

New unions in the UK: the vanguard or the rearguard of the union movement?

Catharine Ross

ABSTRACT

Between January 1999 and March 2010, 34 trade unions entered the Certification Officer list or schedule in the UK. This article reports on a survey of those unions, discussing the extent to which they represent new forms of unionism and the possible implications for union revitalisation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The decline in union density and influence in the UK towards the end of the 20th century has been widely noted (see, e.g. Heery *et al.*, 2003: 79). Trade union density fell from 32.4 per cent of those in employment in 1992 to 26.9 per cent in 1999 (Archur, 2010: 7), whereas the percentage of workplaces with at least 25 employees recognising unions declined from 66 per cent in 1984 to 42 per cent in 1998, although the level stabilised after 1998 (Blanchflower *et al.*, 2007: 287–288). Nevertheless, the relatively low levels of union density and influence, and their possible reversal, remain a key concern of many commentators.

A range of strategies of union renewal and revitalisation have been debated. These include partnership with employers, renewed focus on organising and union mergers (Heery *et al.*, 2003); the adjustment of interunion and intraunion relationships (Fairbrother, 2000); the development of new organisational forms (Verma and Kochan, 2004: 14); community unionism (Stewart *et al.*, 2009: 3); forms of social movement unionism (e.g. Le Queux and Sainsaulieu, 2010); and the adoption of workplace learning initiatives (McIlroy, 2008).

For the most part, these analyses focus on the development of existing unions. However, between 1 January 1999 and 31 March 2010, 34 trade unions entered the Certification Officer list or schedule in the UK for the first time. This raises the question of the potential contribution of these new unions to the renewal and revitalisation of the union movement. On the one hand, such unions may aid renewal and revitalisation, for example through increasing density levels, broadening union membership or adopting innovative strategies and structures from which the wider union movement could learn.

□ Catharine Ross is Lecturer in the Business School, University of Worcester. Correspondence should be addressed to Catharine Ross, Business School, University of Worcester, City Campus, Castle Street, Worcester, Worcestershire WR2 6AJ; email: c.ross@worc.ac.uk

Alternatively, these newer unions may do no more than reproduce the structures and strategies of existing unions. Moreover, Gall (2003: 88) finds some staff unions were established by employers in an attempt to block independent union recognition. In such cases, it may be argued that new unions are not only not pointing the way to union revitalisation but also actively hindering it.

This article therefore examines the phenomenon of new union formation in Britain. Specifically, it explores the longevity and membership numbers of unions that entered the list or schedule of trade unions between January 1999 and March 2010, their origins and the degree to which they represent new strategies or forms of unionism that might help or hinder union revitalisation. The analytical framework that will be adopted is discussed in the next section, followed by discussion of the research methods. The findings are then presented. Finally, the article discusses the possible lessons for union revitalisation in Britain.

2 LITERATURE

The terms 'renewal' and 'revitalisation' are both used in the literature to indicate general union recovery (McIlroy, 2008: 301). Sometimes, however, the term renewal is given a more specific meaning, referring to the strategy of addressing union decline through the development of workplace unionism (Fairbrother, 2000). To avoid confusion, therefore, Heery (2003) reserves 'renewal' for this particular theoretical approach and adopts 'revitalisation' to indicate the broader reversal of union decline, and these are the definitions adopted here.

Two key points must be made about the concept of revitalisation. First, it addresses not only the decline in union density but also in union influence (Heery *et al.*, 2003: 79). Second, it is concerned with the significant recovery of trade unionism as a whole (McIlroy, 2008: 301). Strategies adopted by individual unions must therefore be considered in terms of their potential to enhance the power and influence of the wider union movement.

Heery (2003) categorises theoretical approaches to union development into three strands: evolutionary, which argues new forms of unions and recruitment strategies are necessitated by the changing nature of work; renewal, which suggests that internal change is needed to resolve a division between union's institutional needs and those of their members; and agency, which focuses on unions' strategic choices and the role of union organisers in shaping these. Each strand draws attention to different issues in relation to union revitalisation.

From the evolutionary perspective, Haiven (2006) suggests that unions need to expand from their traditional recruiting grounds and in order to do this may need to offer different services like individualised bargaining (Haiven 2006: 108) or professional development (Haiven 2006: 110). Similarly, Heery *et al.* (2004a: 127) note the increasing numbers of temporary workers for whom traditional 'worksite unionism' may be inappropriate (Heery *et al.*, 2004b: 20), whereas others argue that the development of the global economy requires unions to move beyond collective bargaining to collaboration with political movements (c.f. Roukis, 2005: 276).

Other 'evolutionary' theorists focus upon changing the nature of union-employer relationships. On the one hand, partnership with employers is put forward as a way for trade unions to get 'back into the mainstream of political and industrial life' (Ackers and Payne, 1998 *op cit.*: 547) and re-establish a role in organisational decision making (Terry, 2004: 215). On the other hand, it is argued that it may not increase

union influence (Tailby *et al.*, 2007), and the more militant organisation strategy is proposed as the way to increase membership numbers and satisfaction (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2011).

Many of the changes recommended by 'evolutionary' approaches conflict with the requirements for unionateness set out by Blackburn (1967), which include independence from the employer, and key activities of 'collective bargaining and the protection of the interests of members as employees' (Blackburn, 1967: 21) rather than 'professional activities and welfare schemes' (Blackburn, 1967: 18). Although Scheuer (1986) argues that unionateness ignores unions' professionalist strategies and is particularly inappropriate for white-collar unions, Gall (2008) finds it still relevant to the analysis and assessment of finance unions. There is therefore debate about the continuing relevance of such traditional forms, and thus about the underpinning assumption of evolutionary approaches. Roche (2000) meanwhile, as Heery (2003: 284) points out, criticises evolutionary theories from another perspective, arguing not that change has been overstated but that it is more fragmented and contingent than evolutionary approaches imply.

Heery's second category, 'renewal' theories, focuses attention upon union structure (Heery, 2003: 285). Fairbrother (2000), for example, argues the importance of workplace organisation and the need for new union forms that balance local activity with the collective interests of the union membership as a whole, whereas Darlington (2010) looks to the bottom-up development of political trade unionism to restore union confidence and strength. Relatedly, Heery *et al.* (2003: 84–85) find unions adopting structures to give representation to minority groups.

Hickey *et al.* (2010), however, have questioned the centrality of member participation. Their research indicates that the importance of participation varies according to context and that it is bargaining power, rather than participation that is most critical. Moreover, Heery *et al.* (2003: 85) argue that complex forms of internal representation raise new difficulties of coordination and resourcing 'with no obvious benefits in terms of strategic advantage'.

Hickey *et al.*'s finding that 'leadership strategies may be more successful' than participation in achieving renewal (Hickey *et al.*, 2010: 76) agrees in part with the propositions of Heery's third theoretical approach, 'agency' theories. In contrast to the more deterministic evolutionary approach, this approach considers that unions are able to make meaningful strategic choices and explores the role of activists and leaders in shaping those (Heery, 2003: 290–291). Thus, Heery and Kelly (1994) argue that unions can adopt one of three strategies in relation to representing their members: professional unionism, in which it is assumed that members' needs are easily identified and serviced by professional officers; managerial unionism, in which members are again passive but their needs are perceived to be opaque and highly differentiated; and participative unionism, in which there is a high degree of member activism. Hyman (2004), meanwhile, argues that unions decide whose interests to represent, which interests to represent and how to represent them.

Hyman also looks to union leadership to develop collective interests (Hyman 2004: 25). This is in line with Kelly's discussion of mobilisation (1998), in which he argues that union leaders play a critical role in developing the sense of injustice and consequent social identification necessary for collective action, social identity deriving from the individual's 'knowledge of their membership of a social group or groups together with the value and emotional significance of that membership' (Tajfel, 1981: 255). Other writers argue that a transformational leadership style, which encourages indi-

viduals to look beyond self-interests and promotes shared vision (Twigg *et al.* 2008: 29), is associated with union commitment (Twigg *et al.* 2008: 36) and social identification, collectivism, and member loyalty (Cregan *et al.* 2009: 714).

The importance of leadership in developing collective action has, however, been questioned, with Atzeni (2009: 6) suggesting that leadership may arise from mobilisation rather than be a condition for it. More broadly, Briskin (2011) criticises much union literature for focusing on individual, 'heroic' leaders and argues for a focus on leadership as process rather than people.

As Heery (2003: 297) points out, these three theoretical approaches are based on differing assumptions, for example regarding the existence of strategic choice, and so ultimately contradict each other. If not pushed to their extremes, however, Heery argues that they may be seen as complementary, drawing attention to different issues: 'In other words, they can be used to devise a research programme instead of a research project' (Heery 2003: 298). It is in this way that these theoretical approaches are used here, providing a framework for the analysis of new unions and the extent to which they represent new approaches to unionism.

3 METHODS

For the purposes of the research, new unions were defined as those that entered the Certification Officer list or schedule during or after 1 January 1999. The rationale for selecting this year was The Employment Relations Act 1999, which gave trade unions in Britain the right to recognition where the majority of workers in the bargaining unit belong to the trade union, or where 40 per cent of those in the bargaining unit vote for recognition (Department of Trade and Industry, 2003: 92–93) and in so doing changed the union environment (Heery and Simms, 2011).

Using the above definition, 34 new unions were established between 1 January 1999 and 31 March 2010. Certification Officer annual reports and union annual returns were examined to explore their longevity and membership numbers.

By the time of the research in 2010, 10 of the unions had left the list/schedule. Of the 24 extant unions, contact details for two were unavailable. The remaining 22 were contacted first by e-mail, where available, and then by follow-up telephone calls to explain the project and seek the participation of the General Secretary or equivalent in a telephone interview. Seventeen unions participated in the research, representing 70 per cent of the 24 extant new unions.

The interviews were undertaken by the author and were semi-structured. This format is appropriate where the investigation has a 'fairly clear focus' (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 479) but allows the researcher to follow up interviewees' replies (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 474), ask complex and open-ended questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 324) and elicit potentially sensitive information (Buchanan *et al.*, 1988: 59). The interviews included questions on the aims and activities of the union; nature of membership; relationship with employers and other trade unions; union structure and member involvement; reasons for and process of formation; methods of member recruitment; development since formation; impact of unionisation; challenges faced; and support received.

Literature on telephone interviewing suggests that it has both advantages and disadvantages when compared with face-to-face interviewing (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 215). However, most research has failed to identify one method as being superior to the other (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 1989), or, where it has, the difference

has been small in magnitude (Holbrook *et al.*, 2003: 110). Saunders *et al.* (2009: 349) suggest telephone interviews may be appropriate where the researcher has had prior contact with the interviewee to establish credibility, as was the case here, and where access would otherwise be impossible due to the location of the interviewee. New union leaders are located across the UK, are often required to travel at short notice due to the exigencies of their job roles and do not always have an office base. Arranging face-to-face interviews would therefore have been difficult and may have introduced a degree of response bias by reducing access to participants from less established unions. Even so, in one case, it was not possible to arrange a time for a telephone interview, and the respondent completed the interview schedule via e-mail instead.

In addition to the telephone interviews, extant unions' websites were examined, where such existed. This permitted some triangulation of documentary and interview data.

Detailed notes were taken during the interviews and written up in full immediately afterwards in order to enhance reliability (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 339). Analysis was undertaken using theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83–84). Thus, codes were developed in relation to the origins of the trade unions, whereas Heery's (2003) typology provided the framework for the development of codes to examine forms of unionism, agency theories drawing attention to the role of union leaders and activists, evolutionary theories to services offered and relationships with employers, and renewal theories to union structure. Interpretation of the codes developed led to the identification of themes, which were then reviewed and related to each other, the research questions and existing literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). Finally, the findings were written up, and the draft paper was sent to participants for checking. This process confirmed the data in all but one case, when it led to enhanced understanding of the nuances of the formation of one union.

The interviews revealed that a number of the participants and their unions had experienced hostility. As Bell and Bryman (2007) find, prevention of harm to participants is one of the key ethical principles in codes of social research ethics. To comply with such ethical codes and minimise harm to the participants, therefore, the researcher made the decision to anonymise the data gathered through the primary research as far as possible. To avoid compromising this anonymity, some of the detail of the formation and strategies of individual unions had to be excluded from the article.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Longevity and membership numbers

Only half of the trade unions that entered the list or schedule between 1 January 1999 and 31 March 2004 were still in existence at 31 March 2010 (Table A1). Of those leaving the list, only one had done so as a result of merger with another union. This lack of longevity of many new unions, and the fact that their members were in most cases not transferred automatically to another union via merger, questions the potential of new unions to contribute to increasing union density.

Data on membership levels (Table A2) indicate that new unions' impact on overall density levels has been minimal. Nineteen of the unions still extant in 2010 had less

than 1,000 members, with four having fewer than 100. Indeed, the overall membership of these newer unions at 31 March 2010 represented just 0.4 per cent of total union membership in Britain.

However, the data presented in Table A2 also indicate that the majority of new unions were male dominated, with women comprising the majority of members in just four unions. This is in contrast to overall union density in Britain, where women's density exceeds that of men, due to their greater representation in the well-unionised public sector (Archur, 2011: 4). The explanation for this difference may lie in male dominance of the new unions' constituencies. It is notable, for example, that a number of the new unions in the list represent workers in private sector employers, and in so doing may therefore be broadening the membership of the union movement.

4.2 The origins of new unions

Analysis of the primary research interview data reveals that new unions in Britain have one of five key origins: in a breakaway from an existing union; in sponsorship by an individual employer; in a pre-existing professional body; in a pre-existing political movement; or in a broader sense of injustice on the part of a small number of activists. These types are labelled here Breakaway; Employer-Sponsored; Professional; Political; and Big Bang, respectively (Table 1).

Breakaway unions have their roots in pre-existing trade unions. One broke away from a general union to provide focus on industry-specific issues; another ceded from a general union to maintain its employer-based identity, whereas leadership of the third perceived that the parent union, while not general, was nevertheless not focusing on issues they deemed important.

The greatest number of new unions surveyed fell into the category of 'employer-sponsored'. These unions represented workers from single employers and were sponsored in some way by those employers. In some instances, the employer was the key agent in the establishment of the union: in one case it was reported that the company formed the union's constitution in an attempt to block recognition claims by external unions. In other cases, however, it was reported that it was members of existing staff associations who initiated the move to become a trade union in order to resist claims by an external union, or workers who decided they needed trade union representation. In one case, the Human Resources director then encouraged workers to set up an internal union; in another, workers failed to find a union willing or able to represent them because of the nature of their membership, and so set up their own union with employer support.

Table 1: New unions by origin

Origin of new union	Number
Breakaway	3
Employer-Sponsored	6
Professional	2
Political	2
Big Bang	4

Professional unions developed out of pre-existing professional bodies, established in order to provide a statutory basis for representation in employment disputes. In both cases, the professional bodies established new union organisations, rather than unionising the professional body as the Royal College of Nursing did in 1976 (Royal College of Nursing, 2012). One explained that the professional body worked well as it was; the other that becoming a trade union would have necessitated the support of a majority of professional body members, which they had not expected to receive. Nevertheless, the new unions worked closely with their parent professional bodies, obtaining members through them, being at least part-funded by them, and sharing some administrative support.

Unions in the fourth category, Political Unions, had their roots in political organisations. One respondent reported that his union, initially, was like a 'club' for members of a particular political organisation; another consulted with contacts in political organisations when establishing the union. Unlike in the previous three types of new unions, the membership of these unions was consequently open to any industry. As one of the General Secretaries explained, these unions had two foci: campaigning on broad political issues and representing members in the workplace, and as they developed, they drew membership both from those with grievances against their employers and those with political affiliations.

New unions in each of the preceding categories, therefore, developed from an existing organisation—another trade union, an employing organisation, a professional association or a political organisation. Unions in the final category, Big Bang, differed in that they were not rooted in single pre-existing organisations. In most cases, a small number of workers in particular occupations from more than one employing organisation recognised an unfulfilled need for a representative body and either established it themselves or sought someone else to establish it for them; in one case, the move was initiated by someone outside the occupation who offered to provide representation. Of the four Big Bang unions surveyed, three continued to restrict membership to particular occupational groups, whereas one had expanded to allow broader membership.

4.3 Role of union leaders and activists

The above findings reveal that new unions have diverse origins. Nevertheless, in relation to agency, two common themes emerge. In the first place, leaders played a key role in establishing and developing new unions. In almost all cases (the exception being those whose establishment was driven initially by the employer), it was the union leaders who articulated the need for a collective body.

Although these findings must be treated with caution, given the source of the data in interviews with union leaders and therefore possible bias, interviewees also cited specific ways in which they had directed union strategy. One General Secretary explained his unions' approach to legal cases through reference to his own libertarian values; another, Employer-Sponsored union was planning a ballot on member subscriptions because the General Secretary claimed being dependent upon the employer 'niggles me'. Two other, recently appointed General Secretaries explained how they had changed union strategy since their appointments, one increasing the focus on career support and involvement in industry-level policy development, the other using his legal expertise to reduce tribunal cases and focus instead on membership expansion.

In the second place, new union leaders showed a keen awareness of the need to engender belief in the efficacy of their unions, in line with Kelly's (1998: 48–49) suggestion that workers may be reluctant to join unions because of a perception that unions are unable to make a difference. One interviewee reported that many potential members had waited to see if his union would grow before joining, explaining that 'time gives reassurance'. Kelly (1998: 64) argues that non-members are encouraged to join when they see unions successfully addressing grievances through strike action, and being seen to be effective was cited as a key recruitment tool by many interviewees, although usually via legal challenges rather than collective action.

For the interviewees, however, building worker belief in the union's efficacy was also often related to personal trust and credibility. One General Secretary argued that workers joined initially because they knew him and stressed the importance of having executive committee members who had maximum contact with workers because this enabled the workers to build trust in them. Other respondents explained that people joined because they knew the leader from their time in other unions. Indeed, another General Secretary claimed that it was the 'character' of the committee members, and their values of honesty and fairness, which had enabled the union to survive, pointing to the importance of leaders' idealistic behaviour, as in transformational leadership (Cregan *et al.* 2009: 705).

4.4 Union services

However, the agency of new union leaders should not be overstated. The findings indicate that the services offered and relationships with employers were not purely determined by union leaders but also, as evolutionary theorists argue, by the context.

The services offered to members varied according to union origin. Representation of workers to employers and/or in legal cases was the core work of Breakaway unions, although only one—a single employer union—had been successful in achieving employer recognition. By contrast, unsurprisingly, all six Employer-Sponsored unions were recognised for collective bargaining, for at least some groups of employees. They were also much more likely, however, to offer non-work-related services such as discount schemes, social events, charity fund-raising and helplines for non-work-related issues. Five of the six reported that they provided some of these services, and the sixth reported that it had offered non-work-related services in the past and was considering doing so again.

In part, these services were offered in response to member demands: one General Secretary reported that his union had had to offer extra incentives to compete with other unions; another that they had to juggle conflicting pressures from members who wanted more social events and shift workers who could not attend them. In other cases, offering services was a response to external changes: one union was considering offering financial advice again due to the recession. Finally, the concentration of membership in single employers may also have facilitated the provision of some non-work-related services. One General Secretary reported that his union was trying to liaise with management in the negotiation of services as that would give it greater buying power.

Professional Unions, like Breakaway unions, focused more exclusively upon work-related issues, their professional parents providing other services such as insurance. However, in seeking to achieve their aims of improving their members' employment terms and conditions, they went beyond traditional 'work-site unionism' (Heery *et al.*

2004b: 20), encompassing not only individual and, in one of the unions, collective representation to employers, but also lobbying and involvement in national committees. This reflected the dispersed nature of the memberships and the existence of national-level institutions that regulated their activities.

Although collective bargaining recognition was an aim of both Political Unions surveyed, neither had yet achieved it. Nevertheless, individual representation in the workplace was a key role for both. However, both again went beyond worksite representation, albeit in different ways. One of the General Secretaries reported that campaigning—on issues related to the unions' political roots—was a key role that sought to protect the interests of workers more broadly. The other described how the union took on some non-work-related cases such as benefits tribunals, even where the claimant was not working and thus not a union member, as a charitable function.

For Big Bang unions, services again reflected not only the values of the leadership but also the nature of the membership. Thus, those with occupationally specific membership were involved in national committees and lobbying on behalf of their memberships, whereas the one more general union focused on worksite representation. Again, although most were recognised for collective bargaining purposes, this was not even an aim for one, whose members were largely either self-employed or on short-term contracts and dispersed across a wide number of employers. This union had encountered legal barriers to its attempts to become involved in establishing a minimum wage, and so had shifted to lobbying as its primary means of protecting member interests.

4.5 Relationships with employers

In the case of the Employer-Sponsored unions, the relationship with employers inevitably tended towards partnership. However, the balance between partnership and militancy in these unions still varied. One Employer-Sponsored union had balloted its members twice over industrial action, once achieving support for a strike and forcing a management compromise.

Although none of the six Employer-Sponsored unions surveyed had been awarded a certificate of independence, their degree of independence varied. Four were wholly funded by the employer (including the union that won a strike ballot) and two by member subscriptions. Moreover, there was a tendency for the level of independence to increase, albeit tentatively. As indicated above, some leaders desired a more independent union but were unable to impose this immediately on either employers or members. One union had however introduced member subscriptions as part of their move to seek a certificate of independence; another (member-funded union) was moving to expand its membership outside the company, and another planned to ballot members on paying subscriptions in the following 18 months. Furthermore, one union had expanded membership to include other employers with whom there was a different relationship.

Some respondents from Employer-Sponsored unions noted disadvantages of the relationship with employers, such as internal representatives being more hesitant about raising issues, or—where funded by the employer—the possibility of the employer closing the union by withdrawing support. However, leaders of these unions drew upon a range of available resources to try to increase their influence over employers. Some made use of personal relationships with directors and/or managers. Others drew attention to the power they gained from the (unspoken) threat of an

external union, one General Secretary explaining that if the employer withdrew funding, he would merge with an external union, which he named his strategy of 'mutual assured destruction'.

In most instances, unions in the other four categories tended to have somewhat more militant relationships with employers. As indicated above, many of these unions had been unable to secure employer recognition and generally aspired to force recognition by gaining sufficient density to mount a legal challenge. Where recognition had been achieved, it was most often through having achieved precisely that membership density and thus—as was the case for one Breakaway union—being able to threaten collective action.

Sometimes, however, a partnership approach was adopted even by non-Employer-Sponsored unions. The General Secretary of one Big Bang union expressed the union's aims as being to reconcile members and employers and reported that some managers recommended staff to join the union. He argued that this relationship arose from his own background in management and his consequent ability to understand both manager and employee perspectives, suggesting that the relationship may be influenced by the leader as well as the context.

4.6 Union structure

Although 10 of the 17 unions surveyed reported having formal representative structures and another three were trying to establish them, there was heavy reliance on direct contact with members to identify interests. In this respect, many new unions appeared to be seeking to combine both the devolution of participative unionism with the centralised tendencies of managerial and professional unionism (Heery and Kelly, 1994).

The small size of most new unions, identified above, is likely to be an explanatory factor. However, even among the larger unions, there was often reliance upon direct contact with members: the General Secretary of a union with a structure of 80 representatives explained that 'ordinary members can ring me up', whereas the leader of another larger union gathered intelligence about his membership primarily through direct contact with members.

Achieving a balance between central leadership and grass roots involvement was a concern for some of the unions. One larger union was trying, with difficulty, to establish a greater level of participation. Two smaller new unions—one Political, one Big Bang—allowed any members to become representatives, as part of a deliberate strategy to increase participation and equality within the union. Meanwhile, the General Secretary of a Breakaway union with over 1,000 members adopted a strategy of close involvement with representatives to avoid the 'void' between members and leadership he perceived in other unions. Clearly, the dilemmas identified in renewal theories resonated even with these relatively small new unions.

5 DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis has identified key features of unions established in the UK during or after 1999. The article now turns to discussion of the extent to which these represent new forms of trade unionism.

A key finding is the diversity of new unions. This appears to support Roche's (2000) contention that union forms are becoming more heterogeneous to represent an

increasingly fragmented workforce. Moreover, despite existing union attempts to develop structures to reflect such diversity (Heery *et al.*, 2003) the formation of Breakaway unions in particular shows that they are, perhaps inevitably, not always successful in representing the perceived interests of all members to their satisfaction.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, Breakaway unions appear to have most in common with traditional forms of unionism, by definition drawing their membership from the same constituencies as pre-existing unions and focusing upon their members' interests as employees as in Blackburn's model of unionateness (Blackburn, 1967: 21). It is not however possible to locate the other categories of new union along a continuum of unionateness, as the nature of deviation from unionateness varies between, and the degree of unionateness within, the categories.

Employer-Sponsored unions, for example, have also adopted many features of traditional unionism. Each had adopted worksite unionism, undertook collective bargaining, and all but one was trying to encourage participative unionism (Heery and Kelly, 1994) through a formal structure of representatives. However, in their various degrees of dependence upon the employer they conflict with another requirement of unionateness, independence (Blackburn, 1967: 29). The implications of this for revitalisation are considered below.

Other types of new union also deviate from traditional forms, although the aim of representing member interests as employees and achieving collective bargaining remains almost ubiquitous. As well as representing member interests directly, Professional unions engaged heavily in lobbying and national committees, arguing that these were effective ways of improving member conditions. As Heery *et al.* (2004b) have argued, such extra-enterprise forms of unionism may be more appropriate to some workers. Moreover, the close relationships of these unions to their parent professional organisations, and their attempts to establish participative forms of unionism alongside the professional forms of the parent (Heery and Kelly, 1994), are also indicative of a different form of unionism.

Political Unions also eschewed traditional worksite unionism, drawing membership from political organisations and addressing broader social justice issues as well as work-related ones. This relationship with broader social movements suggests similarities with the social movement unionism set out by Roukis (2005: 276), with the difference that the Political new unions are not organising 'beyond their [work] organizational bounds' (Roukis, 2005) but originated outside such bounds.

Finally, Big Bang unions arose around perceived unmet needs for representation, and their diverse activities and structures reflected the different requirements of these previously unorganised constituencies. Although collective bargaining and individual workplace representation were important to some, to others lobbying and employment advice were as or more crucial.

However, the charge remains that some categories of new union, notably Employer-Sponsored and Breakaway, may hinder, rather than promote, the revitalisation of the movement. Gall (2003: 88) finds that some unions are established by employers to resist independent unions, and there was evidence of this in the establishment of some of the new Employer-Sponsored unions. If union revitalisation is about increasing union influence (Heery *et al.*, 2003: 79), the development of Employer-Sponsored unions could have a negative effect through excluding independent unions and so ceding potential influence to employers. Moreover, as the findings showed, the dependent unions' power may rely partly on the existence of a strong independent union threat (Gall, 2008). The fact that Employer-Sponsored

unions formed the biggest single category of new unions surveyed means such possible effects are of particular concern. Similarly, Breakaway unions could be seen to have a negative impact by reducing the density and thus power of established unions.

There are, however, some important caveats to these arguments. First, it is not certain that existing unions would have recruited or retained all of those members in the absence of these new unions. Waddington (2006) has noted many sources of dissatisfaction that can lead to union members leaving, and it is at least possible that without Breakaway unions some of those members would have left the union movement altogether. Similarly, it may be that independent unions would have struggled to organise some workplaces even in the absence of an Employer-Sponsored alternative. Respondents from some Employer-Sponsored unions suggested that many of their members did not wish to belong to an external union, whereas another formed because workers were unable to find an existing union to organise them, and thus accepted the employer's support in setting up a dependent union. Although the reliability of these responses is clearly open to question, Atzeni (2009) finds that the workplace provides a location for the development of the solidarity associated with collective action, and in some contexts single company unions may be well placed to support this.

Second, employer hostility may have made organising those workplaces unviable for independent unions. Willman (2001) finds employer support important for union viability, whereas Heery and Simms (2010: 19) find that employer hostility has a negative impact on the success of organising campaigns. Terry (2004) argues that partnership agreements may therefore sometimes give the union movement a route into organisational decision making that would not otherwise be open to it, and Employer-Sponsored unions may perform a similar function. Certainly, some leaders of Employer-Sponsored unions aspired to greater levels of independence but were unable to impose it immediately on either employers or members.

Crucially, however, the findings also reveal that new unions do not remain static, and a current lack of independence is therefore not necessarily permanent. The continual interaction between leadership and context, facilitated by union structure, provides space for new unions not only to adapt to changing contexts but also to be developed by their leaders. Thus, as Gall (2008: 166) finds in his analysis of dependent finance sector unions, the tendency is for Employer-Sponsored unions to shift gradually towards greater independence.

6 CONCLUSION

Clearly, the direct impact of new unions on density in the UK has been minimal. However, in relation to demonstrating new forms of unionism, although some reproduce traditional forms, others appear to be more in the vanguard of the movement, demonstrating innovative features in terms of their constituencies, the extra-organisational services they offer and the ways in which they relate to their members. Moreover, the new unions are continually evolving, offering new services, introducing new structural forms and adjusting their relationships with employers.

These findings have several implications for those involved in the trade union movement in Britain. First, they suggest that the movement may be able to draw upon a range of pre-existing social groups not only from within but also from outside the workplace—for example professional memberships or political organisations—upon

which social identities may be based (Tajfel, 1981). Although Kelly (1998: 27–29) argues that social identification arises from a sense of injustice, this is not essential in Tajfel's definition of social identities, whereas Atzeni (2009: 6) argues that a sense of injustice is not an essential precursor of collectivism.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of both leadership agency and responsiveness to context, and the role of union structure in effecting dialogue between the two. Although identifying the role of leadership in establishing new unions, the research thus adds some support to Briskin's (2011) claims of the limitations of heroic leadership. Moreover, it concurs with those who argue that strategies of union revitalisation need to be specific to the particular context (Hickey *et al.* 2010: 76). Indeed, the pragmatism shown by new union leaders in many respects mirrors that of the unions in Hickey *et al.*'s research, who draw upon whatever leverage they can to increase their bargaining power (Hickey *et al.*: 72–73).

Third, and relatedly, the findings demonstrate that new unions can and do evolve, creating the possibility of others in the union movement influencing that evolution. One response to the lack of independence of some new unions, therefore, might be for others in the union movement to support their development into more independent unions.

Clearly, new unions in Britain do not provide a simple blue print for union revitalisation. They are too diverse, and, in some cases in their current forms may lack the independence necessary to increase the influence of the union movement. Rather, what they highlight is the number of ways in which the union movement could develop: the myriad of social groups upon which it is possible for the trade union movement to draw; the various forms and strategies that can be adopted to address members' work-related interests; and the continual and essential interplay of leadership, context and structure that provides space for union evolution. The military analogy of the vanguard/rearguard, with its suggestion of movement in a single direction is, it seems, misplaced. It is perhaps demonstration of this, rather than of any particular form of unionism, which is these new unions' greatest contribution to debates about revitalisation.

References

- Ackers, P. and J. Payne (1998), 'British Trade Unions and Social Partnership: Rhetoric, Reality and Strategy', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **9**, 3, 529–550.
- Archur, J. (2010), *Trade Union Membership 2009* (London, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills).
- Archur, J. (2011), *Trade Union Membership 2010* (London, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills).
- Atzeni, A. (2009), 'Searching for Injustice and Finding Solidarity? A Contribution to the Mobilisation Theory Debate', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **40**, 1, 5–16.
- Badigannavar, V. and J. Kelly (2011), 'Partnership and Organizing: An Empirical Assessment of Two Contrasting Approaches to Union Revitalization in the UK', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, **32**, 1, 5–27.
- Bell, E. and A. Bryman (2007), 'The Ethics of Management Research: An Exploratory Content Analysis', *British Journal of Management*, **18**, 1, 63–77.
- Blackburn, R. (1967), *Union Character and Social Class: A Study of White Collar Unionism* (London, BT Batsford).
- Blanchflower, D., A. Bryson and J. Forth (2007), 'Workplace Industrial Relations in Britain, 1980–2004', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **38**, 4, 285–302.

- Braun, V. and V. Clarke (2006), 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, **3**, 2, 77–101.
- Briskin, L. (2011), 'Union Renewal, Postheroic Leadership, and Women's Organizing: Crossing Discourses, Reframing Debates', *Labor Studies Journal*, **36**, 4, 508–537.
- Bryman, A. and E. Bell (2007), *Business Research Methods*, 3rd edn (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Buchanan, D., D. Boddy and J. McCalman (1988), 'Getting In, Getting On, Getting Out, and Getting Back', in A. Bryman (ed.), *Doing Research in Organizations* (London, Routledge) pp. 53–67.
- Certification Officer (2012a), 'Annual Reports'. Retrieved 29 November 2012 from <http://www.certoffice.org/Publications/Annual-Reports>.
- Certification Officer (2012b), 'Trade Unions'. Retrieved 29 November 2012 from <http://www.certoffice.org/Nov/Trade-Unions.aspx>.
- Cregan, C., T., Bartram and P., Stanton (2009), 'Union Organizing as a Mobilizing Strategy: The Impact of Social Identity and Transformational Leadership on the Collectivism of Union Members', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **47**, 4, 701–722.
- Darlington, R. (2010), 'The State of Workplace Union Reps' Organization in Britain Today', *Capital and Class*, **34**, 1, 126–135.
- Department of Trade and Industry (2003), *Review of the Employment Relations Act 1999* (London, Department of Trade and Industry).
- Fairbrother, P. (2000), 'British Trade Unions Facing the Future', *Capital and Class*, **23**, 71, 47–78.
- Gall, G. (2003), 'Employer Opposition to Union Recognition', in G. Gall (ed.), *Union Organizing: Campaigning for Trade Union Recognition* (London, Routledge) pp. 79–96.
- Gall, G. (2008), *Labour Unionism in the Financial Services Sector: Fighting for Rights and Representation* (Aldershot, Ashgate).
- Haiven, L. (2006), 'Expanding the Union Zone: Union Renewal through Alternative Forms of Worker Organization', *Labor Studies Journal*, **31**, 3, 85–116.
- Heery, E. (2003), 'Trade Unions and Industrial Relations', in P. Ackers and A. Wilkinson (eds), *Understanding Work and Employment* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) pp. 278–304.
- Heery, E. and J. Kelly (1994), 'Professional, Participative and Managerial Unionism: An Interpretation of Change in Trade Unions', *Work, Employment and Society*, **8**, 1, 1–22.
- Heery, E. and M. Simms (2010), 'Employer Responses to Union Organising: Patterns and Effects', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **20**, 1, 3–22.
- Heery, E. and M. Simms (2011), 'Siezing an Opportunity? Union Organizing Campaigns in Britain, 1998–2004', *Labor History*, **52**, 1, 23–47.
- Heery, E., J. Kelly and J. Waddington (2003), 'Union Revitalization in Britain', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, **9**, 1, 79–98.
- Heery, E., H. Conley, R. Delbridge, M. Simms and P. Stewart (2004a), 'Trade Union Responses to Non-Standard Work', in G. Healy, E. Heery, P. Taylor and W. Brown (eds), *The Future of Worker Representation* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 127–150.
- Heery, E., H. Conley, R. Delbridge and P. Stewart (2004b), 'Beyond the Enterprise: Trade Union Representation of Freelancers in the UK', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **14**, 2, 20–35.
- Hickey, R., S., Kuruvilla and T., Lakhani (2010), 'No Panacea for Success: Member Activism, Organizing and Union Renewal', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **48**, 1, 53–83.
- Holbrook, A., M. Green and J. Krosnick (2003), 'Telephone versus Face to Face Interviewing of National Probability Samples with Long Questionnaires', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **67**, 1, 79–125.
- Hyman, R. (2004), 'The Future of Trade Unions', in A. Verma and T. Kochan (eds), *Unions in the 21st Century: An International Perspective* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 17–29.

- Johnson, T., J. Houghland and R. Clayton (1989), 'Obtaining Reports of Sensitive Behavior: A Comparison of Substance Use Reports from Telephone and Face to Face Interviews', *Social Science Quarterly*, (University of Texas Press) **70**, 1, 174–183.
- Kelly, J. (1998), *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves* (London, Routledge).
- Le Queux, S. and I. Sainsaulieu (2010), 'Social Movement and Unionism in France: A Case for Revitalization?', *Labor Studies Journal*, **35**, 4, 503–519.
- McIlroy, J. (2008), 'Ten Years of New Labour: Workplace Learning, Social Partnership and Union Revitalization in Britain', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **46**, 2, 283–313.
- Roche, W. (2000), 'The End of New Industrial Relations?', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, **6**, 3, 261–282.
- Roukis, G. (2005), 'Global Labor's Uncertain Future', *Journal of Collective Negotiations*, **30**, 4, 271–282.
- Royal College of Nursing (2012), 'Our History'. Retrieved 29 November 2012 from http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/our_history
- Saunders, M., P. Lewis and A. Thornhill (2009), *Research Methods for Business Students* (Harlow, Pearson Education).
- Scheuer, S. (1986), 'Social Structure and Union Character', *Acta Sociologica*, **29**, 1, 45–50.
- Stewart, P., J. McBride, I. Greenwood, J. Stirling, J. Holgate, A. Tattersall, C. Stephenson and D. Wray (2009), 'Introduction', in J. McBride and I. Greenwood (eds), *Community Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of Concepts and Contexts* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 3–20.
- Tailby, S., M. Richardson, M. Upchurch, A. Danford and P. Stewart (2007), 'Partnership with and without Trade Unions in the UK Financial Services: Filling or Fuelling the Representation Gap?', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **38**, 3, 210–228.
- Tajfel, H. (1981), *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Terry, M. (2004), '“Partnership”: A Serious Strategy for UK Trade Unions?', in A. Verma and T. Kochan (eds), *Unions in the 21st Century: An International Perspective* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 205–219.
- Twigg, N., J. Fuller and K. Hester (2008), 'Transformational Leadership in Labor Organizations: The Effects on Union Citizenship Behaviors', *Journal of Labor Research*, **29**, 1, 24–41.
- Verma, A. and T. Kochan (2004), 'Unions in the 21st Century: Prospects for Renewal', in A. Verma and T. Kochan (eds), *Unions in the 21st Century: An International Perspective* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 1–16.
- Waddington, J. (2006), 'Why Do Members Leave? The Importance of Retention to Trade Union Growth', *Labor Studies Journal*, **31**, 3, 15–38.
- Willman, P. (2001), 'The Viability of Trade Union Organization: A Bargaining Unit Analysis', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **39**, 1, 97–117.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Unions established from 1999 by year of origin and whether extant in September 2010

Union name	Year of entry onto Certification officer list or schedule	Extant in September 2010?
Ambulance Service Union	1999	No
Expressions Union	1999	No
Union of General and Volunteer Workers	1999	Yes
National Bus drivers union	2000/1	No
National union for professional interpreters and translators	2000/1	No
Independent Pilots Federation	2001/2	Yes
G4S Care and Justice Services Staff Association	2001/2	Yes
Associated Podiatrists and Chiropodists Union	2002/3	No
General Practitioners Union	2002/3	No
Union Federation of Door Supervisors and Security	2002/3	No
Welsh Rugby Players Association	2002/3	Yes
21st Century Aircrew	2003/4	No
City Screen Staff Forum	2003/4	Yes
Currys Supply Chain Staff Association	2003/4	Yes
Heathrow Express Staff Association	2003/4	No
Shield Guarding Staff Association	2003/4	Yes
Warwick international Staff Association	2003/4	Yes
Scottish Artists Union	2003/4	Yes
Associated Train Crew	2004/5	Yes
Locum Doctors Association	2004/5	Yes
Independent Democratic Union	2005/6	Yes
Industrial Workers of the World—British Isles	2005/6	Yes
Solidarity	2005/6	Yes
UDW	2005/6	Yes
United and Independent Union	2005/6	Yes
National Car Park Workers Union	2006/7	No
North of England Zoological Society Staff Association	2006/7	Yes
Association of TU Political and Public Sector Staff	2007/8	Yes
LEGION	2008/9	Yes
Palm Paper Staff Association	2008/9	Yes
PDA Union	2008/9	Yes
Door Supervisors Union	2009/10	Yes
Association of College Staff Scotland	2009/10	Yes
Workers of England	2009/10	Yes

Source: Certification Officer (2012a).

Table A2: Membership of unions established from 1999 onwards in December 2010

Union name	Male membership	Female membership	Total membership
PDA Union	5629	8887	14516
Independent Democratic Union	4449	2071	6520
Locum Doctors Association	2613	1651	4264
Currys Supply Chain Staff Association	1614	401	2015
G4S Care and Justice Services Staff Association	1238	775	2013
Independent Pilots Federation	941	36	977
Associated Train Crew Union	770	65	835
Scottish Artists Union	269	404	673
United and Independent Union	385	214	599
UDW	379	85	464
Solidarity	340	60	400
Industrial Workers of the World—British Isles	252	90	342
Shield Guarding Staff Association	234	22	256
North of England Zoological Society Staff Association	114	110	224
Union of General and Volunteer Workers	130	77	207
Welsh Rugby Players Association	203	0	203
City Screen Staff Forum	80	80	160
Warwick International Staff Association	132	16	148
Workers of England	89	58	147
Palm Paper Staff Association	96	4	100
Association of College Staff Scotland	14	15	29
Association of Trade Union Political and Public Sector Staff	2	22	24
Door Supervisor's Union	12	4	16
LEGION*	0	0	0

*LEGION has since left the list of trade unions.

Source: Certification Officer (2012b).

Copyright of Industrial Relations Journal is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.