



## **The TUC and civil alliance building: towards social movement unionism?**

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British union revival strategies range from recruitment and US-style organising approaches and workplace partnerships through union mergers and restructuring to efforts to (re-)build political and institutional conduits. Social movement unionism (SMU), unionism which extends beyond concern with matters of job regulation to 'reaching out' to other groups to emphasise social justice aims, has never formed a central characteristic of British unionism. However, recent interview and documentary evidence suggests that the Trades Union Council (TUC) is increasingly engaging in alliances with other social movements and parties. While TUC insiders view this activity as a facet of familiar revival strategies, examples were provided of how it encourages a broadening of labour movement purpose to emphasise solidarity around wider social justice interests. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study findings for TUC and union policy and development.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social movement unionism (SMU), unionism which extends beyond concern with matters of job regulation to 'reaching out' to other groups to emphasise social justice aims, has never formed a central characteristic of British unionism. Yet, civil alliance-building, a key thread of SMU, 'is not a recent innovation, devised by new 'social movement unions', but has long formed part of labour's repertoire' (Frege et al. 2004:137). Only a limited body of work examines alliance efforts in the UK, particularly by larger or community-linked unions, although the international literature is extensive (e.g. Turner & Cornfield 2007, Fairbrother & Yates 2003, Reynolds 2004). And empirical appraisals of the extent of British unions' engagement in civil alliances and their association with SMU are yet to be developed.

There is also an absence of work on the engagement of the peak union body, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), in civil alliances. Nor have such alliances been comprehensively examined with relation to prevailing revival strategies. Arguably, the absence of direct TUC authority over affiliates and emergence of several 'super unions' make the TUC a less obvious candidate for examination in these terms. However, its significance as a policy think tank; labour symbol, exemplar, supporter and guide; mediator of union and other interests; and coalition partner stresses the need to examine its recent and potential alliance activities, and their relationship to revival strategies and union purpose. The following overview of the union situation and civil alliance literature frames an empirical analysis of alliances involving the TUC. Implications for TUC and union purpose and practice are discussed.

### **UNION CRISIS AND RESPONSE**

The decline of UK trade unions is a familiar story. Mass unemployment, privatisation and de-industrialisation in the 1980s were followed by the pressures introduced by globalisation and reluctance on the part of the Labour government to reverse anti-trade union legislation introduced by its Tory predecessors. Service economy growth, decentralisation of bargaining arrangements, an employer-driven insistence on flexibility, expansion of sub-contracting and the growth of smaller workplaces with increasingly diverse workforces have hastened the erosion of traditional modes of regulation. Declining union membership has proved difficult to stabilise via organising in new sectors and workplaces. From a peak of 12.2 million in 1980, TUC affiliate membership almost halved by the mid-1990s and then continued to drop to 6.5 million, despite robust employment growth. Women are now more likely to belong to a union than men, reflecting workforce feminisation and a retreat of trade unionism into the public sector. Union decline has provoked reinvigoration efforts ranging from recruitment, US-style organising and company-level partnerships through mergers/restructuring to (re-)development of political/institutional conduits. However, their impacts have not significantly boosted regular measures of union vitality (Parker forthcoming).

## **SMU, CIVIL ALLIANCES AND STUDY AIMS**

Dibben's (2004) review draws out three main propositions about what SMU might entail: grassroots democracy and unions returning to their roots; reaching out to other social groups and pursuing broad social justice aims; and a struggle against the excesses of international business and neo-liberal hegemony. Focussing on the second, unions sometimes ally with other social movements and parties to contest exploitation, inequality and discrimination. Such activity may be class- and/or 'other'-based and/or reflect opposition to more general forces, recognise that political and economic issues are connected and that union and other movements' constituencies have become more diverse as working and social patterns alter.

However, TUC and unions' civil alliances have received little consideration in the revival literature other than in broad qualitative assessments of labour movement activity or casework on individual unions (e.g. Baccaro et al. 2003, Cumbers 2004, Wills 2001). Turning to the TUC, one finds even less analysis. However, Frege et al. (2004:144-149) venture: 'coalitions of influence in which unions seek coalition with other "insider" organizations in order to make use of their expertise and legitimacy in advancing their own policy to government have been developed most strongly by the TUC under the definite influence of the European model of social partnership'. This emphasis is reinforced by a context of reduced union membership, financial resources and political influence, and the TUC's formal shift since 1994 towards being a body that speaks for 'a broadly conceived labour interest' (Heery 1998:342). Nonetheless, they write, even the 'risk-averse' TUC sponsors "coalitions of protest" to generate external pressure on government'. Such illustrations help to pique academic interest in the rationale for, nature and impacts of civil alliances involving the labour movement. This study maps the extent to which and how the TUC, as the union 'parliament', think-tank, exemplar, guide and coalition partner, has recently engaged in civil alliances. It then examines the perceived rationale for and effects of such activity in terms of its meaning for existing revival efforts, developing a 'new' strategy and encouraging SMU.

### **Methodology**

During 2005, semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior personnel whose expertise and sections or departments were deemed relevant for the study by top TUC officers. Interviewees at Congress House included the Head and the National Organiser of Organisation and Services (the TUC's largest department), a Project Officer (PO) engaged in international development and a Senior Policy Officer (SPO) whose brief includes Energy, Transport, the Environment and Labour Market. The Head of the Learning Services (HLS) at the Midlands TUC regional centre was also interviewed. Most provided documentation to elaborate on their comments. Specific constructs and themes relating to the study aims were derived from the extant literature and categorical aggregation of data from the three sources.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Rationale for civil alliances**

Environmental processes (e.g. the neo-liberal turn in politics, globalisation) were commonly seen to have helped motivate recent TUC and affiliate interest in civic alliances. However, it was also reported that manifestations of such, albeit developing, are patchy and not underpinned by a general strategy, reflecting a practical approach by the labour movement:

Unions have always been fairly pragmatic and responsive. Some [alliance building] is reactive but it's a more engaged, professional and lively reaction to the kinds of pressures that have always been there but have taken a new form because globalisation is now such a massive force. (Head of Organisation and Services (HOS))

Most informants also linked these broad external pressures to alliance building which has direct meaning for union vitality. For example, several doubted whether the existing array of main union revival strategies could kick-start a comprehensive union recovery and implied that civic alliances might augment their overall effects. More specifically, TUC involvement in civil alliances was generally conceived as an evolving feature of recruitment, organising and political revival strategies (cf. a 'new' strategy or shift in union purpose). This said, several examples were given of TUC alliances with less obvious links to union organising and reflected intrinsic solidarity around certain interests. For instance, while it is mainly inclined towards connecting with NGOs that have a relationship with the workplace, the international development section also worked on Jubilee Debt campaign issues as a member:

Where an NGO sees the importance of decent work as a way of combating poverty and increasing development, which enables us to work with them ... but for capacity issues, we have to prioritise. (PO)

Counter to the labour movement's traditionally reactive nature, informants also described a growing proactive tendency among social organisations in their approach to alliances that engage with the TUC. A number now research issues and prepare a brief on the purpose and nature of a proposed campaign before seeking the TUC's involvement. For example, in 2004, one of the TUC's biggest, occasional non-labour partners, Oxfam, contacted it about co-examining the reasons for the poor working conditions of women employed in the sportswear industry internationally: 'The TUC was pretty sold with the idea. Of importance was that they'd done the research before they came to us. This has happened with lots of NGOs' (PO). It was also observed that links between industrial and 'non-industrial' issues are increasingly being made, stimulating more interest in civil alliances. The SPO commented, for instance,

You can't deal with the energy agenda now without having climate change as a fundamental issue ... A more concerted approach has emerged over the past year, possibly as the issue has grown rapidly in national significance, and there's a fundamental issue about global poverty as climate change bites.

Consciousness of such connections was related to increasing constituent and activist diversity. A 'new generation' of union reps were seen to be helping develop understanding of the need for practices involving the TUC and affiliates in civil coalitions. For instance, younger activists (particularly women and from ethnic minority groups) are 'possibly more prepared to look at global, international and poverty issues, ... more likely to see some of the links between campaigns inside and campaigns outside the workplace although it's always been there' (HOS). This reflects what he saw as their 'above-average' involvement in other social movements. The traditional FTO corps, though experienced with this work, were said to be 'more comfortable dealing with stuff at the workplace level, where they know the ... terrain'.

Part of the TUC's caution over supporting or engaging in certain alliances was attributed to its concern with the extent to which it can pursue its aims and control such alliances:

We've a clear idea about what we want to achieve ... Somebody else playing around on the margins, that's difficult for a lot of FTOs and some activists. The TUC is a strong brand. We speak on behalf of unions. There's a question about how real the risk is of building some relationships that could damage that brand because we can't control what some partners are going to do ... To an extent that has held us back ... (NO)

However, others stressed the TUC's coordinating role by suggesting that the main impetus for joint activity ought to be 'whether affiliates are up for it ... We need to build this kind of contact through the unions and let the TUC follow' (SPO), as when the TUC endorsed the CWU's community-based campaign against post office privatisations under the Tories.

### **Alliance scope and parties**

TUC departments and sections involved most in recent civil alliances were reported to have engaged in projects of varying scope and character. For instance, within a wider departmental focus on work-based issues and activities, sections in Organisation and Services emphasised their support of and direct involvement in community-level coalitions. While 'older' examples of civil alliances (e.g. involving many trades councils) have united unions to campaign around issues affecting people in their local workplaces and communities (e.g. Wills 2001), recent initiatives were said to have engaged an increasingly diverse range of parties. Informants indicated that civil alliances involving the TUC were usually instrumental in seeking to strengthen mainstream union revival strategies but some of their examples highlight TUC involvement in alliances which mesh worker/union empowerment and social/political justice protest goals (e.g. via TUC regional and youth section links with anti-racist community groups to counter the BNP and National Front; regional TUC (East Anglia) and TGWU training courses to help migrant agricultural workers learn English, about their work rights and to respond to their concerns and discuss how to organise in and join a union).

The TUC's small international development group tends to engage with more internationally- and development-oriented civil and sometimes government-backed alliances. In July 2006, the TUC extended its dealings with the Department for International Development (DfID) when it signed a three-year Strategic Framework Partnership Arrangement (SFPA) which is designed to increase UK unions' engagement with DfID and build capacity to internationalise their agenda. Again, both union vitality and Dibben's (2004) second and third propositions about SMU (see earlier) are addressed. Recent progress has included four unions' TUC-encouraged and successful applications to the International Development Learning Fund; a SFPA-organised International Development Conference in 2007 at Congress House which highlighted best practice examples of unions and NGOs working together on development issues; and an introduction to a development course for TUC and union officers and tutors.

As with its community alliances, the TUC's international development agenda was seen to have encouraged a growing number of alliances and campaigns which encompass a wide array of external parties. The TUC has directly engaged, but more often supported or partially coordinated activities such as the multi-party Ethical Trading Initiative, Jubilee Debt Campaign, MakePovertyHistory campaign, War on Want, Justice for Columbia and Trade Justice with human rights, political and welfare/anti-poverty movements spearheaded by organisations/charities such as Oxfam, Labour Behind the Label, AI and One World Action. The TUC development group also meets every four months with the Secretary of State for International Development, NGOs and affiliates to discuss mutual interests and share ideas.

The TUC's involvement in alliances is also rapidly developing around environmental/climate change. The SPO described various connections with Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the WWF (e.g. with WWF on the draft EU directive on registering, evaluating and controlling chemicals across Europe). As the TUC's rep, he also takes part in a group concerned with the government's deregulation agenda as it affects environmental controls, which also involves the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environmental Industries Commission. As he noted, 'There's a need to maintain environmental regulations and benefits and employment benefits and skills development so there's synergy between workforce/union interests, employment/manufacturing interests and concerns over the environment', emphasising TUC involvement in alliances of both protest and influence.

However, limited resources for pursuing a broad environmental agenda were seen to have encouraged TUC engagement with and promotion of related alliances in an *ad hoc* manner. Informants also indicated that while different TUC departments and sections are broadly associated with particular types of civil alliances and partners, the situation should not be oversimplified. The peak body takes the lead in certain areas while affiliates and other groups drive others. And certain parts of the TUC which are not well known for their involvement in civil alliance work indirectly stress its significance. For instance, the Organisation and Services' union education section and Organising Academy promote community involvement via courses and training, while the department generally looks to overseas experiences for lessons on ways in which unions can mobilise communities to support unions and *vice-versa*.

### **Alliance duration and activity**

While the TUC has been involved in a diverse range of civil alliances, this activity was generally reported to occur 'sporadically from campaign to campaign'. Several informants felt that this emphasises the labour movement's traditional pragmatism which is shaped by the need to heavily prioritise limited resources, including FTO and activist time. For example, the NO stressed an instrumental angle on alliances, and more particularly the primacy of organising considerations, for the discontinuation of the TUC's alliance with the National Group on Home Work begun in 2003 'because unions, when they're looking to commit resources to something, had no genuine prospect of membership "payback"'. In other instances, he linked the temporary nature of most alliances to the non-development of a strategic vision: 'The picture is mixed and patchy in an inconsistent way. We don't have well-thought out strategy in every area or at every level. There're good pieces of individual work but there's no grand master plan at the TUC'.

Indeed, the PO singled out her area's involvement in a global alliance with Oxfam and Labour Behind the Label for its longevity. Oxfam was also considered an unusual NGO partner for the TUC's international development section on account of its large size, experience and sizeable resources, affecting the TUC's ability to shape and control the alliance.

However, examples were given where funding for certain TUC/union-NGO alliances has enabled them to operate longer-term, with implications for their capacity to broaden union purpose. For example, DfID funding to help raise global awareness on poverty and trade encouraged the TUC's on-going involvement in the multi-party MakePovertyHistory protest campaign that emerged through its affiliates. Further, internal TUC developments such as the registered charity TUC Aid, established in 1988 and which uses funding from affiliates to provide humanitarian relief, union training and education activities in league with overseas unions, enable the development of longer-term strategy, links and activities.

TUC alliance activities and, where devised, strategy, also vary in their level of structure. For instance, the SPO described the TUC-WWF arrangement over the environmental impact of chemicals as a 'loose joint strategy'. Notwithstanding such fluid arrangements, the TUC's involvement in environmental alliances has become increasingly framed by terms of reference set by its Congress. For instance, he commented: 'The energy and environment resolution to Congress [2004] has got everything ...: balanced energy policy, clean coal technology, skills development, employment opportunities of moving to renewable energy'.

The TUC's support, guidance and coordination of environmental alliances were also seen to have strengthened existing revival strategies and extended labour movement interests. For example, informants cited its encouragement of certain affiliates to establish environmental

rep training and structures; provision of climate change information and TUSDAC-organised events; awareness-raising seminars on government policy (e.g. emissions trading); the first GreenWorks conference at which the TUC launched a *Greening the Workplace* consultation document (TUSDAC 2005); and use of Congress to put motions on this complex area.

The TUC was seen to have also engaged in civil alliances in a grassroots fashion to a lesser extent. The HOS commented, for instance, ‘our Northern and South-West regions have got active groups ... of people who go out on the street and campaign around issues to do with fair trade and so on’. The HLS indicated that her section’s organisational hierarchy and operations were ‘not an issue when working with a community organisation because it’s been a TUC project worker who’s been going in on an advisory/awareness-raising capacity. We haven’t been working together in that depth for there to be issues around internal structures’. Thus, the TUC’s regional flexibility and cherry-picking approach to involvement have meant that this has not been problematic for a limited amount of ground-level alliance work.

Further, informants did not regard the TUC as a whole or affiliates as overly bureaucratic although smaller unions were generally considered ‘better at linking in because they are more nimble’ (HOS). This view held, even when the TUC was compared with external/non-union alliance parties, many of which are relatively small. Interviewees pointed to recent internal developments in the TUC (particularly following its formal relaunch) and many affiliates, such as the rise of task groups and identity structures, as emphasising an open, energised organisational atmosphere; informal rather than bureaucratic tendencies; and the capacity to ‘reach out’ and thereby help challenge internal union democratic ideals, cultures and practices. However, there were few references to the sizeable and growing number of civil alliances involving equality/identity groups within the TUC or unions, both as stand-alone or elements of wider TUC initiatives (e.g. Parker 2003, Ledwith and Colgan 2002).

At the same time, several ventured that its formal function as the labour movement parliament sometimes facilitates alliance work. For example, the existence of clear TUC procedures in the face of difficult decisions where there are often multiple views was regarded as useful for developing a framework approach to certain alliances, resources permitting.

### **Civil alliances - TUC perceptions and prospects**

Alliances with external social group were generally not seen to constitute a major TUC or affiliate activity. As the HOS noted, ‘we’re much more likely to form coalitions with other stakeholders who are interested in the world of work’. However, it was felt that interest in such within certain TUC quarters has been building, while practical involvement lags behind.

TUC interest and direct engagement in alliances were considered most established at the community level. Even here, however, such activity was considered to have ‘a long way to go and less developed than in some other countries ... and some of the big, growing [UK] unions’ (HOS). One area in which further community involvement by the TUC looks set to develop further is via the Department for Education and Skills-supported TUC Union Academy (TUC 2005), in its planning stages at the time of the research. This initiative adds elements to a combined Learning Services section and traditional TUC education role, and is designed ‘to place unions more centre-stage as a route to learning for members of the public’ (HLS). For example, the Academy and unions will use a national telephone helpline to create more awareness among enquirers of the relevance of unionism and provide work and wider educational opportunities (i.e. reach out via both revival and intrinsic/union purpose aims).

The rationale for alliances involving the TUC in the development of balanced policy making around single and baskets of complex transnational concerns was also seen to be intensifying. For example, the Policy Officer whose brief includes the environment commented:

When I applied for the job [mid-2004], there was no mention of climate change or the environment. Transport and energy were priorities but the environment or climate change wasn't. What's unified all these areas is increasing awareness of the importance of tackling climate change through a new energy strategy.

However, while it emerged that government/other funding has grown for alliances involving the TUC, it is often already stretched and sometimes provisional, constraining the TUC's capacity to develop frameworks or engage more deeply or quickly in coalition work. For instance, at the GreenWorks conference in March 2005, the government pledged to support the TUC's study of climate change and employment with around £20,000 of funding, and announced its £30 million consultation fund on climate change. At the time of the research, the TUC planned to draw on this funding for union projects. Further, the TUC's *Greening the Workplace* consultation document has come to define the 'work programme' for unions, government and industry, which is being taken forward in a series of initiatives. However, the Policy Officer assessed that although the environment agenda has recently broadened in the TUC and TUSDAC-affiliated unions, and the TUC has taken more of a lead, 'we still haven't all caught up with the priority which is climate change and greenhouse gas issues'. He specified particular developments which might help to advance this agenda (e.g. the need to broach sustainability in learning reps and FTOs' training). The TUC encourages unions to do this in ways with which they are most comfortable while recognising constraints on such (e.g. some employers' refusal to give shop stewards time off to deal with environmental issues or attend training courses). As the HOS stressed, the TUC does not have massive resources:

All we can *ever* do is encourage, prompt, lead, train, put a bit of priming money in for certain projects, do exemplar projects, publicise case studies, convene conferences, discussions and seminars so that unions can learn all about this. But unions are doing it as much as we are. The TUC's role is partly leadership, partly to facilitate shared knowledge and discussion about learning from one another about ways to move forward.

A connected point was the shared view that momentum for civil alliances could increase if they are conducted more strategically and with more regard to regulatory frameworks and accessing people with the requisite skills. For instance, the TUC's Special General Council Meeting in March 2004 provided a platform for proposals for a new movement-wide initiative, 'Organising, Campaigning, Growing' which stresses the need for more consistency in how the TUC builds links with voluntary community partners. The HOS looked to the TGWU whose recent large intake of new organisers includes those with experience of leading people in workplaces *and* local communities 'so that they bring not just organising skills but also contacts, networks, ways of relating with community groups'. The NO added that

SMU is about building long-term, sustainable relationships with outside organisations ... to campaign around issues that matter to them and us and hopefully to build some mutual support in different types of campaigns.

His comment re-emphasises the need for alliances that reflect more concern with goals other than union development to increasingly attract civil partners. Informants perceived that as well the advancement of a more strategic approach, social alliances need to be flexible so as to enable timely TUC responses to rapid climate change and other external developments and dynamic relations with alliance partners. In relation to the former, for instance, the aviation industry will not come within the European Emissions Trading Scheme until 2008 but scientists stress the need for immediate action. Aviation unions are increasingly aware that sustainability needs to be part of the case for aviation growth. The Policy Officer commented:

‘The TUC can’t take a simple position ... This is going to be a classic problem if we ever engage with the climate movement’. The HOS more generally concluded: ‘you have to ... find common cause with unlikely organisations in unlikely quarters’.

Informants concurred that monitoring of the nature and impacts of existing and nascent TUC-civil alliances has been limited - ‘everyone can tell you good and bad news stories but they struggle to be able to give an overview’ (NO). They also recognised that a comprehensive review might help to promote commitment and resource allocation to alliance projects. However, several recognised that the measurement of progress could be complicated by the nature of an alliance’s focus. For instance, it was suggested that the TUC and other parties’ ‘have to keep pushing’ to help reduce domestic violence because the level of their influence is difficult to determine and the scale and recurrence of the problem remain relatively unknown. Other areas were considered more open to assessment in revival and other terms, however:

We’re making a lot of headway on learning services [with] a steadily rising number of learning reps and members. We’re reasonably successful working with those organisations ... We’ve clear purpose and agenda, funding and often a local architecture of organisations where we can work out common strategies. (HLS)

She qualified that learning reps’ experiences of bedding into mainstream union structures vary though in large workplaces they are often shop stewards within a traditional union structure. The TUC supports unions in such matters (e.g. helping to develop Learning Rep Networks). Despite difficulties with measuring alliance impacts, informants proposed that success might be reflected by the level of positive feedback received by the TUC. Emphasising their revival effects, the progress of particular groups (e.g. migrant workers) could be tracked through the movement. Legislative change might be used to chart labour movement progress. And mapping activist engagement with other movements could yield data for proposed alliances.

## DISCUSSION

Civil alliance-building involving the TUC and affiliates is generally perceived to form a tool of familiar union revival strategies, particularly recruitment, organising and political initiatives, rather than as a means to propel a new form of trade unionism. The muted impacts of mainstream strategies might also imply *its* limited contribution to union health. Indeed, in practice, TUC engagement with, promotion of and guidance on civil alliance-building has been largely emergent and sporadic, reflecting the absence of overarching strategy. This supports Heery’s (1998) conclusion, using Hyman’s (1996) union identity typology, that the TUC’s relaunch reflects elements of seemingly opposing social movement, friendly society, company and social partner approaches. Inattention to links between civil alliances and other revival strategies’ impacts has been reinforced by an absence of robust measures of such. And the need to allocate limited resources to existing revival projects, political sensitivities, the continuing primacy of a workplace focus in some quarters; and under-reporting of alliances involving the TUC have contributed to a lag between interest and prominence. However, optimism about the TUC’s role in civil alliances continues to build. Impetus for such stems from factors such as shrinking collective bargaining coverage, a union ‘identity crisis’ relating to the need for higher impact revival strategies; increased recognition of links between globalisation, employment and socio-political interests; the growth of union activist links with other movements; and the rise and reformulation of other movements and political debates.

TUC and union alliances are more extensive in practice than might have been thought though information is patchy. Certain TUC departments and sections have augmented its overall promotion of and to a lesser extent direct engagement with broader purpose initiatives, particularly as an exemplar and supporter. This was clear in respect of international



development, environmental change, and community-level alliances aimed at developing learning services and upholding social justice ideals. In all areas, its involvement is expected to advance, particularly as a facet of familiar revival strategies. And as the union movement congress, the TUC has been concerned to help develop, albeit unevenly, workable consensus-based policy to enable affiliates to develop alliances on the ground, a model of unionism that is more akin to a social movement than efforts to lead alliances from the top.

Even recent funding, however, has often become quickly overstretched by TUC responses to alliance interests, even when they have fallen short of a necessary scale or strategic approach. Resource shortages have implications for the TUC's degree of authority over and coordination of alliances involving unions; the extent to which expertise among its personnel can be used; and the likelihood that it will focus on a narrower, do-able agenda. And there is understandable concern at the TUC about the extent to which it can shape alliance partners' activity to reduce the risk of antagonising other parties, given that many alliances involve local decision-making and action. Arguably, curbs on the TUC's resources for and influence over civil alliances could benefit partner organisations if they mean that the TUC is less able to use them as a 'tool of domination' (Russo & Corbin 1999). However, a preferable scenario is one where more of its resources, profile and influence are made available to civil alliances so as to benefit all partners; involvement with SMU groups should be framed by 'mutual respect about neither side trying to colonise or capture the other' (HOS).

Possible ideal conditions for alliances for protest or influence emerged. First, TUC departments need to clarify their role in civil alliances to inform expectations of their input. Second, while recognising the practical complexities of alliances and that it cannot lead everything in which it engages, the TUC has increasingly sought to protect and enhance partners' interests by working with groups that research the shape and potential of the alliance. Third, the TUC is increasingly sensitive to partners' priorities, approaches and 'ways', reflecting the growing diversity of its own personnel and constituents, and increasing openness to internal change. Fourth, many alliances involving the TUC need longer-term commitment, resources and strategy if sought and actual effects are to converge.

The study also revealed a relative inattention to civil alliances initiated by 'non-mainstream' identity groups within the TUC. Their networking approaches and goals often reflect ways of working found in other movements, and have inspired change in the TUC and union mainstream. While their representation of working class diversity is seen by some to encourage union division, the separatism of identity-based bodies has helped to empower those who have traditionally lacked voice, and to emphasise the relevance of 'their' interests to others. Arguably, greater conceptualisation of these alliance efforts in relation to wider TUC or affiliate initiatives would help counter the criticism that SMU is infeasible in the context of an increasingly fragmented working class or that increasing diversity acts against or rules out SMU. However, debates over the TUC's breadth of purpose and its capacity to transform look set to run, not least given an enduring aversion to risk in certain quarters.

## CONCLUSION

As Baccaro et al. (2003) conclude, while more than one union revival strategy 'makes sense', each component may vary in importance as part of a strategic combination to strengthen labour's overall position. Most of the TUC's recent civil alliances have been interpreted as a facet of recruiting, organising and political revival strategies though some show elements of a capacity to act as a 'sword of justice' (Flanders 1970). Little is known, however, of the relative significance or interactive effects of familiar revival strategies, making it difficult to

calculate the utility of civil alliances for other revival strategies (whose impacts have been modest) or their relative potential contribution to union revival. TUC interest in alliance-building is nonetheless gathering pace due to various factors, particularly in respect of ‘big issues’ such as international development and environmentalism, and quieter but essential matters such as the availability of learning services. This study flagged up how the TUC might develop superior alliances by developing longer-term strategy, commitment and resources; mutually beneficial aims; consensus-based and flexibly applied policy; the means to manage tensions over complex interests; and partner organisations’ capacity to coordinate their departments’ alliance activities. While certain alliance features (e.g. loci of control) will always test the TUC’s authority, it is well-placed to offer a coordinating and advisory role, and potentially, more. Further, its alliance ‘utility’ may be enhanced via more data collection from organisations with whom it plans to work and the development of gauges to assess alliance effects in revival *and* other terms. Conceptualisations of the future role for British unions may need to stress less a distinction between work- and ‘non-work’ interests, and acknowledge more that broader purpose unionism can help them respond to workplace issues in a socio-politically informed way.

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