteenth century to undermine this patriarchal arrangement. A growing appreciation of the need for child nurture and a widespread belief that women were best suited to this task combined to improve maternal rights over child custody.

Legislation haltingly began to recognize mothers' rights, but the bulk of the change came from the decisions of the judges. Grossberg argues that leaving the custody awards to the discretion of the judges was less threatening to nineteenth-century politicians than full-scale legislative recognition of maternal custody rights would have been. Indeed he makes the intriguing argument that as the patriarchal status of husbands and fathers diminished, nineteenth-century judges became "new kinds of patriarchs" in their stead. Grossberg concludes that the undermining of the patriarchal family gave women and children an expanded presence in the legal order, but only in very restrictive ways. They were never granted political or economic authority, and their dependent status was re-enforced and continually supervised by a new patriarchy of judges.

Governing the Hearth is a work of remarkable magnitude. The scope of Grossberg's research and his insightful and sensitive analysis combine to make this book an impressive addition to our growing knowledge of nineteenth-century legal history. For Canadian researchers who are struggling to understand the place of women and children in nineteenth-century society, this information provides a strong foundation upon which to examine comparative Canadian data. The unique Canadian heritage of English tradition and American influence will no doubt result in findings of some legal parallels and some legal differences. Canadian historians have much to ponder in Grossberg's first-rate *Governing the Hearth*.

Constance B. Backhouse
University of Western Ontario

The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada. Laura C. Johnson with Robert E. Johnson. Toronto: *The Women's Press*, 1983. pp. 135

Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement. Edited by Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz. Toronto: *The Women's Press*, 1983. pp. 421

In 1895, the federal government conducted an investigation of labour practices in the textile and clothing industries. The resulting document, *Report on the Sweating System in Canada*, revealed the shocking exploitation of thousands of women doing piecework at home for poverty-level wages.

As Laura C. Johnson reports in *The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada*, nearly ninety years of labour legislation, union organizing and improvements in the status of women have failed to do away with the practice of home piecework. In her readable and well-researched book, she traces the history of the home piecework system and paints a tragic portrait of today's homeworkers, who seem little better off than their nineteenth-century sisters.

A sociologist for the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto, Johnson combined traditional research techniques with interviews with some 50 homeworkers in Ontario and Quebec. Because of that, the book is part-sociology, part-journalism and part-oral history, and the approach works to the advantage of Johnson's main thesis: that the home piecework system is unlikely to go away without major changes in legislation, the economy and the provision of such support services as day care. She quickly dashes the myth of the homemaker as an independent businesswoman whose "cottage industry" gives her the advantage of staying home with her children while earning additional income. Instead, the homemaker is usually an immigrant, exploited by her employer, and

nearly always at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Much of the book is devoted to exploring the reasons why homework persists in our society. Many of the women engaged in it have few alternatives: some cannot find other employment because of the language barrier, others cannot work outside the home because of family responsibilities — a problem which is exacerbated by the scarcity of affordable day care. But Johnson clearly places the blame for homework not on the women who accept it, but on the employers who find it a good source of cheap labour. And although the employment of homeworkers in Canada is subject to regulation by provincial employment standards laws, many employers have managed to escape legal scrutiny by a variety of means. In a chapter entitled “The Unprotected Homeworker”, Johnson analyzes the Ontario and Quebec legislation affecting homeworkers and concludes that it has been ineffective in improving the conditions under which homework is performed. In Ontario, for example, anyone employing homeworkers is required to obtain a government permit; however, a survey of 30 Toronto manufacturers employing homeworkers showed that 20 of them were operating without a permit. Moreover, homeworkers are often excluded from the legal definition of an “employee”, denying them the right to Unemployment Insurance, Canada Pension or Workers’ Compensation.

Johnson’s conclusion is that in the long term, homework must be eliminated because she believes that no amount of legislation will ultimately resolve the problem. In the short term, however, she prescribes much tougher enforcement of the existing laws, raising the level of fines for violations and the provision of alternatives to homework through expansion of quality child care services, provision of increased maternity and child care allowances, and increased language training, job training and employment opportunities.

Needless to say, homeworkers aren’t unionized; but neither are nearly three-quarters of all female workers. While more than 40 percent of all Canadian male non-agricultural workers belong to unions, the equivalent figure for women is in the area of 27 percent.

Moreover, even in unions where women make up a healthy proportion of the membership — the figure for public sector unions, for example, is around 50 percent — they are still vastly underrepresented in leadership positions. As Françoise David, a Quebec union activist, has written: “To be a woman and a worker is increasingly common. To be a woman and unionized is rarer, but our numbers are growing. But to be a woman and an active trade unionist — that is another story.”

David’s article on the problems facing women activists in one Quebec labour federation is one of 28 chapters of *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*. The book, one of several on women and unions which has been published during the past five years, covers a broad territory, ranging from a statistical analysis of the unionization of women to such specific workplace issues as microtechnology, sexual harassment and part-time work.

While several of the contributors are academics, the vast majority are trade union activists, which gives the book a more personal and subjective tone. As in *The Seam Allowance*, the combination of personal experience and objective fact is effective. Instead of being merely a recitation of statistics and events, *Union Sisters* also gives readers a first-hand glimpse of the problems facing women in the workplace and how they have worked through their unions to overcome them. Typical of that approach is Joanne Kates’ and Jane Springer’s account of their experiences organizing freelance writers and editors, Susan Genge’s piece about union involvement in lesbian and gay rights issues, and Arja Lane’s description of Wives Supporting the

Strike, a group formed to support the 12,000 workers who went on strike against Inco in Sudbury in 1978. While the authors are dedicated trade unionists, they make no bones about the fact that the labour movement is still male-dominated, and that barriers often arise not only when facing the employer, but within the unions themselves.

Perhaps most impressive about *Union Sisters* was the ability of its editors to bring together so much expertise and experience on such a diversity of labour-related issues. *Union Sisters* essentially continues where Julie White's also excellent *Women and Unions* leaves off (White is also a contributor to *Union Sisters*), taking a more detailed look at the specific struggles labour women are waging on a day-to-day basis. For women outside the labour movement, the book provides significant insights into how unions and labour centrals operate. And for those of us who are labour activists ourselves, it gives a sense of perspective, demonstrating some of the different strategies that have been used in the ongoing fight for equality.

Also noteworthy are the last two chapters — a "Cineography", listing films, videos and slide presentations dealing with women, work and unions, and a bibliography of union publications related to women, complete with the addresses of the unions which produced them.

While virtually all the contributors acknowledge that women have a long way to go to achieve equality in the workplace and in the labour movement, the overriding tone of *Union Sisters* is one of optimism. As Jane Adams and Julie Griffin put it in their chapter on "Bargaining for Equality":

Women have not stopped, and will not stop using the collective bargaining process to address the broad range of issues affecting women's health, happiness and welfare. Five years ago, few people thought

sexual harassment, paternity leave or paid child care were fit issues for collective bargaining. Now many people are looking at the whole range of seemingly "sacred" management rights. These issues will become increasingly subject to collective bargaining and women workers have only to gain from such challenges.

Donna Balkan
Ottawa

Congressional Women: Their Recruitment, Treatment and Behavior Gertzog, Irwin N. *New York: Praeger, Women and Politics Series, 1984 pp. 290*

Political Equality in a Democratic Society: Women in the United States Kendrigan, Mary Lou *Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1984 pp. 149*

These books, while strikingly different in focus and approach, are nonetheless best examined together as their strengths and weaknesses are complementary. Gertzog's book is a straightforward, empirical analysis of women in Congress which eschews theoretical discussion of the field of women and politics. Kendrigan's book, on the other hand, raises numerous theoretical issues without exploring the relevant empirical data to flesh them out. Together, they offer the reader a significant amount of food for thought.

Gertzog's purpose is to determine whether or not contemporary Congresswomen differ from their predecessors. Accordingly, he gathered background data on all the women who had served in Congress from 1917 to 1976. As well, he interviewed 13 of the 18 women and 11 of the 25 men reputed to be sensitive to personal and professional relationships among House members serving in the 95th Congress about the experiences of contemporary Congresswomen. The dis-