

This story explodes the popular belief that women white-collar workers tend to reject unionization and accept a passive role in the workplace. On the contrary, the women workers of Harvard University created a powerful and unique union - one that emphasizes their own values and priorities as working women and rejects unwanted aspects of traditional unionism. The workers involved comprise Harvards 3,600-member support staff, which includes secretaries, library and laboratory assistants, dental hygienists, accounting clerks, and a myriad of other office workers who keep a great university functioning. Even at prestigious private universities like Harvard and Yale, these workers - mostly women - have had to put up with exploitive management policies that denied them respect and decent wages because they were women. But the women eventually rebelled, declaring that they could not live on prestige alone. Encouraged by the womens movement of the early 1970s, a group of women workers (and a few men) began what would become a 15-year struggle to organize staff employees at Harvard. The women persisted in the face of patronizing and sexist attitudes of university administrators and leaders of their own national unions. Unconscionably long legal delays foiled their efforts. But they developed innovative organizing methods, which merged feminist values with demands for union representation and a means of influencing workplace decisions. Out of adversity came an unorthodox form of unionism embodied in the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW). Its founding was marked by an absorbing human drama that pitted unknown workers, such as Kris Rondeau, a lab assistant who came to head the union, against famous educators such as Harvard President Derek Bok and a panoply of prestigious deans. Other characters caught up in the drama included Harvards John T. Dunlop, the nations foremost industrial relations scholar and former U.S. Secretary of Labor. The drama was played out in innumerable hearings before the National Labor Relations Board, in the streets of Cambridge, and on the walks of historic Harvard Yard, where union members marched and sang and employed new tactics like ballooning, designed to communicate a message of joy and liberation rather than the traditional hate-the-boss hostility. John Hoerr tells this story from the perspective of both Harvard administrators and union organizers. With unusual access to its meetings, leaders, and files, he examines the unique culture of a female-led union from the inside. Photographs add to the impact of this dramatic narrative. Author note: John Hoerr, a freelance writer, has been a journalist for more than thirty years at newspapers, magazines, public television, and United Press International. A specialist in labor reportage, he is the author of *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*.

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