

In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations. By *Cynthia Cockburn*. Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 1991.

The Promise and the Price: The Struggle for Equal Opportunity in Women's Employment. By *Clare Burton*. North Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1991.

Joan Acker University of Oregon

FEMINIST ACTIVISTS have been toiling for twenty-five years and more to improve the opportunities and rewards for women workers in large organizations. Positive changes have been modest, as these two books attest. This paucity of progress poses theoretical as well as practical problems, for the minimal changes suggest that gender is deeply embedded in organizational structures and that the predominant theories of gender-neutral organizations are inadequate. In response, some feminist theorists suggest that we need new theories of gendered organizations. New theories demand new knowledge of gendered processes. Fortunately, feminist researchers and policy advocates have greatly increased our knowledge about how male dominance and the subordination of women are perpetuated as they have tried to understand why great efforts bring disappointing results.

Originating in different standpoints—Cynthia Cockburn writes about British organizations as a feminist researcher; Clare Burton writes about Australian experience as the feminist Director for Equal Opportunity in Public Employment for the New South Wales Government—both of these books contribute substantially to this growing knowledge. Their contributions are theoretical as well as practical, elucidating the concrete practices that constitute the gendered structures of power as well as the complexities of sexual identity, emotion, and meaning that also constitute organizational life.

Cockburn's *In the Way of Women* is a splendid study of equality initiatives and white men's responses to these efforts in four large British organizations, all with a reputation for having a strong commitment to equality for women and racial and ethnic minorities. This is the latest of Cockburn's books on organizational change and patriarchy, which include *Brothers*, a study of the printing industry, and *Machinery of Dominance*, a study of male dominance and technological change in several organizations.¹ In the present book, as in her earlier studies, Cockburn

¹ Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1983), and *Machinery of Dominance: Women, Men and Technical Knowledge* (London: Pluto, 1985).

places her work in a historical materialist feminist tradition that recognizes the patriarchal character of capitalism and the capitalist character of contemporary patriarchy. At the same time, she skillfully weaves other "differences" into her analysis, discussing race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical disability, in addition to gender and class, as grounds upon which discrimination is organized.

The four organizations Cockburn studied were a large retail chain, a government civil service department with thousands of employees, a large trade union with a majority of women members, and a local governmental authority well known for innovations on equality questions. Each organization had an equality policy and staff devoted to equal opportunity. In each there was a short agenda and a long agenda for change. The short agendas focused on recruitment and promotion, getting women and other excluded groups into higher positions. Top management gave its support to such efforts, while male middle managers often resisted, sometimes with vociferous objections and the vilification of feminism, other times simply by ignoring equality policies. The long agendas existed primarily in the hopes of equal opportunity officers and pertained to reorganizing work, reassessing the value of women's work, and transforming organizational culture; these objectives got much less male and managerial support. Only in the local authority and the union were some changes under way toward long-term goals affecting lower-level as well as higher-level women. Some of these changes, such as maternity leave and flextime, created management problems—for example, who would do the work of the absent mother? Moreover, many men experienced measures to benefit women as unfair and threatening.

Cockburn's description of men's resistance is both dense and fascinating. She emphasizes the great variation in responses to equality efforts as well as this issue's marginality to the goals of most organizations and the white middle-class men who control them. Profit and efficiency come first, and equality is usually irrelevant to those ends. This is the disheartening reality.

Clare Burton in *The Promise and the Price* also discusses masculine resistance to equal opportunity initiatives, but she gives most attention to organizational practices that contribute to women's subordination and to measures to counter or alter those practices in the Australian Public Service. Her perspective includes diversities other than gender; she focuses in particular on Aboriginal people who have suffered severe discrimination. Although grounded in specifics, the issues she discusses are common in similar settings in all industrial countries. Non-Australian feminists can learn much from her.

Burton explores how gender is involved in the definition of merit and in the design and redesign of jobs. She argues strongly that job redesign should be part of all equal employment opportunity efforts and discusses

important elements in the redesign process. She also argues for a central equal employment opportunity agency, analyzing the disadvantages of decentralization of this responsibility. This discussion is relevant in the United States, where one of the mechanisms for undermining affirmative action has been decentralization. The book includes a very informative study of gender bias in performance assessment and several chapters on approaches to pay equity.

I particularly appreciated Burton's discussion of the Australian wage-fixing system and the gender pay gap. Australia is often cited in the United States as the one country that has implemented pay equity, but this is not the reality. Decisions by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, beginning in 1969, increased the ratio of female-to-male wages from 0.65 in 1972 to 0.79 in 1977, where it remained through 1987. No comprehensive evaluation of the value of work in predominantly female occupations has been undertaken. Burton concludes that "none of the wage-fixing principles devised over the last fifteen or so years has facilitated the implementation of the 1972 Principle [on equal pay for work of equal value]" (144).

In summary, both these books show that feminists have made some changes in women's opportunities to advance in large organizations but that they have been much less successful in altering the conditions for the masses of women in lower-level jobs. Women move into managerial jobs when a demand exists for their labor, but men resist these incursions or begin to feel alienated, as though the workplace no longer belongs to them. White men define differences and use those differences to exclude women and minorities. They still define women primarily in terms of motherhood, taking that as evidence that women are not suited for or not interested in certain male-dominated jobs. Strategies that would raise the wages of masses of low-paid women workers meet particular resistance, both because such strategies are expensive and because a widespread belief still exists that men are worth more, and probably need more, than women. As Cockburn argues, such ideas about women and gender are hegemonic. They help to structure processes inside work organizations that support the present patterns of power. Thus, feminism, especially one that recognizes diversity, is subversive; equally subversive are the practical steps Burton proposes to take apart gradually those organizational processes and construct more democratic and participatory work organizations. To achieve this, to paraphrase Cockburn, women will have to organize effectively to define the discourse of difference and to make alliances across differences of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Feminist theories of organization, informed by studies such as these, may help along the way.

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