

Chapter 8

Individuals at Work? Collectivism and New Employment in the Irish Workplace

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Irish trade unions, like their counterparts across Europe and throughout the industrialised world, are facing an uncertain future. The trade unions of Ireland are among the oldest economic institutions of the modern world (Wallace, et al 2004). From beginnings as mere offshoots of UK-based unions, the period of sustained growth in Ireland from the late 1950s (after the abandonment of economic protectionism) catapulted trade unions into the heart of Irish social, economic and especially working life. The 1960s and 1970s were periods of sustained improvements in living standards, rapid wage growth and an approximation of full employment for many (if not all) categories of workers. A weak form of neo-corporatism in the form of National Wage Agreements negotiated by the social partners had given unions a direct role in influencing government economic policy (Hardiman 1988). The union movement, too, had a close and complex relationship with Fianna Fáil, the dominant political party of post-Independence Ireland, which enabled it to gain ready access to influential policy-makers (Allen 1997). A surge in economic confidence in this era brought about a ‘drift of power to the workplace union, with shop stewards dominating the collective bargaining scene at plant level’ (Wallace, et al 2004: 11). This was frequently accompanied by rising levels of industrial action (D’Art and Turner 2002). Thus, the experience of the workplace union was a very salient (if not always positive) one for the majority of Irish workers.

Trade union density in Ireland reached a high point of 55 per cent in 1980; by 2004 this figure would fall below 40 per cent. In between times the Irish economy had suffered severe depressions in the 1980s and early 1990s, with levels of unemployment approaching 20 per cent, before the onset of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era with its rapid growth, employment creation and Social Partnership process. In the light of the new, globalised economy, how is the modern workplace trade unionism is

experienced by contemporary workers? And is workplace unionism still a prominent element of the everyday work experience?

Irish unions, like most others in the industrialised world, have faced a decade or more of hard times with frequent questioning of the commitment of the modern worker to collective aims and actions (Ferner and Hyman 1998; Martin and Ross 1999). First, unions that have traditionally acted on the national stage are being confronted by the dynamics of a global economy and the growth of transnational capital (Soskice 1999), the implications of which are particularly profound for small open economies. In Ireland, almost 100,000 people are employed by US multinational companies (MNCs) alone (Roche and Geary 2002; Gunnigle *et al* 2002). The increasing power of capital to 'take flight' (Streeck 1999) has led many to argue that the power of capital relative to that of organised labour and the nation state has increased (Allen 2000).

Second, there has been a continuation and acceleration of long-term transformations in economic and employment structure, in particular growth in private service sector employment (Castells 1996; O'Connell 2000). This growth has been associated in the literature with the dominant need for 'flexibility' in employment relations (Adnett 1996), including the growth of various forms of 'atypical' work such as part-time, temporary and agency work (Beck 2000). Third, and perhaps most importantly, unions have been accused of being antiquated and superfluous because they have not realized that collective organisational principles and forms of action are passé (Lind 1996; Giddens 1998). The decline in trade union membership is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing debates around the undermining of worker collectivism and solidarity by the increasing atomisation of social and working life (Esping-Andersen 1999).

This chapter explores the extent to which the impact of structural labour market changes and the discourse of 'new individualism' are reflected in the attitudes, experiences and activities of Irish trade union members in the workplace. Drawing on case study data from two work sites in the public and private sectors respectively, the chapter argues that the 'collective experience' based on membership of, and support for, the workplace union remains a salient part of working life in Ireland. In both cases the shifting nature of employment - privatisation and deregulation in public

transport; flexibility and new management techniques in financial services - is questioning the commitment of workers to trade unions and presenting fresh challenges for the workplace union (Bacon and Storey 1993). Yet, the data suggests that the 'individualisation thesis' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1998) is by no means an uncontested one.

2. The Individualisation Thesis and Trade Unions

The literature of the last two decades has overwhelmingly identified trade unions as major victims of the increasing fragmentation and individualisation of social and working life (Beck 2002; Waddington and Hoffman 2002). The shift towards private sector services is associated with important labour market features that militate against trade union organisation, requiring unions to develop recruitment and representation strategies appropriate for the 'new' constituencies of female workers, part-time workers and temporary workers (Dickens 2004; Hyman 1999). Arguably, this renders the notion of a standardised group of workers pursuing similar interests increasingly difficult to sustain (Bacon and Storey 1996; Leijnse 1996).

In the public sector, following the general rejection of Keynesianism and state ownership, there have been major moves towards economic deregulation, including the privatisation of state-owned industries (Crouch 1999). As the public sector has traditionally been heavily unionised and characterised by bureaucratic structures that encouraged standardised work relations, this has clear implications for trade union membership (Carter 2004; Conley 2002).

These changes are associated with arguments around post-Fordism (Lash and Urry 1987; Boyer 1988). Post-Fordist changes are often said to involve more cooperative industrial relations at the workplace, where employers seek to enhance the status and well-being of their workers through, for example, participative decision-making and enhanced job security (Hirst and Zeitlin 1990). However others, like Kelly, argue that 'the "skilled content" of new manufacturing jobs or service sector employment can be easily exaggerated...if anything the trend...is towards less security of employment, except for small groups of core workers' (1998: 151).

Collective failure?

These structural changes have been seen by many as signalling a break-up of a traditionally homogenous and collective experience of employment, fostering the diffusion of individual orientations at the expense of traditional forms of class related solidarity (Lash and Urry 1987; Zoll and Valkenburg 1995).

Have these changes been accompanied by a general erosion of societal collectivism? Beck argues that the changes in the labour market - through its interlinked processes of education, mobility and competition - have become the driving force behind the individualisation of peoples' lives (1992; 2000); while in the USA, Putnam has impressively documented a sea change in attitudes to collective engagement in all areas of social life, particularly amongst the young (2001). Equally, Madsen (1997) has pointed out that personal experience is increasingly shaped by multiplicity and that the basic security offered by the welfare state has increased individual orientation to non-material needs.

Not only is the workplace said to be changing but its significance in the economy and society is also said to be dwindling in comparison with the sphere of consumption (Kelly 1998). Consumption, it is argued, has become more significant in the economy as a source of wealth, employment and, indeed, identity. Changing patterns of consumption allow people (and workers) more choice in the construction of a diverse range of lifestyles; choice that is less constrained than ever before by social or occupational ties (Harvey 1990). One way in which the pre-eminence of the sovereign individual is demonstrated occurs through the decline of collective organisational principles and forms of action. This is shown in terms of employment relations through the decline in trade union densities, industrial action and rank-and-file trade union participation (Fosh and Cohen 1990).

While the changes described above are argued to be universal, the economic boom of the last decade has led to a transformation in Irish social and working life. As an economy influenced by both the neo-liberal US and the European 'social model', Ireland has combined a high dependence on foreign investment and MNCs, with a much admired model of neo-corporatist governance (Boucher and Collins 2003). Thus trade unions have been systematically excluded in newer American MNCs and

brought to the heart of partnership in Irish social and economic life. Further, there has been a strong focus on private service sector employment (IT, financial services), yet employment in the heavily unionised public sector has progressively expanded (O'Connell, 2000). Finally, we can clearly observe the prominence of many of the elements said to be required for an increase in the significance of consumption including higher average disposable income, increased range of available goods and services, and the easing of 'traditional social constraints' like religion (Lash and Urry 1987; O' Toole 2003).

3. The Case Studies

The data presented here focuses on two work sites; one in the transport sector (a bus company) and one in the financial services sector (a bank)¹. I conducted thirty-three formal interviews with employers, union members, representatives and officials, and engaged in non-participant observation of daily work routines. As with any case study research, there are distinctive circumstances that apply to these workplaces and issues about the lack of generalisability do arise (Black, et al 1997). Both present a relatively benign atmosphere for trade union activity. Bus Company is a traditional, public sector employer with virtually universal unionisation levels. People's Bank is a foreign subsidiary, private sector service employer, but has a long tradition of union recognition and continues to support basic trade union institutions. Nevertheless, these features are not necessarily unique and many of the general industrial relations and union features equally apply to other large, unionised organisations. Crucially, both are and have been enduring a period of continuous change that is fundamentally altering employment practices; in particular privatisation and deregulation in public transport, and flexibility and new management techniques in financial services.

The Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA) represents over 17,000 members in Ireland's banking and finance industry. My focus is on People's Bank branch in Suburbia, which encompasses Lending Services, Securities, Corporate Lending and the Legal Department. The People's Bank is located on a Greenfield site on the outskirts of a major city. There are around 200 People's Bank employees based there, of whom 160 are full-time with a further 40 part-time or temporary. Exact figures for

¹ As a guarantee of confidentiality was given to the respondents, all names of people, businesses and places have been changed.

membership of the IBOA at the branch are unavailable but union informants estimate that about 50 to 60 percent are members. The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) represents around 4000 bus workers in Bus Company, a public transport company that operates citywide. The Bus Company garage in Cubtown was pinpointed as the second case study site. Essentially, this is the place where bus drivers begin and end their routes, and deal with any administrative issues. There is also a canteen and some social facilities there. As with all Bus Company garages, two unions co-exist side by side, SIPTU and the National Bus and Railworkers Union (NBRU). The SIPTU/NBRU membership split is about 40 per cent to 60 per cent in Cubtown respectively (with 232 SIPTU members).

The Salience of Collectivism²

Why do employees become members of trade union and what do they expect their union to deliver? The rationale for union membership is often described along an ideological-instrumental continuum (Hartley 1996). At one end workers join for predominantly collective motives, for example, ideological commitment to unionism and the protection of the vulnerable employee in the asymmetric employment relationship; at the other the motivation is more individualistic, for instance, access to employment insurance and legal services. If there has been a general decline in collectivist values and an erosion of occupational ties as outlined above, we would expect that union members would join for predominantly individualistic motives (Van der Veen 1996). Equally, we might anticipate that they would expect their union to deliver more individualised benefits.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given that they voluntarily donate their time to union activities, the five local representatives interviewed professed a strong ideological belief in the need for trade unions. However, several other respondents reported similar beliefs like, 'I do really believe in them and I would encourage everyone to join them' (Irene, IBOA member). Overall, just under half the respondents professed some ideological preference for union membership (often in terms of the union as a

² This section follows a similar structure to that of Black et al (1997). Interestingly, it also tends to corroborate their findings on the salience of collectivism in a British context.

guarantor of better working conditions³); and, in line with the findings of Waddington and Whitsun (1996) in the UK, who found that joining a union in principle was more likely among white collar employees, the majority of these were bank workers.

Perhaps, given the small sample size, what is significant is that in both cases the local representatives and union officials believed that if it were required they would have the ideological backing of the majority of members, 'If you're not going to get the backing don't ask the question...but I'm lucky, very lucky' (David, IBOA official). Further, this ideological commitment demonstrated by the local representatives is to a large extent sustained by the ordinary members: '(the local representatives) are great and they think the same way we're thinking here' (Gearoid, SIPTU member).

The other most important reason for joining the union (and many respondents identified this in addition to their ideological preferences) was to gain a measure of protection against management: 'make no mistake, upper management will screw you if they can, be certain of that' (Aidan, IBOA member). This may reflect arguments around the increased power of transnational capital vis-à-vis labour: 'some of the stories I've heard out there about people who just kind of get screwed over and the union helped them get out of it' (Hector, IBOA member); or indeed the insecurity that accompanies modern employment relations: 'Just the thought of (the union) being there for management limits them' (Jim, SIPTU member).

Union potential: membership expectation

Having joined a union, what is it that members expect the union to provide for them? Three particular points emerge from the data on this issue. Firstly, again protection from unfair treatment by management was a key concern: 'they look after you, you know. I mean, your rights. Things can go pear-shaped very easy in a job without a union' (Kevin, SIPTU member). In the case of Bus Company, protection for the individual was a significant factor. For example, several respondents had themselves experienced problems with management (suspension, problems with pension entitlements, even dismissal) and in each case the union had provided them with what

³ It might be argued that viewing union membership as necessary for protecting working conditions is itself an individualistic motive; I would argue at the very least however it corresponds with Goldthorpe, et al's (1968) 'instrumental collectivism'.

they perceived as excellent support. This was less frequent in People's Bank, but several respondents referred to union membership as a type of 'cover plan' in case of any possible future difficulties.

Secondly, in both companies there was significant use of the local union representatives as a 'resource': 'they nearly descend upon you as soon as you walk in the door, with various problems...you're needed for all sorts of things, you're like a go-between, really, between the people you're representing and their families nearby, as well as the company' (Donal, SIPTU workplace representative). Another representative in People's Bank referred to himself as a 'contact point'. This expectation of what the union can offer is a more constructive conception of unionism than the 'defensive' nature of the unions' protection function. In this case, the representatives were seen as being able to offer reliable and professional advice on various work and non-work related issues.

Perhaps disturbing from a trade union perspective, however, was the fact that most members felt that the union either had diminished or insufficient influence over other areas of working life. In Bus Company the intention by the state to progressively franchise out the company's routes to private operators (what members perceived as privatisation) was the burning issue of the moment. There was deep frustration amongst members that the union had not gone ahead with threatened strike action, 'we're not happy with the union because...they had to pull back. Just go out and stay out' (Gearoid, SIPTU member).

There were also some doubts expressed as to the viability of such action: 'strikes nowadays don't do anybody any good' (Niall, SIPTU member). There was evidence in both cases of a general feeling that union power and influence, at least as measured in terms of industrial action, had declined: 'to be brutally honest, you'll never see a strike coming again in the foreseeable future...(with) the likes of the LRC and these intermediaries; I think there's more willingness now for guys to sort things out' (Gary, IBOA workplace representative).

In terms of pay bargaining, the general view was that with the advent of social partnership, the union at the workplace was virtually redundant: 'pay is less relevant

now because of the partnership agreement' (Aidan, IBOA member). The interesting point here is that despite a general view that unions had insufficient influence in respect of two of the traditionally fundamental areas of union activity - capacity to take industrial action and pay bargaining - respondents generally reported high degrees of satisfaction with what their union achieves in the workplace. This may indicate a significant shift in union members' conception of the function of trade unions.

A final point in relation to members' expectations of what their union can provide relates to arguments around a US style 'business unionism' model (Heery and Kelly 1994). This model relies on trade union activities external to the workplace, particularly the provision of individual, consumer-type services (Waddington and Hoffman 2000). Examples of the types of services unions provide are individual welfare benefits like sickness benefits; financial service packages such as insurance packages; legal services; and leisure-centred items like cinema ticket discount cards. This new focus on members as 'customers' is claimed to represent an adjustment to a 'new individualism' among members, whose identities are formed increasingly around their consumption patterns (Bacon and Storey 1996). Both SIPTU and the IBOA offer services of this nature.

Among the Bus Company respondents, however, not one interviewee mentioned individual services of these types as being relevant to their union membership. In People's Bank, a more concerted effort is being made by union officials to promote these benefits: 'we have a car insurance scheme; we have holiday insurance, squash court, cheap cinema tickets. But that's what a modern day trade union has to do' (Frank, IBOA official). Yet, only one bank employee pointed to the availability of discounted car insurance as a significant factor in his decision to join. In general, while bank workers were more likely than their transport colleagues to avail of these services, the services were tangential to their expectations of what the union should provide for them.

Union delivery: instrumental salience

Having looked at what union members expect from their union we now turn to the question of whether they felt their union was in fact successful in achieving these

aims. As indicated above, in terms of pay many members did not see the workplace union as particularly relevant⁴. In both workplaces the union was seen as having a positive influence in some of the 'newer, qualitative' areas of representation (Hyman 1999), for example, sexual harassment and gender equality. As noted above, respondents also rated the unions very highly on being effective in representing employees in individual disputes with management (on the basis of either personal experience or word of mouth).

The two areas where unions were not felt to be delivering were in Bus Company on the issue of job protection and in People's Bank on the issue of individual 'consumer' services. On the former there was deep frustration amongst all the lay union respondents that concerted industrial action had not been taken against the planned deregulation of the bus market: 'they've delayed the strike, which I think is stupid. They have the backing of the whole garage' (Gearoid, SIPTU member). On the latter, those limited number of members who had availed of things like discounted car insurance were not satisfied with the outcome. This illustrates the problem for unions of this type of service provision: competing with specialist providers who may be more adept at providing customer satisfaction (Klandermans 1996).

Yet, in both of these areas the 'individualisation' thesis (including the advocacy of 'business unionism') is challenged. Thus, workers were frustrated by their union's *failure* to take collective action, while the value to unions of offering individualised, consumer services is questioned.

The Nature of Collective Action

Hyman (1999) has argued that many unions have traditionally exhibited a view of worker solidarity that, following Durkheim, can be termed 'mechanical solidarity' in which standardised rules and values are imposed on members whose circumstances were relatively homogenous. Barling et al (1992) point out most of the time little is

⁴ As noted, many (primarily IBOA) members felt the advent of social partnership had removed this issue as a salient workplace one (although several also acknowledged the role of their union in those negotiations); others (primarily SIPTU) noted that unions, to an extent, were victims of their own success in that as pay levels were generally satisfactory, members were not looking to the union on this issue. Of course, were that situation to change a different response might well be forthcoming.

required of trade union members in the way of participation in union affairs: voting in elections, authorising the (automated) payment of membership subscriptions, and so on. Nevertheless, the decline in the incidence of industrial action and membership participation in ‘everyday’ union business has been cited as further evidence of a general erosion of collectivism (Putnam 2001)⁵.

In terms of industrial action, it was noted above that many respondents (particularly amongst the bank employees) indicated a belief that this element of trade unionism may no longer be as relevant: ‘obviously...nobody wants conflict. Industrial stability is a good thing’ (Eoghan, IBOA member). However, several writers have pointed to the role of grievances (and how they are used by union representatives) in stimulating membership participation in industrial action (Klandermans 1992; Kelly and Heery 1994). This was clear in both workplaces. In Bus Company the perceived threat to jobs, pay and working conditions from deregulation had created an environment in which there was a firm commitment at grass roots level to strike action: ‘it’ll only take a spark, really I think, for some major disruption to take place. The situation on the ground is very volatile; the men are every angry, very frustrated when they see what’s happening’ (Donal, SIPTU workplace representative). The role of the workplace representative in such situations is crucial (Fosh 1981; Fosh and Cohen 1990). Here, the SIPTU representatives were clearly tapping into to the ‘latent workplace solidarity’ (Fosh 1993: 580) and the ideological basis of many of the members’ union membership to arouse the required support for action, in this case action that would not be sanctioned by the union leadership: ‘the men may well take (illegal) action...I happen to agree with the men and I won’t be doing anything to stop it’ (Donal, SIPTU workplace representative).

In People’s Bank, action was also being taken to address a perceived injustice. Thus, in response to a refusal by management to provide increased remuneration rates for lower grades of bank staff, the union had instructed members not to cooperate with the conducting of staff appraisals. Although all of the IBOA respondents were at higher levels of grade and pay and therefore not personally affected by this issue, and

⁵ Although as Kelly (1998) rather sardonically notes: ‘in the literature on trade unionism...one of the most frequent complaints by writers and activists, from the Webbs onward, has been the lack of interest in branch affairs by the rank-and-file membership and the chronically low level of attendance at union meetings’

some had, in principle, no problems with the appraisal system, the following quote is typical:

I definitely agree with the union on that. And I wouldn't sign off my appraisal as part of it. And I think that's the general mood of a lot of people in the bank, who I've come across. They're not going to do their appraisals until the union say, 'green light. Go ahead.' (Hector, IBOA member).

In terms of other types of membership participation, the respondents were asked general questions about both formal (voting in ballots, standing for election, attending meetings and informal (talking about the union, reading the newsletter/circulars, helping the local representative) forms of participation (Hartley 1996). Levels of formal participation in both workplaces were low. All union officials reported difficulties in getting people to adopt the position of local representative. For example, in People's Bank one of the workplace representatives described himself as an inactive member!

In both cases, however, informal participation levels were relatively high, particularly in Bus Company. This most often related to going to the local representative informally for help or advice or reading union literature. Clearly, though, even this (limited) level of membership participation can have implications. This is suggested by Fosh who argues that argues 'during a surge of participation, a significant proportion of the members shift from an attitude of leaving it to others to one of assuming their share of the group action as their latent workplace solidarity emerges' (1993: 580). Possible explanations for low general levels of participation will be discussed below.

The New Employment Relationship

As outlined above, the shift to an economy dominated by private sector services, and often characterised by the privatisation of state enterprises has a number of implications for the employment relationship (Greco 2002; Thompson 2003). In Bus Company, we have already seen that the issue of impending deregulation (or as the drivers saw it, privatisation) was the key issue for many respondents. Almost without exception the drivers were prepared to strike to attempt to fend off this outcome. The general fear was that moving them to the status of private sector employees was a

naked attempt to downgrade their pay and working conditions, and endanger their job security⁶: ‘working for a private operator we’d lose all our working conditions, and those guys hire and fire at will... We can’t live under those circumstances in this day and age...we shouldn’t have to’ (Donal, SIPTU workplace representative).

The financial services industry has undergone significant change in recent decades and is viewed as being in the vanguard of new, post-Fordist employment (Hutton 1996; Sassen 2000, Regini, et al 2000). At People’s Bank, a key issue for respondents was job security. Interestingly, again, this was not always an issue that affected the respondents personally, many were core personnel, but there was an awareness that the nature of financial services employment had become more fluid. It was pointed out to IBOA members at a union meeting that the bank were quite happy with high levels of staff turnover at junior levels (IBOA members meeting, June 2003). In fact, three of the (middle grade) younger respondents were actively seeking other employment.

Several of the respondents had begun life at the bank as temporary workers. This was significant in that the union does not attempt to recruit such employees: ‘I joined the union after I was made permanent. There wasn’t much point I was told, in joining before I was made permanent’ (Jill, IBOA member). So, on the one hand, the bank is pursuing a policy of high levels of staff turnover and increased numbers of temporary staff and, on the other, these staff are not encouraged (indeed are discouraged) to take up union membership. This has clear implications for workplace collectivism, given the increasing share of part time and temporary Irish workers (O’ Connell 2000).

Consumption, Time and Non-Participation

Low levels of (at least formal) participation in union affairs were common in both workplaces. One explanation for low levels of rank-and-file participation is that such activity is now seen as largely irrelevant in comparison with the importance of consumption in the lives of working people (Harvey 1990). However, the data suggest that an alternative explanation may be simply one related to time pressures. All of the

⁶ It should be noted, too, that most respondents made reference to their view of the job as a ‘public service’, which they felt would be downgraded to the detriment of the general public if the plans went ahead.

bank respondents (including those only in their present jobs for up to a year) reported that work loads were constantly increasing: 'I think the way people are working isn't conducive to their own health...if you're having to do it week-in, week-out you're physically, mentally, you're under a lot more strain all the time' (Eoghan, IBOA member). Frequently, time pressures and work stresses were accompanied by family and domestic responsibilities: 'I was actually offered a promotion here and I turned it down. One of the reasons was my wife works in a bank, she works in the IFSC, and we've two kids' (Gary, IBOA workplace representative).

A big problem was that work levels were on the increase at the same time that the bank was increasingly adopting a policy of high staff turnover levels. This illustrates that employers may decide to make specific trade offs in the type of 'flexible' work practices they pursue. Attempts to pursue functional flexibility (which requires a skilled, well-trained workforce, implying a long-term commitment by the firm to the employment relationship) will make it difficult to implement numerical flexibility (which is not based on any training element, but fluid external labour markets and therefore a low commitment employer/employee relationship (Lodovici 1999; Regini 1999). Clearly, the latter, at least in terms of non-core workers is the model preferred at People's Bank.

While participation levels at Bus Company were higher, and there was general satisfaction with working conditions, issues of stress and work intensification were raised by several respondents: 'at the moment, the times that you're expected to do your journey as one man with the traffic conditions... You don't even get time to get out and stretch your legs. It's crazy' (Niall, SIPTU member).

Again, time pressure was linked frequently with domestic responsibilities. Thus, both union representatives and company officials noted that issues of 'life/work' balance were increasingly surfacing, particularly for workers with long commutes. The significance of time and/or domestic responsibilities is significant for another aspect of the collective work experience as well. In both companies there were quite extensive sports and social facilities. However, many respondents complained that they simply did not have the time to avail of them. The data suggest, therefore that, in terms of non-participation in union (and indeed other non-job specific workplace

activities), the rise of consumption is less relevant than issues of work intensification and time pressure.

4. Conclusions

This chapter has considered arguments around the demise of collectivism, the rise of consumption, and structural changes in the nature of employment in Ireland that impact on union members' participation in and relationship with their trade union. Far from a decline in the salience of trade unionism to working life, the importance of the union is clearly acknowledged. Indeed, in Bus Company union membership is central in the lives of workers under threat from macro-economic structural changes. This salience has persisted even though a majority of respondents feel that their union's role has diminished or that it has unsatisfactory influence over many key areas of working life. This has been demonstrated by the willingness in both workplaces of members to take industrial action over perceived injustices.

What is clear, however, is that most respondents feel under threat from ever more powerful employers. The salience of the union, then, as a protective mechanism has remained important. Finally, we have seen that many recent changes in the employment sphere are perceived as negative by employees. Most respondents reported work and stress intensification and greater job insecurity. This intensification has also resulted in severe time pressure that impedes the ability of members to participate fully in union and, indeed social, activities at the workplace, but has reinforced their belief in the necessity of union membership.

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