IIRA Symposium Proposal

a. Title of symposium

**THEORISING AND ASSESSING UNION RENEWAL
IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

b. Convenor(s)

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c. Justification

The objective of this symposium is to to explore comparative analytic frameworks for understanding union renewal efforts in the context of sweeping changes taking place in workplaces around the globe. This symposium builds on the on-going international collaborative research project – Rethinking Collective Representation – which is part of a broader project on Building Institutions and Capabilities for Work and Employment in a Global Era.

Earlier in this project we have explored how traditional models of collective representation, despite being rooted in older organizational forms and predicated on assumptions about the relative ease of framing and aggregating worker interests, have sought to come to terms with the multiple faces of the new labour market (Fairbrother and Yates 2003, Kumar and Schenk 2006, Lévesque and Murray 2006). But the challenges remain daunting. First, long term movements in the types of jobs people do and in the industries in which they do them, as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of these workers and the values they bring to work, erode union representativeness and raise questions about unions' ability to move into new job territories and to reflect the diversity of people at work (Yates 2005, Hunt and Haiven 2006, Peetz 2006). Indeed, union organizations are often cast as an atavistic manifestation of an industrial past: "pale, male and stale" according to a popular vernacular and little permeable to new identity groups such as women, visible minorities, young workers and aboriginals who are changing the face of the labour market. Even though growth in female membership is compensating for relative declines in male membership in many national contexts, the inability to connect with young workers appears to be a generalized phenomenon (Verma and Kochan 2004, Visser 2006). Second, the multiple and combined effects of new technologies and changes in work organization, the proliferation of new forms of employment, the internationalization of production and services and the pursuit of labour flexibility are changing the organizational topography for union action and it appears that collective union actors are often singularly ill equipped to deal with this changed topography (Bellemare 2000, Stone 2004, Cranford et al. 2005, Haiven 2006, Heckscher and Carré 2006, Fine 2007, Tufts 2007).

We investigate how collective actor capacity is responding to wider changes at work and in society, with a significant shift towards the study of organizational

experimentation with varying kinds of collective representation because it is our theoretical and methodological contention that this experimentation is critical to our understanding of the role of collective actors for institutional renewal in the regulation of work and employment. Drawing on the substantial body of analytical and normative research on union revitalization or renewal (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998, Nissen 1999, Turner et al. 2001, Clawson 2003, Fairbrother and Yates 2003, Fantasia and Voss 2004, Frege and Kelly 2004, Milkman and Voss 2004, Turner 2005), we are engaged in a comparative and meta evaluation of union actors in the light of the many tensions in the literature. These oppose "big bang" theories of structural change and incremental experimentation, top-down emphasis on strategy and leadership and a bottom-up focus on democracy, internal resources and external alliances, and visions to transform society through social movement unionism as opposed to workplace partnerships for competitiveness. Because the results on the ground are so often underwhelming, we will seek to construct an analytical consensus on key avenues for future analysis.

Although there are many country-based studies of union renewal, or case studies of union activities, there is remarkably little truly comparative work on union renewal. There is a need to set a new agenda for research around comparative work on union renewal and this first entails considerable conceptual work. This symposium will focus on that conceptual work: it looks at key concepts in union renewal, and their links to issues in comparative analysis of union renewal.

d. Format

The first 60 minutes of the symposium will be devoted to the six presentations. These presentations will combine a vignette based on presenters' empirical research or a brief summary of research findings that illustrates the concept, along with a theoretical and/or methodological discussion that wrestles with the challenges of applying this concept in a comparative context. A time limit of 10 minutes per presenter will be strictly enforced. The remaining time will be devoted to discussion amongst the attendees and responses from the presenters. The presenters and short abstracts of their papers are as follows:

Critically Evaluating Scalar Discourses in Union and Employer Practices
Andrew Herod, University of Georgia, USA

A central theme in much globalization writing has seen the process as one whereby scales like "the national" or "the local" are being eviscerated by "the global". In this paper, I outline recent developments in the geographic literature which address what has come to be called "the politics of scale". Specifically, I explore how the various scales which are typically taken as those at which social life is organized – the local, the regional, the national, the global – are conceptualized and discursively presented. Thus, for instance, referring to a transnational corporation as "multi-locational" rather than as "global" can dramatically frame particular capital-labor disputes in very different ways. By dissecting the scalar discourses that are typically used in both the academic literature and the world of work to describe the geographical organization of various industrial relations actors – are they locally organized or are they globally organized, and what does that mean? – in this paper I highlight how such actors are

enframed within particular "geographical imaginations" that can have significant material effects.

The dynamic between collectivism and individualism
David Peetz, Griffith University, Australia

Collectivism and individualism are ends of a continuum of possibilities rather than the only two possibilities, and most people exhibit some combination of them in their attitudes and behaviour. We distinguish between individualisations and collectivism at different levels. Unions seek to enhance the collectivist dimension of each to build up collective power, and attempt to: identify collective issues and the source of members' problems; build sense of common purpose, to promote collective identities; promote union values such as solidarity through developing discursive capacity; shape expectations and build confidence and hence individual and collective efficacy; develop networks of support; develop workplace representative structures as mobilisers of collective action; and shape the environment, using politics and other leverage to reduce impediments to collective action. Conversely, sophisticated modern corporations seek to harness the benefits of collective behaviour in ways that do not enable the creation of alternative power sources that challenge the corporation. We consider how to measure these different levels of individualisation/collectivism and unions and employers' responses, and what the data so far tell us about each.

Institutional change and union renewal: Union efforts to shape changing economic landscapes
Robert Hickey, Queen's University, Canada

Early industrial relations scholars associated changes in market structures with declines in union power and organization. These dynamics continue to form the critical backdrop to the contemporary crises facing unions. The insights of institutional theory hold tremendous potential for advancing our understanding of the dynamics of both union decline and union renewal. Drawing from the current debates over the nature and extent of institutional change, this study examines the role of actor interests and strategies in the process of economic restructuring across three very different cases of economic restructuring: industrial unions in the manufacturing sector, public sector unions in the developmental services sector, and postal unions in the mailing industry. The central argument emerging from these studies is that both union decline and renewal are inherently linked to institutional change. Reactive strategies, which attempt to mitigate the negative impacts of economic restructuring can, at best, slow union decline. In contrast, unions which successfully initiate strategic changes of institutional structures achieve sustained growth and renewal.

Understanding Union Power: Resources and Capabilities for Renewing Union Capacity
Christian Lévesque and Gregor Murray, HEC Montréal and École de relations industrielles, Université de Montréal, Canada

Power is at the core of current debates over the future of unionism because it is seen as a key variable for understanding the declining influence of unions in a number of societies. This paper argues that the historical foundations on which union power was constructed and is still embedded are shifting in multiple ways, be it through globalization, the reorganization of production and services, new ways of organizing work and employment, and shifting social identities. We analyze this movement and its consequences for the way that we think about union power as an analytical construct in the contemporary literature on the future of unions. In particular, in the light of the larger union renewal literature, we identify and examine distinct types of resources and the capabilities required to mobilize those resources in the process of enhancing union power. Drawing on both positive and negative examples, it is argued that union organizations that have renewed their collective identities, enlarged their repertoires of action and, more generally, innovated and succeeded in institutionalizing that innovation have drawn on these generic resources and capabilities, which are articulated in different ways in order to enhance union power.

Capacity, Strategy and Consciousness: Questions for Union Renewal
Peter Fairbrother, Cardiff University, United-Kingdom

The debates about union renewal have opened up a range of questions relating to the ways unions organise and operate, in many different contexts. While much of the debate has focused on examinations of the ways unions in advanced capitalist states have been challenged by the recomposition of managerial hierarchies and approaches, the restructuring of work and employment conditions, and the complexity of legislative requirements, it is equally important to consider the pro-active initiatives taken by unions in relation to capacity building, including the conditions for the development of a trade union consciousness in the context of the internationalisation of economies. This aspect draws attention to the role and place of education and research within the range of union organisation and operation, exploring the relationship between education and research in relation to activist skills development. The question is whether such developments provide the necessary conditions for the formation and elaboration of union consciousness. This draws attention to a diverse range of literatures, and focuses on debates about identity and interest. Via an empirical examination of two selected sectors (water and transport), these themes will be explored.

Union Power and International Competitiveness: The Experience in US Manufacturing Workers in Comparative-Historical Perspective
Étienne Cantin, Université Laval, Canada

Since the mid-1950s, US manufacturing workers have been confronted with a problem unprecedented in the US economy during the first half of the twentieth century: the growth of competition from abroad, which has increasingly undermined the viability of some of the bargains and institutions for work that unions had won from employers and the state. Changes in US workers' position in the emerging pattern of transnational production and world competition forced organized labor to turn from advocating open international markets to a failed attempt to slam the door on the encroaching global economy. In the course of sustaining unprecedentedly serious threat from international competition, US manufacturing corporations took up

what was immediately recognized at the time as a new 'hard line' in their industrial relations policies, and secured significantly lowered rates of wage growth for their employees. The decade from the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s also marked a turning point in the development of US manufacturing-sector unionism—the beginning of a long and precipitous process of decline. Then, as competition sharpened from Japan and Europe, US-based manufacturing corporations began outsourcing production to offshore sites, and unionists began to associate international trade with an exodus of US jobs and the erosion of domestic working standards and labor rights. How did changing international competitiveness contribute to union decline in theory and practice? What have been the fruitful avenues for union revitalization in that context?

e. Confirmation of attendance

See separately forwarded emails.

NETWORKS AND THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN COLLECTIVISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

David Peetz (Griffith University, Australia)

Collectivism is at the heart of unionism. Union renewal, by definition, involves renewal of collective activity by labour. In this chapter I consider the elements that make up collective activity, and the achievement of collective power, and what this suggests about the prospects for union renewal. I discuss a number of elements of collectivism, and the interrelations between them, but focus on one in particular: the role of networks. Network analysis has been applied extensively in many fields, but its use in analysis of unions is relatively underdeveloped. Paul Jarley (2005), in one of the few exceptions, proposes unions develop a 'social capital model' of unionism for renewal, relying on 'the logic of mutual aid'. I aim here to broaden our conceptualising of how networks fit into the framework of labour collectivism.

This paper is set out under a series of broad headings, and organised around a number of core (italicised) propositions. We begin with a general discussion of collectives and collectivism.

COLLECTIVES AND INDIVIDUALISM

Unions and corporations are both collectives, of labour and capital respectively. Through collective behaviour both labour and capital seek to enhance their power and rewards. Unions are the principal mechanism by which workers organise themselves against the owners of capital, to whom they sell their labour. But unions are not the only collective in this partly antagonistic, partly cooperative relationship. The corporation is a collective of the owners of capital, treated by the law as an 'artificial person'. It has most of the rights and responsibilities of natural persons, but it behaves differently to natural persons because it has a single objective: the maximisation of profit (Bakan 2004). People, in contrast, have complex and conflicting objectives. Unions, as continuous associations of workers 'for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives' (Webb & Webb 1920), have members, not shareholders. Accordingly they have even more multiple and complex objectives that may be in conflict with each other.

Individualisation is a term used in many ways, but the key way to conceptualise it is as the antithesis of collectivism. Collectivism has been considered in many different ways (eg Devine 2000; Hofstede 1984; Triandis 2001), and for our purposes here it is useful to think of it as referring to *the way in which interests, orientations and behaviours are based on predominantly group rather than predominantly individual reference points and involve cooperation with other members of that group.* Collectivism requires that, for at least a period, individual self-interest gives way to the common good. Individualism, by contrast, refers to the extent to which interests, orientations and behaviours are based on predominantly individual rather than predominantly group reference points. At the individualist extreme all decisions are based on self-interest with no reference to any persons other than the selfish individual. The *individualisation of employment relations* refers to the implementation of *individual contracting* or what Brown et al (1998) refer to as 'procedural individualisation'. It is the *opposite of collective bargaining*.

In practice, most people exhibit some combination of individualism and collectivism in their attitudes and behaviour. Collectivism and individualism are points on a continuum of possibilities rather than the only two possibilities. If you are part of a family, chances are that you will behave collectively with regard to the interests of members of the family. Few people live hermitic lives with no concern for any other person. At the other extreme, few people are so committed to the interests of a family, group or society that they will subjugate the entirety of their interests and abandon their free will to the will of others.

Power can be expressed through individual or collective action. Some people may occupy market positions which enable them to exercise individual power. But, for many, collective behaviour is the only realistic way to exercise significant power.

DIMENSIONS OF COLLECTIVISM

It is useful to distinguish between different dimensions of collectivism/ individualisation. These are summarised in Figure 1. *Unions that develop collective power seek to enhance the collectivist aspect of each of these dimensions.* The *attributional dimension* refers to the collectivism of needs. That is, to what extent are the needs or grievances felt by individuals also shared by others, and open to collective resolution.

The *attitudinal dimension* refers to the extent to which identities, values and beliefs strengthen or weaken collective orientations. It has three major elements. One is the extent to which individualistic or collective *values* exist or are created or reinforced. Values that promote *altruistic* or mutually *supportive* behaviour, that reinforce *trust* among group members, or that emphasise the *welfare of the group*, as against successful individuals, will strengthen collective orientations.

A second element is the extent to which *social identities* are shared, and align with those necessary for collective action. People are unlikely to act together if they lack any sense of common identity (Kelly 1998). People have multiple identities, but the mere fact that they might identify primarily as, say, Vietnamese migrants or hip hoppers, does not preclude them from also identifying as workers.
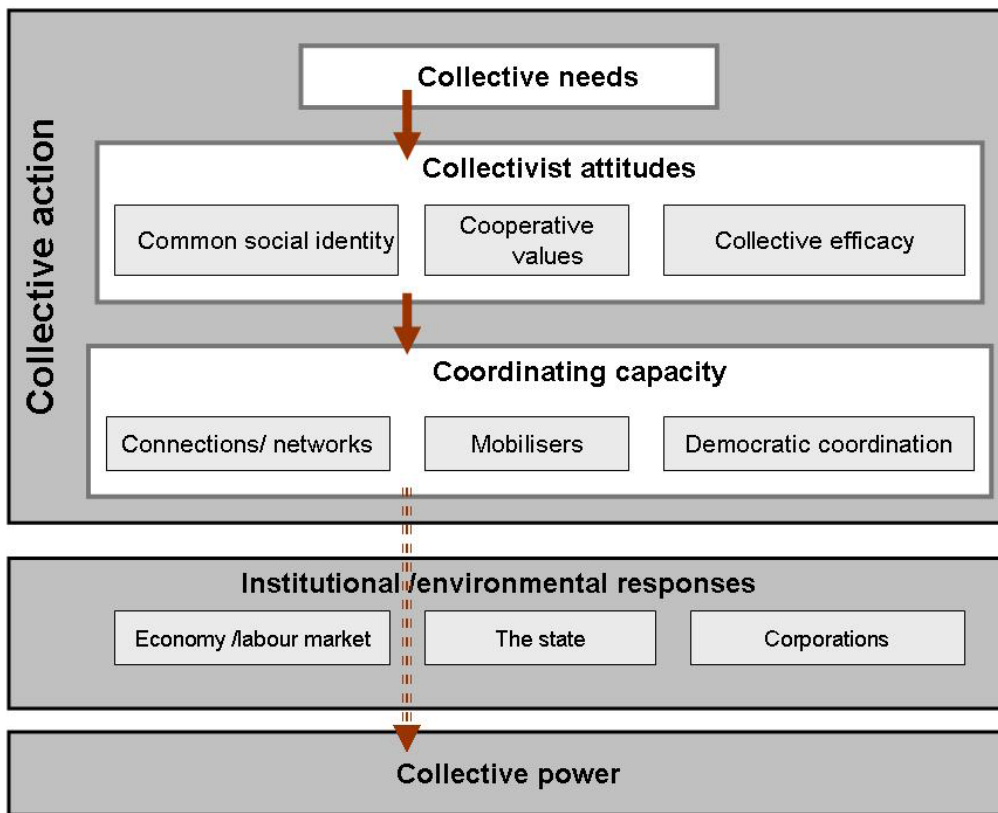

Figure 1: Collectivism

The third attitudinal element is the extent to which group members possess beliefs of efficacy (Bandura 1997), that is, they sense agency and believe they have the power to achieve goals. Efficacy may be individual (you can achieve your objectives as an individual) or collective (your group can achieve its objectives). Unlike other elements of this attitudinal dimension, individual and collective efficacy are *not* at odds with each other. Workers with

low individual efficacy will have low collective efficacy, and will be reluctant to coalesce into collective organisations (unions) because they will not see that it could make a difference to them: 'a collective of self-doubters is not easily forged into a collectively efficacious force' (Bandura 1997:480).

The *coordination dimension* refers to the creation of coordinating capacities or structures. Again, there are three elements . The first is the existence of connections, or series of connections – that is, *networks* – between members of the group. A huge literature exists on networks, though much less so in relation to collective action by labour. Networks, combined with trust and associated collective values within the attitudinal dimension mentioned above, are often taken to constitute *social capital* (Bourdieu 1984; Putnam 2000), about which a large related literature has developed. We come back to networks shortly.

A second is the existence of collective *mobilisers* (referred to by Kelly (1998) as 'leaders') – people or organisations who can mobilise cooperation. Without mobilisers, networks may provide greater knowledge resources (social capital) to deal with individual problems, but mobilisers are necessary for collective action to deliver power. In the a broad, unions themselves are mobilisers; at the workplace, union delegates and activists are mobilisers; in between, union organisers are mobilisers.

The third is the extent of *democratic* (or collective) coordination versus autocratic (or individual) coordination within the collective. The more effective input people have into decision making, the more they believe the collective is pursuing their interests, and so the more likely they are to participate in collective action themselves.

These attributional, attitudinal and coordination dimensions shape the extent to which collective action is likely to occur. How much this then translates to collective *power* will also depend on *institutional and environmental responses* to collective action. The three key elements are: the actions of the *state,* including the legislative framework; those of *corporations* or employers; and the condition of the *labour market.*.

Unions that develop collective power seek to enhance the collectivist aspect of each of these dimensions of collective action. Unions that develop collective power identify issues and the source of members' problems (this is the 'anger' in the 'anger-hope-action' model of organising), focus on collective needs and attribute them to factors (eg a corporation) that can be subjected to pressure. They promote a common social identity as members of the union, often through building occupational or class identity. They promote collective values of solidarity, trust, and concern for economic injustice through a strong discursive capacity. They build confidence and hence individual and collective efficacy ('hope' in 'anger-hope-action'), shaping expectations of what is possible through collective action. They develop and empower local union representatives (delegates) and other 'mobilisers' - identifying, motivating and training them. They develop connections between members and networks of support (discussed later), and democratic structures and processes.

Having established the power of members at the workplace, unions must then develop and manage reciprocal relations with employers – a state of permanent warfare is not sustainable. They use politics and other forms of leverage to bring about laws and policies that promote the interests of labour, including by removing impediments to collective action. And they may aim to promote conditions for a favourable economy.

These dimensions and elements interact. There are positive feedbacks, for example, successfully identifying common needs help shape a common identity. In turn, identity shapes needs: dissatisfactions are more motivated if people see others in a reference group not suffering the same deprivation.

Unions have to manage the negative feedbacks or *tensions between some of those elements. C*onsider the tension between mobilisers and democratic coordination. Richard Hyman identified the importance of a union's *power over* its members, without which it would not have *power for* its members. In other words, a union can only exercise collective power on behalf of its members 'to the extent that it can mobilize disciplined collective action on the part of its members'. On the other hand, survey research into delegates shows the single most important determinant of perceived local union power is the apparent level of union

democracy. A union cannot have *power for* its members 'unless the members have *power in* the union.'

There are others. The benefits of reciprocal relations with employers are at tension with those from promoting workplace activism and using conflict from collective action to develop common identity and self-efficacy. One approach to managing this is through developing ongoing workplace consultation mechanisms that involve local activists.

Unions operating at the national level may seek to promote favourable economic conditions, for example through incomes policies, but this may conflict with the desire for high wage increases from the successful exercise of power.

It is worth noting that unions are not the sole deployers of collective ideology in the employment relationship. *Sophisticated modern corporations also seek to harness the benefits of collective behaviour, but often in ways that do not enable the creation of alternative power sources.* They do this to promote dynamic efficiency (faster adaptation to change), functional flexibility and intense modes of work – through such things as shaping expectations to contain the development of collective needs, seeking to create values and identities that emphasis the collective of the corporation, and suppressing discourses that promote alternative (union) values. They seek not a demise of collectivism, but rather a reorientation of common social identity towards the corporation, to suppress the development of alternative coordinating capacities, and may isolate, expel or incorporate internal mobilisers of union activity (delegates), and prevent access to the workplace by external mobilisers (union organisers). When collective units (such as teams) develop into forms that challenge corporate authority, they may seek to break up those networks, disestablishing and reconstituting the units with different personnel.   It is slightly ironic, because decades or 'dual commitment' research show that *employees can be committed simultaneously to a union and an employer* (eg Angle & Perry 1986; Gallagher & Clark 1989). However, their fellow workers (and union) may rank higher than the employer in members' hierarchy of identities (Fougere 1989), and so represent a challenge to the prerogative and authority of the corporation.

INTERACTIONS AND NETWORKS

Rather than go further into detail about all the potential interactions, I want to focus on one which can be said to hold the rest together: networks. Networks are the circulatory system that pumps blood between the different elements of collective action. This is not to privilege networks over other elements of collectivism, any more than it makes sense to privilege the circulatory system over, say, the brain or the respiratory system in a human body. But it is to illustrate many of the interactions between elements of collectivism, and to show some useful aspects of applying a network perspective to unions. I do this in the context of Paul Jarley's argument for a social capital model of union renewal. He says unions should build dense social networks among members by promoting group activities that reinforce reciprocity norms. As Bailey and Brown (2004) point out, this workplace focus downplays the multiple roles and activities of unions, and it makes more sense to see networks as one important aspect of collectivism by workers and unions, and an extension of existing moves towards "organising" approaches, rather than an alternative as suggested by Jarley. A broader perspective on the relevant networks is required.

So, what role do networks play in union power? To start, communication about common problems through effective networks enables identification of collective needs. Conversely, common needs will facilitate the emergence and growth of networks.

Networks are more likely to emerge amongst people with common social identity. Networks will increase the sense of identification with the group by reinforcing the message of common concerns and interests.

Repeated contact through networks also builds up trust that other group members will behave in a particular way, increasing the likelihood they wish to cooperate. Trust and cooperative norms then increase the effort people put into maintaining a network.

Networks will make people more confident that other members of the group feel the same as them, and would be willing and able to take action in support of a common cause.

That is, they increase efficacy. A network is more likely to sustain and grow if members feel it can help them achieve their objectives.

Intra-union networks

But perhaps we should go back and ask what types of *intra-union networks* unions create and rely upon? We can turn to Figure 2. As shown in Panel (a), unions encourage networks between different *members*, M, and between the workplace delegate (D) and her members. Unions necessarily develop networks that go beyond the workplace, as per panel (b), between the delegate and the organiser (R). This case, however, shows that's not so for direct links with the members.
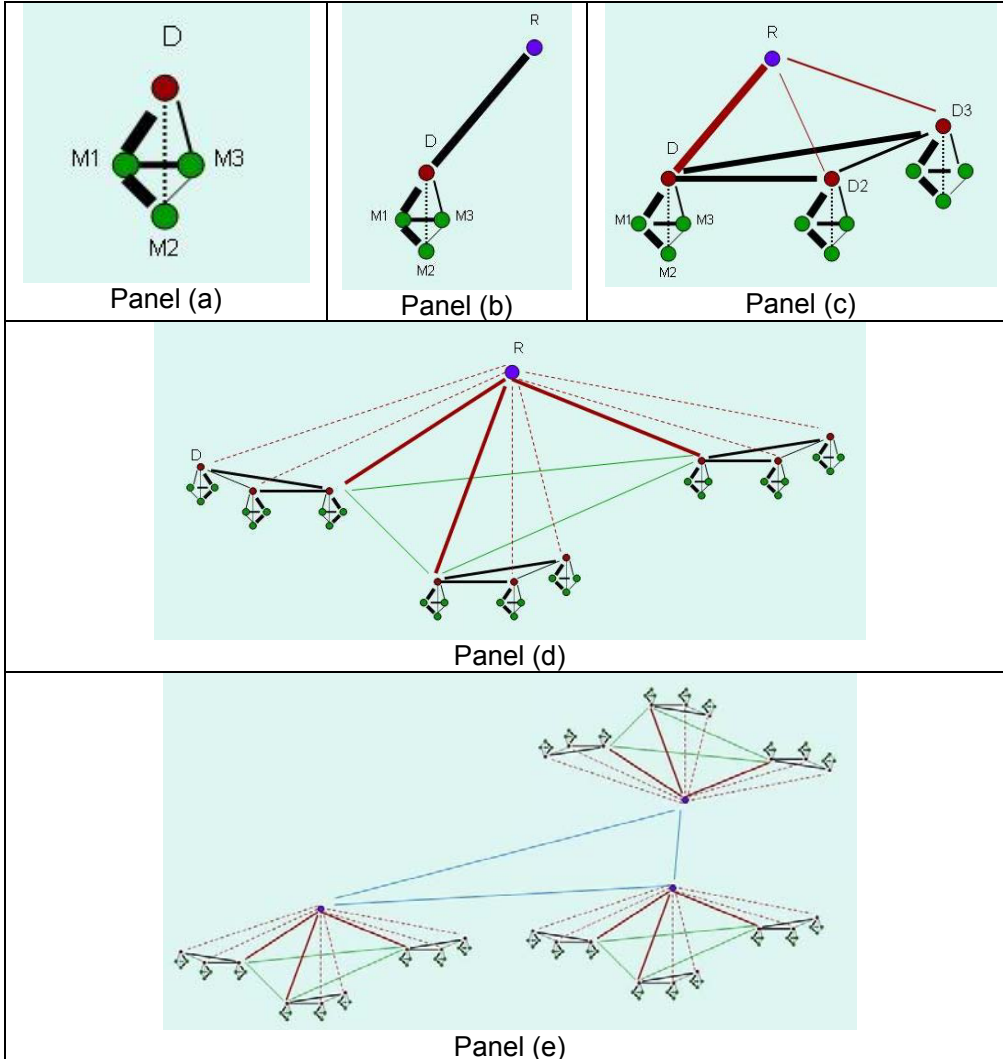

Panel (a)

Panel (b)

Panel (c)

Panel (d)

Panel (e)

Figure 2 – Networks between members, workplace delegates and organisers

A larger workplace in particular will often have more than one delegate, and panel (c) shows how networks develop between delegates. Note that, in this diagram, the organiser has strong links with only one delegate, D, who is the senior or lead delegate. R's main connection with the other delegates is through D, who has strong connections with D2 and D3. The lead delegate, D, is a focal member of this network. Unions also develop networks between different delegates across workplaces for whom a particular organiser has responsibility (panel (d)), links which occur partly through the organiser, and partly directly between lead delegates of workplaces.   Unions also have links between organisers

themselves, which become the focal points through which coordination across workplaces occurs (panel (e)).

The density of these networks matters. Delegate survey data show activism and local union power are higher where delegates have considerable contact with other delegates, they receive support from their own members, have frequent contact with their organiser, who effectively mentors them, and the union is effective in showing them how to develop networks of support (Peetz & Pocock 2009 (forthcoming)). But not all connections need or should be strong. Unions succeed most when they develop strong networks within workplaces, and when organisers train delegates on developing power at the workplace, provide support and resources, and rely on delegates to activate workplace networks – rather than organisers doing things for the members.

I have drawn the relationships in Figure 2 as consistent with an 'organising' approach to unionism. That is, indicating that links between organisers and individual members (excluding delegates) should not be strong, or members become too dependent on organisers and don't develop their own strength. In a servicing approach, when organisers have direct dealings with members, providing services like grievance resolution , there would be many direct links in panels (b) and (c) between the organiser and individual members. But union organisers have limited time, so these would be at the expense of substantially weakening the ties between organisers and delegates. This then would weaken the capacity of *delegates* to develop networks with other delegates, and members, because they would be more likely to lack the training and hence confidence necessary to build such networks. Through focusing on developing workplace strength through strong delegate-member-member ties and organiser-delegate ties, and weak organiser-member ties, unions develop a strong sense of *self-efficacy* amongst members and delegates.

And the links between *mobilisers* and networks? Effective mobilisers are able to activate networks. Without mobilisers, networks will generally have little power. Key people within a network (the best 'networkers') will often be the best people to choose as mobilisers (for example as workplace delegates in a union). Good networks will increase the effectiveness of mobilising activities, for example by identifying potential members through workplace 'mapping'. Effective mobilisers and an effective network together create strong coordinating capacity.

While dense networks might generally enhance some of the key elements of collectivism, by reinforcing common identity, collective values and collectively identified needs, it does not follow that denser is always better (Bailey & Brown 2004). This is in part because of the insight arising from Granovetter 's (1973) demonstration of the 'strength of weak ties'. Granovetter argued that some of the greatest benefits for networked individuals arose from their weak ties – not the people who they knew closely, but those who they had relatively distant relations with, because they provided them with information to which they were not privy. In the case of union collective action, the practicality of trying to manage strong ties in all directions is what dictates the importance of weak ties. An organiser who tries to develop strong ties with all her members, or even all her delegates and activists, will spread herself too thin, and persuade members that she can, or at least, solve their problems. Weak ties between organisers and members, mediated principally through delegates, combined with strong ties with delegates through which delegates receive training, support, resources and knowledge, will enable delegates to build up their own networks of support amongst the membership, increasing the likelihood that members will do things 'for themselves' and develop a strong sense of collective efficacy.

External solidarity networks

As Levesque & Murray show 'external solidarity' resources are important for collective power. Most obvious are connections between unions - within a workplace in some countries, in others perhaps informal inter-union cooperation over specific issues or formal coordination through peak labour councils, even international cooperation.

Beyond this, networks can comprise connections with like-minded organisations: community groups, NGOs, consumer groups, even environmental groups. Such 'community

unionism, like the Justice for Janitors campaign, can range from instrumental through coalitional to embedded engagements.

Institutional networks

Unions also develop institutional networks: external connections with the state and corporations that shape the economic and institutional environment and how it responds to collective action. Networks with institutions increase the likelihood institutional policy will favour unions - or at least, the representatives of those unions. The state, or a corporation, is more likely to take account of a group, or defer to it, if it believes it is powerful, which is *in part* a function of the strength of its internal and external solidarity networks. Institutional policy can make it easier of more difficult for networks to exist and operate – for example through laws on freedom of association or corporate on union recognition. Close institutional connections can therefore lead to gains for members, but there is also the danger of downplaying members' interests. Links to state institutions were once a major factor in union strength in Australian and New Zealand, but then also in explaining union decline in the 1990s, because of the impact of these networks in reducing workplace activism. So strong institutional networks *can* compromise the independence of unions, weaken democratic coordination (by centralising decision making), weaken the influence and ability of mobilisers at the workplace level, and thereby undermine the long term capacity for collective action.

SOME RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Space prevents an exhaustive discussion of how the above elements be measured but in essence a wide variety are measures are required, including survey data from employees, delegates and employers, qualitative observation through case studies, and content analysis of media. There are several challenges in deploying these concepts in comparative analysis. Terms, concepts and structures can be very different between countries. Comparative surveys and case studies are more difficult, the more different are the frameworks, but they are by no means impossible. On some issues, such as attribution, there are simply not many existing data. While aspects of needs and values can be tracked across countries, with general survey data from time to time collected across countries with similar or related questions asked in different contexts, we need to be wary of similar questions meaning different things in different contexts. Likewise, networks or connections may mean different things in different institutional frameworks – French union networks, for example, are very different to others. Some issues are challenging to measure. How, for example, do we measure democracy? Is it evidenced by the existence of competing groups within an organisation (Lipset, Trow & Coleman 1956), by the existence of formal structures which allow the rank and file to have real input, or by survey data on member and delegate perceptions of democracy? Power itself is controversial to measure – particularly if reference is made to Lukes' 'third face' of power (1974), which interacts extensively with perceived needs, identities and values. While efficacy (an explanatory variable here) has a well-established history of measurement, we must distinguish it from achieved power (an outcome variable).

What might an agenda for future research look like? More research on the meaning of democracy would be a good start – what structures and practices are consistent with member perceptions of involvement and democracy? I also agree with Bailey and Brown (2004) that researchers 'could well use ideas about network arrangements, and perceptions of individual and collective efficacy, to explore union behaviour'. The links between networks and efficacy, and indeed between networks and the other concepts discussed above, have been outlined in principle but in many cases there are only a small number of studies, if any, that have identified and perhaps attempted to quantify or explore in depth the relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

Unions exercise collective power through developing strong networks of members and delegates at the workplace, supported by strong supportive networks between organisers and delegates, but not through strong networks between organisers and

individual members, which may promote dependency and reduce self-efficacy. Delegates and organisers are, in different ways, mobilisers of networks, using these networks, and other mechanisms, to identify collective needs, promote common social identity and develop collective efficacy. They supplement these internal sources of strength with lateral (solidarity) networks across unions and peak union bodies, and with community organisations. Institutional networks with the state and business can also be a source of power, if they enable gains to be achieved, but also a source of weakness, if they lead to a loss of workplace activism or independence.

Networks play a key role in the exercise of collective power and of class power. Overt collective action requires networks of individuals, mobilisers of those networks, collective needs, a sense of common identity, cooperative values, a sense of collective efficacy. All these things influence, and are influenced by, networks. But networks alone do not generate power. Nor are all networks 'good' for union power. Nor does it follow that unions should, in effect, go back to being mutual aid societies (cf Jarley 2005). The strength – and weakness – of networks extends beyond the relations between individual union members. Better understanding of them and their role in reinforcing or undermining other aspects of collectivism will contribute to our understanding of what builds and sustains worker power through unionism.

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UNDERSTANDING UNION POWER: RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES FOR RENEWING UNION CAPACITY

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Power is at the core of current debates over the future of unionism. The declining influence of unions in a number of societies is readily linked to their weakened power. The results can range from less capacity to protect and improve the working conditions of their members to a chronic incapacity to reach non-union members or an ability to influence economic and social policies in a direction likely to benefit workers. What explains this weakened power? A first plausible reading points to changes in external conditions that impact on unions. A second and equally plausible account suggests that unions and their leaders have not made suitable adaptations to changed circumstances or have not adjusted in the right ways at the right time.

Our contention is that we need to unpack power as it relates to union agency. Power is the kind of concept that can explain everything and nothing. Analysts often evoke the notion of power without seeking to specify it. Unions undertook collective action and constructed organizational forms in response to the particular political economies from which they emerged. It now appears that the historical foundations on which their power was constructed and is embedded are shifting, which questions the efficacy and the agency of unions. The key argument is that strategies for union renewal must be focused on power and its constitutive elements. Without a clear focus on what these elements are and how they are at play, it is virtually impossible to develop effective union renewal strategies.

This paper therefore analyzes the nature of union power and its consequences for the way that we think about it. We first look at how power was constructed and the foundations for developing power in the new globalized context have shifted. We then focus successively on four organizational resources and three actor capabilities that appear critical to union capacity in this new context. Overall, we seek to enhance our understanding of the nature of union power, the levers that activate it and the strategies that might enhance it. It should be stressed that we deliberately set aside many of the external aspects of an overall account of union power in order to focus more clearly on what unions do and what they can do about it.

THE SHIFTING FOUNDATIONS OF UNION POWER

The development of competitive capitalist labour markets in the 19th and 20th centuries led in most developed and developing countries to the creation of some form of collective organization for workers. Faced with economic vulnerability and arbitrary treatment, working women and men formed labour unions to deal with the most egregious excesses of the capitalist labour markets in which they sought to sell their labour. The emergence of labour laws was predicated on an understanding of both the structural inequalities inherent in the labour-capital relationship and that human labour was not a commodity like other commodities traded on the marketplace. The role of trade unions in most modern economies was gradually institutionalized over the last century. This came about in successive phases (from outright illegality to relative tolerance to a positive right to unionize to even state promotion of unionism and collective bargaining in some cases), was subject to variable geometry (with notable differences between different types of national business systems) and was characterized by important historical disjonctures from one country to another (periods of political exceptionalism such as dictatorships, wars and domestic social conflicts).

This process can be understood through the lens of power relations. According to this view, a social actor (the organized working class or the trade union movement) constituted its power and this resulted in an institutionalization of a set of rules, mechanisms and visions of the relationships between capital and labour (on these three dimensions of institutions, see Campbell 2004). While clearly variable from one society to another, this institutionalization consecrated and routinized the mobilization of certain resources that

governed the power of the actors in play (unions, employers, governments). Minor variations in resources could inflect outcomes. Significant variations in these resources, especially at critical moments, could change and often did change institutional arrangements in favour of one actor or another or just change them with contradictory consequences for the actors at play. Institutions in this sense are "common sense" compromises in the power relations between social actors and their relative effectiveness was most often the result of the capacity and willingness of actors to mobilize or exercise their agency therein.

The long view of the historical creation of unions as actors and their relative power to effect change relative to other actors is particularly relevant to current debates about union renewal. Globalization, the reorganization of production and services across borders, and changing professional and social identities in the workplace and beyond are all part of a more encompassing explanation of the decline in influence of unions as the historical foundations on which previous union practice was constructed appear to shift. From this perspective, debates on union renewal or revitalization concern how unions should address key issues of power related to these new conditions.

Power reflects and is the material basis of the complex relationship between actors. For many authors, it is the veritable elixir of organizational life. Some equates power with the exercise of "power over", as in actor A influencing Actor B to do something that he or she might not otherwise do (Dahl 1957); others see it in terms of the ability to set agenda or to shape beliefs about what is possible or not (Lukes 1974, Fox 1977, Gaventa 1980); while others perceive domination in a less perceptible form (Foucault 1980). These approaches to power focus on the 'power over' instead of on the "power to", which puts much emphasis on power as a dispositional concept, that is the capacity of social agents. More precisely the "power to" refers to "agents' abilities to bring about significant effects, specifically by furthering their own interests and /or affecting the interests of others, whether positively or negatively" (Lukes 2005: 65).

This definition of power is particularly well suited for unions since even though they are engaged in "power over" (see Hyman 1976), they are primarily concerned with using power to empower workers, by increasing their resources and capabilities and thus their capacity to act. This "power to" refers to the capacity of unions to represents workers' interests, to regulate work and to effect social change. On each of these aspects, the capacity of unions can have a variable extension depending on the scope of issues (single issue versus multiple issues), the contextual range (context bound versus context transcending), on the degree of non-intentionality (intended versus unintended consequences) and on the activity it involves (active exercise versus inactive enjoyment) (Lukes 2005: 74-80).

Our argument is that "capacity to" should be the starting point to understand union power. In previous studies of local unions (Lévesque and Murray, 2002 and 2005), we have argued that particular resources (internal solidarity, external solidarity, and strategic and discursive capacity) appear to be of special importance to the capacity of local unions to influence the regulation of work in their increasingly globalized workplaces. In the light of ongoing innovations in the literature, our own field research and the need to adapt this framework to other levels of analysis, we want to suggest three innovations to this framework.

First, resources are here understood as fixed or path-dependent assets specific to an organization that an actor can normally access and mobilize. Our previous focus on a triangle of salient organizational resources remains relevant but that triangle becomes diamond-shaped as we seek to integrate other types of organizational resources or what we will call infrastructural resources in order to facilitate a change in levels of analysis (levels other than the workplace) and to take account of what other authors have suggested (for example, Pocock 2000) as well as the results of our own field research.

Second, organizational resources are a necessary but insufficient condition to contend with the rapidly changing rules of the game. From our own observations and recent developments around institutional theory, there seems to be an independent element with regard to capabilities. Capabilities refer here to sets of aptitudes, competencies, abilities, social skills or know-how that can be developed, transmitted and learned. Fligstein (2001),

for example, draws attention to the importance of social skills, or what we will label "capabilities", in order to understand overall actor capacity. In other words, organizational resources are not enough; it also requires the development of specific types of capability.

Third, and this is contextually driven, there is not just a need for resources and capabilities, but for the right resources and the appropriate capabilities so that organizational actors can mobilize those resources in appropriate ways and in a timely manner. There are changing requirements for both resources and capabilities. The study of unions offers immense potential to understand the dynamic between the two. It is this dynamic that informs unions' capacity to and the structuring of the social fields in which they act.

GENERIC RESOURCES

Multiple studies have highlight the importance of the range and types of resources to variations observed in the capacity of unions to renew (Dufour and Hege 2002; Frost 2000; Hyman 2005; Lévesque and Murray 2002 and 2005). It's therefore important to understand the nature of the resources available and to assessing their relevance to changing contexts.

Four types of resources seem particularly important. First, *internal solidarity,* relates to the mechanisms developed in the workplace to ensure collective cohesion and deliberative vitality. Second, *network embeddedness*, or external solidarity, refers to the capacity of unions to work with their communities and to build horizontal and vertical coordination with other unions and with community groups and social movements. Third, *narrative resources* refer to the existing stock of stories that frame understandings and union actions and inform a sense of efficacy. Finally, *infrastructural resources* cover the material and human resources and their allocation through processes and policies in more or less efficient ways.

1) Internal solidarity: cohesive identities and deliberative vitality. As suggested by popular refrain "solidarity forever, for the union makes us strong", internal solidarity is at the very heart of union action. Unions rely on sufficiently cohesive identities to pursue their goals and employers typically seek to gauge the degree of membership support that underlies union positions. Unity of purpose enhances power, whether it flows from common collective identities or deliberative processes where members surrender their individuality in favour of a collectivity (see, for example, Hyman 1976).

When asked to explain the weakening of unionism, many observers point to a fragmentation of the apparently monolithic collective identities that characterized industrial unionism. In their place emerge more complex manifestations of multiple identities, both collective and individual. This questions how unions come to define collective union identities and how and under what circumstances certain identities, such as that of semi-skilled male manufacturing workers, predominate over others (Yates 2003). This is further exacerbated by a much greater variety of social identities in the workplace stemming from different social locations in the labour market and in the community; the possibility of greater employee involvement and participation in some workplaces, with less egalitarianism and more differentiated rewards; and, overall, an increased societal emphasis on individualism and differentiation through patterns of consumption. Two interrelated features characterize internal solidarity as a power resource: the first relates to cohesive collective identities; the second to deliberative vitality. They are strongly interrelated but it is possible to be strong on one dimension and not the other.

Union collective identities concern the degree of membership cohesion. According to Polletta and Jasper (2001: 285), collective identities concern "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution." They entail a perception of a shared status or relation, either imagined or experienced directly. There are naturally a variety of collective identities within any workplace or union. Key questions concern to what extent some prevail in providing operational definitions of commonality, which interests count for most and what is the resilience of this collective cohesion over time (Hyman, 2001: 170-173; Dufour and Hege 2002).

Deliberative vitality refers to the participation of members in the life of their union. A first aspect of deliberative vitality concerns the basic internal structural mechanics of union

representation: the presence and density of a network union delegates or stewards or representatives in the workplace; the existence and regularity of mechanisms that ensure links to members and to particular groups of members (for example, identity structures); the existence and relative effectiveness of different means of communication between members, stewards and local leaders and with other levels of the union; the existence of policies and programs to integrate new groups and new activists. A wide variety of studies, including our own research observations, suggest that the basic mechanics of deliberative vitality are critical to internal union solidarity (Peetz and Pocock 2009; Lévesque and Murray 2005). The second aspect of deliberative vitality concerns the extent of membership participation and the quality of engagement in these different deliberative structures. Is it passive or active? Are there different groups contending within these forums? Drawing on the classic union democracy literature (Lipset et al. 1956), Frost (2000) emphasizes the importance of internal political practices such as contested elections, organized political groups, and high levels of voter turnout.

Two clarifications are required here. First, interests are not a given. Individuals define their interests in interactions with other actors and these interactions affect the understanding of those interests (Fung & Olin Wright, 2003; Mansbridge 1992). This processual nature of solidarity highlights the importance of participation in debates about union strategies. Internal solidarity is therefore a relationship, underpinned in important ways by a degree of deliberative vitality (Lévesque and Murray 2005). Second, while a strong case can be made for compelling synergies between collective cohesion and deliberative vitality resulting in exemplary internal solidarity resources in a union, there is no necessary congruence. Deliberative vitality can certainly characterize a highly factionalized union driven by competing identities and their contending projects. Conversely, it is possible to imagine a union with strongly cohesive collective identities but very weak deliberative vitality. These multiple scenarios highlight the complexity of internal solidarity as a union power resource, where deliberative vitality appears to be one of the few methods to build bridges between emerging and contending identities.

2) Network embeddedness. Structural change in labor and product markets creates new sources of division between the employed and the unemployed, between plants in the same companies, between workers with typical and atypical jobs, to name but a few. These new sources of divisions present a real challenge for trade unions because they reinforce differentiation between workers and fragmentation between and within unions. The task of unions has always been to reconcile a multiplicity of interests in order to avoid sectionalism and to build broader spaces of solidarity (Hyman 1997).

Solidarity is built through organization, but also through lateral and vertical coordination among unions and the community. Network embeddedness refers to the degree to which unions are linked to other union organizations, community groups, social movements or any other type of actor. Although some unions are caught in a spiral of isolation (Wells, 1998) others are building horizontal links with unions in the same sector and among communities with the same employer. Other unions are creating intense vertical links with regional, industry, national and international structures (Anner 2006). Some unions are developing community coalitions which do not simply seek support for unions but rather highlight the multidimensional life of workers on issues such as the protection of the environment and of public services (Tattersall 2006).

Trade unions integrated into a larger network, whether horizontally or vertically, are also more likely to develop and promote their own agenda which, in turn, enables them to influence the change process (Dufour and Hege 2003; Frost, 2000; Lévesque and Murray 2005). There is mounting evidence of the importance for trade unions to be connected into vertical and horizontal networks and structures in order to achieve their objectives. In a context of globalization, the exchange of information, of expertise, of experience and of policy is of ever greater importance.

Two dimensions related to network embeddedness appear relevant: the diversity and the density of the network. The first dimension refers to the types of networks in which a union is involved; for example, whether it is a relatively homogeneous network which

involves only unions or a heterogeneous network that also engages NGO and community groups. This first dimension enables us to distinguish along a continuum: from, at one end, unions that are relatively isolated to unions that are integrated into vertical networks (homogeneous) to those which are involved both in horizontal and vertical networks (heterogeneous networks). The second dimension relates to the intensity, thickness and permanency of contacts between the union and the other actors. Unions can develop either strong or weak ties within the network. Many permutations of diversity and density would seem to exist but it is our contention, drawing on previous findings (Lévesque and Murray 2009), that unions embedded in thick networks and that develop strong ties can draw on a larger pool of power resources.

3) Narrative resources. Narrative resources consist of the range of values, shared understandings, stories and ideologies that aggregate identities and interests and translate and inform motives. As opposed to the capability to which we will return, they are resources because they constitute a body of interpretative and action frames that can be mobilized to explain new situations and new contexts.

Any encounter with union activists releases a flood of stories that inform the way the actors think. They draw on a stock of narratives. New trade unionists are often socialized into these stories or must contest them. They can relate to real stories, as they were lived, and to quasi-mythical incidents that have been told and retold, often to the point that they no longer relate to any real event but can be just as effective. These stories reflect values, projects and repertories of action, sometimes suggesting types of actions for particular situations. They are a living organizational heritage. In evoking feelings of efficacy about actions undertaken, they can exert a powerful positive or negative influence (Peetz 2006, Lévesque and Murray 2002, Martinez and Fiorito 2009), providing a basis for proactive positions.

As situations change and narrative resources appear to have less hold on the actors, they can translate into declining potential for power. Voss (1996: 253) highlights the importance of what she labels "fortifying myths", namely "an ideological element that allows activists to frame defeats so that they are understandable and so that belief in the efficacy of the movement can be sustained until new political opportunities emerge". Such narrative resources, which is the tale itself and not the ability to tell it, constitute a power resource.

4) Infrastructural resources. Infrastructural resources refer to material and human resources as well as to the existence and sophistication of organizational practices, policies and programs. Unions differ greatly in relation to the extent and sophistication of these different types of infrastructural resources.

A first dimension concerns the different ways that a union can generate the material resources it requires. These include dues, union time release (both paid and unpaid), offices and meeting space for its activities, and any other kind of material resource that permits it to pursue its mission. Some unions prove to be particularly adept at generating new sources of revenue to undertake their activities, drawing on state research and training funds, negotiating provisions in collective agreements that provide paid access to different kinds of training, founding specialist funds (such as social justice and humanity funds in the case of a number of Canadian unions), founding union-organized pension and investment funds, etc.

People resources are a second dimension of infrastructural resources. To what degree are union organizations able to draw on specialist and technological resources giving them access to expertise, knowledge about industry and community environments? A number of unions have sought to innovate in the recruitment of their staff, drawing on a greater range of personal biographies, social locations, ethnic and linguistic origins. This can entail seeking out different types of expertise, drawing on experience with other organizational forms (corporations, social movements, etc.). There is also the question of the way that the talents of activists and staff are mobilized to pursue union objectives (Kelly and Heery 1994).

A third dimension of infrastructural resources concerns organizational practices, procedures, policies and programs. Kumar and Murray (2006) identified a range of innovations in the way that unions sought to enhance their infrastructural resources. These included programs and processes for membership engagement (communications, education

and training, methods of servicing), use of new technologies (Websites, computer networks, polling, staff and activist training, development of videos, etc.) and new methods of recruitment (training, dedicated allocation of resources, etc.). Kumar and Murray (2006) found that unions pursuing innovations in the way that they organize their infrastructural resources were influenced by narrative frames seeking to enlarge labour market solidarities.

There are negative and positive examples of the impact of infrastructural resources. In the US union movement, a continuing debate about "cultural resistance" to change is really a euphemism for new methods of mobilizing staff and activists within unions that run up against existing ways of doing things (Fletcher and Hurd 2001). Pocock (2000) amusingly evokes the problem of the allocation of cars to full-time staff as a barrier to many types of change. The 2008 Democratic presidential election campaign in the United States provides a counter example. It highlighted the importance of both persons with special technical skills and the sophisticated technologies to which they had access in order to convey information rapidly to a wide network of supporters as significant new power resources. This is of course also linked to deliberative vitality but the material resources, the people involved and the organizational processes that underlay them are infrastructural resources.

GENERIC CAPABILITIES

The notion of capabilities suggests that resources are not sufficient. As argued by Ganz (2001), union leadership requires both resources and resourcefulness. Social actors need to be able to use their resources in different situations. Fligstein (2001) highlights how social skill is pivotal to the construction and reproduction of local social orders.

Our earlier work tended to conflate resources and capabilities (Lévesque and Murray 2002). Unions can have power resources (or attributes) but not be particularly skilled at using them. This can be seen in a variety of studies of the foundations of micro-power in local unions. In a case study of a local union, Wells (2002) highlighted its strong external links (what we labelled above as its network embeddedness or external solidarity) but also how this local did not necessarily make much use of those links. Lévesque and Murray (2009) point to similar cases. One plausible explanation is related to the weakness of its other resources, for example deliberative. However, in neither of these studies were the local unions under investigation entirely bereft of deliberative resources. A re-reading of these cases suggests that these unions had considerable resources at their disposition but they were lacking in generic capabilities.

By capability, we refer to sets of aptitudes, competencies, abilities, social skills and know-how that can be developed, transmitted and learned. This is not to be confused with loftier and more philosophical treatments of the notion of capability in relation to economic development and human freedoms (see Sen 1999 and Nussbaum 2000). Rather, there is a more pragmatic notion that organizational actors engage in learned and fairly stable patterns of collective activity through which they seek, in interaction with others, to achieve their goals and improve their effectiveness (see, Zollo and Winter 2002; see also Sassen 2006: 8).

In assessing both our own research work and that of others, we identify three capabilities that are of particular significance in the mobilization of union power resources: intermediating, strategizing and learning capabilities.

1) Intermediating capabilities. Union are increasingly acting at different levels, dealing with multiple actors and engaging in issues that transcend workplace labour and employment relations issues. The multiplication of levels, actors and issues compel union leaders to arbitrate conflicting demand and to manage contradictory expectations. The necessity to balance conflict and cooperation (Frost 2000) or to manage conflicting demands (Hyman 2001) is not new but it takes a more complex shape in the context of a multiplication of identities at work and the pressures on workers associated with globalization.

The multiple identities within and outside the workplace exert considerable pressure on union leaders. They must arbitrate between different identities and organize them into a hierarchy. This is a key problem for union leaders since identities are not stable but dynamic (Dufour and Hege 2002). According to Kelly (1998), collective mobilization is linked to the capacity of leaders to arbitrate between conflicting demands and to favour the emergence of

collective interest. This process is not uni-directional but bi-directional since workers have agency and also shape how collective interest emerge and change (Darlington 2002).

Union embeddedness in different types of networks, particularly heterogeneous ones, also requires new sets of intermediating capabilities. This is particularly noticeable in coalitions involving ONG and trade unions (Compa 2004; Frege et al. 2004). Not only are they relying on different kind of repertoires of action but the actions undertaken by an actor may jeopardize other actors. Such tensions are highlighted in studies of different types of coalitions (for example, the Clean Clothes Campaign, see Egesls-Zanden and Hyllman 2006). Perhaps, most importantly they show that the success of these campaigns rests on the capacity to intermediate the contrasting impact of different repertoires of actions.

Union involvement in cross-border alliances also requires the development of inter mediating capabilities. A growing body of research (Dufour and Hege 2008, Lévesque and Dufour-Poirier 2007; Turnbull 2006) show the tensions that arises in the development of coordinated action. Not only are the interests of workers from different countries far from being convergent, they are relying on contrasting repertoires of action and mobilization strategies (Bronfenbrenner 2007).

All of this goes to show that intermediating capabilities are critical for the construction of union power. Two dimensions appear relevant. First, the ability of the union to mediate between contending interests and foster collaborative action: to arbitrate between conflicting interests, foster an ongoing dialogue on the relationship between union objectives and means, to manage the interface between intra- and inter-union channels, to build consensus in leadership style and accountability. Second, the ability to access, create and activate salient social networks: to foster social relationships between networks of individuals or groups (or organizations) and to give them a human face (v. Hyman 2007, Peetz 2006, Jarley 2005). It is our contention that unions developing these capabilities are in a better position to cope with globalization and to effect change at different levels.

2) Strategizing capabilities. One core argument underlying our approach is that actors, particularly trade unionists, can devise strategies that enable them to shape regimes within and beyond the workplace. They do not adapt passively to globalization and are not passive agents who merely implement policies laid down from the top. They shape these policies and formulate strategies on the basis of their own view on how best to implement and achieve these policies. In order to do so they must be able 1) to frame agenda and 2) to articulate and integrate different levels and types of action. Together, these strategizing capabilities define a union's capacity to define a proactive and autonomous agenda.

Framing refers to the ability to put forward an agenda which can be more or less inclusive and can be part of a broader social project. It involves how the union defines the alter (them) and the ego (US). Narrative framings play an important role in the representation and discussion of these interests and would appear to be an essential ingredient in enlarging repertories of union action (Ganz 2004; Piven 2000; Tarrow 2005). The ability to provide overarching narratives as a frame of reference for union action is an important discriminating factor between defensive isolation, risk reduction and proactive solidarity in cross-border alliances (Lévesque and Murray 2009). Active union involvement in international alliances clearly requires and leads to a broadening of the conception of worker interests. This points to the need to engage in and better understand discursive capacity building and to the complexity of trade-offs about the commonality of interests in situations where workers interests can collide (both within and across borders). Moreover, and consistent with earlier findings, discursive capacity must be grounded in and interact with other local resources, notably an embedded democracy and connectedness to external networks. In our view, much work remains to be done in order to elucidate the development of and interactions between these different types of union resources and capabilities.

Articulating involves integrating different levels of action in new ways and balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches (Voss & Sherman 2000). There is a growing body of literature on the importance of articulating different levels of action in unions and social movements (Tarrow 2005, Turnbull 2006, Wills 2002). In a context where substantial rescaling is occurring, both in the organization and integration of worksites in global

networks and in the construction of and relationship between different forms of worker solidarity, it is the combination of these levels that seems important. In a study of local unions in Canada and Mexico, Lévesque and Murray (2009) point to the importance of the ability to make the links between local resources play in interaction with national unions and in interaction with the opportunities, resources and forms of brokerage provided by the relative thickness of international regulation. As suggested by a variety of recent studies (Herod 2002, Wills 2002), trade unionists have to think about the multiple levels at which they seek to exert an influence and how they develop the interactions between these levels. This highlight the importance of building capabilities to make the links between different levels of action in the way that unions contend with transnational and even local employers.

3) Learning. Our third capability concerns the ability within the union to learn and to diffuse that learning within the union. Learning suggests an ability to foster, reflect on and learn from past and current change in organizational practices and routines in order to anticipate and act upon change. In his insightful study of contending unions among agricultural workers in California, Ganz (2000: 1012) highlights the critical importance of this capability: "When faced with novel problems -- often the case for leaders of organizations operating within new or changing environments -- heuristic processes permit actors to use salient knowledge to devise novel solutions by imaginatively recontextualizing their understanding of the data." Learning is a reflexive and imaginative process that entails thinking about the past in order to draw out lessons that can be applied to the present and projected into the future. In a penetrating study of his own union experience, Martin (1995:1) cites his own daughter's description of what he did as a union official. Then a primary school student, when asked by her teacher to say what was her father's job, his daughter said that "He teaches workers how to talk back". This description points to learning and teaching as critical capabilities in the construction of union capacity.

In an overview of the literature on union learning, Hyman (2007) emphasizes that learning is an essential element of adaptation and innovation in unions. Without this capability, union leaders are more likely to tend familiar ground, mobilizing well-worn tactics and actions that flow from an existing repertoires of action, even when these approaches are not necessarily suited to changing circumstances.

Learning is therefore essential to the renewal of union actions and practices. Drawing on Ross et Martin (1999), absent this learning capability, we might suggest that a local union remains a prisoner of its own history, caught in a path dependency of its repertoires and identities; it is likely to follow a trajectory that will not challenge its projects, values and traditions. The challenge, as highlighted by Frege and Kelly (2004: 14-15) is to understand why unions continue to follow patterns of behaviour that do not respond to the new challenges of collective representation and, under what circumstances, they succeed in innovating, charting new courses of action in collective representation. Learning is thus a critical capability in the renewal process. In a study of two local unions in France and Canada that seem to be stuck in a path dependency that limits their capacity to respond to the challenges of their increasingly globalized workplaces, Dufour et al (2009) point to the appropriation of "an organizational self" in the process of local union renewal. Learning capabilities are central to such an appropriation.

RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF UNION POWER

Our attempt to disentangle the resources and capabilities of power in trade unions necessarily remains an incomplete account. Our focus is on actor capacity, which we present here as a melding of the organizational resources and actor capabilities within unions. These are key dimensions of union power. They are, moreover, the dimensions over which unions themselves have some degree of control. However, actor capacity does not provide a full account of union power. Power is necessarily a relationship (or multiple sets of social relationships) in a particular context. A full account of union power, necessarily contextually specific, requires that we look at a broader range of its constitutive elements: i) union capacity (organizational resources and actor capabilities);   ii) the institutional

arrangements in which the actors are at play, which themselves reflect past power relations; iii) the particular opportunity structures in a given circumstance (be they economic, political, organizational, ecological); and iv) the capacity of other actors in these sets of relationships.

Any account of this larger evolution of union power is both complex and specific. Our focus on union capacity suggests that it is possible to explore key elements of union agency and to the factors that influence their capacity and, ultimately, their great or lesser degrees of power. This has two important consequences for union praxis and for our research agenda.

First, not all results are the same. This is the complex makeup of power relations in particular contexts where we argue that resources must be important (and relevant) but you also have to know how to use them in particular circumstances (capabilities).

Second, and this is why we believe we are at a watershed, there are moments in organizational and institutional history when things are just up for grabs. As previous arrangements come unstuck, and union capacity weakens, union resources and capabilities come increasingly are under the microscope. Some of the old resources need to be reconfigured or invigorated; the capabilities do not seem to be calibrated to the new context. The concept of power is at the very heart of this process because the internal components of union power (the resources and capabilities that constitute union capacity) are found to be wanting. This calls into question the capacity of collective worker organizations to shape the new institutions for the regulation of work and employment as they emerge.

There have been generational shifts in the past and we are once again at such a watershed. Such changes only come about at certain historical moments. An understanding of union resources and capabilities is critical to an understanding of efforts to enhance union power. There might have been moments in the past when resources appeared sufficient as union actors, clearly skilled in what they did, could mobilize their resources in contexts where the rules of the game were highly routinized and that the relevance of these resources was recognized and accepted in these situations. As the institutions change, the relationships between actors in the context of globalization are more fluid and more indeterminate, both resources and the capabilities to act upon them become all that more important.

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