SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH PRACTICE AND SOCIALISATION: A STUDY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN SINGAPORE

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Abstract

Focused contextually on the labour movement in Singapore, this thesis examines the key roles and functions played by labour unions here, claiming that they function primarily as agents for social integration. This assertion is made both in relation to the observed longstanding alignment and support given by the dominant coalition of labour unions under the aegis of the NTUC to the government and its principle practice of adopting a 'non-confrontational' approach to industrial relations, which has led to labour unions functioning as conduits for the mitigation of conflict. However, structural processes alone are inadequate for the maintenance of such a system, another crucial contributing element is the support of labour union leaders whose views and perceptions are shaped not only by the existing objective set of social-structural conditions but also by their own subjective experiences, rooted in the routine day-to-day practices.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 The Beginning

The original conception of this thesis was to examine the response of labour unions to the forces of globalisation, specifically, the effect of the latter on various unionised sectors and how labour unions were reacting to such forces; focusing namely on the strategies that unions employ to cope with this phenomenon. This plan proved too ambitious as I came to discover in the course of my fieldwork. This led to the attempt to answer a more fundamental but nevertheless important and relevant question, what is the role of labour unions here?

The central focus to examine the role of labour unions, in particular, those within the dominant 'mainstream' coalition of labour unions aligned under the aegis of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), is motivated both by the dearth of information within the contemporary labour field and the need to elucidate their function given the changed contextual circumstances (since its founding) and the plethora of criticisms that have been levelled against them.

To this end, some of the questions that this thesis will seek to answer include the following: Is there a rationale for the continued existence of unions? What is the underlying nature of the relationship between the government and unions? Are the latter marionettes in the service of the former?

Theoretically, the study of Singapore's labour movement tend to take either one or a mix of these approaches: 1) Modernisation theory; this details how the role and influence of unions and their relationship with political parties is tied to the stage and period of economic development (Frenkel 1993: 5-8). Later industrialising countries like the Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs), which are likely marked by a strong state presence and 'pressure to contain union activity' would see less empowered labour movements with a more limited role and scope of action (Frenkel 1993: 8).

Anantaraman 1990, Chew et al 1989 and Deyo 1981b examined the development of Singapore's labour movement and traced the emergence of its 'bureaucratic authoritarian-corporatism' brand of industrial relations system in relation to its economic and industrialising process, which aside from the period of political upheaval leading to Singapore's independence, showed the close cooperation between government and labour movement across the different economic development phases – through unemployment, EOI (Export Oriented Industrialisation (EOI) – up to 1990.

The central idea behind the second approach, 2) International Labour-Market theory is that the mobility of 'global capitalism' gives more power and influence to multinational corporations (MNCs) over government in developing countries, leading to the weakening and increasing marginalisation of labour unions and workers due to 'repressive public policies' – 'aimed at maintaining stability, profitability', and the attraction of direct foreign investment – taken against them (Frenkel 1993: 8-9).

To varying degrees, Lim et al 2000, Rodan 2001 and Yeung 2001 have affirmed this view, citing the inevitable need to make changes in light of this 'New Economy'. For the state, 'opening up the domestic economy to international competition' makes it more emasculated, while for workers and labour unions, the onset of this 'New Economy' upholds efforts for 'labour market deregulation', notably, the legal prohibition of industrial action and the denial of minimum wage legislature (Lim et al 2000: 160-163, 167-170; Rodan 2001: 164).

Another approach to labour union research is the use of comparative politics and political Sociology (Frenkel 1993: 9). This research category theorises and examines the relationship between political parties or government types with labour movements, often doing so by incorporating the aspects highlighted in both the first and second category.

Works that utilise socio-economic or political factors to draw conclusions on the nature of state-labour relations have been carried out by Barr (2000), Leggett (1993), Deyo (1981a, 1981b), Rodan (1993) and Rosa (1990). The consensus being that a 'corporatist' form of state-labour relations exists wherein labour has been 'incorporated' (Rosa 1990) by a dominant state[1].

The commonality that course through all these works is the 'structural-institutional' approach taken to examine labour, which implicitly suggests that it exists as a

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[1] While Deyo claims this corporatism to be 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' in nature, Barr (p.481) – borrowing David Brown's term – claims that it leans closer towards 'inclusionary corporatism' – in Brown, D. (1994) The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia (London, New York: Routledge) p.89.

homogeneous monolith. This oversimplification as a result of generalising state-labour relations offers no understanding of the dynamic and complex relations that belie it. In particular, it fails to address the motivations for the quiescence and support given by the 'agents' of labour, namely, union members and its practitioners.

1.2 Thesis Aims and Arguments

While the broad aim of this thesis is to identify the primary role and function of the dominant 'mainstream' coalition of labour unions aligned under the aegis of the NTUC, it seeks to do this from the perspective of the agents within it. The argument being that support from agents stemming from their beliefs and perceptions is a crucial factor in maintaining the roles and functions of unions.

Even though tracing the trajectory of historical-structural linkages is fundamentally important to understanding institutions and their workings in the present, they are not the sole determinants. Often, there is a tendency to gloss over how institutional structures are inhabited and governed by agents whose actions affect how they function. Thus, an understanding of the relationship between institutional structures is not complete without an examination of the agents who operate within them.

In this sense, the established 'cooperative' labour-government relationship cannot be assumed to be a *de jure*, given that labour unions are not passive partners. Instead, the condition of this relationship needs to be understood as the resultant effect of an active

and conscious decision making process made by individual agents, specifically, labour union leaders, whose decisions are shaped by a complex set of mutually reinforcing social-structural conditions.

The result of this is the proposition that labour unions in Singapore function primarily as an integrative force in society. This first proposition view labour unions to be socially integrative to the extent that they help manage and diffuse conflict, preventing their escalation often by asserting common interests that are nationalistically oriented.

The second question that this thesis addresses is this: what enables this system of industrial relations – which emphasises non-confrontational approaches – to be maintained? The key to this rests on the support from practitioners, who through the course of their experience within the labour unions' system, come to identify with, support, and reinforce this particular system, thereby enabling its continuation.

The focus here is the examination of 'processes'; how structure interacts with agency in a dialectically mutually reinforcing relationship that characterises the relationship between the labour movement and the government here. This requires the examination of the following components: Structurally, the legislative framework governing labour relations, as well as the nature of the relationship between the NTUC labour movement and the government.

In terms of agency, and a contributing aspect of this thesis, how the views of individual practitioners influence their actions and participation that contribute to the maintenance of the labour relations system. What views and opinions do they hold with regards to the purposes of labour unions?

The significance of this stems from their being an incidence of agency and structure: How do structural factors influence the decision-making, and thereby the actions of an individual? How then do individual actions affect existing structural relations? The convergence of these considerations on the individual, means that the participant actor is not only subject to structural influences but is also in a position to influence (i.e. change or perpetuate) structural processes, provides the justification for giving emphasis to the individual actor, the labour union leader.

The thesis's focus on the concerns outlined above is neither an apology nor an endorsement of the manner in which the labour movement in Singapore is structured or operates. More modestly, it hopes to provide a better understanding as to the opinions and perspectives held by the agents – namely the leaders and practitioners – within the movement, and to show the subtle yet complex dialectical manner in how these subjective views are both shaped by and go towards reinforcing the established structural institutional norms.

1.3 Structure and Organisation of Thesis

This thesis will be organised as such: The first chapter covers Singapore's labour relations system, detailing the legislative framework governing it, as well as the legal-structural procedures for the resolution of labour disputes. This will help contextualise the examination of the labour movement – specifically the NTUC – and how it is organised. The second chapter will be devoted to the discussion of research methodology, and a review of some the key difficulties encountered in the course of the research.

Tracing the historical rise of Singapore's labour movement, Chapter 3 seeks to identify the key factors that have influenced the movement's development. Aside from showing the inextricable influence of the past on the present, the intention is to show how individuals' understanding of the present is shaped by the interpretive understanding of the social-historical trajectory.

Chapter 4 reviews not only the theoretical frameworks used to examine, locate and analyse Singapore's labour movement but also discusses the interrelationship between labour practitioners and their environment as well as their mutual influence within the scope of agency-structure analysis. Lastly, Chapter 5 will offer a more substantive analysis of the labour movement (with an emphasis on the NTUC), highlighting some of the contemporary concerns and issues.

1.4 Leaders run a Movement

Although it is accurate to say that a labour movement does not consist solely of its leaders, one cannot ignore the influence they wield. Occupying positions of authority within unions, they act simultaneously as representatives of their membership, articulating the concerns of their constituents; while being agents subject to the higher authority of the labour confederation, where they work to disseminate and implement initiatives passed by the latter.

As intermediaries between confederation and members, their importance – and this thesis's decision to focus on them – arise from their role as gatekeepers who are responsible for determining on the one hand, which 'concerns' or 'issues' to highlight and the intensity to lobby them; and on the other, the degree of attention and effort that are invested into federation initiated programmes.

1.5 Overview – Industrial Relations System

The aim of the following sections are as follows: one, to explore the role of unions from the perspectives of its practitioners; two, to detail the operation of the industrial relations system, in particular, the established system for resolving industrial disputes; and three, to examine how the NTUC is structured and organised.

1.5.1 Overview and Role of Unions

Overall, union membership has seen a steady increase since the late 1980s, rising from 205,717 members in 1987 to 443,983 in 2004 (see Table 1A). Union density, which looks at union membership as a percentage of the number of employed persons has also risen. In 1993, only 14.8% of the working population was unionised, this rose to 15.4% in 1999, and leapt later to 19.3% in 2002 and 21.5% in 2004 (see table 1B).

Functionally, union leaders are of the view that the role of unions may be bundled into two categories: The first is '*to protect and enhance the well being of workers*'; and the second, is to '*provide them with representation*' (Interview 16: 2), with the aim to attain '*good conditions [and] equitable pay*' (Interview 15: 3).

In practice, the two are difficult to distinguish, but may still be divided into several notional areas: 1) One involves [*the negotiation of the terms and condition of employment*] (Interview 3a: 4), which involves remunerative conditions for employment, such as salary, [*annual increment and bonus*] (Interview 9: 6) and other additional non-monetary '*non-standard [enhancements]*' (Interview 9i: 10). 2).

2) Another is the provision of representation to members in the event of disputes and unhappiness, which tend to manifest in the form of grievance handling, as well as the mediation of disputes and unhappiness. 3) Further, unions are also seen to serve as a '*channel of communication*' (Interview 8: 3) that would enable '*work improvement*' (Interview 8: 2) and aid in improving worker-management relations.

Table 1A: Employee Union Membership and NTUC Membership
1960 - 2003

Year	Number of Unions	Membership[1]	NTUC Membership[2]
1960	130	144,770	-
1961	124	164,462	-
1962	122	189,032	-
1963	112	142,936	-
1964	106	157,050	101824
1965	108	154,052	112635
1966	108	141,925	104626
1967	106	130,053	92930
1968	110	125,518	88401
1969	110	120,053	88558
1970	102	112,488	85423
1971	100	124,350	96227
1972*	97	166,988	142762
1973	92	191,481	168090
1974	90	203,561	189214
1975	89	208,561	196622
1976	91	221,936	211956
1977	90	229,056	216890
1978	89	236,907	226306
1979	85	249,710	236628
1980	83	243,841	232895
1981	86	224,362	211548
1982	89	214,337	203077
1983	90	205,155	198268
1984	86	192,394	186111
1985	84	201,132	197320
1986	83	200,613	200082
1987	83	205,717	203569
1988	83	210,918	209051
1989	86	212,874	209193
1990	83	212,204	211575
1991	83	217,086	216291
1992*	81	228,686	230000
1993*	82	235,723	236110
1994	82	232,927	234363
1995	81	235,157	237443
1996	83	255,020	257815
1997	82	260,130	262484
1998	80	272,769	277507
1999*	76	289,707	293831
2000	72	314,478	312794
2001	71	338,311	337387
2002	70	389,676	387278
2003	68	417,166	406449
2004	68	443,893	-

[1]Figures from MOM; [2] Figures are as at Dec each year from NTUC National Delegates Conference Oct 2003

* Figures estimated

Table 1B: Union Membership as a Percentage of Employed Persons (1993-2004)

Year	Employed Persons (at mid-year)	Union Membership	Union Density
1993	1,592,000	235,723	14.8%
1994	1,649,000	232,927	14.1%
1995	-	235,157	-
1996	1,748,000	255,020	14.6%
1997	1,830,000	260,130	14.2%
1998	1,870,000	272,769	14.6%
1999	1,886,000	289,707	15.4%
2000	-	314,478	-
2001	2,047,000	338,311	16.5%
2002	2,017,000	389,676	19.3%
2003	2,034,000	417,166	20.5%
2004	2,067,000	443,893	21.5%

Source: Employed Persons - MOM, Union Membership - MOM

1.5.2 Collective Agreement and the Bargaining Process

One importance of unions, often deemed to be the capstone of trade unionism, is that they confer protection in the employment of workers through the conduct of CA (Collective Agreements). Without this, [*the terms and conditions of employment would not be as good, and workers are vulnerable to exploitation since it is really up to the 'whims and fancies of the company'*] (Interview 2a: 1)

The terms and conditions of employment stipulated by a CA generally encompass (but is not limited to) the following aspects: wages; number of work hours; benefits such as annual, medical, maternity or marriage leave, medical coverage; extra-monetary recompense, such as AWS (Annual Wage Supplement), AVC (Annual Variable component) or vocational-related allowances; overtime terms; welfare or '*[non-standard] benefits*' (Interview 9h: 5); and compensation derived due to workforce retrenchment[2].

However, '*there are [also] agreements that are not stated in the CA*' (Interview 9a: 54). These unrecorded clauses arise when companies '*don't want [the benefits] to be published*' (Interview 9a: 54) and revealed to their competitors.

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[2] AWS – Known colloquially as the '13th Month Bonus', this payment , which is equivalent to a full month's pay, is commonly viewed (where it is paid out) as an inviolable fixed year end payment – paid out to all employees of a firm irregardless of their performance. The AVC on the other hand is a non-cumulative incentive bonus paid according to the individual's work performance.

Usually, a CA is in force for a period of 'not less than 2 years or not more than 3 years', and are negotiated by unions on a company-to-company basis[3]. Industry wide bargaining is not practiced in Singapore; while '*companies … do not want to do industry bargaining*' (Interview 10: 12) because of the immense difficulty in setting a common standard given their varying financial means, workers object to it because it threatens those who currently have better benefits.

According to the Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 136), collective bargaining can only be undertaken by a trade union recognised by the employer for 'bargainable' workers. The latter group, '*as defined by the law, [refers to] non-executive, non-managerial and non-confidential*' (Interview 9: 2) employees, basically, individuals who has '*no supervisory responsibility*' (Interview 9: 2) (Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[4].

To be recognised, the union first needs to ensure than more than 50% of the bargainable workers are its members, only then can the union serve a notice (under Section 18 of the Industrial Relations Act) to the employer stating that '*[they] represent [a] majority of [the workers]*' and that the employers '*have to give [them] legal recognition*' (Interview 9a: 5). When this is acknowledged, the union can then '*serve a notice [an invitation to negotiate] to the employer*' (Interview 9a: 5).

However, the union's demand for recognition may be challenged by employers:

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[3] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 25 (5) (a). In the negotiation of the CA with the management, the union is usually represented by members of the branch committee and the Industrial Relations Officer (IRO) assigned to the branch.
[4] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 17 and Section 30 (1)

'*we don't believe you have 51%, we want to challenge you through a secret ballot, [thereupon] the Ministry of Manpower as provided by law will step in and conduct a secret ballot*' (Interview 9: 5).

If successful, the management would be legally bound to recognise the legitimacy of the union and upon receipt of the union's invitation to negotiate would have to serve a reply within the next 7 days stating its acceptance or non-acceptance of the union's invitation to negotiate (Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[5].

If the invitation to negotiate is not accepted, the party serving the invitation may then notify the Commissioner of Labour[6]. The latter would then meet with (either) the employer (or the union) in order to persuade them to accept the invitation (Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[7]. If this fails, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Registrar of the Industrial Arbitration Court (IAC) will be notified, and a trade dispute would be deemed to have occurred.

If unresolved within 14 days, the Commissioner of Labour may consult with both parties and offer to help them reach a conciliation (Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[8]. If the situation persists 7 days after consultation, it would be referred to the Ministry of Manpower. The

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[5] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 19. The invitation to enter into collective bargaining may be served by either union or the employer. In either case, the recipient of the invitation has 7 days to give an acceptance reply.
[6] Once recognition has been established, either the union or the employer may serve notice for negotiation.
[7] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 20 (1) and (2)
[8] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 21 – 14 days after serving Section 18.

Minister may then direct that compulsory conferences be held (Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[9].

1.5.3 Labour Disputes and their Resolution

Even if collective bargaining does proceed, negotiations can collapse either as a result of acrimony or because no agreement could be attained. When this happens, the union and management may apply for arbitration either jointly or unilaterally. Previously, I discussed the resolution process when the employer refuses to negotiate. I will now discuss the process of dispute resolution (applicable to collective bargaining or situations of conflict) when attempts at resolution between union and management fail or become deadlocked.

In the above scenario, union or management may request for the MOM to act as an arbiter. Should the matter fail to be resolved at this level, either party can file an application for the dispute to be heard at the Industrial Arbitration Court (IAC), or they could be referred there by the manpower ministry.

But even before the matter '*goes to [the] arbitration court …, the practise nowadays is to settle out of court … the judiciary … will try to mediate in chambers and get both parties to try and settle*' (Interview 9f: 3). This 'chamber mediation' is the last opportunity for settlement before an open court hearing.

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[9] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 23 – Compulsory Conferences

During such a meeting the '*Registrar will tell you your legal points and whether you can win or lose; and they tell you "compromise and don't embarrass in the open court"*' (Interview 4a: 10). Sometimes, they may,

> '*[see the union separately] and say: "you go, sure lose, reason so and so", which they cannot tell. Sometimes it can be because of Singapore's economy [and the union] tried asking [for] too much*' (Interview 4a: 10).

To the employer:

> '*"you go, your company's name gets spoilt, [actually your company's name is] very good, [so] why go and do all these?" Open court wait [appear in] papers. That's why [in] Singapore, very few go to open court*' (Interview 4a: 10).

Should this fail, the IAC will decide '*how the dispute is to be settled*' (Interview 9f: 3). The outcome of which is final and '*binding on both parties*' (Interview 9f: 3).

The strong emphasis on settlement stems not just from the view that:

> [*The need for arbitration is in itself a kind of failing, since it showed that both parties were unable to compromise with each other and that it is very likely that one party would eventually lose out*] (Interview 15: 10),

but also because victory is uncertain.

Unions may lose their case if it was not presented properly. This is due not just to having the burden of providing evidential documentation that is verifiable, a task that gains added difficulty given the need to negotiate legalist interpretations which employers may exploit to their advantage (see Annex 1.1).

1.5.4 The Arbitration Process and its Implications

Lamenting the present, one union leader remarked that in the past, '*the ministry is quite helpful*' (Interview 5: 7) and '*the registrar of the arbitration [is] very effective*' (Interview 5: 6); '*they are supportive of the workers*' (Interview 5: 6),

> '*if [a] case [is referred] to [the] arbitration court, the arbitration court [would be] very strict with them … ultimately, the management learn … to live with the union and … they also learn [that] when they make profit, they also have to share with the workers*' (Interview 5: 7).

However it is perceived that this is no longer the case; legislation and regulations are perceived to have become increasingly opaque and bureaucratic (technical and difficult to understand) to the extent that that it is felt that the '*ministry and [the] arbitration court [are] not doing their job*' (Interview 5a: 31) (See Annex 1.2).

This is seen to be one of the three elements contributing to the deteriorating situation of unions, which '*over the past 10 or 20 years [have] definitely become [weaker and weaker]*' (Interview 5: 6). The other two being the absence of effective union leadership because '*there is no union leader*' (Interview 5: 6) and unions themselves being '*unable to maintain the members*' (Interview 5: 6).

Additionally, one consequence of having a gradational and systemic dispute resolution system is the notable absence of any industrial actions or strikes, which may only take place should conciliation fails (Singapore Statutes Cap.333); a remote possibility to say the least, given the compulsory and legislatively enforceable nature of arbitration[10].

1.5.5 Employment Practices, Union Organisation and Wage Policies

In Singapore, employment practices are governed primarily by the Employment Act (Chapter 91). There is no stipulation of minimum wage and Part IV of the act, which covers rest days, work hours and other conditions of service, are only applicable to 'workmen' and employees whose [salary does not exceed $2,000 a month][11]. Setting a minimum wage is regarded as a pointless endeavour: '*you can have minimum wage, then you have a black market … There will be people [the foreign workers] willing … to take a lower [pay] than your minimum wage*' (Interview 10: 62).

Employers on the other hand, have full prerogative over promotions, transfers, employment and termination, retrenchment, and the allocation of duties which may not be included into the collectively agreement[12]. This is rationalised as not to place undue constraints on employers and enable the development of a free labour market. However,

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[10] Trade Union Act (Cap. 333) Section 27 (15) – Definition of 'Industrial Action'
[11] Employment Act (Cap. 91) Section 35. (Interview 10: 62) – The stipulation of minimum wage is seen to be a pointless endeavor as it merely encourages the development of a 'black market': '*you can have minimum wage, then you have a black market … There will be people [the foreign workers] willing … to take a lower [pay] than your minimum wage*'.
[12] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 18 (2) (a) – (f)

management have been known to exploit these prerogatives to resist the entry of labour unions into their companies.

Despite having legal provisions to protect union members from discrimination unions still [*have difficulty trying to organise workers*] (Interview 9b: 2) [13]. While part of this is due to '*apathy, ignorance [and] workers' attitudes*' (Interview 9a: 26), employers have also been known to adopt '*union-busting*' (Interview 9a: 24) tactics.

For instance, it is '*very common [for the management to sack the ringleader] trying to get people to join the union*' (Interview 9a: 23). In these cases, even though '*there is protection against victimisation in the law*' very little can be done because '*victimisation is very hard to prove*' (Interview 9: 15). As such, unions have to be '*discreet [in organising unions*' (Interview 11: 11).

The negotiation of wages between employees and employers usually take place without government intervention. But tripartite cooperative efforts between government, employers and labour have seen the establishment of national bodies like the National Wages Council (NWC), whose role is to offer *recommendations* on wage matters such as bonuses and increments (Rosa 1990: 492-3)[14]. These recommendations are made in relation to both productivity gains and the performance of the Singapore economy as a whole (Rosa 1990: 493).

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[13] Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 79 and 80.
[14] The NWC was established in 1972.

The creation of such centralised guidelines serves four main purposes. First, it legitimises organised labour's claim to an equitable share of the economic rewards, and serves as a measure to diffuse and prevent the rise of any potential conflict during collective negotiation thereby preserving industrial peace. Third, having centralised guidelines allow for the preservation of Singapore's economic competitiveness by restricting the share that goes to labour (Rosa 1990: 493).

Lastly, the representation of labour through the NTUC in this tripartite arrangement ensures the organisational involvement – if not subordination – of the labour movement, which can be seen from the higher incidence of NTUC affiliated unions adopting recommendations put forth by the national tripartite body (MOM 2006b: 22)[15].

1.6 Background – NTUC Structure and Organisation

As the sole labour confederacy in Singapore, the NTUC occupies a position of unrivalled dominance, claiming a membership in excess of 460,000 and having 93% of all labour unions – 63 of the 68 labour unions – in the country affiliated with it (NTUC 2007). Given this dominance, it would be an understatement to claim that it heavily influences the character of the labour movement here, making its discussion a necessary one.

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[15] In a survey carried out by the Manpower Ministry, it was found that unionized firms have a higher incidence of adopting the key recommendations put forth by the NWC. Of three key recommendations suggested by the NWC: 1) linking variable bonus to Key Performance Indicators (KPI), 2) implementing a Monthly Variable Component (MVC), and 3) narrowing maximum minimum salary ratio (Max-Min Ratio), the implementation rate by unionized establishments was reported to be 75.6%, 75%, 67.4% for each of the respective recommendation. Contrasted with this, the proportion of non-unionized establishments that implemented the same recommendations was 40.8%, 17.4% and 56.5% respectively (Table 12).

1.6.1. Branch Committee

How are the NTUC and its affiliated unions structured and governed? Beginning at the level of individual labour unions, each union consists of the membership from various branches, with each branch representing workers of a unionised company. Except when there are too few members where it is '*not practical to have a committee*' (Interview 9d: 10), the unionised workers in each branch will elect from amongst themselves a branch committee, who will then function as their representative in liaising with the union or during negotiations with the management[16].

These elections which are seen as '*quite a democratic process*' and '*quite informal, [done] by show of hands or ballot paper*' (Interview 9c: 11), can be done in two ways:

> '*one is to convene a general meeting and then elect there and then; … people are nominated and then the names are put up, and the members at the meeting will vote for each position and the person with the highest vote, say two names may be nominated for chairman so the person with the highest vote becomes the chairman, and then next position is secretary and so on*' (Interview 9c: 11)[17].

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[16] (Interview 9c: 28) – '*less than ten we don't have a committee, we say just appoint one… to be the liaison person*'.

[17] (Interview 9c: 11) – Depending on the arrangement (within the branch), there can be a variation in the sense that the nominee who fails to secure the post contested for may be allowed to fill the next available post. The three most common positions are: Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

'*… another method will be we say ok we will just nominate a committee of x [number of people] because we need x to cover all the departments … the members just nominate and then this x after they have been duly nominated and elected … they will amongst themselves decide who to be chairman and secretary*' (Interview 9c: 11).

The first method where members vote directly for those who wish to stand or have been nominated for a particular position is termed by one interviewee as the '*open system*' (Interview 4b: 2); while the second which is currently used during the selection of the NTUC's Central Committee is called the '*direct system*' (Interview 4b: 2). Although the term-of-office for the Branch Committee (BC) has '*recently [been] amended*' (Interview 9c: 12) to four years, changes and reshuffling may take place when required by circumstances or if deemed necessary by the committee.

More commonly, changes and reshuffling may be the result of members having '*[resigned from the] company*' or in some cases promoted, leading to some positions being '*[left] vacant*' (Interview 9c: 12). In such cases, the committee has the option of conducting a reshuffle of the committee without looking for a replacement member, or they may at their discretion, look for an additional member to replace the member who left or otherwise simply carry on with the status quo till the next election.

However, in some instances it is due to '*the person elected … not performing*' or '*human factor issue [such as] personality cash or people don't work well together*', in which case

'*the IRO (Industrial Relations Officer) have to solve the problem*' by consulting with the committee to either get them '*to talk to the person to make a change or a switch*' (Interview 9c: 12).

1.6.2 Union Executive Committee

One level up from the BC is the Union Executive Committee (EXCO). This body serves principally as the governing body of the union and oversees '*the day-to-day administration of the union*' (Interview 9c: 23). It comprises union delegates who are elected into the committee during the union's triennial delegates' conference – during which '*the EXCO will report back to the delegates who are the branch rep on the finances of the union, the policies, what's been happening over the last 3 years*' (Interview 9c: 22)[18].

In order to stand as a nominee for election into the EXCO, a union member must first be a union delegate, chosen from amongst the members within the BC. Although it is '*normally the rule of thumb … that the branch secretary will be the delegate*' (Interview 9c: 22), this also depends on other factors, key amongst which is the size of the branch the delegate comes from.

While the delegate to members ratio differs from union to union (according to the individual union's constitution), the ratio is usually 1 delegate for every 50 *branch*

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[18] Like the Branch Committee the term-of-office for the Union EXCO is in the midst of being revised into a 4-year term.

members (Interview 8: 1)[19]. Branches that are too small ('*less than ten*') where there is not even a branch committee will not be represented by a delegate, only a '*liaison officer*' who may then '*come as [an] observer*' (Interview 9c: 28)[20].

In order to prevent larger branches, which are predisposed by virtue of their having more delegates, from dominating the EXCO, some unions impose certain restrictions such as stipulating that '*a branch cannot have more than [an x number of individuals] sitting in the EXCO*' (Interview 4b: 4)[21]. It is from this pool of union delegates from the various branches of the union that the EXCO of the union is formed. The process being akin to that which takes place in the BC, where elections may be conducted either in the open or direct system style.

It should however be pointed out that not all EXCO members need to be elected. The constitution of some unions contains provisions that allow some members to be appointed. The '*appointed ones will be the full-time staff, [they are] not from the branch, [they] are full-time employees*' (Interview 9c: 23) – IROs (Industrial Relations Officer).

1.6.3 NTUC Central Committee

At the highest level, the NTUC is governed by the NTUC Central Committee (NTUCCC), '*the decision making body for NTUC*' (Interview 4a: 25); '*a executive*

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[19] We place an emphasis on branch members in order to distinguish this from the general membership of the union, a topic we will discuss later.

[20] An observer has no voting rights.

[21] (Interview 4b: 4) – In the case of this interviewee, only '*maximum 3 can sit in the EXCO*'.

committee of NTUC' (Interview 4a: 22) headed by the NTUC Secretary-General, which decides on a wide range of matters such as the increase in membership dues or the decision to invest union money overseas (ST 2005, 23 Sep)[22]. Comprising 21 members, the NTUCCC is elected once every 4 years; this was a change that was first implemented in 2003. Previously, the NTUCCC election was held once every 3 years (ST 2003, 7 Oct)[23].

The process by which this committee is formed closely resembles that of the union's EXCO: '*each union EXCO will … appoint delegates to the NTUC delegates conference to elect the NTUC EXCO, which is called the Central Committee*' (Interview 9: 21). Similar to the union EXCO, the number of NTUC delegates that may represent each union is dependent on its membership size – both ordinary and general[24].

The system functions on the principle of proportional representation works in such a way:

> '*for the first 400 paid up member 1 delegate for every 25 members or part thereof …. Then 401 to 1,000, 1 delegate for every 50 member ….Above 1,000 paid up members 1 delegate for every 100 member.* ' (Interview 4b: 7)

This illustration was provided by an interviewee to show how the number of delegates an individual union branch was entitled to send to the union EXCO was determined. Our

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[22] (Straits Times 2005: 'Union Membership Fees to Increase Next Year', 23 Sep)
[23] (Straits Times 2003: 'Unionists to Chart Movement's Direction', 7 October) – The last three year term NTUC Central Committee was elected in October 2003.
[24] (Interview 4b: 6) – In addition, the union is allowed to bring in 1 observer for every 1 delegate, though the '*observer got no voting right*'.

reference to it is merely to illustrate that the calculation of delegates a labour union could send to the NTUC delegate conference works on the same principle (ST 2000, 28 Mar)[25].

Although the institution of proportional representation is '*so you will not have dominance of one union*' (Interview 4b: 4), '*there was a lot of argument that it's not fair*' (Interview 4b: 3) to include general branch membership because this way, if '*the industrial unions all vote they will sure win*' since they have '*got a lot of general branch*' members (Interview 4b: 4). What this illustrates is the large representation size of the largest (usually industrial ot general) unions; '*if all the big [unions] can form a coalition and say ok let's all help each other … they can influence something*' (Interview 4b: 5).

It is notable too that the election of the NTUCCC follows the direct system, wherein the NTUC delegates are only responsible for electing the 21 members of the NTUCCC, whereupon these 21 would then amongst themselves decide who would fill what position within the central committee (Interview 4a: 30).

1.7 Turf Management

The NTUC categorises labour unions into four types. 1) General unions; non-industry specific, these unions have a diversity of branches in various industries. 2) Industrial unions; cover specific industries, and are responsible for all branches in that particular industry. 3) Craft/Job unions; represent workers engaged in a particular line of vocation

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[25] (Straits Times 2000: 'Boon Heng Among 23 in NTUC Polls', 28 Mar) – In the 2000 Triennial NTUC Delegates' Conference, there were 359 voting delegates.

or trade; and 4) House unions, which are enterprise based unions that provide representation for bargainable employees within that particular enterprise only.

The categorisation of unions functions as a strategy for '*turf management*' (Interview 3: 1); by establishing specific boundaries so as to prevent unions from '*[entering] into each [other's] turf area. … this guideline was created … for those affiliated unions of [the] NTUC*' (Interview 3: 1). The system works like this:

> '*before the union move into a company to unionise, [they] have to … inform NTUC membership department that [they] intend to move, [if there are] any other union interested in the same company [they] will sit down and discuss which is the proper union to go [in], this is the [rule]*' (Interview 3: 2).

The aim of '*this turf rule is [to create] an understanding*' (Interview 3: 2), which helps to prevent and manage disputes amongst unions when they arise, relying on the NTUC as the central authority figure. However, turf demarcation also has the unintended result of favouring the growth of some unions over others as boundaries limits the unionisation extent of unions, since they cannot unionise beyond their established scope[26].

1.8 Chapter Summary

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[26] A point we shall elaborate on in Chapter 5.

This chapter began with the examination of some approaches used to examine labour unions, in particular, the labour movement in Singapore, and how these approaches possess an overly structural bias, having too much of an institutional emphasis.

Within this context, this study stipulates that examination of institutional-structural conditions must not come at the expense of neglecting the views and role played by agents who participate within the structure, given that it is through their participation that structural conditions and organisations come to be realised, maintained and acquire their distinct characteristics.

In this way, an understanding of Singapore's labour movement, its function and long standing relationship with the government cannot be complete without taking into account the beliefs, perceptions and motivations held by individuals working within it and the structural institutional processes that influence them.

Having established this, the main body of this chapter sought to contextualise this study by providing a cursory examination of the industrial relations system, focusing on the role of labour unions, employment practices, and the manner in which collective bargaining and dispute resolution is carried out. The structure and organisation of the NTUC was then briefly examined, with attention given to the design of its electoral, delegate representation and union management system.

The following chapter will deal with the issue of research methodology. There, I will not only discuss the key methods employed for gathering the data used for this research, but also, some of the research difficulties encountered, ethical concerns, and the referencing method used for citation purposes.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

2.1 Establishing Contact

An early difficulty in this research was to gain entry and establish contacts with potential interviewees. It did not help that I had no personal contacts that might have been able to help in a less officious way, a factor which would have aided the research process given the requisite need for trust and rapport.

This lack of informal contacts led me to embark on the only other viable alternative of making 'prospecting', essentially, making 'cold' calls to various unions and soliciting their help. While prospecting, emphasis was given to target particular unions based on their size and the industry that they covered; a consciousness based on the initial proposal to study the effects of globalisation on particular industries and the response of unions to these changes.

Using this method, I managed to secure interviews with 12 union representatives of unions of varying sizes, representing workers in different industrial sectors[27]. There were inevitably rejections as well, which realistically was unavoidable. While scheduling a first meeting with those who have consented to meet was not difficult, follow-up interviews were much harder to secure; this tend usually to take the form of non-response

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[27] Labour unions had clearly demarcated representational boundaries; they were responsible for representing workers who fell into their sphere of influence which was carved up either along industry category or place of work (in the case of house unions). This allowed for a certain degree of spread in representation. See chapter 1 'Turf Management'.

from email communiqués or politely sidestepping the issue of scheduling another meeting.

While further attempts could have been made to gain access, I felt that it would not be meaningful given the expressed unwillingness of the contact to meet again. In such cases, 'dogged determination' may come across as pushy, pressurising and coercive, compromising researcher-respondent rapport while making it difficult for future research to be conducted in the same field. Thus, follow up meetings and interviews were only made with willing contacts.

2.2 The Problem with Listening to the 'Ayes': Internal or Broad-based Consistency?

The implication of this is that there is a greater reliance on particular sources, opening this thesis to the criticism of having a narrow focus or of being insufficiently representative and therefore partial and inconclusive. In addition, it also raises suspicion on the intentions of the contacts, who may possibly be being motivated by more personal or parochial interests, which again exposes the thesis to accusations of biasness and inaccuracy.

But this risk is both necessary and unavoidable given the degree of subjectivity entailed by the research topic. However, the admittance and acceptance of this risk does not preclude any effort made to address it, and effort has been given to minimise such risk by

cross checking interview data received with known facts, or with interview information that has been gathered through different contacts. Nonetheless the concern is not so much to achieve broad based consistency, which the cross comparison would have (to a degree) provided but to ensure the individual consistency of a contact's narrative.

I have attempted to ascertain this through repetitive questioning, asking similar questions in subsequent interviews. Unexpectedly, this reiterative technique of revisiting previously discussed themes and questions has served at times to elicit new information and issues that were not previously mentioned by the respondent.

2.3 Information Saturation: Trust and the One Voice

Although the consistency, and therefore the reliability, of the views proffered by contacts is of some concern, this was less worrying than the homogeneity of perspectives that I found myself confronting. Contacts (particularly those from NTUC) almost always appear supportive, giving praise and applauding the merits of the labour movement. It was this gulf between what I experienced and the literature critique on this system that influenced my decision on the direction of my research.

This is not to say that no critique can be made of the current industrial relations system, but that respondents are reluctant to of their own volition offer up any such criticisms, and understandably so. The worry expressed by respondents is that I might use the information that they provided in a manner that would result in some negative

repercussions for them. One respondent declined any in-depth discussion with me prior to my producing documentary proof of my student status, speculating that '*for all [he] knows [I] might be from Amnesty International*' (Interview 1).

A far fetched thought, but it highlights the vital importance of trust when conducting research in this field and the disadvantage that a lack of personal contact can place one in such a situation. Even if contacts spoke, they may do so while withholding personal or negative perceptions, given their uncertainty as to how I might handle the information they provide. This may lead them to exercise political correctness by repeating key catchphrases that are vaunted by the institutions they serve in

Barring short-lived contacts, trust may be fostered through long-term constant contact albeit subjected to the willingness of the contacts themselves to do so. In which case, I have found that gaining the confidence of the contact can be greatly aided by supplying a copy of the transcript following each interview. In addition, reiterating the condition of confidentiality and anonymity also helps.

However the effectiveness of these measures is still very much dependent on the willingness of the contacts to accept them on the basis of 'faith', which may be mitigated by the use of interviews as the primary research method. Even then, the use of interviews is not without its problems: the interview's duration constraints the extent and intensity of the interaction with the interviewee and may be inadequate for cultivating rapport; potential momentum may be disrupted by the frequency and time interval between

subsequent interviews; and the role expectation (of 'researcher' and 'interviewee') generated by the formal "set-piece" interview setting might hinder the establishment of a deeper rapport.

Despite the possible setbacks that may arise due to the use of interviews, it would appear that some measure of trust can be secured from the use of interviews. Of the 12 labour representatives approached, I managed to secure a follow-up (second) interview with at least half of them, with the remaining having expressed the openness to meet again. This outcome was rather unexpected and suggests that the use of formal interview may not deter the cultivation of trust and rapport with one's contacts as initially feared[28].

2.4 Research Methodology – Interview

2.4.1 Source and Approach

The interviews were arranged and conducted over a period of two years between 2004 and 2006. A total of 36 interviews were conducted with individuals from 17 different sources. These sources include labour unions and organisations that are part of the industrial relations framework[29]. The duration of the interviews ranged from thirty to forty-five minutes to under three hours, most averaged a period of one to one and a half hours.

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[28] Though admittedly, such an outcome might be regarded as highly subjective and contextualised. Given that union representatives are generally quite wary, their willingness to speak may either be a reflection of trust, or that the information which they are disclosing is something is not something that they would have to worry about saying.

[29] Thirteen sources were from trade unions.

A semi-structured approach was adopted for the interviews; a prepared questionnaire set that covered specific themes and topics served as a guide, but was not adhered to too rigorously, giving flexibility to the manner in which questions were asked and put across to the respondents (Fontana et al 2003: 68).

Respondents were also given latitude to elaborate and speak freely and interjections were kept to a minimum. Follow-up questions were then made on particular points or statements mentioned by the respondent. The aim was to avoid creating an atmosphere that would be too formal and oppressive, trying instead to foster a conversational atmosphere that would hopefully help strengthen rapport with the respondents and make them feel more at ease with speaking up.

2.4.2 Picking Respondents

The majority of the respondents were from the labour unions and effort was taken to target those occupying 'leadership' positions within the unions. These union 'leaders' fall into two distinct categories. The first encompasses individuals employed directly by the labour unions or the NTUC, they can generally be categorised as IROs (Industrial Relations Officers).

Varying in seniority, they are career professionals responsible for the day-to-day administration of the unions and constitute the immediate liaising body between the

union headquarters and its members. The second category of union 'leaders' refers to elected labour union representatives from amongst the 'rank and file' employees of a company or firm[30]. It is individuals from these two (distinct) categories of 'leaders' that constitute our respondents.

This thesis's intention to focus on the individual and how the latter interacts with current social-structural conditions to maintain and realise a mutually reinforcing dialectical dialogue, makes the selection of labour union 'leaders' as the key respondents an appropriate one. To maximise "representativeness" I made attempts to secure interviews from both groups of leaders[31].

Labour union leaders like the IROs and representatives, occupy 'gatekeeper' positions with a role to implement organisational policy and directives, or to represent and further the interests of their members. Our interest then is to see how structural conditions act on and are reinforced in turn by the actions of these labour union leaders.

2.4.3 A Qualitative Approach

The focus on individual leaders and the selection of interviews as the main research method for gathering data reflects the realist ontological approach taken by this thesis, which aims to capture the descriptions and explanations offered by the respondent (Thomas 1993: 34). The rationale for this qualitative approach lies in its focus on the

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[30] See Chapter 1 section 1.5, for the election and appointment process.
[31] I also interviewed non-NTUC union leaders as a way to give more balance to the views and perspectives of NTUC leaders.

individual as the main unit of analysis, which hopefully would yield 'a view from the inside'; capturing the subjective meanings and beliefs that arise from their [active experiences] and shed light on the social processes at work (Allan et al 1991: 178-180; Burgess 1984: 3; Denzin et al 2003:12).

This approach necessarily addresses the issue of how social reality is construed, which in this case stresses the social constructed nature of reality, wherein the latter is not seen as a singular, unchanging, homogeneous monolith, but rather, comprised of a myriad of facets; a montage of the varying interpretations and meanings expressed by individuals (Denzin et al 2003: 5, 8, 12-13).

A common criticism raised in relation to the use of the qualitative approach is the question of the validity of such a research (Denzin et al 2003: 28). But the issue of reliability in this research does not come about from the lack of variety in the research methodology, which would be more of a concern (given the need for triangulation purposes) had the concern of the research been centred on identifying causal relations rather than social processes (Allan et al 1991: 178-179).

Of greater concern is the distortion that could be created as a result of the unwillingness of respondents to share their thoughts, beliefs and interpretations in an honest fashion, which is contingent on the level of rapport and trust established between researcher and respondent – issues which have been addressed previously in the chapter (Wirth 1946:

xx)[32]. But broadly speaking, there appears to be a low level of variation in the responses gathered, which would appear to fulfil the condition of generalizability, though the conclusion on the degree of rapport and trust built remains elusive given its subjective nature and the impossibility of ascertaining it.

In capitalising heavily on the use of interviews, the data collection methodology that this paper utilises offers little difficulty in the way of replication. But the same cannot be said of the results gathered, which is highly contextualised both in terms of the time reference and the data collated, which is subjective and dependent on the personal biography of the respondent involved.

These factors and the varying interpretations that are likely to result from the interview process suggest that uniform accounts are not likely to result (Allan et al 1991: 182). Nevertheless replicability of the study can come in the form of pursuing a similar themed study and the use of the methodology employed (Allan et al 1991: 183).

2.5 Referencing System

Crucially, there is the question as to how data gathered is going to be represented in this thesis. Since this thesis utilises a qualitative approach hinging heavily on the use of

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[32] The key concern here was with the issue of objectivity and the ability to discern 'truth', which Wirth felt is not simply about the simple 'correspondence between thought and existence'. Distortions can still result from 'inadequate perception or incorrect knowledge about oneself' and also 'by the inability or the unwillingness to report ideas and perceptions honestly'.

interviews, there is the matter of referencing them through the use of quotations, an issue which raises the matter of confidentiality.

To uphold the latter and to avoid the possibility of punitive reprisals befalling respondents as a result of what they have said or shared, I would not cite the name of the source for the quotes I would be using, nor would I use any pseudonyms that might suggest the age and gender of the individual.

As I was told, '*[the labour scene in Singapore] is very small*' (Interview 2: 1). It would take only a quick examination to see how true this is, making it difficult to even volunteer 'general' information like 'union size', 'respondent's title' or the industry it represents without revealing which union and whom the respondents were. An endeavour not helped by the classificatory system used to organise the (NTUC) unions[33].

Thus, I would simply use a two set numeral system; the first number denotes which interviewee it is from, the second numeral following the colon denoting the page in which the quote or statement was recorded[34]. In the case of a follow-up interview, an alphabet will be used alongside the first numeral.

2.6 Ethics

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[33] See Chapter 1 'Turf Management'.
[34] All interviews – whether recorded or not – have been transcribed.

Undertaken as an overt research, this study offers little in the way of discussion on issues such like the concealment of the researcher's identity given that respondents in this case are aware of their participation in a research process. In this respect, the issues faced are fairly different, but significantly, three issues deserve mention.

The first is on the matter of openness. How much should be divulged to the respondents with regards to the aims of the study? This is of concern given the restriction of time and the desire on the part of the respondents to 'cut to the chase'; providing too detailed a revelation of the study's aims runs the risk of alienating respondents that do not agree with the themes and the approach of the study, who may either discontinue their participation or try to influence it through withholding particular information and views.

The latter concern is extremely important and as is also correlated with the perceived threat they feel their participation and response might have on the office they that occupy. And this brings us to the second issue of promises; should the researcher honour promises made to respondents? This researcher feels a need to. In seeking the help of respondents, it is sometimes necessary to offer something in return, for example, the provision of the transcript from the interview. The drawback of which arises when respondents asks for the omission of certain parts of the interview from the transcript.

The negotiation of which ties with the third issue of this section that is the protection of the respondents. In the case of this research, any information and quotations extracted from interviews made with respondents will be made with anonymity and as far as

possible not bear any distinguishing characteristics that could result in it being traced

back to the individuals who have provided it. A concern previously addressed.

Chapter 3 – Development of the Modern Labour Movement: Key Events and Historical Background

3.1 Introduction

The aim in this chapter is to examine the historical rise of the labour movement in Singapore, an event intertwined with the advent of the NTUC (National Trades Union Congress), which is itself linked to the country's political history and the ascendancy of the PAP (People's Action Party). The intent is to highlight key events and developments that have influenced the character of the current labour movement, and through this, an understanding of the concerns it is preoccupied with.

3.1.1 Theoretical Significance

Just as the thoughts of individuals are rooted in specific social-historical situations, bound so to speak, with particular 'inherited' situations of the group, the same may be said for institutions (Mannheim 1991: 3). Institutions, which function as a form of social control by making conduct 'more predictable', are created through the 'typification of habitualised actions by types of actors', are historically rooted and need to be understood in relation to the historical circumstances that led to their founding (Berger et al 1966: 71-72, 74, 80)[35].

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[35] 'Habitualisation carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed' (p.71). When speaking of the 'typification of habitualised actions', not only must the institution typify the type of habitualised actions, but they also have to typify the actors, combining the two process to attribute particular type of actions to particular type of actors (p.72).

But because an institution's existence tend to precede the present – representing a divergence from the socio-historical context of its founding – its reality appears as a 'historical one'; this needs to be 'explained' and 'justified' to those in the present (for whom it is not part of their 'biographical memory' and thus have no access to its original meaning) in order for it to maintain its legitimacy (Berger et al 1966: 79).

For institutions to have legitimacy, 'legitimating formulas' need to be incorporated within the 'cognitive and normative interpretations' of subsequent generations (Berger et al 1966: 79). The subsequent legitimacy it yields can then be channelled to supporting its current relevance and to extract compliance (Berger et al 1966: 80).

In this way, this chapter's examination of the labour movement's historical background serves principally as an examination of the 'legitimating interpretations' used to explain the role played by unions presently. It explains not only how the industrial relations order came into being but also forms the basis for its continued legitimation and the 'convincing' socialisation of new union entrants (Berger et al 1966: 79-80)[36].

3.1.2 Organisation of Chapter

Taking 1954, the year in which the PAP was formed as our starting point, there are three identifiable phases that labour underwent. The first phase was marked by the struggle for political control ending with the political triumph of the PAP and the depoliticisation of the labour movement.

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[36] This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

The second phase of national economic modernisation coincided with a similar modernisation process of the labour movement where 'cooperation' became the new guiding philosophy. The third phase witnessed the tightening grip of corporatisation together with an increasing centralisation of the NTUC, an emphasis on enterprise unionism and efforts to stem the decline of union membership.

3.2 Phase I (1954 – 1968) – Period of Struggle: Political Contestation and Depoliticisation

The period between 1954 and 1968 was characterised first by the tumultuous political struggle for independence amidst an internal tussle with communism, and the subsequent post-independence expulsion of Singapore from the Malaysian Federation. It was during the period within the federation where fuelled by the intense political competition and lobbying between political parties for power that organised labour began to mobilise and expand its influence (Deyo 1981b: 37).

Unlike the post-war period where unions operated autonomously, unions, driven by the increasing politicisation, were becoming increasingly tied to political parties, who were dependent on them as bases of populist support and political strategy; as evident during

the 1955 bus and student union demonstrations against the Labour Front government (Anantaraman 1990: 68-69)[37].

3.2.1 'Co-leadership' – Party-Union Synthesis

The politicisation of organised labour peaked in the 1960s with the political contest between PAP and the Barisan Socialis (BS). The latter formed on 17 September 1961 following ideological rifts within the PAP (Deyo 1981b: 37)[38]. This split created a similar division within the union arena as well; the BS was backed by Singapore Amalgamation of Trade Unions (SATU), while the PAP was supported by the NTUC.

The significance of this factionalised alignment is the erosion of the boundary between organised labour and political parties. The close relationship is not limited to a shared outlook between union client and political patron but also includes a 'co-leadership' condition wherein key political figures of the PAP and BS also occupied concurrent leadership positions within their affiliated union organisations, a condition which raises the eventual question as to the fundamental compatibility between the interests of the party and that of labour[39].

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[37] The Singapore Bus Union called for a strike on 13 May 1955 three weeks following David Marshall's government took office, they were joined later by Middle School students who formed a union, conducted campus sit-ins and demanded the exemption of Middle School students from conscription. This led eventually to a bloody confrontation with the police. The Labour Front government later on alleged that members of 'the PAP Central Executive Committee (CEC) members (Fong Swee Suan particularly)' were involved 'in the agitation and riots'.

[38] The PAP formed 'Singapore's first locally autonomous government' in 1959 following the successful mobilization of support from the leftist labour groups.

[39] Individuals like Fong Swee Suan and Devan Nair, who held leadership positions within the BS and PAP respectively, were also at the same time leading union leaders for the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union and the Singapore Teachers Union, which were correspondingly affiliated with the BS and PAP.

3.2.2 Political Triumph and the Consolidation of Organised Labour

In November of 1963 following the PAP's political ascendancy, SATU was denied registration thereby leaving the pro-PAP NTUC as the undisputed ('legitimate') labour confederacy within Singapore (Anantaraman 1990: 73-74; Chua 1995: 17; Chew et al 1989: 53; Heyzer et al 1972: 16)[40].

The demise of SATU spelled the beginning of the depoliticisation of organised labour. An effort aided by the 'Registration and Deregistration' clause of the Trade Unions Act, which enabled the government to deregister any trade union found being 'used for unlawful purposes or against the interests of the workmen' (Anantaraman 1990: 106-107).

Judiciously complemented with the powers of political detention, it placed a stranglehold on the leftist unions, eliminated 'open political opposition' from labour and effectively prevented the use of organised labour as a 'possible [base]' to spearhead 'organised sectional interests' (Chua 1995: 18; Deyo 1981b: 37-38).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the close links between political parties and affiliated trade unions was not new and had already been observed to be in existence during the time of the Labour Front government prior to the internal split within the PAP. See (Anantaraman 1990: 68-69) – The Singapore Bus Union called for a strike on 13 May 1955 three weeks following David Marshall's government took office, they were joined later by Middle School students who formed a union, conducted campus sit-ins and demanded the exemption of Middle School students from conscription. This led eventually to a bloody confrontation with the police. The Labour Front government later on alleged that that 'the PAP Central Executive Committee (CEC) members (Fong Swee Suan particularly)' was involved 'in the agitation and riots'.

[40] The PAP came to power following a snap election on 21 September 1963.

3.2.3 Depoliticisation and the Extension of Restriction

While organised labour was initially depoliticised to deny the political rivals of the PAP a support base, more restrictions were later added. This came in the form of the Trade Union (Amendment) Act and the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill passed in 1966. The most notable feature of the former, now colloquially known as the 'management's prerogative' under the Industrial Relations Act, is to exempt companies from having to negotiate with unions on matters pertaining to [hiring, firing, promotions, and internal transfers] (Chew et al 1989: 54; Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[41]. This together with the latter, which required unions to seek the consensus of members before conducting a secret ballot, heralded a new stage of organised labour relations (Chua 1995: 18; Singapore Statutes Cap.333)[42].

3.3 Phase II (1969 – 1979) – National Survival and the New Role of Organised Labour

The hint of this new role surfaced in 1968 with the introduction of the Employment Act, which reduced employment costs by 'standardising' the amount payable on pay and employment benefits (Chew et al 1989: 54)[43]. Other than reducing labour costs, it also restricted the bargaining scope of unions (Chew et al 1989: 54).

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[41] Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 136), Part III Section 18.
[42] The Trade Union (Amendment) Bill was passed in August 1966. Trade Union Act (Chapter 333), Section 27.
[43] This included 'bonuses, annual leave, overtime, [retirement and retrenchment benefits]'.

The message was clear, 'national development' is the priority (ST 1968, 13 Feb)[44].

Unions and workers were told that 'better working conditions and higher wages' cannot

be attained through militancy, only through hard 'work' (ST 1968, 3 Mar)[45]. Placed

within the context of the impending British withdrawal in 1971 that would render

100,000 individuals 'unemployed or under-employed', it provided justification to the call

for '*intelligent* cooperation between labour, management and Government' (ST 1968, 8

Apr, 14 Apr)[46].

Despite being a collaborative effort, it was labour that was exhorted to make the

'sacrifice' deemed necessary to secure 'national security' and a 'better life for all' (ST

1968, 14 Apr)[47]. The involvement of the NTUC was particularly pertinent, since it

represented more than one quarter of the labour force at the time – '130,000 of

Singapore's 400,000 workers' (ST 1968, 14 Apr)[48].

3.3.1 Why Labour must go Modern

Announced in 1969 at the NTUC's watershed 'Modernisation of the Labour Movement'

seminar, the key emphasis of this 'new approach to trade unionism' was socio-economic

modernisation. It was made clear that the old style trade unionism of militancy and

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[44] (Straits Times 1968: 'Nation before Union', 13th Feb)
[45] (Straits Times 1968: 3rd Mar)
[46] (Straits Times 1968: 8th Apr); (Straits Times 1968: 'Sacrifice Yes, Suicide No', 14th Apr)
[47] (Straits Times 1968: 'Sacrifice Yes, Suicide No', 14th Apr)
[48] (Straits Times 1968: 'Sacrifice Yes, Suicide No', 14th Apr)

'slogan shouting' was now 'obsolete' (NTUC 1970: 33; ST 1969, 5 Oct)[49]. With political

independence, labour's interest was now inseparable from national survival, which

requires rapid industrialisation (NTUC 1970: 19, 21). The success of which is dependent

on creating a stable political environment and a quiescent labour movement (NTUC

1970: 9).

Despite the appeal for cooperation, organised labour in reality had little alternative given

its financial dependence on the government, who contributed $400,000 a year, covering

90% of their running expenses, and the veiled suggestion of a clampdown otherwise (ST

1969, 18 Oct, 15 Nov, 18 Nov)[50].

While not clamping down on labour was explained as being to avoid creating 'submissive

and docile' workers, it also opened the opportunity for the government to extend

stewardship over the labour movement, thereby preventing its organic development

(NTUC 1970: 19)[51]

The extension of the government's influence was aided by an abject decline in union

membership. Between 1962 and 1969, the NTUC lost approximately 12,000 members,

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[49] (Straits Times 1969, 5th Oct) – 'More and more trade unions in Singapore are being stifled by inertia.'
Devan Nair: 'We must wake up to the indignity of being impoverished by an uncritical adhesion to obsolete
concepts of trade unionism'.
[50] (Straits Times 1969: 'NTUC Poised for Plunge into Big Business', 18th Oct) – Statistics cited from Prof
Tom Elliot. (Straits Times 1969: 'Seah: Tell your Woes', 15th Nov), (Straits Times 1969: 'Dependence on
Govt for money Criticised by Delegates', 18th Nov)
[51] It is nevertheless also worth considering if an outright dismantling if the labour movement might have
been in the long term favour of the government. Considering the case of Korea, while outright destruction
of the labour movement might neutralise immediate social and political challenges from organised labour,
it nevertheless leaves open the possibility that a renewed labour movement might arise in some future
period; one that was organically founded, unfettered and not subject to government influence.

while overall union membership declined by almost 60,000 (see Table 1-A) – from 189,000 to 121,000 – creating a loss in morale that saw the membership of the labour movement turning to the government rather than the leaders of the movement itself for leadership (ST 1969, 18 Oct)[52].

Workers' dignity aside, preserving the organised labour movement provided the social network framework for distributing 'a variety of [social] services to the working population'; this contributes to 'economic [development]' and serves also to act as 'an effective instrument in determining public opinion' (NTUC 1970: 6, 11, 14)[53].

3.3.2 Cooperation and Formation of the New Labour Movement

It is undeniable that organised labour's leadership has contributed significantly to this process. However, the decision to modernise the labour movement was not without its detractors. In the period leading up to modernisation, there was widespread disillusionment, criticisms and dissent amongst union leaders who feel that the NTUC's new approach 'towards workers' problems' was 'feeble and compromising' (NTUC 1970: 29).

The new employment legislature, particularly the 'employer's prerogative' – section 18(2) of the Industrial Relations Act – was heavily criticised as being over reliant on the 'employers' benevolence or bureaucratic sympathy', and offering no provisions to

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[52] (Straits Times 1969: 'NTUC Poised for Plunge into Big Business', 18th Oct) – Statistics.
[53] Example of social services include education, housing, financial assistance, as well as skill planning and upgrading.

safeguard union organisers from arbitrary termination (ST 1969, 15 Nov; ST 1972, 6 Mar)[54].

The government was dismissive of those who expressed such opinions, viewing them as holding onto 'old habits and attitudes' that were detached from the reality of today[55]. However, the denunciation underlined the importance of the union leadership's support in enacting modernisation reforms. From here on, any distinction remaining between government and organised labour would be further eroded.

3.3.3 Modernisation and Change

Aside from 'cooperation' (between union and management), there was also concern with 'equitability', wherein it was necessary for workers to share in the benefits of growth, as reflected through their wages (ST 1972, 4 Mar, 20 Aug)[56]. This reflected a cognizance in the existence of a class of economically 'less favoured citizens' and their potentially destabilising effect if ignored (ST 1972, 24 Apr)[57].

One of labour's (new) role was to address this through the establishment of consumer cooperatives, which aim to provide affordable goods and services to workers in the 'middle and lower income groups', an aspect that the [*NTUC has become synonymous*

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[54] (Straits Times 1969: 15th Nov), (Straits Times 1972: 'Amend Labour Laws, Urges Industrial Policy Committee', 6th Mar)

[55] If anything, these views are still being expressed in the present, as will be shown in Chapter 5.

[56] (Straits Times 1972: 'Prosperity only if "Nationalcake" is Shared Fairly'; 'Wages must Reflect our Affluence', 4th Mar), (Straits Times 1972: 'Continuing Working Closely with Management, Ong tells Union', 20th Aug)

[57] (Straits Times 1972: 'Help Less Favoured Citizens, Devan Urges Elite', 24th Apr)

and identified with] (Interview 17: 19) (ST 1972, 20 Oct, 6 Nov)[58]. While doing this '*[addressed] social issues*' (Interview 17: 2), it also enabled the labour movement to attain financial independence thereby aiding its modernisation process (ST 1969, 10 Nov)[59].

3.3.4 New Union Leadership

The shift towards corporatisation also encompassed a determination to break away from 'old style' slogan shouting, table thumping style of unionism, which involved an advocacy to reshape the labour movement's leadership, both qualitatively and in terms of its relationship with the government (ST 1972, 14 Feb)[60].

The traditional practice of selecting union leaders from amongst the ranks of the union membership is incompatible and unable to meet the requirements of modernisation and corporatisation, which require individuals with higher qualifications (ST 1972, 14 Feb; ST 1979, 22 Apr)[61]. The subsequent drive to recruit 'talent' from outside the ranks of the unions came to be seen as a pretext for inducting members of the political elites into the

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[58] (Straits Times 1972: '$400,000 From Public for Co-op Mart', 6th Nov; 'NTUC to set up Consumer Co-op Supermarkets' 20th Oct) – Initial cooperatives include INCOME, which provides insurance coverage; COMFORT in the field of transportation; and Fairprice, a supermarket chain.

[59] (Straits Times 1969: '"Machines" Role for Trade Unionists', 10th Nov) – 'The struggle today is not against employers as such nor against Governments, but against the very conditions that impede economic growth'.

[60] (Straits Times 1972: 'What a Union Leader Must Develop', 14th Feb)

[61] (Straits Times 1972: 'What a Union Leader Must Develop', 14th Feb), (Straits Times 1979: 'Unions Told to be Cautious in Ventures', 22 Apr)

labour movement and the reciprocal cooptation of 'promising unionists' into the party ranks (ST 1979: 1 May)[62].

However intimate or cooperative the labour-ruling party relationship appears as a result of the cooptation-induction process, it is still premised on the subordination of labour. This has been justified on the basis that the parochial social interests represented by labour cannot take precedence over 'long-term national interests', hence the dominance of the political elites (BT 1979, 1 May; ST 1980, 11 Jan)[63].

A somewhat incoherent assertion given that the objectives of the PAP and the NTUC are supposed to be similar (ST 1979, 1 May)[64]. This suggests that the interests of organised labour may not necessarily be similar to the national interests and the role of the NTUC is to bring about such an alignment. Similarly, even if affiliated, the views of individual unions may not necessarily be in agreement with the NTUC.

3.3.5 Reaction to Reorganisation and Other Developments

The revamp of the NTUC and the uncertain role of trade unions led to a 'slower growth' of its membership (ST 1980, 11 Jan)[65]. Between 1977 and 1979, NTUC membership

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[62] (Straits Times 1979: 'Search for Second Line Union Leaders, Test for top 2 or 3', 1st May)
[63] (Business Times 1979: 'Lee on the Ideal Leaders, Changing of the Union Guard', 1st May) – 'This is the first lesson of life in Singapore unions: that the political leadership is supreme' – The Prime Minister's (Lee Kwan Yew) May Day message to the labour movement. (Straits Times 1980: 'Uncertainty over Union's Role Hits Membership', 11th Jan)
[64] (Straits Times 1979: 'Search for Second Line Union Leaders, Test for top 2 or 3', 1st May)
[65] (Straits Times 1980: 'Uncertainty over Union's Role Hits Membership', 11th Jan)

increased by approximately 14,400 members, less than the period between 1974 and 1976 where membership rose by around 22,700 members (see Table 3A) (BT 1979, 7 Nov)[66].

Despite the slower rate of union membership, the 10-year period between 1969 and 1979 saw the NTUC expand its membership by 159%, representing 95% of the total organised labour's membership (BT 1979: 7 Nov)[67]. On the other hand, non-NTUC unions have been declining; the same 10-year period, saw them lose some 61.6% of their membership, their proportion of the overall membership base also fell, from 26.2% in 1969 to 5% by 1979 (see Table 3A) (BT 1979, 7 Nov)[68]. The unassailable dominance of the NTUC confederacy also concludes the rivalry that previously existed within the labour movement. However, it also raised the question as to what role unions would play in the future.

The intention was for unionism to extend beyond the confines of industrial relations and job regulation, to participate in national initiatives that comprise both corporate and social-policy aspects (ST 1980, 11 Jan)[69]. The former called for the development of 'profitable business ventures' that would offer it financial sufficiency, while the latter envisioned the NTUC being actively involved in the training and education of its

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[66] (Business Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7th Nov)
[67] (Business Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7th Nov) – Figures.
[68] (Business Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7th Nov) – Figures.
[69] (Straits Times 1980: 'Uncertainty over Union's Role Hits Membership', 11th Jan)

Table 3A: Growth of Trade Unions in Singapore (1969 - 1979)

Year	Unions	Total Membership	NTUC Membership	Percentage of NTUC membership to total organised labour (%)	Non-NTUC Membership	Percentage of Non-NTUC membership to total organised labour (%)
1969	112	120,053	88,558	73.8%	31,495	26.2%
1970	102	112,488	85,422	75.9%	27,066	24.1%
1971	100	124,350	96,227	77.4%	28,123	22.6%
1972	97	166,988	142,162	85.1%	24,826	14.9%
1973	92	191,481	168,090	87.8%	23,391	12.2%
1974	90	203,561	189,214	93.0%	14,347	7.0%
1975	89	208,561	197,510	94.7%	11,051	5.3%
1976	91	221,936	211,956	95.5%	9,980	4.5%
1977	90	229,056	215,522	94.1%	13,534	5.9%
1978	89	236,907	226,257	95.5%	10,650	4.5%
1979	86	242,014	229,932	95.0%	12,082	5.0%

Figures: (Business Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7th Nov) - Amendment has been made to the 1969 "Percentage of NTUC membership to total organised labour", the original figure printed in the newspaper was 71.3%.

members (ST 1979, 5 Sep; ST 1980, 8 Aug)[70]. It is through such national initiatives that the NTUC and the PAP-led government hope to win greater appeal (Wright 1996: 102).

3.4 Phase III (1980 – 1997) Restructuring and Expansion

3.4.1 Structural Reorganisation: Centralisation and Control

If the previous phase saw the increasing corporatisation and professionalisation of the labour movement, the third phase saw its actualisation. A key development within the NTUC was the appointment of its Secretary-General (then Lim Chee Onn) as a Minister Without Portfolio as part of symbiotic relationship between union and party – introduced earlier in having MPs perform a 'dual function' (ST 1979, 5 Sep; ST 1980, 15 Sep)[71].

Other than closely linking the NTUC and political leadership, such an appointment is viewed favourably as: 1) it gives labour a cabinet level presence to represent their problems and interests, 2) which allows both labour and government to identify common goals and coordinate their efforts to attaining them (ST 1980, 15 Sep, 16 Sep)[72]. But most importantly, 3) this would ensure 'support for the decisions and policies of the government' (ST 1980, 15 Sep)[73].

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[70] (Business Times 1980: 'The Challenge of the Eighties', 8th Aug), (Straits Times 1979: 'A Glimpse of Singapore in the Eighties (Part 5) – Industrial Thrust: NTUC is at Vanguard', 5th Sep)

[71] (Straits Times 1979: 'A Glimpse of Singapore in the Eighties (Part 5) – Industrial Thrust: NTUC is at Vanguard', 5th Sep), (Straits Times 1980: 'To Preserve PAP-NTUC Ties, Chee Onn made Minister', 15 Sep)

[72] (Straits Times 1980: 'To Preserve PAP-NTUC Ties, Chee Onn is made Minister', 15 Sep), (Straits Times 1980: 'Unions Hail Chee Onn's Appointment: "Positive Step to Bring Labour's Voice into Cabinet"', 16 Sep)

[73] (Straits Times 1980: 'To Preserve PAP-NTUC Ties, Chee Onn is made Minister', 15 Sep)

Indeed, it was suggested that the 'dual role' of MPs is to an extent mooted to prevent situations where labour and government are in disagreement from arising, and should it arise, ensure that it would be what the government prescribes that would prevail (ST 1980, 16 Sep)[74].

3.4.2 Indeterminate Deferment[75]

Aside from cautioning against assuming unison of interest between state and labour (particularly with respect to individual labour unions), the above also indicates that a gulf exists between state and labour in terms of their claim-making authority. The state's dominance here enables it to practice a process of *indeterminate deferment*. This essentially refers to its authority to deny, dismiss or postpone any claims, demands or challenges on the basis of them being deemed 'inappropriate' given the existence of other more crucial and pressing matters.

The assumption is that the government is: 1) objective; 2) knowledgeable, knowing and able to decide what is 'best'; 3) and possesses the moral integrity and therefore could be entrusted with the duty of making the 'right' decisions, which they are acknowledged to

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[74] (Straits Times 1980: 'Unions Hail Chee Onn's Appointment: "Positive Step to Bring Labour's Voice into Cabinet"', 16 Sep)

[75] 'Indeterminate deferment' is intended to be a description of the manner/process by which the government handles claims/demands/challenges that it does not agree with; namely through denial, dismissal or postponement. This is different and needs to be differentiated from the stated ideology that guides government action, i.e. the basis and principle/s which the government uses to guide and make its decisions, namely *pragmatism*. The latter having been adequately covered by Chua in 'The Communitarian Ideology' (p. 68-9, 74-5). In it, he established that the 'overriding goal of PAP pragmatism was to ensure continuous economic growth'. In fact it is even contended that pragmatism might be seen as a form of rational choice and therefore non-ideological (p.68).

have done, given their success in 'delivering the goods' and 'improving the lives of the people', a success which serves to strengthen, legitimise and validate, their claim and decision-making authority (Chua 1995: 3, 74).

As such, the ministerial appointment of the NTUC's Secretary-General and the 'dual role' of MPs serve a double mandate: to enhance the cooperative-symbiotic relationship between government and organised labour, and to exercise a degree of control over organised labour (BT 1979, 1 May; ST 1980, 16 Sep)[76].

3.4.3 Restructuring Unions – House Unions

This period also saw the organisational restructuring of labour unions. Previously organised along the line of industrial unions, there was a shift from 1984 towards the formation of House Unions, a move that was met with a mixture of approval and unhappiness at the same time (ST 1984, 29 Apr)[77]. While it claimed to offer members greater participation and 'ownership' over their own unions, it was also motivated in part by unhappiness and suspicion over the years towards the larger unions and their officials, who it was felt, had too much power and influence.

3.4.3.1 The Phey Scandal and its Aftermath

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[76] (Straits Times 1980: 'Unions Hail Chee Onn's Appointment: "Positive Step to Bring Labour's Voice into Cabinet"', 16 Sep) – 'if the union leadership challenged the political leadership, political leaders must triumph.', see also (Business Times 1979: 'Lee on the Ideal Leaders, Changing of the Union Guard', 1st May)

[77] (Straits Times 1984: 'The Big House Union Debate', 29 Apr) – Organising along industrial lines, does not mean industrial bargaining.

This is best exemplified by the Phey Yew Kok scandal. Phey, a Chairman of the NTUC and once MP (1972), misappropriated union funds and later absconded to avoid criminal prosecution (ST 1979, 4 Dec, 11 Dec)[78]. In the ensuing fallout, Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation, Pioneer Industries and Employees Union (SILO-PIEU), two of the three unions where Phey was the General-Secretary, were restructured into 10 industry-wide unions (ST 1980, 16 Mar, 6 Apr)[79].

The intent was for house unions to mitigate the vulnerability and predisposition of large unions like SILO-PIEU to abuse, since they amassed 'too much power over too many workers in the hands of too few individuals' (ST 1980, 16 Mar)[80]. The greater concern however, was that large unions with their sizeable membership bases may be exploited and used to undermine or depose the 'existing economic and political system' (ST 1980, 17 Mar)[81].

Thus, whether it is for the purpose of reducing graft and 'mismanagement', or preventing political usurpation from rogue union leaders, both highlight the risk inherent with the

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[78] (Straits Times 1979: 'Under Investigation' Devan, "Phey Quits 3 Posts"', 4 Dec), (Straits Times 1979: 'NTUC Chairman charged', 11 Dec) – Phey once the MP for Boon Teck (1972), was charged (1979-1980) for contravening the Trade Unions Act and for Criminal Breach of Trust involving $100,265.
[79] (Straits Times 1980: 'Omnibus Unions to go in 18 Months, Smaller ones will be set up and Devan Warns of Bloody Noses for those who try to Block the Path', 16 Mar), (Straits Times 1980: 'Restructuring will take 12 – 18 Months, SILO and PIEU to be Split into 10 Unions', 6 Apr) – The proposal was for unions to be split into these 10 broad categories: 1) electrical electronics; 2) textiles, spinning, garments and leather; 3) metal industries and machineries; 4) shipbuilding, repairing, oil engineering and oil rigs; 5) timber, woodworks and paper products; 6) chemicals, gases, pharmaceutical, plastics and rubber; 7) building, construction and cement productions; 8) transport; 9) food and beverage; 10) and a 'general industries division for industries that cannot be classified under the other headings'.
[80] (Straits Times 1980: 'Omnibus Unions to go in 18 Months, Smaller ones will be set up and Devan Warns of Bloody Noses for those who try to Block the Path', 16 Mar)
[81] (Straits Times 1980: 'Never Again', 17 Mar)

over-centralisation of leadership and control within large unions, thereby providing the *raison d'être* for their [dismantlement] (ST 1980, 17 Mar)[82].

3.4.3.2 Towards House Unionism

The establishment of House Unionism raised the consideration as to the extent to which decentralisation and the devolution of authority should be carried out (ST 1979, 7 Nov; ST 1980, 17 Mar)[83]. It was agreed that so long as the preconditions of, a 'right [workforce size], good climate of union-management relations,' capable union leadership and 'financial viability', were met, affiliates of industry unions could break away and establish themselves independently so long as it was in the 'workers' interests' (ST 1984, 28 Apr, 29 Apr)[84].

Despite these requisites, objections continued to be raised (ST 1984, 21 Mar)[85]. There was fear of a loss in privileges, of being disadvantaged when negotiating with

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[82] (Straits Times 1980: 'Never Again', 17 Mar)

[83] (Straits Times 1980: 'Never Again', 17 Mar), (Straits Times 1979: 'seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7 Nov) – The shift towards house unionism was a direct reversal of the decision made during the trade union seminar conducted in 1969, which called for amalgamation of 'all small unions into big effective unions'.

[84] (Business Times 1984: 'Ong Clears the Air Over House Unions – By Lucy Ng', 28 Apr), (Straits Times 1984: 'The Big House Union Debate', 29 Apr) – The survivability of both the would-be House Union and the former union to which it was previously affiliated being a crucial consideration.

[85] (Straits Times 1984: 'House Unions: Decisions left to Members', 21 Mar) – The formation of House Unions depended on the outcome of a referendum conducted through secret ballot. Allegations were made by Mr Jeyaretnam that union members (of SATU – Singapore Air Transport Union) were being coerced to form house unions.

management, and in particular, about the long-term sustainability of house unions due to its smaller membership base (BT 1984, 28 Apr; ST 1984, 19 Jan, 18 Apr)[86].

While the Phey scandal was unequivocally important in influencing the formation of house unions, it was not the only factor involved (ST 1984, 10 Jul)[87]. Economic motives also played a great role; it is hoped that promoting greater cooperation between unions, workers and management would foster closer worker identification with their company, thereby [reducing industrial strife] and raising productivity (BT 1984, 26 Jul; ST 1984, 26 Apr, 28 Jul)[88].

3.4.4 Declining Union Membership

Interestingly, union membership declined during this restructuring (BT 1984, 15 Aug)[89]. NTUC membership, which represented 96.4% of all union membership in 1983, had

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[86] (Business Times 1984: 'Ong Clears the Air Over House Unions – By Lucy Ng', 28 Apr), (Straits Times 1984: 'Teng Cheong gives Assurance: Privileges won't be lost with House Unions', 19 Jan), (Straits Times 1984: 'Teng Cheong's Plea to Affiliates: "Help the House Unions Financially"', 18 Apr)

[87] (Straits Times 1984: 'Laws to Check Powers of Union Leaders – By Ivan Lim', 10 Jul) – There was emphasis on 'collective leadership' and proposed changes to the election process of key union officials, which aimed to institute greater accountability and prevent the rise of domineering 'strongmen'. In order to impede the cultivation of a personal following, the proposal was made to replace the current system 'where the president, general secretary and treasurer are individually elected by the rank-and-file or delegates. Under such a system, the general secretary for example was not beholden to the executive council and could thus 'act at will and ignore the views of the other officials'. The new system on the other hand, proposes the need for the general secretary to have the 'backing of most – if not all – members of his committee.

[88] (Business Times 1984: 'Teng Cheong Shares His Views on Qualities of Good Union Official', 26 Jul), (Straits Times 1984: 'It will be Suicidal to go back to Old-Style Trade Unionism: Teng Cheong – "Table Thumping Days are Over"', 26 Apr), (Straits Times 1984: 'Unionists with Primitive Ideas: Dhana Rebukes those who are Against Union – By Ivan Lim', 28 Jul)

[89] Though there are still labour unions that are not affiliated with the NTUC still in existence, they nevertheless make up only a small portion of the overall union membership; in 1983, the total union membership figure stands at 205,155, out of which 198,280 are members of NTUC-affiliated labour unions. This essentially means that the NTUC membership is responsible for 96.4% of the total labour union membership figures, while the proportion represented by non-NTUC unions are 3.4% - or 6875 in

declined by 16% after peaking at 236,630 in 1979 (BT 1984, 15 Aug)[90]. Overall, although the percentage of organised workers rose from 17.3% in 1970 to 25.5% in 1978, it declined to 23.1% in 1980 and fell further to 19.1% in 1982 (ST 1979, 7 Nov; ST 1984, 10 Jun)[91].

3.4.4.1 Why Decline?

This decline was attributed to several factors: Firstly, workers were less reliant on unions as economic growth and full-employment made it easy to find jobs (BT 1984, 28 Jul, 19 Sep; ST, 19 Sep)[92]. Secondly, there is no tangible impetus for workers to join unions, since the 'pay and fringe benefits between unionised and non-unionised workers were undifferentiated (BT 1984, 28 Jul)[93].

Third, improved relationship between workers and management due to 'enlightened management' – and ironically 'responsible unionists' – contributed to workers' apathy and ignorance, towards union membership (BT 1984, 19 Sep; ST 1984, 19 Sep)[94]. Lastly,

real figures. Figures from: MOM – See file Thesis – Data and Tables "Union Membership from 1960" and (Business Times 1984: 'NTUC Looks into Ways of Stopping Membership Fall', 15 Aug). Hence, given that the large proportion of union membership belongs to NTUC-affiliated unions, reference to NTUC unions membership will be deemed to be akin to a representation of the national figures, with necessary clarifications made when necessary.

[90] (Business Times 1984: 'NTUC Looks into Ways of Stopping Membership Fall', 15 Aug)

[91] (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions' Shrinking Membership', 10 Jun) – Published figures from Ministry of Labour. (Straits Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7 Nov) – It should be pointed out that the percentage of NTUC membership of total organized labour membership was 76% (1970), 93% (1974), 95.5% (1976) and 95.5% (1978).

[92] (Business Times 1984: 'Unions must Show Employers where the National Interests Lies', 28 Jul), (Business Times 1984: 'Union Membership Likely to Worsen as Full Employment Continues – By Foo Choy Peng', 19 Sep), (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions Must Serve All – Chok Tong', 19 Sep)

[93] (Business Times 1984: 'Unions must Show Employers where the National Interests Lies', 28 Jul)

[94] (Business Times 1984: 'Union Membership Likely to Worsen as Full Employment Continues – By Foo Choy Peng', 19 Sep), (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions Must Serve All – Chok Tong', 19 Sep)

retrenchments within the manufacturing sector, the traditional base of union membership, which led to a 25% fall in membership (BT 1985, 1 Apr)[95].

3.4.4.2 Response to Decline

While both labour and government leaders voiced a need to stem the decline, no concrete plans were surfaced. Instead, the government continued to emphasise how labour unions 'existed to look after the interests of the masses and not their members' welfare alone' (BT 1984, 19 Sep; ST 1984, 19 Sep)[96]. This, and the 'free-rider' problem, where non-union members enjoyed the benefits won by union members provided little incentive for workers to take up union membership (ST 1984, 19 Sep; ST 1985, 31 Mar)[97].

While it is understandable that union membership would decline in times of economic growth and full-employment, the reverse is not necessarily true; unions are not better placed to extend protection or make demands during economic downturns either (BT 1984, 28 Jul, 19 Sep)[98].

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[95] (Business Times 1985: 'Unions face Real Problem of Continuing Decline in Membership: Where are all the Members?', 1 Apr)

[96] (Business Times 1984: 'Union Membership Likely to Worsen as Full Employment Continues – By Foo Choy Peng', 19 Sep), (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions Must Serve All – Chok Tong', 19 Sep)

[97] (Straits Times 1985: 'NTUC Chief Against Membership by Force, Teng Cheong: Up to Unions to Woo Members', 31 Mar), (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions Must Serve All – Chok Tong', 19 Sep) – It was expressed that benefits won by unions should not be confined only to union members.

[98] (Business Times 1984: 'Union Membership Likely to Worsen as Full Employment Continues – By Foo Choy Peng', 19 Sep) – 'Unions cannot expect membership to rise when there is full employment in Singapore… suggested that the situation would have been different if there were massive unemployment as in Britain's case.' Contrast with (Business Times 1984: 'Unions Must Show Employers where the National Interest Lies', 28 Jul) – 'Mr Dhanabalan told workers that it is also important to be a union member because there is no guarantee that there will always be full employment and prosperity'.

Given this, why would workers join unions when there is no obvious benefit to be derived? Ong Teng Cheong (then Secretary-General of the NTUC) attributed this to union leaders, whose dedication and commitment is crucial in both motivating workers to join unions and in retaining current members (BT 1985, 1 Apr; ST 1985, 31 Mar)[99].

Despite initial claims that the union would not compel membership, the pressure to halt membership decline, led the NTUC to eventually discriminate against non-union members (BT 1985, 25 Mar; ST 1985, 25 Mar, 31 Mar, 2 Apr)[100]. This illustrates that despite being the unopposed labour confederation, the NTUC is still not invulnerable to populist demands, having to pay attention and (sometimes) accede to the demands of its membership (ST 1985, 2 Apr)[101]. It also raises the question as to the possibility and viability of deeming it necessary for unions to serve 'everybody' as insisted by the political leadership (ST 1984, 19 Sep)[102].

3.4.5 Continued Membership Expansion and other Developments

Membership concerns never quite subsided, and in the 1990s, efforts were made to expand union ranks by opening union membership to executives, and later through the

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[99] (Business Times 1985: 'Unions face Real Problem of Continuing Decline in Membership: Where are all the Members?', 1 Apr), (Straits Times 1985: 'NTUC Chief Against Membership by Force, Teng Cheong: Up to Unions to Woo Members', 31 Mar)

[100] (Business Times 1985: 'NTUC Getting Less Fees from Union Members', 25 Mar) – 'Affiliation fees received from member union fell by 5 per cent to $2.89 million compared with $3.03 million for 1983/84.', (Straits Times 1985: 'NTUC's Plan to Stem Decline', 25 Mar), (Straits Times 1985: 'NTUC Chief Against Membership by Force, Teng Cheong: Up to Unions to Woo Members', 31 Mar), (Straits Times 1985: 'Ong: NTUC will Discriminate against Non-Union Members', 2 Apr)

[101] (Straits Times 1985: 'How to Arrest Declining Membership: Discriminate Where Possible – Says NTUC Chief', 2 Apr), (Straits Times 1985: 'Ong: NTUC will Discriminate against Non-Union Members', 2 Apr) – 'Are we stressing too much on long term interests and not enough on immediate benefits?' – Address by Mr Ong Teng Cheong at the Fifth Triennial NTUC-Delegates Conerence.

[102] (Straits Times 1984: 'Unions Must Serve All – Chok Tong', 19 Sep)

'General Branch' membership scheme. Interestingly, this was not framed as a membership issue, but recognition of the changing composition of the workforce and the NTUC's need to cater to them (BT 1990, 7 Jan)[103].

However, unlike 'regular' membership, executive ('associate') members will not be allowed to hold office, participate in collective bargaining, speak at meetings or be given representation (BT 1990, 14 Feb; ST 1990, 20 Feb)[104]. The main attraction of an associate membership lay in the tangible gains via the NTUC Club Card scheme, which offers various discounts and privileges (BT 1990, 14 Feb)[105]. This emphasis on 'recreational and consumer benefits' essentially reduced labour unions into social clubs (ST 1990, 20 Feb)[106].

3.4.5.1 General Branch Membership

The attempt to address the membership problem led to the introduction of the general branch membership in 1992 (ST 1992, 5 Mar)[107]. The aim was to halt membership decline, by raising the overall membership base and addressing the high turnover of members (ST 1990, 20 May)[108].

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[103] (Business Times 1990: 'NTUC Acts to Cater for Needs of more Sophisticated Members', 7 Jan)
[104] (Business Times 1990: 'Executives can now Join Trade Unions', 14 Feb), (Straits Times 1990: 'Storm in a Teacup', 20 Feb)
[105] (Business Times 1990: 'Executives can now Join Trade Unions', 14 Feb) – The card offers various discount schemes and privileges such as free admission to public swimming pools.
[106] (Straits Times 1990: 'Storm in a Teacup', 20 Feb)
[107] (Straits Times 1992: 'Trade Unions to set up General Branches to Recruit Members', 5 Mar) – This was an extension of the associate membership programme.
[108] (Straits Times 1990: 'High Turnover of Union Members Eroding Gains Made', 20 May)

There were still a substantial number of 'bargainable but not organised' workers, glossed over mainly because they were employed in small and medium size enterprises which were difficult and not seen to be worth the effort it takes to organise them (ST 1990, 20 May)[109].

The situation was not helped by the 1985 recession and the subsequent wave of resignations, retrenchments and tight labour market thereafter, which acted as disincentives for joining the unions (ST 1990, 20 May)[110]. The general branch membership allowed workers in small enterprises and the non-unionised sector to join as members, albeit without the coverage of representation and collective agreement, (ST 1992, 5 Mar)[111].

Similar to the associate membership, the key attraction of general branch membership lay in the tangible benefit of providing cost savings at NTUC operated supermarkets or cooperatives (ST 1992, 3 Apr, 19 May)[112]. But despite the introduction of this new form of membership, union membership is still being encouraged on the basis of the 'traditional' (namely representation, the safeguarding of rights and compensation) benefits (that general branch membership does not confer), which is still necessary given

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[109] (Straits Times 1990: 'High Turnover of Union Members Eroding Gains Made', 20 May)
[110] (Straits Times 1990: 'High Turnover of Union Members Eroding Gains Made', 20 May)
[111] (Straits Times 1992: 'Trade Unions to set up General Branches to Recruit Members', 5 Mar) – '…it would not be viable to carry out such negotiations [of collective agreements] for members of general branches working for companies with fewer than 20 workers.'
[112] (Straits Times 1992: 'NTUC to Launch Massive Recruitment Campaign', 3 Apr), (Straits Times 1992: 'More than 5,000 Apply to be NTUC Members', 19 May) – 'Mrs Yu-Foo, who is the MP for Yuhua, said that the applicants were attracted by NTUC Club facilities and rebates offered by NTUC FairPrice [supermarket].'

that victimisation and intimidation still occurs (BT 1992, 30 Apr; BT 1992, 3 Jun; ST 1990, 20 Oct; ST 1992, 3 Jun)[113].

3.4.6 End of Phase III

The above illustrates the difficulty faced by the NTUC in managing their sometimes incompatible aims; while it tries to raise membership by emphasising 'social benefits', it also simultaneously stress the benefits of its 'traditional' function, but yet, have expressed an unwillingness to organise new members when it is 'not viable' to represent them.

But all this is peripheral to the centrally held belief of the NTUC, which is that 'workers cannot achieve freedom and peace if they do not have decent jobs' (ST 1992, 9 Apr, 13 Jul, 16 Oct)[114]. In this respect, the role of the union is viewed to ensure workers will continue to have 'bread' – in a competitive economy – by raising their skills and keeping them employable (ST 1992, 13 Jul, 16 Oct, 14 Nov)[115]. A more understated role of the NTUC lies in its shoring up political support for the government. While this was clear at

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[113] (Business Times 1992: 'Unionised Workers Enjoy More Safeguards: Teng Cheong', 30 Apr) – 'Only 4.5 per cent of non-unionised workers had the benefit of an extended retirement age'. (Straits Times 1990: 'Bosses Unreasonable? Teach them a Lesson: Teng Cheong', 20 Oct), (Business Times 1992: 'OCBC Finance Using Scare Tactics', 3 Jun) – 'The Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union (SMMWU) has accused OCBC-Finance of using scare tactics to prevent its officers from joining the union', (Straits Times 1992: 'Execs Allegedly Harassed over Union Membership', 3 June) – The listed scare tactics included: 'Calling up officers to dissuade them from joining the union; indicating that officers would be interviewed personally by the general manager of they persisted in signing on; threatening to deploy the officers to do personnel work, thus making them ineligible for union membership'.

[114] (Straits Times 1992: 'Workers "must have jobs first to achieve freedom"', 9 Apr), (Straits Times 1992: 'Unions Expected to Maintain "relevant role in the 90s"', 13 Jul), (Straits Times 1992: 'Singapore faces Stiff Competition in Race for Economic Growth, Unionists told. "Work together or be left behind" – PM Goh', 16 Oct)

[115] (Straits Times 1992: 'Unions Expected to Maintain "relevant role in the 90s"', 13 Jul), (Straits Times 1992: 'Singapore faces Stiff Competition in Race for Economic Growth, Unionists told. "Work together or be left behind" – PM Goh', 16 Oct), (Straits Times 1992: 'Aussie, S'pore Unionists Provide Poignant Study in Contrasts', 14 Nov)

the onset of the NTUC's formation, it has grown increasingly oblique with the 'depoliticisation' of labour.

While reciprocal endorsement for each other's policy initiatives hinted at the 'mutual support' between the government and the NTUC, the expectation for affiliated unions to offer their political support was directly stated during the 1992 by-election, where the NTUC warned of potential political instability and the loss of investor confidence in Singapore should the Goh Chok Tong led PAP team lose the election (ST 1992, 19 Dec)[116].

3.5 Summary – Themes and Issues

The aim in this chapter was to trace the development of the modern labour movement in (post-independence) Singapore, one which is synonymous and inextricably linked with the development of the NTUC, which represents a dominant proportion of the overall labour union membership. Examining the key structural and legislative developments that took place within the NTUC during the socio-economic and political context of the time, enable us to understand the NTUC and the labour movement of the present.

From its heavily politicised beginning, the NTUC has continued to adapt itself according to changes the political landscape, unions' roles have also been continuously redefined. Now depoliticised and having their industrial scope restricted by legislature, labour

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[116] (Straits Times 1992: 'PAP Loss will Affect all Workers in S'pore: NTUC', 19 Dec)

unions have been presented with the need to embrace economic competitiveness as the only plausible means to safeguard the long-term interests of workers effectively.

Reviewing the socio-historical circumstances that led to the present-day system of industrial relations and the established role of labour unions helps us understand how it is used to justify it to those in the present; which is important because it serves as a basis to 'convince' new union entrants of the necessity and legitimacy of the current established arrangement (Berger et al 1966: 79-80).

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Conceptions and Application

4.1 Introduction

Focused on the theoretical frameworks used to address the concerns of this thesis, this chapter is organised into three sections. The first section will attempt to locate Singapore's form of trade unionism amongst different trade union typologies. This may be differentiated according to the 'role' and 'function' they play in relation to their representatives and the wider socioeconomic and political system in which they exist in.

The second section addresses the theoretical frameworks backing this thesis's claim that trade unions in Singapore play an integrationist role. This consists of two parts. The first is based on Georg Simmel's view that conflict would bring about social integration instead of social change as Marx proposed.

Key to Simmel's view are the existence and development of structural processes that help channel and manage conflict, with some focus also on the nature of the conflict, and the emotive feeling of the individuals involved. However, this alone is too structurally lopsided, and fails to address the fundamentally important question of why individuals would accept the established structural processes.

This thesis proposes to address this through Berger and Lukhmann's 'Social Construction of Everyday Life', which focuses on individuals and locates their importance in the

maintenance of structures. What results is the thematic emphasis on the interrelationship that exists between agency and structure, and how 'knowledge' is a socialised process that takes place through both structural influences and everyday practices.

4.2 Trade Unions – Ideological Range and Trajectory

4.2.1 Varying Purposes

There are essentially two aspects in which labour unions may be understood. Their purpose and whom they serve; both of which are linked to their ideological influence, which determines what they do, how they do it and the strategies or approaches they utilise to achieve their stated purposes.

While the Webbs define labour unions to be 'a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives', V. L. Allen (1966:149) saw them simply as institutions organised to 'protect and improve the living standards of their members' (see also Martin 1989: 11; Webb et al 1935: 1). While both offer broad definitions that encapsulate the fundamental aims of unions, they do not state the extent to which these interests should be satisfied or the prescriptive for attaining them, of which there are a variety (Martin 1989: 10-12).

4.2.2 Theories of Trade Union Purposes – Typological Overview

Union purposes may essentially be classified into 5 categories, Pluralists, Syndicalists, Marxist-Leninist, Organicists and Authoritarians. Each differs in terms of conceiving the scope of union purposes and also how unions relate to other social institutions, particularly the state.

4.2.2.1 The Pluralists

Of the five, Pluralists proffer the narrowest definition of union purpose; seeing the responsibility of the union and its leaders as being to protect the material interests of its members not by toppling the existing socioeconomic institutional system or by engaging in zero-sum outcomes, but by protecting workers' rights through legislature and employing collective bargaining as the main means to secure the 'regulation [and] control of [the] employment relationship' (Martin 1989: 14-16, 21; Perlman 1949: 300)[117].

4.2.2.2 The Syndicalists

The anti-state Syndicalists who aspire for the 'total overthrow of capitalism' and thereafter designating the 'trade unions' to be the new administrators view the role of trade unions as two-fold (Martin 1989: 23-24, 34-35)[118]. The first involves aiding in the

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[117] (Martin 1989: 14, 21) – Refers to 'market economies and liberal political systems'. Perlman describes this to be the rift between 'organic labour' and 'labour's devoted but impractical friends' (which encompasses also the revolutionary intellectual types); stating a belief that 'organic labour' aspires for a 'civilised level of existence for oneself and one's dependents'. The relative nature of such outlooks and perspectives will be addressed later on in the chapter.

[118] There are three sub-categories of Syndicalism: 1) Anarcho-Syndicalism, 2) One Big Unionism and 3) Guild Socialism (p.23). The use of strikes is seen to be a necessary part of the process (p.24). What is of contention however is to whom self-governance should be accorded to, and therefore, where the responsibility of the trade unions lies. While the Anarcho-Syndicalists and the One Big Unionists

destruction of capitalism through the use of the general strike (Martin 1989: 24, 37; Rocker 2004: 33, 78-88)[119]. And secondly, by acting as a platform for educating workers on 'real essence of the social problem' and 'schooling' workers in resistance to facilitate the eventual realisation of workers' control (Martin 1989: 24, 36-37).

4.2.2.3 Leninist-Marxists

For Leninist-Marxists who desire to eliminate capitalism, labour unions in capitalist society serve an educational function. They are responsible for [emancipating the proletariat] by organising and stirring workers' consciousness; 'moulding [their] minds', uplifting them to 'revolutionary class-consciousness' thereby rendering them 'capable of concerted industrial and political action' (Moses 1990: 30-31, 44, 64; Tucker 1975: 51).

4.2.2.4 The Organicists

To the Organicists who feel a *moral obligation* to preserve the 'common good' over 'self-seeking' parochial interests, unions need to defend and extend the rights of workers while safeguarding the common interests (Martin 1989: 62). This leads them to lean towards 'corporatist' based arrangements emphasising cooperation in employment relations, with

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conceptualised 'workers' and the responsibility of trade unions to the 'proletariats' (defined exclusively to mean manual workers), the Guild Socialists' version was more inclusive, encompassing manual, wage, 'salariat' and administrative workers (p.35).

[119] Strikes range in 'gradations from the simple wage-struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in its countless forms; anti-militaristic propaganda, and in particularly critical cases, armed struggle.

the state being entrusted with the moral authority in determining and upholding what is 'in the interest of society' (Martin 1989: 51-52, 68-69)[120].

4.2.2.5 The Authoritarians: Unions as an Extension of the State

To the Authoritarians, the defence of workers' rights should not result in socio-political division or jeopardise the wider, state-defined, economic interests or 'common good' (Martin 1989: 70-73, 74, 76, 79). As such, unions occupy a subordinate role to the state or party and have to exercise 'restraint' in exercising industrial action so as to maximise economic production for the common interest of economic growth and national prosperity whose trickling-down effect would then benefit and improve the conditions of workers (Martin 1989: 70-72, 74, 76, 79, 82-84)[121].

4.2.3 The Matter of Autonomy

The discussion of labour union typologies in the above section underlines the importance of the socio-political environment unions operate in. This will define the nature of the

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[120] The state's moral authority to arbitrate what is deemed to be best for society is not without limitations. This is a crucial element which distinguishes Organicists from the Authoritarians, for whom no such limitation on state power exists.

[121] "'Restraint', instead, was required of them – and not only because that was essential for economic growth but also… because it was necessary if the unions themselves were 'to survive the impatience and genuine determination by our new nations to move ahead'." – Mboya, Tom. (1963) *Freedom and After* (London: Deutsch), p.250. "This meant, in particular, that the unions would be obliged to accept 'the fundamental condition that the business of the community must not be interfered with' – in other words, limitations on the right to strike and, ultimately, the settlement of serious industrial disputes by 'an authoritative fiat' of the state." – Webb, Sidney. Webb, Beatrice. (1902) *Industrial Democracy* (London: Longmans) p.813-814.

relationship between unions and the socio-political regime, the scope and extent of union strategies, as well as the question of their legitimacy (Dahl 1971: 1).

4.3 – Trade Union Movements and the Question of Autonomy

4.3.1 Typology of Autonomy – Relationship between Unions, State and Party

Aside from the socio-political environment, the autonomy of labour unions, which encompasses what they do, can or cannot do, is also affected by their relationship with the political actors, namely the state or political parties. Accordingly, Martin defines three default positions that a trade union movement may occupy in relation to either the state or political parties. In the ancillary, labour unions are subordinated; the surrogate, happens when unions dominate either state or party; while in the autonomous unions are neither subordinated nor dominant (Martin 1989: 113)[122].

4.3.2 The Nature of Corporatism

Singapore's labour relations has often been described as corporatist, so what then does corporatism entail? Conceptually, corporatism is defined as 'a system of interest representation' where the 'constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised' by the state (Schmitter 1974: 93-94). 'In exchange

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[122] Five more subcategories can be derived from this three categories. They are 1) the state-ancillary and 2) party-ancillary, the 3) state-surrogate and 4) party-surrogate, and the 5) autonomous (p.113).

for observing certain controls on the selection of leaders and articulation of demands and support' these units are given 'representational monopoly within their respective categories' (Schmitter 1974: 93-94).

A heuristic category which is compatible with a wide variety of ideological and 'political configurations', it is more helpful instead to view corporatism as an 'observable', praxis defined concept: a system of interest representation, an institutional arrangement that links the 'associationally organised interest of civil society with the decisional structures of the state', which is 'compatible' with various regime-types (Schmitter 1974: 86-88, 91-92, 94)[123].

As a system, the intention of corporatism is to systematise and institutionalise interest representation by categorising and thereby limiting and giving order to competing interests while emphasising their interdependency within the confines of an 'organic whole' (Schmitter 1974: 97)[124].

4.4 Contextualising Singapore's Labour Movement

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[123] 'Regime-types' i.e. 'with different party systems, varieties of ruling ideology, levels of political mobilization, varying scopes of public policy etc'.

[124] Corporatism emphasises 'controlled emergence, quantitative limitation and vertical stratification' as a strategy to limit and order competing interests. A comparison with pluralism would better show what corporatism is. Like corporatism, pluralism also sees the need to manage interest representation but does so using an opposing remedy which advocates 'spontaneous formation, numerical proliferation, horizontal extension and competitive interaction'; unlike corporatism, in pluralism the 'the constituent units are organised into an unspecified number of multiple, voluntary, competitive, non-hierarchically ordered and self-determined (as to type or scope of interests) categories which are not specially licensed, recognised, subsidised, created or otherwise controlled in leadership selection or interest articulation by the state and which do not exercise a monopoly of representational activity within their respective categories' (p.96-97).

As a pure heuristic type, Singapore's labour movement most closely resembles the Authoritarian, State-Ancillary typological categorisation. Its '"soft-authoritarian"' regime (Zakaria 1994: 109) which exercises 'extra parliamentary constraint on challenges to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) (Bell 1997: 8; Rodan 1993: 77) and exhorts the development of [social peace and political stability] alongside economic success, is seen as an 'Asian alternative' to Western 'no-holds-barred' democratic-individualism associated with the unravelling of social cohesion and the 'erosion of communal life' (Bell 1997: 6-7; Dahrendorf 1995: 30; Rodan 1996: 336-338)[125].

In socio-political practice, 'soft-authoritarianism' has been translated to 'paternalistic' (Lazar 2001: 61, 66-67; Rodan 1993a: 58; Tremewan 1994: 45), a reference to the state's involvement in the social lives of its citizenry, and communitarian (Chua 1995: 31; Lazar 2001: 61, 66-67; Rodan 1989: 185; Rodan 1993a: 58; Tremewan 1994: 45)[126]. The latter constituting a set of cultural values that is perceived to have enabled East Asian nations to close the economic-development gap with the West (Chua 1995: 31-32)[127].

4.4.1 Position of NTUC Unions and their Relation to the State

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[125] (Rodan 1993: 77) – This sees the use of both 'crude' measures – like political detention or imprisonment – and subliminal techniques.

[126] Lazar situates the State's 'eugenicist' conviction (of getting better educated women to reproduce) within the context of 'strategic egalitarianism', wherein granting women equality is contingent on the realisation of pragmatic economic and national interests. (Rodan 1993a: 58) – One highly publicised issue was how the state 'called on women university graduates to produce more babies', and the unequal fashion – by selectively bestowing 'gifts' – in which this is encouraged; see also (Rodan 1989: 185) – This is based on the Straits Times article 'Talent for the Future' 15th August 1983. (Tremewan 1994: 45) – The provision of public housing is seen to be a major feature of social control given that a majority of the population (86%) reside in it.

[127] The cultural values identified to comprise 'communitarianism': 1) 'placing society above the self'; 2) 'upholding the family as the basic building block of society'; 3) resolving major issues through consensus instead of contentions'; and 4) 'stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony'; were later reworded and presented as an epithet of national 'Shared Values', to which a fifth value of 5) 'regard and community support for the individual' was added.

Within this context, the NTUC expresses two key objectives, to [better workers' working conditions and enhance their socio-economic status], as well as to benefit the national economy through increased productivity and better industrial relations (NTUC 1984: 1)[128].

> '*In [this] sense there is no conflict, both [government and NTUC are] working towards national interests [and] what is reasonable and fair [for workers] will be upheld, but not to the extent that it will jeopardise national interest*' (Interview 9a: 10).

This provides justification for what has been discursively referred to as the 'symbiotic' relationship between government and union, which has seen the emplacement of ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) within the central committee of the NTUC and its unions (Coe et al 2002: 352; NTUC 1970; ST 2004, 2 May)[129].

Such an arrangement together with the limitation on union autonomy, particularly when [*furthering the interests of union members come into conflict with the interests of the state*] (Interview 15: 3-4) reflects the subordinate status of unions and supports the claim

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[128] Article 3(i) of the NTUC Constitution states the principal objective of Congress to be: a) 'to improve the working conditions of workers and enhance their economic and social status, and b) to achieve the raising of productivity for the benefit of workers, the employers and the economy of Singapore through the promotion of good industrial relations between workers and their employers'.
[129] Of the 21 members within the 2003-2007 NTUC Central Committee, 2 were ministers, while 3 were MPs. In addition, 5 others within the committee had at some point held office as Nominated Members of Parliament (NMP). While *elected* members comprise the Central Committee, the Central Committee may also upon the recommendation of the Secretary-General *appoint* members; a situation permitted under Article12ib) of the NTUC Constitution, which has seen the appointment of at least one MP – Mr Ong Ah Heng (Assistant Secretary-General) – and the appointment of one minister – Mr Lim Swee Say (Deputy Secretary-General – appointed in 2004); (Straits Times 2004: 'Lim Swee Say being groomed to be the next NTUC Secretary-General', 2 May).

that '*there are no free, democratic trade unions in Singapore*' (Interview 9: 22)[130]. In essence, the NTUC is not a 'genuinely independently' labour movement (Barr 2000: 481; Rodan 1993: 98).

4.4.2 Repudiation of Industrial Action

Described as 'bureaucratic-authoritarian corporatism' by Deyo, labour relations emphasises the depoliticisation of organised labour and increases government regulation of labour affairs as a strategy for pursuing economic growth and averting political instability (Chua 1995: 17-18; Deyo 1981a: 353). Here, '*the national interest comes first*' (Interview 1: 1) over special-sectional interest groupings, which are viewed to 'threaten national survival' (Deyo 1981a: 354).

This is most apparent in the governance of labour relations where the 'restrictive legal framework over industrial conflict' eschews industrial action in favour of [*non-confrontational cooperation*] (Interview 16: 12), which is viewed to be a form of '*responsible trade unionism*' (Interview 16: 12) (Deyo 1981b; Rodan 1993: 81; Singapore Statutes Cap.136; Wong 1983: 263)[131].

While the rejection of the use of industrial action has been justified on the basis that it carries [*significant 'negative repercussions' for Singapore's economy*] (Interview 8: 14),

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[130] Interview 15 was not recorded at the request of the interviewees.
[131] (Deyo 1981b; Rodan 1993: 81; Wong 1983: 263) – Some have regarded the imposition of a 'restrictive legal framework' as an effort to '[supplant] effective independent trade-union organisations'. Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 136) – Part III: 18) Invitation to Negotiate, 21) Conciliation, 23) Compulsory Conferences; Part V: 32) Court to Arbitrate; Part VI: 47) Award to be final.

given the '*hard fact that we [are] dependent on investors*' (Interview 13: 24), some sees it as being governed by 'active patriarchalism', wherein 'discursive space' is limited to pre-empt the [encroachment of labour on capital's prerogatives] thereby leaving organised labour dependent on the 'enforceable benevolence' of the state to the extent that it is regarded as an effort to '[supplant] effective independent trade-union organisations' (Deyo 1981b; Rodan 1993: 81; Wong 1983: 263, Woodiwiss 1998: 237, 241).

4.4.3 The Hand of Pragmatism and the Ideology of Survival

The 'ideology of survival' that underlies the legislative governance of the union movement and its consternation to preserve the national interest is principled on the praxis (thought-action-practice) of 'pragmatism' (Chua 1995: 17-18; Papini 1907: 124)[132]. As the 'frame for action', pragmatism takes an '"instrumental" view of truth' (James 1907: 113; Shusterman 2004: 6, 8), prioritising 'last things' such as 'consequences [and] facts' first (James 1907: 112; Shusterman 2004: 5).

Its concern with consequences makes pragmatism an 'empirically guided forward-looking social tool' that seeks to hold onto preceding 'truth' while willing to adopt new ideas that would help stabilise and illuminate the current situation, thereby enabling a 'maximum [degree] of continuity' (James 1907: 113-114, 116; Shusterman 2004: 8).

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[132] Pragmatism is not a philosophy (p.124). This ideology of survival is rooted in the tumultuous period of national independence.

In this incorporation process, the 'new truth' merely involves [the addition of new facts, or facts of old kinds, to our experience]; there is 'no alteration in the old beliefs' (James 1907: 114). This is achieved not by discarding 'older truths', but by preserving, [modifying] and 'stretching them just enough [to] admit the novelty' of new ideas, and regarding [that novelty] in as familiar as the case permits (James 1907: 114).

In pragmatism, 'loyalty to [older truths] is the first [and only] principle' (James 1907: 114). 'Their influence is absolutely controlling' to the extent that any phenomena sufficiently novel to threaten and erode current preconceptions would either be ignored altogether or those who embrace them would be sanctioned (James 1907: 114).

Even though there is no pure objective truth – as 'truth' is interpretive and hinges on the 'individual's appreciation' – pragmatists see truth as inherently tied to its utilitarian value, gauged against the experience of what works (James 1907: 115-116; Shusterman 2004: 10)[133]. This means that pragmatists will embrace abstractions as long as they are 'profitable' to the pragmatist's pursuit (James 1907: 118-119)[134].

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[133] (James 1907: 112-113) – Pragmatism is a 'theory of truth', where [our] beliefs and 'ideas (which are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience'; truth by virtue of instrumentality. (James 1907: 116) – 'Objective truth must be something non-utilitarian, haughty, refined, remote, august, exalted. It must be an absolute correspondence of our thoughts with an equally absolute reality. It must be what we ought to think unconditionally. The conditioned ways in which we do think are so much irrelevance and matter for psychology'. 'This pragmatist talk about truths in the plural, about their utility and satisfactoriness, about the success with which the "work" etc.'… 'Truth, for him [the pragmatist], becomes a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience'.

[134] How useful abstract ideas are, would then be determinant on how close they are to the 'truth' as perceived by the pragmatist.

Thus, continued belief in an idea is dependent on: 1) firstly, the usefulness of the idea for 'life's practical struggle'; 2) secondly, our fondness of the idea; and 3) thirdly, whether or not 'belief in it [clashes] with some other vital benefits' stemming from other beliefs (James 1907: 119 – 120)[135]. The last is most significant, as it reveals pragmatism as a 'mediator and a reconciler' (James 1907: 120). This is crucial particularly for considering how individuals and institutions manage change and the significance of their choices.

In this way, pragmatism may be mistaken to be a strategy in itself as Chua did when he described the waning favour for 'pragmatism' in lieu of electoral unpopularity as a result of passing 'tough but unpopular policies', when it is actually more a 'method for action' (Chua 1995: 20-22). This does not mean unprincipled action either, but rather, one geared towards particular objectives and beliefs (Papini 1907: 123, 125).

In Singapore's case, the perennial preoccupation with economic-survivalism. It is in this regard, that unions have declared themselves as being '*more pragmatic*' (Interview 10: 58). Viewing the '*fundamental objective of a union [is to] offer assistance when people [are] in trouble*' (Interview 10: 63). Even if unions are criticised for '*[listening] to government, [and working] too closely with [employer*s]*' (Interview 10: 64), eventually, '*in terms of unemployment, in terms of benefits, in terms of assistance, [these critics] have very little compared to us*' (Interview 10: 64)[136].

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[135] 'The greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths'.
[136] See Annex 4.1.

This acceptance of pragmatism is also manifested by some unions' rejection of the use of industrial action, believing its use would '*cause a lot of disruption and damage*' (Interview 9: 12), '*[frightening] away potential investors who may come in*' (Interview 9i: 19) and should thus be reserved as [*a last resort*] (Interview 8a: 13) since [*the impact would be a loss of business to the company and Singapore*] (Interview 8: 14).

4.5 Unions: Conflict as Integration

The perception that unions within a socio-political regime pursuing a [neo-liberal economic] strategy are potentially politically destabilising is taken from Marx's theory of conflict (Hing 2003: 105; Leggett 1993: 223). The latter argues that unequal distribution of resources produces conflict of interests that would lead to the political and ideological mobilisation of subordinate groupings, resulting eventually in 'violent and change-producing revolution' (Turner 1975: 621; Turner 1993: 102-103)[137]. The problem with this vision is it expects the lineal and cumulative rise in the 'intensity of conflict' (Turner 1993: 102)[138].

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[137] Marx's basic Principle of Conflict in Systems of Inequality: (1) The more unequal the distributions of scarce resources in a system, the greater will be the conflict of interests between its dominant and subordinate segments. (2) The more the subordinate segments become aware of their true collective interests, the more likely they are to question the legitimacy of the unequal distribution of scarce resources. (3) The more the subordinate segments of a system are aware of their collective interests, the greater their questioning of the legitimacy of the distribution of scarce resources, and the more likely they are to organize and initiate overt conflict against dominant segments of a system. (4) The more the subordinate segments are unified by a common belief and the more their political leadership structure is developed, the more the dominant and subjugated segments of the system will become polarized. (5) The more polarized the dominant and subjugated, the more violent the ensuing conflict will be. (6) The more violent the conflict, the greater the structural change of the system and the redistribution of scarce resources (p.102-103).

[138] (Turner 1993: 105) – This is unrealistic because the value of variables located within the causal process is indeterminate, and any change would alter the resultant effect.

Like Marx, Simmel also saw conflict permeating society, but did not feel that social systems are characterised only by conflicting interests, or that the presence of conflict would necessarily lead to violent change (Turner 1975: 619). For Simmel, conflict represents more than the conflict of interests, it is a form of 'sociation', a constituent part of an ongoing dualistic conceptual interaction (Simmel 1950: 4, 10; Simmel 1955: 13, 15, 17; Turner 1975: 619)[139].

This extends from Simmel cautioning against examining 'dualistic relations' – such as 'unity and 'discord' – in functionally unitary terms; that they are conceptual opposites does not mean the effect of one part of the dualism can be considered in isolation from the other, or assume that the net consequences for the group is similar to the individual's (Simmel 1955: 16-17). What counts, is 'the "unity"' (synthesis) of the effect, which is the net result of the dualistic forces (Simmel 1955: 17)[140].

4.5.1 Simmel and Conflict

While Simmel did not account for the 'ultimate causes of conflict', choosing instead to examine the intensity of conflict, and its consequences for both the immediate parties and the 'systemic whole', he did however explain the trigger mechanism for the occurrences of conflict (Turner 1975: 623)[141]. This is significant not only because it emphasises the

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[139] Absolute harmony is deemed to be 'empirically unreal', and it would not show any 'life process', (Simmel 1950) – Explanation of 'sociation'.
[140] Simmel describes this 'unity' as the 'total group-synthesis of persons, energies and forms, that is, the ultimate wholeness of the group'.
[141] He explained this while differentiating between the different types of conflict.

role of the individual in triggering conflict, but also raises consideration as to the conditions and motivations that induce individuals to take action.

In this context, the intensity of a conflict is determined by three factors: one, the degree of 'emotional arousal'; the greater the emotional involvement, the more violent the conflict (Simmel 1955: 43-48; Turner 1975: 624)[142]. Second, the nature of the contest between opposing groups, where it could be either a '*contest over objectives*' or '*contest between individuals*'. In both cases, it could lead either to an escalation of violence or it's mitigation depending on how it is perceived (Simmel 1955: 38-39; Turner 1975: 624).

Third, the clarity of the goals articulated by groups in conflict; the 'more clearly articulated [and focused] their interests [and goals]', the more likely that 'less violent' solutions – like negotiation or bargaining – will be used to attain them (Simmel 1955: 39-41; Turner 1975: 624)[143]. Of the three, this is most significant as it contradicts Marx's hypothesis that objective consciousness of interests' would result in the organisation for violent conflict (Simmel 1955: 40; Turner 1975: 624)[144]

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[142] Simmel: Individuals who are more distant (i.e. strangers who share or know little about each other) have fewer points of contact. So the scope of difference is only limited to particular areas of interests. So any conflict will also be limited to those areas, hence limiting the scope of conflict. Turner: 1) Greater solidarity among members of conflict parties; 2) and greater prior harmony between conflict parties is seen to heighten emotional involvement. Despite this, the data of our research shows that the two conditions above helps mitigate conflict when it occurs rather than escalate it. Conflict parties [labour unions and management] are less inclined to resort to more extreme measures and are more inclined to bring about a speedy resolution.
[143] This makes it possible 'to view violent conflict as only one of many means' to achieve them (p.624).
[144] (Simmel 1955: 40; Turner 1975: 624) – 'Consciousness of common interests' can result in 'highly instrumental and non-violent conflict'. However, the specific conditions under which this would happen is not mentioned. To an extent, the third proposition may be seen as an attempted refinement of the second, where conflict over stipulated (but not necessarily objective) goals results in an indeterminate outcome of a binary possibility.

4.5.2 Social Integration through Conflict

Unlike Marx, Simmel saw mobilisation and organisation as giving groups a more instrumental role to reduce the chances of violent conflict and promote integration and adaptation to the system (Turner 1975: 624). Conflict's integrating role comes about in two ways; first, groups will create more distinct boundaries to delineate themselves from others, and secondly, the presence of outward hostilities serves to rally members of a group, encouraging 'cooperation, affection, mutual aid, and harmony of interest' (Simmel 1955: 18; Turner 1975: 625)[145].

Conflict is most likely to be integrative where there is a degree of functional interdependency between groups, and where the conflict is 'less violent' and intense but occur with higher frequency (Turner 1975: 625). The interdependency encourages the regulation and organisation of conflict, allowing tension to be released without the escalatory effect, this enables the conflicting parties to better articulate their interests thereby 'promoting stability' in the system (Turner 1975: 625-626).

In violent conflict, integrative effects tend to be manifested either: a) before the event, where its anticipated potential violence push groups to prevent its occurrence, thus

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[145] Simmel cautions against concluding that the absence of antagonistic 'repulsive' forces would naturally result in 'a richer and fuller social life', given that conflict exerts an effect on the internal dynamics – such as the 'internal solidarity' and degree of centralization (Turner 1975: 625) – of groups.

encouraging the organisation of the conflict groupings; or b) following a sustained period of conflict, where groups seek each other out in a bid for alliance (Turner 1975: 626)[146].

4.5.3 Trade Unions and their Integrative Function

Within the context of the NTUC, 'integrative' features appear at several levels. At the highest, the symbiotic relationship between labour movement and the government emphasises common 'national interests', utilising the '*philosophy of tripartism*' (Interview 9b: 5) to call '[government, labour and employers] to cooperate for the economic well-being of Singapore' (Commonwealth Secretariat 1998: 109).

The tripartite framework is best exemplified by the NWC. The council, established in 1972, comprised government, labour, employers' institutions and foreign business councils, that aim to sustain Singapore's economic competitiveness through the recommendation of wage policies that are '[aligned] with productivity growth' (Chew 1996: 23-26; Chew et al 1998: 97-98; Lim 1998: 18-19; MOM 2007)[147].

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[146] a) 'The more prolonged the threat of violent conflict between groups, the more enduring are the coalitions of each of the conflict parties'; b) 'The more violent and the more prolonged the conflict relations between groups, the more likely is the formation of coalitions among previously unrelated groups in a system'.

[147] Chew 1996 – The NWC was established to address the tight labour market situation and to ease the reliance on foreign workers, created by the 'informal wage restraint policy' enacted in the late 1960s when Singapore was facing a high level of unemployment. MOM 2007 – In the NWC Council 2007/2008, the Employers' group sees representation from the following organisations: Singapore Business Federation (SBF), Singapore National Employers' Federation (SNEF), Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) and representatives from the American (American Chamber of Commerce Singapore), German (Singapore-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce), Japanese (Japanese Chamber of Commerce Singapore) and Indian (Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) business councils. The Employees' group was represented by the NTUC. While the Government saw representatives from the following ministries and statutory boards: Economic Development Board (EDB), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA), and the Public Service Division (PSD).

However, it should be pointed out that '*the [NWC] guidelines [is a] guidepost*' (Interview 9a: 55). Even though the government sets the example by implementing them, the large number and diversity of firms makes it difficult and unrealistic to implement any legal measure to ensure universal adherence (Tan 1998: 77)

Contrasted with the loose cooperative framework at the macro level is the clear legislative framework governing labour relations at the meso level, exemplified by '*compulsory arbitration*' (Interview 9f: 2). Apart from regulation, the legal structure enables issues to be dealt with objectively and minimises escalation stemming from emotional impulses or 'extraneous circumstances', (Simmel 1955: 36). Nevertheless, the resort to '*arbitration is the last resort'* (Interview 9f: 27), taken only after previous '*peaceful settlement of dispute*' (Interview 9f: 4) have failed.

It is at the level of practise, which this thesis seeks to examine (in closer detail in the following chapter). In particular, how participation in day-to-day processes and practices – such as decision-making, collective bargaining and conflict resolution – of unions socialises individuals into view of the labour confederation and the socio-political view espoused by the government.

Even though national organisations and structural processes are important in the maintenance and governance of labour relations, this thesis is also cognizant that this is not a static process but one dependent on the participation of individuals. In this

structure-agency duality, individuals play an important role in maintaining organisational structures and systems.

4.5.4 The 'Ideology' Blind Spot

Despite offering a good elucidation and antithesis to Marx's perspective, Simmel's theory of conflict does not engage the Marxian conception of 'ideology'. Does the class which controls the 'means of material production' also control the 'means of mental production' (Abercrombie et al 1980: 7)? Does the ruling class exert 'ideological control over the working class' such that the latter '[identifies] its interests with those of capitalism rather than with a revolutionary movement' (Abercrombie et al 1980: 9)?

Bernstein who rejected Marx's collapse theory [of capital] sought to find a way to extend the economic and political rights of the working classes within a 'monarchical-capitalist order' (Moses 1990: 116-118)[148]. He concluded that the system of wage labour could not be eliminated, that 'the obligation to work would always remain' and 'socialism would not abolish factories and the need for workers' (Moses 1990: 123). Thus, unions should direct their attention to attacking the system of wage determination instead (Moses 1990: 122-123)[149].

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[148] Bernstein's departure from Marx is also encouraged by what he viewed to be a serious flaw in Marx's (original) 'labour value theory' – i.e. that the value of a commodity is based on the amount of labour-power invested in it. And if this was the case, then all the 'ideas, policies and actions' based on it would be 'fallacious and erroneous' (p.120-122).
[149] It was the view that taking on the 'system of determining wages, the methods of calculating wages, indeed the whole legal position of the worker in the workplace' enabled the process to take on a more collective outlook, which could be determined through collective bargaining. Not only would workers gain more freedom if 'law and order prevailed in the factory' but improving the system of wage determination

This revisionist stand was criticised by Luxemburg as 'trade union bureaucratism', a labour of Sisyphus' that turned unions into an impediment for 'mobilising the working class to political activism', and hindered the proletariat's expression of natural revolutionary zeal (Moses 1990: 129-131)[150].

The contrast between Bernstein and Luxemburg merits Marx's questions. Yet, if it were not so, how may we account for the political quiescence – without succumbing to the accusation of 'false consciousness' – of the working class through its representation in the labour unions?

4.6 Turning to the Sociology of Knowledge

The consideration of 'ideology' is necessary in order to defend both the claim that unions act as an integrating force in society, and the potential charge of 'false consciousness' from being levelled against unions and their agents. Doing so gives focus to agency, particularly, in understanding the factors influencing thinking-processes and decision-making.

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and work conditions (which translate to more money and time) would enable workers to enjoy more creative time outside of work.

[150] This revisionist stand of Bernstein was conceived in the time of Wilhelmine Germany where only politically neutral trade unions were allowed to survive. As much as Rosa Luxemburg agreed with the necessity of engaging in 'parliamentary and trade union tactics' as a means for the proletariat to acquire political and economic power as well as to 'educate and organize the proletariat for the advent of socialism', she felt that the nature of this everyday struggle also blurred the 'vision of the ultimate goal of revolution' (p.135).

4.6.1 Thought and Ideology

To do this, we utilise Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge framework from 'Ideology and Utopia', which is concerned primarily with understanding the originating circumstances of individual thought; circumstances which are rooted in social-historcial situations, bound with particular 'inherited' situations of the group and differentiated further through the actions of individuals (Mannheim 1991: 3).

To understand thought, it is first necessary to understand the problems of 'ideology' (Mannheim 1991: 49)[151]. A behaviour is seen to have an 'ideological taint' when it has been identified as an untruth resulting from 'a distorted and faulty conceptual apparatus' (Mannheim 1991: 54). The implied notion of truth and falsehood thus becomes a basis to question the veracity of an adversary's thoughts and claims on the grounds that it is 'unrealistic' given current practises and happenings (Mannheim 1991: 62-64).

This was how Marxist theory intended to use ideology: as a negative 'value-judgement' that insinuates 'a conscious political lie' committed to preserve the control of the dominant class over the proletariat (Mannheim 1991: 66, 111). As such, ideology becomes relative, with groups using it to discredit their adversaries' views on the basis of being ideological (Mannheim 1991: 65-66). This leads to the question of 'what constitutes reality', since no group can accuse another without being similarly accused, and also, what can be used to distinguish between truth and falsehood (Mannheim 1991: 64-66).

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[151] See Annex 4.2 for Mannheim's conception of ideology.

4.6.2 Sociology of Knowledge – Ideology and Utopia

Mannheim responded by advocating the development of a total conception of ideology, a Sociology of Knowledge that would take into account all ideological positions and not just that of the adversary's (Mannheim 1991: 68-69). What resulted was a relative and relational 'non-evaluative analysis' which tie ideas to the social-historical context in which they emerge, without passing judgement on the 'correctness' of these ideas (Mannheim 1991: 70-71)[152].

According to Mannheim's analysis, knowledge could be 'distorted and ideological [if it failed] to take account of the new realities to a situation', or when it tries to use inappropriate categories to conceal them (Mannheim 1991: 86). 'False consciousness', occurs when: 1) people interpret their social experience falsely, intentionally concealing, 'deifying, romanticising and idealising' what they do when this is not so; 2) people's behaviour are not synchronous with the ideals they avow to abide by; 3) a particular knowledge can no longer be sufficiently used to understand the actual world (Mannheim 1991: 85-86).

Mannheim's key contribution lay in making a further distinction between 'ideology' and 'utopia'. Ideology and utopia belong to the 'situationally transcendent' category of ideas

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[152] (Mannheim 1991: 70-71) – Whereas *relativism* traces the thoughts of a person to the 'concrete position' occupied – since all knowledge is dependent and held based on the 'subjective standpoint and social situation of the knower' – *relationism*, recognises that some truths cannot be conceived without taking into account the social context in which it appears (p.70-71). This makes all (historical) knowledge relational, dependent on the social position of the observer (p.71).

that 'do not fit into the current order' – as compared with 'situationally congruous' ideas that correspond with the 'concretely existing and de facto order' (Mannheim 1991: 175).

Not all ideas that transcend reality are utopian. An idea is utopian if it transcends reality and possesses the potential to bring down 'either wholly or partially' [the prevailing order of things] (Mannheim 1991: 173-174)[153]. This is what separates utopia from ideology. Although ideology also holds onto situationally transcendent ideas, they are unable to realise their 'projected contents' – often having their meanings and intentions distorted in practice (Mannheim 1991: 175)[154].

While ideologies can become utopian, utopias are not ideologies (Mannheim 1991: 174, 176)[155]. It is difficult to distinguish between the two as it involves not only 'values and standards', but also more subjective elements such as the 'feelings and motives' of those involved (Mannheim 1991: 176).

4.6.3 Ideology and Utopia – A Matter of Position

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[153] Just because an idea transcends the existing order does not make it utopian. To be utopian, the idea has to offer 'revolutionary possibilities', otherwise, they would only be seen as 'appropriate ideologies' that were 'harmoniously integrated into the worldview' of the period.

[154] (Mannheim 1991: 175-176) – Distortions in practice can take place in three ways: 1) First, the ideological mentality arises when the 'subject is prevented from becoming aware of the incongruence' between his ideas and reality by the 'axioms involved in his historically and socially determined thought' (p.175). 2) Second, the possibility for discovering the incongruence between ideas and actions is 'concealed' due to some 'vital-emotional interests' (p.176). 3) Lastly, the ideological mentality is based on conscious deception, where ideology is a 'purposeful lie' (p.176).

[155] (Mannheim 1991: 174, 176) – Ideologies can become utopian when social groups try to realise them by actualising the 'wish-images' in their actions.

As it stands, ideology and utopia is differentiated based on the social standpoint of the individual. From the *point of view* of representatives of an [emerging order], ideas adapted to the present order would be ideologies and deemed 'illusionary' (Mannheim 1991: 183)[156]. While utopia describes 'unrealisable' ideas from the standpoint of those within the existing social order – this is based on the political evaluations behind the 'whole system of thought' of the 'thinker' (Mannheim 1991: 177, 185)[157].

Determining what is ideology and utopia is difficult not only because of the socio-historical subjectivity involved, but also because they both alternate between being and coming into being; what is deemed utopian in the present context may well become reality tomorrow, thereby making identification possible only in retrospect (Bell 1960: 373; Mannheim 1991: 183-184).

4.6.4 Contextualising and the Critique of Ideology and Utopia

As stated earlier, the examination of Mannheim is intended to defend against a possible accusation of Marxian 'false consciousness' in explaining the apparent quiescence of agency within the established industrial relations system. Such an explanation would be objectionable because it forcibly foists a version of 'truth' and value-judgement held by

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[156] (Mannheim 1991: 183) – This group is known as the 'ascendent class', who are 'in conflict with things as they exist'.

[157] (Mannheim 1991: 177, 183) – This refers to the 'dominant group', who are in 'full accord with the existing order' (p.183). Mannheim recognizes utopia as a broad category and makes a further distinction between utopias which are a) absolutely unrealizable, and those that are b) relatively unrealizable. This recognizes that the label may be applied to obscure or suppress 'the validity of the claims of the relative utopia' (p.177).

one group onto another, a process which is problematic since it cannot defend itself from the same charge of 'ideology'.

In conceptualising ideology in relativist, relational, non-evaluative terms, Mannheim acknowledges ideology as being socially and historically bound, influenced by the socio-political orientation of the individual, making it 'flawed, limited [and] perspectivistically one-sided' (Kettler et al 2000: 103).

The appropriation of Mannheim removes the need to pass value judgements on the 'correctness' of views and opinions articulated by interviewees. This enables the views articulated by labour union leaders (LUL) to be examined in relation to their social position and experience, as well as their interrelationship with other social actors.

This necessitates locating them within the organisational structure in which they inhabit, bringing us back to the initial aim to examine: how the actions of LUL are affected by the structural-organisational norms within the unions, how their social position and experience leads to the reinforcement and validation of these norms and practices, and how this relates to the larger theme of unions functioning as conduits for social integration.

However, this only offers analysis at the level of the particular conception of ideology, which is bound with the particularistic perspectives of LUL derived from their union experiences. This allows us to gauge assertions made by subjects, which 'can be regarded

as concealments, falsification or lies without attacking the mental integrity of the total mental structure of the asserting subject' (Mannheim 1991: 238).

This way, the aim would be to show that the views and beliefs held by LUL are synchronous and influenced by their union experiences, which occur at two levels: 1) the first being structural-organisational, wherein the actions and behaviour of LUL are governed by particular rules and legislature at the national and union level; 2) while the second, involves the experiences accumulated in the course of their day-to-day practices. This differentiation helps identify the basis of how people come to 'know' and recognise what is 'true'.

4.7 Importance of the Everyday Experience

Although Mannheim's framework noted the importance of epistemology and social structures in influencing how people come to interpret and 'know' the world, it lacked the robust conceptual tools to trace the processes by which this takes place without loosing perspective of the wider intersubjectivity that continues to coexist alongside the common and the shared (Mannheim 1991: 253, 259; Berger et al 1966: 37)[158].

This theoretical gap is filled by Berger and Luckmann who viewed knowledge as rooted in everyday life, and traced how individuals subjectively create and interpret meanings

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[158] To briefly describe, a common reality – what Berger and Luckmann term as 'commonsense consciousness' – is established because of the interaction and correspondence continuously taking place between individuals that allow for an overlap in the exchange of meanings; but intersubjective meanings and perspectives are retained because this overlap is neither perfect nor complete.

within this 'everyday reality' context – the 'reality *par excellence*' (Berger et al 1966: 33).

The incorporation of the everyday is necessary to discern the features used by unions to enable social integration; aside from structural features, support and legitimacy from labour union members is also important. Crucially, the 'personal motivation' of LUL for supporting the endeavours of the NTUC is rooted in the day-to-day realities experienced by LUL.

4.7.1 The Role of Personal Motivation

'Personal motivation' can be broken down into two forms: 1) the first is personal interest, and 2) the second is the acceptance of the labour movement's objectives and the legitimacy of its system. In the first instance, LUL support of the system arises as a result of their pragmatic interests (Berger et al 1966: 59). Here, whether LUL believe in the principles of the organisation is irrelevant, what matters is their adherence to them (Berger et al 1966: 59). However, such views have never been offered, and can only be speculated.

The second form, which I term as an 'acceptance' by LUL of the NTUC's objectives and approach, is based on the belief that LUL are motivated by reasons other than personal functional utilitarian gains outlined under the first instance; reasons which are rooted in factors within the day-to-day practices and situations experienced by LUL.

The aim in this section is to apply conceptual analysis from Berger and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality* to identify and understand how 'acceptance' comes about, and how this affects the views and perceptions of LUL. The focus here is to tease out the conceptual frames for explanatory analysis, leaving the more detailed analysis and discussion to the following chapter.

4.7.2 The Shaping of Objective Reality: Agents' Experience with Structure

Although I state of 'acceptance' as being rooted in day-to-day practices and situations it would be more accurate to say that it is rooted in how people understand their reality as a result of their experiences. In this way, it would be apt to begin by examining how objective reality is created.

The 'objective world' we refer to is an 'institutional world', a *sui generis* order that appears 'as given, unalterable and self-evident' (Berger et al 1966: 70, 77). The institutional world is experienced as an objective reality primarily because its (antecedent) existence transcends individual biography (Berger et al 1966: 77-78).

Institutions, which are created through the 'typification of habitualised actions [of social] actors' are historically rooted and function as a form of social control by making conduct 'more predictable' (Berger et al 1966: 71-72, 74, 80)[159].

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[159] (Berger et al 1966: 71-72, 74, 80) – Being historically rooted, they therefore need to be understood in relation to the historical circumstances of their founding. 'Habitualisation carries with it the important

This has been expressed by interviewees in various ways such as, *attributing the emphasis on non-confrontation to the period of Singapore's separation with Malaysia in the mid 1960s*] (Interview 16: 12), or accounting for [*the secretary-general of the NTUC not being a worker with the formation of the NTUC, back to the time of the contestation between the NTUC and SATU*] (Interview 8: 13).

Doing so '[explains] and [justifies]' the institution, and helps legitimise it (Berger et al 1966: 79). To elaborate, even though the reality of institutions precedes the present, their reality appears as a 'historical one'; for those in the present who have no access its original meaning, it appears more as a tradition as it is not part of their 'biographical memory' (Berger et al 1966: 79).

Due to this, 'legitimating formulas' need to be incorporated within the 'cognitive and normative interpretations' of subsequent generations to give the institution the necessary cover of legitimacy (Berger et al 1966: 79). This is even more necessary as institutions move away from the socio-historical context of their founding, which leads to questions about their relevance (Berger et al 1966: 80).

4.7.3 Institutional Conduct for Legitimating Realities – Methods for Seeking Agency Compliance

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psychological gain that choices are narrowed' (p.71). When speaking of the 'typification of habitualised actions', not only must the institution typify the type of habitualised actions, but they also have to typify the actors, combining the two process to attribute particular type of actions to particular type of actors (p.72).

4.7.3.1 Intersubjective Sedimentation

The most direct method for institutions to reclaim their authority over individuals is through socialisation; institutionalising conduct to control and thereby make the behaviour of individuals more predictable (Berger et al 1966: 80)[160]. This can be done in two ways. One is is 'intersubjective sedimentation'. This is the process where 'several individuals share a common biography'; the experiences of which can 'become incorporated in a common stock of knowledge' such that its objectification can allow for this knowledge to be transmitted to other generations (Berger et al 1966: 85).

Aside from transmitting important lessons, it also enables knowledge to be 'reaffirmed', and for 'legitimations to succeed each other' since new meanings and significances can be added onto the 'sedimented experiences' (Berger et al 1966: 86-88). For example, justifying non-confrontation on the basis of '*international competitiveness*' (Interview 6: 12) and how it could '*frighten away potential investors*' (Interview 9i: 19). It offers institutions the opportunity to adapt and reinvent themselves, thereby justifying their relevance and legitimacy (Berger et al 1966: 87).

4.7.3.2 Role Typification

The second method is role typification; it is only through the [performance of roles] that institutions are experienced as 'real' by individuals (Berger et al 1966: 92, 96). By playing a role, an individual [enacts] in human conduct, what an institution represents;

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[160] This is done to ensure the priority of their claim over the individual's in defining a situation.

the role is the means by which the individual is inducted into 'specific areas of socially objectivated knowledge' (Berger et al 1966: 94, 96)[161].

Thus, learning a role does not only mean learning the routines necessary for performing that role but also the 'various cognitive [and] affective layers [of] knowledge' – such as the 'norms, values and even emotions' – that are 'directly and indirectly appropriate to this role' (Berger et al 1966: 94, 96).

4.7.4 The NTUC and Legitimacy

In examining and explaining how objective reality is created from the point-of-view of institutions, the above section is also a reminder that the NTUC is not exempt from having to justify and legitimise its continued existence. By passing on the meanings of an institution – such as [*giving concern to the socio-economic conditions of its members*] (Interview 17: 11) – 'intersubjective sedimentation' aids the NTUC's adaptation to new circumstances and helps it gain 'social recognition' as an institution with a '"permanent" solution to a "permanent" problem', thereby securing its relevance and continuity (Berger et al 1966: 87). In addition, by transmitting symbolic, formal or informal knowledge, it helps 'systematically [acquaint]' 'potential actors' with the institutional meanings (Berger et al 1966: 87-88).

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[161] The roles played by individuals are in turn 'representative of an institutional order that defines their character', their 'appendages of knowledge', and is the source 'from which they derive their objective sense' (p.96).

Applied to our consideration of the NTUC, role typification suggests LUL perform the routines of their roles while being mindful not to breach the boundary of what is considered to be the acceptable norms, values and emotions of the wider social context that labour unions are situated in.

The 'wider social context' may refer to two areas: 1) one, is the NTUC; given that *'[unions] are linked to [the] NTUC, [whatever the] NTUC agree at the national level, [unions] will have to implement'* (Interview 3: 16). 2) The other context is the operating (economic) environment, specifically, the *'market trend [or] industry trend'* (Interview 9a: 53) for wage and benefits, which is significant during the conduct of collective bargaining.

A dialectical relationship where the NTUC and LUL mutually reinforce the other thus results (Berger et al 1966: 92). LUL in performing their roles – *'[reviewing] the terms [for the] renewal of a collective agreement'* (Interview 9h: 4); *'[bringing] proper communication to the people on the ground'* (Interview 11: 3) – enable the union to become perceived as a 'real' entity, similarly, LUL through their participation, come to derive a sense of the objective world.

4.7.5 Issues and Considerations of Institutionalisation

With regards to role typification, there is the concern that it would bring about greater institutionalisation of conduct, thereby leading to a loss in 'alternative' institutional

programmes (Berger et al 1966: 80, 91)[162]. For the NTUC, this is significant for varying reasons: on the one hand, it makes conduct more controlled and predictable, allowing for the development of a more consistent and stable labour relations system.

In relation to the wider theme of social integration, greater institutionalisation and regulation help moderate conflict in the event of its occurrence. One concern with the institutionalisation of conduct is that it reduces institutional alternatives, and imposes restrictions on the authority and actions of LUL, which may affect the NTUC's ability to respond to the needs of its membership[163].

4.8 Subjective Reality and the Production of a Unanimous Interpretation

Since society possesses both 'objective and subjective reality', any understanding of it necessarily requires the examination of both aspects (Berger et al 1966: 149). While the previous section examined the creation of objective reality, this section will examine subjective reality in order to comprehend how individuals (through their experiences) come to understand their reality

Like objective reality, subjective reality is also 'composed of the three moments of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation' (Berger et al 1966: 149). But whereas

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[162] By making behaviour more controlled and predictable, conduct could now be 'taken for granted'.
[163] From the perspective of the organization, institutional practices such as having IROs (Industrial Relations Officers) '*rotated out [every three years]*' (Interview 10: 18), helps prevent them from being '*[alienated] from the NTUC [and doing] things … not in line … with the general policy*', serving thereby to safeguard the functioning of the organisation.

'objective reality' begins by looking at how the individual is confronted with the *sui generis* nature of the objective institutional world, subjective reality starts by looking at how individuals derive differential meanings and interpretations from similar objective events (Berger et al 1966: 149). To understand how these perceptions are formed first requires understanding how people make sense of and interpret events through their own subjective interpretive schemes (Berger et al 1966: 149)[164].

This requires an appreciation of socialisation, which explains how a consensual interpretation of the objective reality prescribed by the NTUC is possible despite the subjective views of individual LUL (Berger et al 1966: 150). This helps substantiate our claim that LUL are motivated to help maintain the objectives and legitimacy of the labour movement because they identify with them and its principles. Thus, the aim is to examine the socialisation process to identify the factors and processes that shape an individual's subjective perception such that a common interpretive stand results.

4.8.1 Primary Socialisation

There are two forms of socialisation, primary and secondary. Primary socialisation is the process where the individual's first world is constructed, through the mediation of

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[164] This begins with the process of internalisation and how individuals' were first inducted to [participate] in the 'societal dialectic'.

'significant others' (Berger et al 1966: 151, 155)[165]. It is important because it provides the 'basic structure' for secondary socialisation (Berger et al 1966: 151, 155).

Primary socialisation can only take place within a [highly charged emotional] environment where there is a high level of emotional attachment to the significant others, it is this which enables the learning process (Berger et al 1966: 151). Despite wide variations across and within societies in the content transmitted, the most important content passed on is language, and through it, the 'motivational and interpretive schemes' that enable individuals to participate in 'socially appropriate' conduct (Berger et al 1966: 153, 155)[166].

Internalisation has occurred when an individual '[take] on the roles and attitudes of [significant] others', by so doing, he takes on their world, making their roles and attitudes their own (Berger et al 1966: 151-152). It is through this that the individual becomes [able to identify himself] and acquire a 'subjectively coherent and plausible identity', which allows him to locate himself within an assigned social position (Berger et al 1966: 151-152).

The significance of primary socialisation is that it allows the individual to create a 'generalised other' that enables the individual to identify with 'concrete others' and [with

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[165] (Berger et al 1966: 151) – In this process, a 'double selectivity' is said to occur, since what the proxies (choose to) transmit to the individual is influenced firstly by the proxies' own social position (class) in the social structure, and secondly by the proxies own biographical idiosyncrasies.
[166] Such as roles and attitudes which are inherited from significant others.

society] (Berger et al 1966: 153)[167]. The formation of the 'generalised other' signals the end of primary socialisation, at this point, the individual is considered to be 'an effective member of society' possessing a subjective world view and sense of self (Berger et al 1966: 157). However, the continued involvement of the individual in society means ongoing interaction, socialisation and internalisation (Berger et al 1966: 157).

4.8.2 Secondary Socialisation

This further internalisation known as secondary socialisation presupposes primary socialisation, takes place at the institutional level and involves the internalisation of institutions or their sub-worlds (Berger et al 1966: 158, 160). It is more formalised and concerned with the acquisition of role-specific knowledge (Berger et al 1966: 158). Unlike primary socialisation, secondary socialisation does not require close emotional identification, and can be carried out in 'anonymity' of the 'performer' (Berger et al 1966: 161-163).

As secondary socialisation does not require such a high degree of emotional identification, its content also does not possess the sense of inevitability (Berger et al 1966: 163, 167)[168]. This 'makes it possible to detach part of the self' from the persona performing the role (Berger et al 1966: 162)[169].

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[167] Society is seen as 'a generality of others'. The formation of a generalised other takes place during primary socialisation beginning with the abstraction of the roles and attitudes of the immediate significant others into a limited and subjective norm that gets progressively extended and generalised into a norm that encompasses the wider society.

[168] This also means that they are more susceptible to be displaced as well (p.167).

[169] (Berger et al 1966: 162) – This allows [the individual] to separate 'his total self and its reality [from] the role-specific partial self and its reality'.

For institutions, that contents do not possess the sense of inevitability is 'pragmatically useful' as they allow for 'emotionally controlled', rational learning to take place (Berger et al 1966: 163-164). This enables institutions to establish selective and progressive learning sequences according to the knowledge necessary and appropriate for the individual (Berger et al 1966: 160)

While the 'sub-worlds' passed on and internalised in secondary socialisation may be considered 'partial realities' compared to the '"base-world" acquired during primary socialisation', they are still 'cohesive realities' that possess '[normative, affective and cognitive] components' that need to be legitimated (Berger et al 1966: 158).

4.8.3 Training and the Acquisition of Legitimacy

Ritualistic or material symbolic forms of legitimacy are important because they distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate (Berger et al 1966: 158). In this context, 'training' is important because it encapsulates the process of secondary socialisation and aid also in the legitimating process.

Training itself is composed of several facets. One such facet is specialised skill training, where individuals are differentiated and trained according to their assigned role (Berger et al 1966: 158). Language is another; the use of terminologies, which are role-specific and carry meanings unique to the sub-world individuals inhabit serve as a form of

communication between members and also allow for them to subjectively identify with each other (Berger et al 1966: 158-159).

These body of meanings are sustained in various ways; '[by] legitimations', which range from maxims to elaborate constructions, or 'representative' forms like objects and ceremonies, such as tokens which are indicative of membership or status, to annual celebrations or initiation rites (Berger et al 1966: 159). Accordingly, how extravagant and elaborate these rituals are, is seen to be correlated with the importance placed on the particular knowledge and vocation (Berger et al 1966: 159).

4.8.4 LUL and Secondary Socialisation

For our purposes, we are more interested in secondary socialisation, particularly, how it relates to LUL 'acceptance' of the NTUC's objectives and approach to labour relations. Under subjective reality, individual unions and the NTUC are the institutions responsible for the conduct of secondary socialisation, the product of which are LUL who are considered to have internalised the normative, affective and cognitive components in addition to role-specific skills necessary for the role in the labour 'sub-world'/reality.

However, any skills or normative-affective and cognitive components are useless unless they are viewed by LUL to be legitimate. This would be achieved through training where individuals are socialised into the 'rudiments' of the role – both materially and

symbolically, which we will elaborate further on in the following chapter (Berger et al 1966: 158).

Although this appears to explain *how* LUL come to possess similar interpretive schemes and understanding of the organisational goals, it offers no explanation as to *why* they would be accepted and obeyed. This is largely due to the primacy of primary socialisation which threatens these new secondary internalisations especially if the latter is: 1) inconsistent with the initial internalisation; 2) and is not as affectively entrenched, making them unreliable; easier to detach, alter, forget or reject (Berger et al 1966: 160, 163-164).

4.8.5 Maintaining the Efficacy of Secondary Socialisation

Thus, the form of secondary socialisation is important as it affects the degree of internalisation. In turn, the degree of internalisation and identification varies according to the nature of knowledge being pursued and the motivation of the individual pursuing it (Berger et al 1966: 164, 166)[170]. In both instance, greater emotional involvement is correlated with greater identification and internalisation.

For institutions, motivating members and getting them to be committed necessitates raising the intensity of the 'affective charge' during the socialisation process (Berger et al

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[170] The need for identification can also vary according to the position occupied by the individual; higher-ranking individuals on the social structure may be required to have a higher degree of commitment and identification as compared to those in the lower echelons. Such a factor would appear to be applicable to our consideration of labour union leaders. (p.166)

1966: 164). There are several strategies for this, ranging from the 'simple' conduct of induction ceremonies to processes that require more thorough-going transformation in the individual's reality (Berger et al 1966: 164-166).

Before elaborating on how through-going these transformations are, we will first examine how subjective reality is maintained. This maintenance is necessary due to the incompleteness of its socialisation, making it susceptible to being dislodged by challenging definitions of reality because 'their reality is less deeply rooted in consciousness' as compared to those internalised during primary socialisation (Berger et al 1966: 166-167).

4.8.6 Routine Maintenance and Crisis Maintenance

There are two types of reality-maintenance: routine maintenance and crisis maintenance (Berger et al 1966: 168). Routine maintenance involves how the 'internalised reality of everyday life' is maintained through institutional processes and routines; a process that is continuously 'reaffirmed' through the 'individual's interaction with others' (Berger et al 1966: 168-169)[171].

Conversations are the primary medium for routine (reality) maintenance; taking place under against a background where all meanings are implicit, causal conversations help

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[171] (Berger et al 1966: 170-171) – 'Others' help reaffirm the subjective reality of individuals by fulfilling the assumptions that have been internalised as the subjective reality of the individual, this provides the 'reality-confirmation' component to complete the dialectical reality-maintenance feedback loop.

affirm the 'routines of a taken-for-granted world' and by extension, the taken-for-granted reality (Berger et al 1966: 172-173).

Ironically, it is precisely because the subjective reality is never explicitly referenced – being taken-for-granted – that it becomes 'shaky', allowing new meanings to be added, thereby leading to the discontinuation and modification of the subjective reality (Berger et al 1966: 173).

Crisis maintenance refers to strategies used apprehend threats that undermine the consistency of subjective reality. These strategies are similar to the processes required for a more thorough-going transformation in the individual's reality when more 'immersion and commitment' from the latter is needed.

4.8.7 'Alternation': The Resocialising of Secondary Socialisation

Termed as 'alternation', this transformation (in the subjective reality) suggests that subjective reality possesses a totality which it never had to begin with; this is because the socialisation process of subjective reality is always ongoing and never complete (Berger et al 1966: 176).

Nevertheless, transformation can occur in different degrees, leading to varying extents of subjective reality modification; alternation is used to refer to the type of transformation

that appears most 'total', requiring 'processes of re-socialisation' to the extent that it resembles primary socialisation (Berger et al 1966: 176).

This arises from the desire to change the reality outlook to the extent that it possesses the intensity of 'affective identification' during primary socialisation (Berger et al 1966: 176). Similarly, for alternation to take place, there also needs to be a group of significant others whom the individual can identify with and mediate the plausible 'new world' – with all its associated affective and cognitive structures – to the individual (Berger et al 1966: 177).

The sequence of transformation can only take place if these factors are available. It begins with the *displacement* of 'all other worlds' particularly the one the individual currently inhabits; the individual is *disaffiliated* from his previous world by being *segregated* from the '"inhabitants" of other worlds', this ensures that the latter's (and all other people and ideas with similar) reality-disrupting influence would not impinge on the individual's newfound reality (Berger et al 1966: 178-179). Finally, the entire transformation sequence needs to be *legitimated* (Berger et al 1966: 179)[172].

This requires the reinterpretation of all pre-alternation biographical experiences of the individual under the new interpretation of reality. But since not all experiences can be successfully reinterpreted – because they are too antithetical to the present – the individual might resort to selectively forgetting, denying or fabricating new events to

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[172] The sequence stretches from the new reality to the different stages by which it is 'appropriated and maintained'.

'harmonise' what is remembered with the 'reinterpreted past' (Berger et al 1966: 179-180).

Given the subjective nature of reinterpretation and the individual's professed 'sincerity', this reinterpretation of the past cannot be considered a lie; rather it represents how the individual view the past in accordance with the 'truth' as he understands it in the current subjective reality (Berger et al 1966: 180-181).

Still, not all transformation reach the extent of alternations; 'partial-transformations' which relate to the individual's 'social mobility' and 'occupational training' occur more frequently (Berger et al 1966: 181)[173]. 'Partial-transformations' however, face problems in maintaining a consistency between the earlier and subsequent subjective reality, which in re-socialisation is solved by the reinterpretation of the past (Berger et al 1966: 181). This problem would only get progressively worse as secondary socialisation approaches re-socialisation without being so (Berger et al 1966: 181).

4.8.8 'Partial-Transformation' and the Outlook of LUL

Secondary socialisation is particularly significant for our examination of LUL as it offers insight on the processes at work that would account for the close identification of LUL – in terms of their held views and perspectives – with the overall principles and objectives of the NTUC. Previously, examination was given to *how* LUL came to possess the

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[173] 'Partial transformation' lies somewhere between alternation and secondary socialisation.

interpretive schemes of [the NTUC's] organisational goals through their training, here we examine *why* these goals would be accepted and obeyed.

As stated earlier, increasing the 'affective charge' during socialisation is one way to motivate and get LUL committed (Berger et al 1966: 164). In this way, it'd help that LUL are confronted with few alternative definitions of reality; this occurs at the societal level, where the socio-political discourse is dominated by the PAP, the political patron of the NTUC, and within the paradigm of labour relations, where the NTUC possesses a monopolistic influence (Berger et al 1966: 138, 143, 165).

This overwhelming and continuous institutional presence (from the general social to the particularistic field of labour) helps to secure the status quo definition of reality and its consistency, which intensifies the socialisation process for LUL. More importantly however, is *how* the subjective reality of LUL acquired during secondary socialisation *maintained*?

The answer rests in the everyday institutional processes and routines conducted by LUL – all of which involves 'partial-transformation'. This would mean day-to-day routines such as meeting sessions with union members and management, the mediation of disputes, attendance of NTUC-organised events, during which LUL perform the roles 'taught' during secondary socialisation [training], which serves to legitimise both the roles and the meanings and that they embody.

The dialectic loop between the subjective reality internalised by LUL is further reinforced through their communication with others (such as politicians, members and other LUL) while undertaking their routine responsibilities that necessitates the presupposition of knowledge and meanings, which are presumably shared amongst the parties they are conversant with[174].

Generally, crisis maintenance is not regularly performed because they seldom occur. In large unions where LUL may not have the opportunity to meet all the members under their charge, the 'correspondence' strategy supposed be employed for crisis maintenance may be adapted for use; by conveying news and updates of ongoing events helps labour unions reinforce the subjective reality of members (see Annex 4.3)[175].

What this suggests is that direct participation, performance and communication are important factors in influencing the perceptions of individuals; the greater the involvement and engagement, the more positive the perception. Given the greater intensity of their involvement, LUL are likely to have a more reinforced internalised subjective reality and also a more positive perception of the NTUC.

By extension, it is likely given the importance of participation and engagement to expect a decreasing sense of identification with the objectives of the NTUC as well as its associated subjective reality as we move away from LUL who represent the 'most

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[174] The taken-for-granted nature of meanings attached to particular terms and words may not necessarily be obvious, unless one is a total outsider to the 'trade union world'. Even whilst doing the research this feature was not immediately noticeable since the nature of doing research in such a field necessitated some prior degree of background knowledge.

[175] (Interview 4d: 28) – 'Actually the NTUC and the union system does act as an information flow system'.

involved' grouping, to union members who are less involved and less informed (see Annex 4.4).

4.9 Summary: Integration through Everyday Practices

The aim of this chapter was to examine the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for addressing the central assertion of this thesis that is labour unions in Singapore function primarily as agencies that encourage social integration; an act realised primarily through the actions of LUL. While it is not surprising that unions conform to Simmel's conception of integration, given their heuristic authoritarian categorisation, it is nevertheless of interest to see how such a structure is maintained.

Given the thematic duality between structure and agency, it cannot be assumed that the structure would be maintained without the support of those who inhabit it. Thus, it is crucial to examine LUL, the agency within the structure of labour relations, to understand how their personal motivation influence and are influenced by wider structural factors, enabling the maintenance of the structure.

This ties labour unions' wider function of integration to the motivation of LUL for supporting the NTUC's objectives and approach to labour relations, something which should not simply be attributed to 'false consciousness'. Rather, this is something tied to the socialisation process, specifically, the partial-transformation undergone by LUL.

In this theoretical emphasis which draws heavily on the duality existing between agency and structure, I wanted to show that actions which take place within the 'permissible constraints' of structure, also acts as the guarantor of its continued existence (Luhmann 1995: 283). This occurs not only at the social-institutional level but also within the individual, in terms of how they come to (subjectively) perceive and construct what they deem to be the 'reality' of their world.

In this sense, the greater the symmetry between the objective and subjective reality, the more socialisation would be considered as successful (Berger et al 1966: 183). However, symmetry is not the only factor determining how successful socialisation is. Another crucial determinant is that of the availability of counter-realities, whether individuals can form a 'counter-community' to the one in existence (Berger et al 1966: 186).

By this, the continued dominance of the NTUC form of trade unions relations would continue unless an alternative grouping challenges its dominance. Although there are currently labour unions not affiliated with the NTUC, these cannot be considered 'alternatives' as they still operate under the similar structure of labour relations.

The next chapter will examine in greater detail, the organisational structure of the trade union system in Singapore, drawing interview accounts, I will look at how individual trade unions function, the roles and duties carried out by LUL as well as the key themes and issues raised by them.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Focus and Contribution

This chapter has two broad aims. The first is to present data collected from my research that examines the role and function of labour unions and LUL (labour unions leaders), as well as the structural-organisation they are located in. The second involves tying the data to the theoretical and conceptual apparatus reviewed in the previous chapter as a fulfilment of the central assertion of our thesis, which is, labour unions function as agents that encourage greater social integration by acting as socialisation platforms wherein its members can partake and engage in union affairs.

A key characteristic and running emphasis of the NTUC (National Trades Union Congress) and its affiliated unions is the rejection of confrontational approaches (i.e industrial action) when dealing with employers, seeking instead '*a more civilised method of resolving trade … or industrial dispute*' (Interview 6: 37) through trust, cooperation and '*responsible trade unionism [by way of] non-confrontation*' (Interview 16: 12); the belief is that it helps facilitate a conducive environment for economic development that

would enable workers' conditions to be improved (ST 1997, 22 Aug; ST 2003, 6 Dec; ST 2004, 21 Apr; ST 2007, 6 Jan)[176].

Aside from an official '*two day strike [in 1986]*' (Interview 6: 38), a cursory examination reveals that there has not been any industrial stoppages since 1977 (ST 1997, 22 Aug)[177]. Trade disputes had also declined; from 1140 and 1091 cases in 1973 and 1974, to 484 in 1980 (Department of Statistics 1983)[178]. This downward trend persisted into the 1990s where it has remained relatively stable (MOM 2004)[179]. This suggests the success of the labour movement in implementing the principle of cooperation and non-confrontation since the idea was seminally mooted in 1969 as part of the labour movement's modernisation plan (NTUC 1970: 23, 27)[180].

While structural features such as legislature and institutional processes have contributed to such a climate, two things should be noted: First, the existence and continued success of the cooperation and non-confrontation principle cannot be attributed solely to the

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[176] (Straits Times 2007: 'I Walked the Tripartite Path Laid out by Nation's Pioneers', 6th January) – 'The new trade unionist, like his predecessor, starts with the basic assumption that without economic development, there can be no real improvement in the living standards of workers.', (Straits Times 2004: 'Union Leaders have Final say in Talks', 21st April) – 'Dr Ng (Eng Hen) [Acting Manpower Minister] said it as vital to protect the industrial harmony that has taken years to build and which could put many jobs and livelihoods at stake if if was undermined.', (Straits Times 2003: 'Militant Unions are going out of Fashion', 6th December) – '… workers who think an adversarial union best represents their interests, are dead wrong.', (Straits Times 1997: 'Promoting Mediation also Important in Industrial Relations', 22nd August) – 'But with … an increasingly competitive global environment … we cannot take cooperative labour-management relations for granted.'

[177] (Straits Times 1997: 'Promoting Mediation also Important in Industrial Relations', 22nd August) – The only exception being a two-day strike that took place in 1986, (Department of Statistics 1983) – Statistics: Ministry of Labour, 'Industrial Stoppages and Trade Disputes, 1960-1982'

[178] Statistics: Ministry of Labour

[179] Statistics: Labour Relations Department, MOM. In 1993, 370 trade disputes were referred for conciliation, in 1994, 333 cases were referred. In 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2002, the figures were 309, 291, 231 and 260 respectively.

[180] See Chapter 3.

established structural features alone. The persistence of these structural norms suggests that the principle of non-confrontation enjoys a degree of support and legitimacy from members of the labour movement itself.

Second, the advocacy of '*non-confrontation*' (Interview 16: 12) does not mean the complete avoidance, absence, eradication or abhorrence of [industrial] conflicts in all forms, rather, it is an approach, which aims to '*try and use a more peaceful means of resolution of dispute rather than [use] media grabbing*' (Interview 9: 12) forms of display – violent or otherwise – in the resolution of industrial conflicts.

There are two key assertions here, 1) the first is that conflict is a necessary component for social integration; building on Simmel's integrative property of conflict, I will examine how labour unions in acting both as agents and sites of contestation, create a more integrated labour movement and society. 2) The second is that support from NTUC LUL not only, i) enables the principle of 'non-confrontation' to be maintained in industrial relations, but also ii) indirectly contribute to the integrative property of labour unions.

It is the 'acceptance' and support for the agenda of 'non-confrontation' stemming from the personal motivations of LUL – encompassing but not limited to personal beliefs – rooted in their day-to-day practices and experiences that enables the agenda of 'non-confrontation' to be continually maintained.

5.1.2 The Thing about 'Social Integration'

Before continuing, what is meant by 'social integration' needs to be clarified. When speaking of 'social integration' I am referring to the resolution of conflict resulting from [(power) disputes within the productive system] as opposed to 'system integration' which seeks to resolve system conflicts due to '"contradictions" between "property institutions" and the "forces of production"' (Lockwood 2006: 347). Our focus is to examine how agency and existing structures help resolve the conflict within the confines of a particular system rather than the contradictions of the system.

5.1.3 Premise and Assumptions

This argument assumes the following: 1) firstly, established structural norms are not sufficient to ensure that the agenda of the labour movement would be carried out. Although structural features determine both the scope of action and the recourse available to institutions and the individuals working within them, overemphasising them makes it too deterministic and overlooks the role played by agency and the interconnection between the two.

2) Secondly, given that individuals working within organisations may not voluntarily identify with the organisation's aims or support its policies and goals, it would necessarily put in place features that would prevent this. These take the formalised forms of structural norms and bureaucratic hierarchies.

The implication is that an organisation can continue to function even if the individuals it employs do not accept its stated aims. While this may be true, it also brings to our attention: a) those who perform the supervisory function to ensure the adherence to the organisation's aims. The establishment of structural norms is not a guarantee of conformity. b) Who determines an organisation's aims and goals?

This justifies the focus on LUL and the thematic structure-agency duality. Structural norms are after all passive guidelines and require more active inputs to prevail. What needs to be considered is the motivation for the 'acceptance' and support of particular organisational aims aside from self-serving remunerative interests and hierarchical compulsion.

This 'motivation' refers to the individual's identification and belief in the stated aims of the organisation. 3) The assumption being, it is necessary for LUL performing 'gatekeeper' roles to believe and identify with the NTUC's aims in order to: i) maintain and perpetuate the aims of the organisation, as well as to ii) augment the structural norms of the organisation by supervising and guiding the actions of other (subordinate) individuals.

This (personal) motivation is applicable not only to those employed by the organisation, but also to those who have voluntarily aligned themselves with it. 4) For this latter group, it may be assumed that there is an even stronger sense of identification and closer alignment of personal beliefs.

5.1.4 Assumptions in Context

The focus on LUL arises from the need to account for how the NTUC maintains the principle of non-confrontation. Although its foundation had been laid out by '*historical forces*' (Interview 16: 12), its persistence cannot be attributed solely to institutional and structural norms, as these would be ineffective if they were not actualised through the conscious actions of individuals working within the labour movement.

While bureaucratic hierarchy and the compulsion of employment suggests that this could be due to coercive pressures, it fails to address why a particular principle might be favoured over another. In the end, this 'choice' is a decision made by individuals. Throughout the course of the research, LUL consistently expressed a belief in the principle of non-confrontation. Ideological concerns aside, it is the view of this thesis that the 'acceptance' of this belief allows the continued application of non-confrontation, which has in turn enabled labour unions to function as platforms for social integration.

5.1.5 Social Integration through Conflict and the Reduction of Violence

Stating that labour unions bring about social integration is not intended to repudiate either their role or the existence of conflict, merely, that it is through conflict that unions encourage adaptation and the further integration of the system (Simmel 1955: 17; Turner

1975: 624)[181]. This view of conflict is a direct antithesis to Marx's, who envisages that conflict would accentuate differences, begetting more conflict, eventually resulting in social change.

For Simmel, the 'integrative functions for the social whole' refers to the resultant effect and function of conflict (Turner 1975: 625; Simmel 1955: 13)[182]. 1) Firstly, conflict preserves the unity of a group by enhancing boundaries; the presence of an opponent or threat provides the basis for rallying members of a group (Simmel 1955: 97).

At the NTUC, this occurs at two levels: a) for individual unions, it is '*when workers are faced with [a] real situation [that] the workers would definitely support the union*' (Interview 11: 19); threat and fear serving as a premise for rallying to the union[183]. b) At the national level, the '*NTUC will focus on macro things on the long term basis*' (Interview 10: 21), such as a flexible wage system (see Annex 5.1).

2) Secondly, conflict serves to [*galvanise*] (Interview 9b: 3) individuals, '[bringing] people and groups [who may] otherwise [not] have anything to do with each other, together' (Simmel 1955: 99) (see Annex 5.2). a) For members, the unions and its ideals provides the focal point for members to interact and form associations.

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[181] Simmel: A net overall integrative effect.
[182] Simmel: 'Conflict… is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.'
[183] (Interview 11: 19) – '*if that real situation comes, they would definitely join. But if no such situation comes, if we just say for the sake of saying … "the management can get us out anytime", the workers may not see the threat*'. (Interview 14: 4) – [*It was actually the fear brought about by the possibility that the company may undertake retrenchment that prompted the workers to seek aid form the union*].

The effect here and on the national level is psychological, enabling the creation of a form of associative connection (Simmel 1955: 99, 101). b) Given its close relationship with the state, the NTUC would be seen to provide an outlet for associative tendencies without generating the usually associated threats, a preservation of the status quo rather than a contestation of it (Simmel 1975: 99-100).

In addition, 3) conflict serves as a valve for the 'releasing [of] tensions', spurring efforts to regulate conflict by creating norms, thereby bringing greater stability and 'unity' to the system (Turner 1975: 625; Simmel 1955: 13). While the effect is similar for all forms of conflict (violent and non-violent), our focus is on the 'less violent' variety, which is seen to have the greatest potential for developing integrative functions (Turner 1975: 625).

By extension, any effort that mitigates violence is also contributing to social integration (Turner 1975: 624). But given that violent industrial conflict is something unheard of in Singapore's present industrial context, we shall use 'heightened conflict' in place of 'violent conflict' wherever applicable.

5.1.6 Emotive Suppression through Institutionalisation

Since 'emotional arousal' is a contributing factor to 'heightening' conflict, a desire to prevent the escalation of conflict necessitates the suppression of emotions (Turner 1975: 624). This can be done by clearly articulating common interests, heightening their 'consciousness', and improving group organisation (Turner 1975: 624). In practice, this

translates to conducting negotiations and '*[resolving] trade dispute*' (Interview 6: 37) in a '*professional*' (Interview 13: 21) and '*very civilised way'* (Interview 6: 7) (see Annex 5.3).

Nevertheless, 'heightening' conflict possesses its own merits. Its absence in the *long term* is said to result in 1) the dilution of an organisation's boundaries and purposes; 2) increasing decentralisation; and 3) the weakening of internal solidarity, factors deemed contrary to the integrative property sought in conflict (Turner 1975: 625).

The implication for Singapore is that it's:

> '*no strike record is a double edged sword …,it is good for investment [and] for attracting people to set up company in Singapore …, but … if this no strike record is too prolonged then rightly or wrongly, people may perceive it as maybe the NTUC dare not to go on strike*' (Interview 6: 38-39).

Deviating from the usual concern with the internal solidarity of groups, the concern here is that it might be perceived as weak by opposing groups, which may embolden opponents.

How then should this be balanced? While heightened conflict should be eschewed as a condition for social integration, confrontation also cannot be absent. The key lies in the *frequency* and *intensity* of conflict. Simmel argued that in highly interdependent systems, 'conflicts of low intensity and high frequency' can allow for the [release of social

tensions and their regulation], 'thereby promoting stability in social systems' (Turner 1975: 625).

This resonates closely with Singapore's current labour relations scene, which has not experienced the 'heightened' conflict in the form of industrial action since the 1980s. Table 5A details unionised disputes referred to MOM (Ministry of Manpower) for conciliation between 1995-2002, however, these are only the '*very severe cases, [having to] go to ministry*' (Interview 10: 39)[184].

Allegedly, '*the number of disputes at the ministry represent only about 10% of what you actually see in all the workplaces, 90% [are] settled at workplace, only 10% goes to ministry*'(Interview 10: 39). This does not reflect the '*actual [IR] cases [reported to] the union [which is a lot]*' (Interview 10: 40)[185]. The 'high frequency but low intensity' nature of conflict observed here appears to fulfil the criteria necessary for social integration.

The concern is that if this was made public, '*investors will say, "actually sound problem you know dealing with unions … we always worry … that the investors don't come*' (Interview 10: 40)*"* '; reflecting the priority of the economic-developmental *raison d'être* (see Annex 5.4).

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[184] Table 5B looks at the unionized trade disputes referred for arbitration from 1995-2002.
[185] (Interview 10: 40) – To give a sense of how many cases there are: '*it is consistent [for] all the years, consistently every year only 100 to 200 [cases] goes to ministry. [In] 2004 [there] is much lesser, I don't know why it is much lesser, every year [it] is about 3 to 4,000 [cases]*'. Refer to Table 5A for comparison.

Table 5A: Unionised Trade Disputes Referred for Conciliation (1995-2002)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
TOTAL	305	309	253	291	246	231	266	260
Breakdown by Nature of Dispute								
Wage Increase & Conditions of Service	174	190	157	144	147	142	128	126
Retrenchment benefits	32	21	14	46	18	19	37	48
Bonus or Gratuity	24	19	31	26	24	19	27	25
Other Industrial Matters (e.g. sales commision, shift allowances etc.)	75	79	51	75	57	51	74	61
Breakdown by Sector								
Manufacturing	98	110	89	84	77	89	116	89
Construction	3	3	4	1	2	-	5	-
Commerce	87	54	42	85	65	44	29	44
Transport, Storage & communications	31	33	19	26	23	27	27	34
Financial, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services & Community, Social & Personal	84	109	99	95	79	71	88	93
Others	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-

Figures: MOM

Table 5B: Unionised Trade Disputes Referred for Arbitration (1995-2002)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Disputes Referred to Industrial Arbitration Court for Arbitration	3	2	1	5	4	5	5	5

Figures: MOM. Note: Some of these disputes were eventually resolved amicably through conciliation

The labour movement's socially integrative features, may be subdivided into 3 categories – as outlined below – will be discussed through the chapter. Emphasis will go to linking how these features address the central premise of this thesis; that is labour unions contribute to social integration and stability.

1) Philosophy/Ideology:

The cooperative relationship between the tripartite partners of government, employers and labour is constantly emphasised. Though it stresses the interdependency between employers and labour, it also designates the government as the arbiter, highlighting the necessity of collaboration and the avoidance of a '*zero-sum*' (Interview 6: 37) mentality (ST 1997, 4 Apr; Wong 1983: 263)[186]. This means the labour movement also needs to be cognizant of the priority of the national interests which it has to uphold (Tan 2004: 77)[187].

2) Structural-Procedural:

The legislative provisions for compulsory arbitration and the regulation of the negotiation process, utilises the law to establish a) commonly recognised 'binding norms' that parties in conflict have to adhere to, while enabling at the same time, b) the exclusion of

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[186] (Straits Times 1997: 'Unions' Role in Taking Singapore to the Top', 4th April), (Interview 6: 37) – '*And in the end this consensus is also always win-win for the employers as well as the workers, and so we don't really go for a zero-sum game here you see.*'

[187] Even though the labour movement needs to be committed to its membership and uphold the '*basic principle [of protection]*' (Interview 4c: 5) and [*the betterment of the terms and conditions of employment*] (Interview 14: 6), it is unmistakeable that it is the national interests, the 'interests of the community as a whole', that is of greater importance – Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 136) – Part V: Section 34(1a).

'everything personal' in lieu of the [objective] nature of legal conflict (Simmel 1955: 35, 37-38; Singapore Statutes Cap.136)[188].

By professionalizing the vocation of the union official (Industrial Relations Officer – IRO), whereby the NTUC trains career professionals to handle union work, minimises the personal involvement of the IRO, allowing for objective emotional detachment, which goes towards reducing the intensity of the conflict (Simmel 1955: 37).

In addition, control over the training of IROs ensures the unfettered transmission of the NTUC's principle of ideological beliefs, while acting also as a form of screening that lets the NTUC sieve out individuals who do not share their tenets. The same happens during the selection delegates at the union level; IROs have discretion in '*eliminating [who they] think have ulterior motives*' (Interview 9c: 29) (see Annex 5.5). The rationale being that these individuals pose a threat to the integrity of the group (Simmel 1955: 49).

3) Individual Beliefs

The 'acceptance' of the NTUC's principles by LUL (both IROs and delegates) also contribute to labour unions serving as platforms of social integration. This is linked to the structure-agency duality wherein acceptance and practice of the key ideological-philosophical tenets of the NTUC acts to mutually reinforce both the structural-procedural features and ideological tenets.

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[188] Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 136) – Part III: Section 18, 20, 2, 23; Part IV: Section 31, 32, 35.

5.2 Organisational Analysis of the NTUC

5.2.1 Open System or Direct System? – The Unseen Effect

In chapter one, I examined the structure and governance of the NTUC at the branch, union and national level, describing the electoral process of union delegates. There are two methods of election, the 'open system' and the 'direct system'. Of the two, the direct system [*is more advantageous for the incumbent as you know directly and immediately who it is that wish to challenge you*] (Interview 4b: 2)

This makes it difficult and [*less likely that people would directly challenge the incumbent in such a small group*] (Interview 4b: 2) setting because of two factors: [*one is the fear of causing the person to lose face, and second is the worry that there would be no support from others*] (Interview 4b: 2). [*Challenge and confrontation is much easier in an open setting where there are a lot of people*] (Interview 4b: 2) and dissent may be more freely articulated.

The advantage of the direct system is that it offers a [*relatively stable system*] (Interview 4b: 2) if an arrangement can be worked out between those elected. However, failure would mean the opposite[189]. Internally assigning positions makes it easier for votes to be obtained but it also means that members have little influence in determining who gets elected to what position, since popularity does not determine the office occupied.

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[189] As would be suggested by the occurrences of coups within the executive committees of unions.

In contrast, the open system selects office bearers [*solely on counted votes*] (Interview 4b: 2); members [*vote directly for those who wish to stand for a particular position*] (Interview 4b: 2) thereby [*minimising the opportunities for office positions to be assigned based on an internal arrangement*] (Interview 4b: 2). This also helps keep [*individuals from bending to peer pressure*] (Interview 4b: 2) or to arguments based on 'solidarity', particularly where there exists an [*inequality of power between members*] (Interview 4b: 2).

5.2.2 Making Sense of the 'Symbiotic' Relationship

The concern with power disparity, in small groups is particularly significant for the NTUCCC (NTUC Central Committee); of its 23 members elected in 2003-2007, 3 were MPs (Members of Parliament), 5 were or had previously been appointed as NMPs (Nominated Members of Parliament). Having a Minister as the titular head of the labour movement, does little to dispel the impression that labour unions are dominated by the state (Griffith 1987: 64, Leggett 2005: 144, Rodan 1998: 65-66).

However, government presence is not confined just to the strategic level of union leadership. Most unions also have MPs and ministers serving in some capacity[190]. It was explained that '*it is the job of the advisor to [answer] when the union do something which is against the Singapore economy*' (Interview 4a: 21) and that, '*[the] government want*

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[190] These could be ex or current officials. Usually they serve as the Executive Secretary, Advisors or Trustees of the union.

some MP here and there and in the central committee to control the feeling and not to go on strike' (Interview 4a: 25).

Given that unions '*are quite good in … feeling the ground*' (Interview 10: 11), their placement has been rationalised as being part of a feedback system that taps on unions' ability to '*know what's happening at the ground*' (Interview 10: 10), to address any potential problems that may arise. Aside from this, it is also an avenue for them as:

> '*policymakers [to] come down to the level of the workers and understand the basic concerns in the needs [and] articulate the workers' concern and their views*' (Interview 9c: 26).

In addition, '*there's no secret about this very close symbiotic relationship between the ruling party and the national body [NTUC]*' (Interview 9: 21)[191]. '*The affinity or the relationship between political party and the union movement is not unique [only] that we seem to have the same party in power*' (Interview 9: 22).

For the most part, this relationship is taken as a positive and (mutually) instrumental one,

> '*in the sense that it keeps workers representation a voice in a lot of government bodies, we have union, labour reps sitting in … to voice out workers' concern, on policies to be made*' (Interview 9: 23).

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[191] (Interview 9: 21) – The close proximity between the government and union is '*not unique to Singapore, if you look at Britain, you look at US it's the same thing, the labour party rides on the trade union to come into power also. In the US it is the democrats*'. See Annex 5.6 for the rationale for the close proximity.

Other than representation, this relationship also offers leverage when bargaining with employers since '*government leaders and their influence … raises the credibility of the union*' (Interview 9: 23).

But however beneficial, the dependence of labour on the government is inevitable not simply because of the disparity in skills and ability – '*you cannot ask a … electronic worker to run a cooperative*' (Interview 4b: 13) – there is also the loss of leaders as workers themselves aspire for upward mobility: '*the better ones don't stay in the working class [so] there becomes a dearth of leadership*' (Interview 9: 23) (see Annex 5.7).

If anything, these views reflect the successful mitigation of an otherwise inevitable conflict between the labour movement and the political party, had political leaders not been institutionally '*inducted*' (Interview 9i: 4) into the labour movement. Though there is no doubt that '*if the union leadership challenges the political leadership, [it is the] political leaders [who will] triumph*' (see Annex 5.8).

This theoretically validates Simmel's view of how 'the very interests of the group necessitate a structure prohibiting or limiting competition', showing the devices used to bring this about; namely centralisation and the supervision of decision-making powers within the hands of political leaders (Simmel 1955: 67, 88).

But whereas labour MPs of the 50's and 60's were from the grassroots, '*today the labour MPs are not …, they are inducted*' (Interview 9i: 4). In the view of an autonomous (non-

NTUC affiliated) LUL this would account for the type and quality of the union leaders today (see Annex 5.9). The state of the union leadership is not surprising given that '*the government definitely want to build the image that … the labour movement in Singapore is under control*' (Interview 5a: 13) (see Annex 5.9).

Aside from the perceived qualitative difference between leaders of the past and now, this illustrates the dialectical duality between agency and structure wherein institutional changes enacted to meet particular objectives – in this case, political-economic aims – lead to changes in practices, and the characteristics of agency employed.

5.2.3 Union Independence/Democracy?

What then can be said about the independence and democracy of unions in light of the induction of MPs and Ministers into the NTUC and unions? Interestingly, LUL appear split in their views, alternating between rejection and acceptance, in how they view the relationship between the PAP and the NTUC.

While one interviewee asserted that [*the NTUC is not part of the government, just that it is coincidental that the Secretary General is a minister in the cabinet*] (Interview 8a: 9), another stated that '*the labour movement has identified itself with the ruling party*' (Interview 9c: 30).

Is the selection process of leaders really democratic? This is an important consideration because the independence of the labour movement is often associated with the extent to which it is seen to represent and uphold the interests of those whom they claim to represent.

Setting aside the presence of politicians, the usual process of leadership succession usually takes the nomination-voting-confirmation trajectory. If this was so, how can a 'designated successor' of the NTUC Secretary-General be announced in the press even before the election process has taken place (CNA 2004, 2 May; ST 2005, 17 Jul)[192]?

Thus, while there is '*strong democracy [in terms of] freedom of association*' (Interview 4e: 9), '*there is no free democratic trade unions in Singapore*' (Interview 9: 22). While the admission is not necessarily astounding, the candour was. More importantly, was why such a situation is accepted and justified. There are in general three justifications: 1) Singapore's economic vulnerability; 2) the fear of electing a corrupt leader; and 3) the current status quo, which is seen to have benefited the '*working class*' (see Annex 5.10).

If anything, this highlights pragmatism; the validation of beliefs on the basis of the (desired) consequences it brings about (Barbalet 2007: 35). An 'undemocratic' electoral arrangement is evaluated to be acceptable based on the resultant factual 'concreteness' it is attributed to help bring about (James 1907: 111).

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[192] (Channel News Asia 2004: 'Lim Swee Say being groomed to be the next NTUC Secretary-General', 2nd May), (Straits Times 2005: 'Swee Say takes over as NTUC chief in mid-'06', 17 Jul)

Understandably, the 'government [would] also want to put control' (Interview 4c: 31) over the position of the NTUC Secretary-General. This would at least in part be politically motivated since '*this [is] a very powerful person, Secretary-General of NTUC means you are talking about half a million people doing what he say*' (Interview 4c: 31).

Such an arrangement is seen to be justifiable so long as the '*democratic process*' wherein '*there is freedom of speech, and freedom of voting*' (Interview 4c: 34) remains. Understanding this requires an elaboration of the process in which a successor becomes 'confirmed'. However, it should first be stated that this process itself had arisen and functions as a '*test period [in order to avoid any] mismatch*' (Interview 9c: 25-26) and embarrassment that may arise in the event that 'heir' is found to be unsuitable.

To begin with, even though '*[the successor] is designated he will still go through a election*' (Interview 4c: 31), and in order to '*to get him there, you must … get a lot of people to support him*' (Interview 4c: 31). The electoral process is thus 'democratic' in the sense that '*you need to go around gather the kind of rapport*' (Interview 4c: 35). This is needed since support is '*not necessarily 100%*' and '*it's not by virtue of him being a Minister or what people vote for him*' although it certainly '*helps*' (Interview 4c: 36).

There are two ways to secure support: 1) the first, which is more indirect, relies on the support of LUL [delegates]; the candidate '*must make sure he have people … like friends go down the ground and saying good about him*' (Interview 4c: 36). 2) The second,

requires the candidate himself '*to go around gather the kind of rapport*' (Interview 4c: 35), since one '*cannot just expect to sit still and expect to [be] voted*' (Interview 4c: 35).

The second form of support, applies to all MPs and Ministers, and does not occur only during election time, but is continually built-up through '*ground work*' (Interview 4e: 2), as acts of service, where within individual unions '*he must build up rapport*' (Interview 4e: 15) by going '*round and familiarise himself and network with the union*' (Interview 9c: 24). This is to '*to gain acceptance and be able to work with them … so that there will be … no problem on the election day*' (Interview 9c: 24).

The individual is further helped in his candidacy by 'the very sympathetic government-owned and controlled domestic media', which may drum up the necessary publicity such that '*they already drill in the mind, he's the one, no more*' (Interview 4c: 31) (Rodan 1996a: 114)[193].

Nevertheless, the designation for a post would only be done after a period of assessment, which involves '*identifying, bringing that person in to test him, how he works with the grassroot*' (Interview 9c: 25). Ultimately, the '*[person's] individual characteristic will still determine whether he is a suitable … candidate; not so much … capabilities but the ability to work with … other people*' (Interview 9c: 25).

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[193] (Interview 9c: 25) – But being 'slated for something' is not sufficient, a brief discussion was made about a previous NTUC Secretary-General, Mr Lim Chee Onn – the first minister to be inducted into the NTUC – during which it was pointed out after some time, because '*there were some working relationship issues … with some of the affiliates … over his personal style*', '*he gave up that position and went into private sector*'.

However, even after all the preparatory work, not all union delegates would vote for the designate, since there will be '*some who don't like him*' (Interview 4c: 31) and will not vote for him. But generally the person just needs to be '*acceptable … difficult to say popular*' (Interview 9c: 25) (see Annex 5.11).

Interestingly, there appears to be an evaluation system for designate heirs of the NTUC Secretary-General position; supposing the number of NTUC delegates voting at the convention of delegates numbered 380, and the designate manages to '*get say 280 [votes]*' (Interview 4c: 33), this would not be considered good, '*because PAP very high standard*' (Interview 4c: 33); '*suppose you get 170, [this is] also not good for Lim Swee Say [he] must get 320 or 370*' (Interview 4c: 33).

Hence, while the appointment of a designate may appear like a straightforward affair, it actually encompasses a good deal of background preparatory work; all that is required from the designate is to '*do his part to make sure he don't cock up*' (Interview 4c: 35), as long he is able to do this, it is '*very hard for him to lose*' (Interview 4c: 36).

So how should the succession 'process' be understood within the wider scope of how LUL construct and perceive reality? Firstly, as part of an institutionalised system, both the manner of the succession as well as the close relationship between the NTUC and PAP confronts the individual LUL as part of their objective reality, having long been inaugurated and legitimised.

The legitimation expressed when examining why the absence of democratic trade unions was justifiable, is in fact 'intersubjective sedimentation'; a mixture of biographical experience and affirmed knowledge which goes towards supporting and continuing the current institutional arrangement (Berger et al 1966: 80, 85)[194].

At the subjective level, the process of political leaders working to 'gain acceptance' coincides with the 'routine' everyday of LUL required to work and interact with them. As such, '*people will know if you are ''playing the game''* (Interview 8: 13), that is insincere and involved in double dealing[195]. Thus, it is through this experience of working with and observation of labour MPs that help validate, constantly 'reaffirm' and maintain the claim that government leaders work for workers and the unions (Berger et al 1966: 168-169).

5.3 General Trend in Union Structure

Organisationally, the trend points to an increasing consolidation of labour unions; smaller unions are giving way to larger ones. Since 1998 there are no longer any unions with a membership size of less than 50, the number of unions in the 50-249 members category has also fallen, along with their membership (see Table 5C).

During the period 1993-2003, the number of mid-size unions in the 250-999 and 1,000-4,999 categories also fell (see Table 5C). But the extent of this reduction is more apparent

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[194]The reasons given being: 1) the country's economic vulnerability; 2) risk aversion: the fear that a situation worse than the present one may result under a different system; 3) and the fact that the current arrangement has been beneficial to both workers and unions.

[195] (Interview 8: 13) – [*If such things happen, they would come to light and people will come to know sooner or later*].

when viewed in terms of membership. The loss for both categories was not only in absolute membership figures but also in the proportion of membership that they represent; in 1993, the 250-999 category accounted for 6.2% of union memberships, by 2003, this was reduced to 2.9% (see Table 5C).

Similarly, unions in the 1,000-4,999 category which accounted for 28.6% of membership in 1993, saw its share reduced to 11.9% by 2003 (see Table 5C). Unions with 5,000-9,999 members fared no better; representing 23.7% of the membership in 1993, they only accounted for 8.8% in 2003 (see Table 5C).

The largest unions (whose membership exceeds 10,000) are the only exception to this trend of decline, not only have their numbers increased, from 5 in 1993, to 8 in 1998 and 13 in 2003, but their share of the total membership also rose, from 40.6% in 1993, to 53.3% in 1998 and 76.3% in 2003 (see Table 5C).

This 'consolidation' is perhaps the result of how labour unions are organised, which coincides with the economic restructuring that took place[196]. The restructuring triggered by the AFC (Asian Economic Crisis) in 1998 did not affect Singapore as badly as the electronic semiconductor slump in 2001, which '*drastically affected [the] electrical and electronics*' (Interview 9a: 28) industry and saw the [*relocation of quite a few big companies*] (Interview 9a: 28) (Huxley 2002: 156)[197].

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[196] The explanation of Turf Management is covered in Chapter 1.
[197] (Interview 9a: 28) – Companies such as Motorola and Seagate relocated.

Table 5C: Membership of Employees' Trade Unions by Size of Trade Union, (1993 - 2003)

(At Year-end)

Size of Trade Union (Number of Members) / Proportion to total membership (%)	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
TOTAL	**235,723**	**232,927**	**235,157**	**255,020**	**260,130**	**272,769**	**289,707**	**314,478**	**338,311**	**389,676**	**417,166**
Under 50	50	35	29	26	26	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-	-	-	-	-	-
50 - 249	2,111	1,941	1,651	1,451	1,329	1,490	1,386	1,257	1,224	1,045	674
	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
250 - 999	14,613	15,541	18,000	16,765	16,858	16,448	14,977	15,415	10,104	10,837	12,123
	6.2%	6.7%	7.7%	6.6%	6.5%	6.0%	5.2%	4.9%	3.0%	2.8%	2.9%
1,000 - 4,999	67,324	62,722	53,972	65,412	57,152	57,698	54,902	45,931	54,887	45,642	49,538
	28.6%	26.9%	23.0%	25.6%	22.0%	21.2%	19.0%	14.6%	16.2%	11.7%	11.9%
5,000 - 9,999	55,817	59,231	65,412	67,240	58,974	51,757	58,011	68,315	39,730	40,902	36,536
	23.7%	25.4%	27.8%	26.4%	22.7%	19.0%	20.0%	21.7%	11.7%	10.5%	8.8%
10,000 and Over	95,808	93,457	96,093	114,483	125,791	145,376	160,431	183,560	232,366	291,250	318,295
	40.6%	40.1%	40.9%	44.9%	48.4%	53.3%	55.4%	58.4%	68.7%	74.7%	76.3%

Source: Labour Relations Department, MOM

The electronic industry slump and poor U.S. and regional economic performance resulted in the collapse of 'Singapore's manufacturing export' in the electronics sector and hastened the restructuring process (Huxley 2002: 156-157). Manufacturing shrank 19%, while the economy contracted by 5.6% in the July-September quarter of 2001 (Huxley 2002: 157; Singstat 2007)[198]. Retrenchment which spiked in 1998, rose again, while the unemployment rate increased to 4.4% in 2002 (See Table 5D Retrenchment and Table 5E Unemployment).

The effect was most keenly felt in the electronics sector, which in 2003 accounted for 30% of Singapore's manufacturing output, down from 49.7% in 1997 (Prystay 2004: 46). Other industrial sectors, notably, aviation, marine engineering, biomedical and chemicals performed well (Huxley 2002: 157; Prystay 2004: 46).

The emerging markets of India and China also added to the pressure of reducing Singapore's dependence on 'traditional manufacturing and low-skilled jobs', a development which will see older workers '*[getting] retrenched [as it is] quite tough [for them] to go and learn a new skill*' (Interview 10: 29) (Rodan 2005: 143).

These together with the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) affliction and the Iraq War worsened the economic situation saw the flight of many enterprises to cheaper manufacturing sites overseas, and the laying off of many workers by 'celebrated' local

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[198] On the whole, the economy contracted by 2.1% in 2001.

Table 5D: Retrenchment Figures (1993-2004)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Retrenched Workers (Number)	6,487	9,444	8,788	10,956	9,784	29,086	14,622	11,624	25,838	19,086	16,400	9,900
Number Retrenched Per 1,000 Paid Workers	8.4	11.6	10.2	11.9	10.1	29.0	15.2	11.5	24.7	18.2	15.8	n.a.
Retrenching Establishments (Number)	305	295	351	399	358	1235	781	525	1239	1149	1106	n.a.

Table 5Di): Re-Employment Rate (1993-2004)

		1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Re-employment Rate (%) Annual Average		n.a.	68.6	70.1	61.0	61.9	64.8	60.2	60.8	62.4	n.a.

All Figures: MOM Statistics Detail - Source: Labour Market Survey

Table 5E: Unemployment Figures (1993-2004)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Unemployment Rate (%)	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8	3.2	3.5	3.1	3.3	4.4	4.7	4.0
Resident Unemployment Rate (%)	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.0	3.5	3.8	3.7	3.8	4.9	5.3	4.5
Resident Unemployed Persons ('000) Annual Average	29.2	31.0	32.3	32.9	30.3	54.3	61.0	59.6	62.8	82.4	92.2	80.0
Resident Median Duration of Unemployment as at June (Weeks) (Non-Seasonally Adjusted)*	5.3	4.9	n.a.	4.9	7.4	8.9	13.4	n.a.	9.7	13.9	12.1	12.0
Resident Long-Term Unemployment	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002		
Annual Average Rate (%)	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.8	1.2	n.a.	0.9	1.4		
Number ('000)	4.2	4.5	4	5.5	5.7	11.8	18.4	n.a.	15.4	23.9		

Figures: MOM Statistics Detail - Data are sourced fro the June Labour Force Survey (LFS). As the survey is on households, it excludes construction workers living at worksites and workers who commute daily from abroad to work in Singapore.

Data for residents refer to Singapore citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents only.
*Data for 1995 and 2000 are not available because the Labour Force Survey was not conducted in these years due to conduct of the General Household Survey 1995 and the Census of Population 2000 by the Singapore Department of Statistics.

Long-term unemployment rate refers to the proportion of the labour force who have been unemployed for at least 25 weeks.

corporations like SIA (Singapore Airlines), SPH (Singapore Press Holdings), and PSA (Port of Singapore Authority) (Case 2004: 118 – 119; Saywell 2003: 46)[199].

The airline, hotel, retail and travel industries were particularly affected. In some unions, the effects contributed directly to a [*20-30% loss in membership*] (Interview 2a: 3), while leading others to consent to the implementation of '*flexible work schedule [and] flexible wage scheme*' (Interview 9g: 5, 10).

Most jobs losses occurred in the manufacturing industry. Between 1998 and 2005, manufacturing posted the highest incidence of retrenchment, with as many as 47 per 1,000 employees retrenched in 2001, and up to 20 per 1,000 in 2005 (see Table 5F) (MOM 2006a: 2-3). Retrenchment was highest in the sectors of electronics (95 per 1,000), textiles (64 per 1,000) and rubber and plastic (73 per 1,000) manufacturing.

Despite this, the employment share of manufacturing was only slightly affected; declining from 21.6% (1997) to 20.5% (1998), and later 19.8% (2001) (see Table 5G). On the other hand, Services saw an increasing share of employment; in 1997, it accounted for 61.7% of employment, in 1998 it was 62.8%, rising to 66.4% in 2001 and 68.9% in 2005 (see Table 5G) (MOM 2006: 12).

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[199] The effect of SARS was particularly felt in the tourism sector; 'tourist arrivals contracted 63% year on year to 678,000'. The export demand for electronics dampened by weak global demand and an uncertain U.S. economy saw a 7.5% fall in manufacturing output in the second-quarter (of 2003). Construction output fell by 10.9% while the services-sector dropped 3%.

Table 5F: Incidence of Retrenchment by Industry (2000-2005)

Industry (SSIC2000)	Year					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
OVERALL	11.5	24.7	18.2	15.8	9.7	9.3
GOODS PRODUCING INDUSTRIES	16.6	32.9	22.8	18.2	11.3	14.8
MANUFACTURING	25.1	47.4	30.9	23.4	13.9	20.0
Food Beverages & Tobacco	22.7	11.7	12.8	11.3	8	5.8
Textile & Wearing Apparel	10.4	64.7	29.1	19.6	43.8	34.0
Paper Products & Printing	4.5	8.4	37.9	16.2	3.7	4.3
Petroleum & Chemical Products	17.1	16.7	13.3	14	23	6.4
Rubber & Plastic Products	3.8	72.7	37.9	31.3	23.4	39.7
Fabricated Metal Products	7.5	41.8	39.3	23.5	9.1	13.0
Machinery & Equipment	9.4	32.1	35.7	15.7	9.5	9.7
Electrical Products	9.1	63	71.8	23.1	52.1	48.5
Electronic Products	65.4	95.1	48.1	40.3	17.8	41.5
Medical & Precision Instruments	0.7	9	17.3	20.4	13.3	7.5
Transport Equipment	4.4	4.6	3.3	7.4	2.1	0.4
Other Manufacturing Industries	8.2	35.5	21.5	19	10.3	19.3
CONSTRUCTION	1.6	4.3	5.7	4.9	3.1	1.6
OTHERS*	2.3	15.5	20.4	39.2	41.9	1.0
SERVICES PRODUCING INDUSTRIES	6.9	17.5	14.5	14	8.5	5.1
Wholesale & Retail Trade	8.3	21.5	15.2	17	9.1	6.2
Wholesale Trade	9.4	27.4	19	18	10.9	8.0
Retail Trade	5.8	6.6	6.2	14.5	5	2.4
Hotels & Restaurants	7.9	3.9	7.2	6.9	9.2	0.9
Hotels	13	2.5	11.4	12.3	17.5	0.2
Restaurants	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.4	5.6	1.2
Transport, Storage & Communications	6.4	14.2	9.5	18.4	11.8	5.5
Transport, Storage & Supporting Services	7.5	13.4	5.6	20.1	12.5	3.1
Post & Telecommunications	1.5	17.8	27	10.1	9.1	16.5
Financial Services	9.6	31.8	36.6	27.6	13.3	8.8
Financial Institutions	10.2	34	39.3	30.1	13.8	9.6
Insurance	5.1	13.6	15.7	11.5	9.1	2.6
Business & Real Estate Services	4.4	21.4	15.5	10.3	4.7	4.3
Real Estate Activities	0.9	4.1	5.8	3.9	2.7	2.7
IT & Related Services	5.4	49.7	45.6	22.6	8.9	4.2
Professional Services	6.6	11.8	10.8	8.7	3.7	5.4
Other Business Services	3.7	32.7	13.8	11.3	5.5	4.3
Community, Social & Personal Services	5.2	3.8	3.7	3.4	4.5	4.1
Education	0.7	1.4	1.3	3.1	4.4	0.3
Health & Social Work	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.8	0.4	5.6
Other Community, Social & Personal Services	11.2	7.8	8.2	6.2	8.8	4.2

Source: MOM Retrenchment and Re-employment 2005

Notes:

(1) Data pertain to private sector establishments each with at least 25 employees

(2) * - Includes Agriculture, Fishing, Quarrying and Utilities

Table 5G: Employment by Sector (1993-2005)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004[P]
Employment as at year-end ('000)	1642.1	1714.2	1823.2	1925.8	2046.1	2022.7	2062.6	2171.1	2171.0	2148.1	2135.2	2201.3
Employment by Sector as at year-end (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Manufacturing	25.7	25.3	24.5	22.8	21.6	20.5	20.3	20.5	19.8	19.8	19.7	20.3[P]
Construction	10.8	11.1	12.7	14.7	16.1	16.0	14.9	14.2	13.2	11.8	11.0	10.3[P]
Services	62.8	62.9	62.3	61.9	61.7	62.8	64.2	64.7	66.4	67.9	68.7	68.9[P]
Others	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5[P]
Employment Change ('000)	70.8	72.1	109.0	102.6	120.3	-23.4	39.9	108.5	-0.1	-22.9	-12.9	66.2[P]
1st Qtr	15.9	9.0	14.2	17.4	16.2	9.1	-9.6	13.7	23.2	-10.3	-4.1	13.7
2nd Qtr	10.3	28.9	27.1	23.3	37.2	-5.9	15.5	29.7	3.3	-3.8	-26.0	10.9
3rd Qtr	18.6	7.9	20.4	22.1	31.1	-20.3	7.7	30.0	-12.5	-8.5	0.9	14.1
4th Qtr	25.9	26.3	47.3	39.8	35.8	-6.3	26.3	35.1	-14.1	-0.3	16.2	27.5[P]

Source: MOM Statistics Detail

Notes:

1. Data are compiled from administrative record

2. Change in employment is the difference in the employment level at the end of the reference period compared with the end of the preceding period

3. p = Preliminary

www.mom.gov.sg Accessed on 16/02/05

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Table 5H: Share of Total Job Vacancies by Sector (1995-2005)

(As at Sep)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
%											
Manufacturing	41.7	35.5	29.9	26.2	29.5	33.2	23.3	33.8	32.9	29.7	30.3
Services	49.1	49.0	51.3	56.5	59.3	60.3	68.0	61.6	60.3	64.1	65.3
Construction	9.1	15.4	18.6	17.1	7.7	5.7	7.1	3.6	5.4	5.4	3.8

Source: Job Vacancy Survey, MOM (2005)

Another indication of the growth and shift towards services is the increasing proportion of job vacancies in the sector; in 1998, services accounted for 56.5% of the total job vacancies in the private sector, this rose to 68% in 2001, and 65% in 2005 (see Table 5H). By contrast, vacancies in construction contracted between 1998 and 2005, while manufacturing's share in the same period remained stable, barring a dip in 2001 to 23.3% (see Table 5H).

5.3.1 Restructuring and Union Consolidation

The impact of economic restructuring on labour unions rests on its effect on employment; the loss of jobs either as a result of retrenchment, the relocation of enterprises overseas or made '*structurally redundant*' (Interview 8: 4) from structural-technological changes, meant a loss of membership for affected labour unions:

> '*the boom sector will need workers … so the membership in this sector will go up … so we have to recruit more from the growing sector to cover the [members] that we lose from … the sector that decline*' (Interview 3: 15).

As manufacturing was the most affected it is not surprising to see that there has been a steady decline in the number of labour unions in manufacturing, from 21 (1998) to 20 (1999), to 17 (2000) then to 15 (2003) (see Table 5I) (MOM 2004). This decline is linked to their increasing consolidation and how the boundaries of labour unions are managed.

Table 5I: Employees' Trade Unions by Industry (1995-2005)

(At Year-end)

Industry (SSIC 1990)	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Industry (SSIC 2000)	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
TOTAL	**82**	**82**	**81**	**83**	**82**	**80**	**76**	**TOTAL**	**72**	**71**	**70**	**68**	**68**	**68**
Manufacturing	23	22	22	22	21	21	20	Manufacturing	17	16	15	15	15	15
Construction	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	Construction	1	1	1	1	1	1
Commerce	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	Wholesale and Retail Trade	1	1	1	1	1	1
								Hotels and Restaurants	2	2	2	2	2	2
Transport Storage and Communications	18	18	18	18	18	18	17	Transport Storage and Communications	14	14	14	14	14	14
Financial, Insurance, Real Estate and Businesses Serveces; and Community, Social and Personal Services	30	31	29	31	31	30	29	Financial Services	4	4	4	4	4	4
								Business and Real Estate Services	5	5	5	5	5	5
								Community Social and Personal Services	24	24	24	23	23	23
Others[1]	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	Others[1]	4	4	4	3	3	3

Source: Singapore Yearbook of Manpower Statistics (2004 and 2006), [1]Include Agriculture, Fishing, Quarrying, Utilities, and Activities not Adequately Defined

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As mentioned, the categorical classification of labour unions defines the limits of their boundaries and therefore the extent of their membership[200]. As such, the loss of membership due to restructuring will affect those unions responsible for giving representation to workers in that industry – particularly, house or industry unions in manufacturing.

Conversely, general unions which are not bound to a specific enterprise, industry, occupation or craft may now find, with the expansion of the service industry, greater opportunities to unionise new enterprises thereby expanding their membership. The disappearance of smaller unions while indicative of consolidation amongst labour unions, also points to the importance of a union's membership size, '*because membership is strength, membership is money, and money is how you survive*' (Interview 4a: 2).

The expansion of large unions holds implications for union representation at the NTUC level, particularly during any NTUC convention of delegates, since an increase in membership size means the union have more proportional representation, and more influence. This voting influence would therefore make the union of greater strategic importance to the union-based political leadership (see Annex 5.12).

5.4 Membership and Finances

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[200] See 'Turf Management' Chapter 1 section 1.6.

'*The more members you have, the more finances you have, the more things you can do*' (Interview 4b: 36), is what makes membership so important. Membership size determines the '*ability [of the union service their members] … if your membership size is small, your revenue is small*', this reduces the union's '*capacity to hire full-time staff*' (Interview 9: 3) and places greater demand on union delegates (see Annex 5.13)[201].

Despite the importance of membership dues – since unions' '*only source of income is from subscription*' (Interview 10: 22) – they are for the most part barely sufficient (or in some cases insufficient) to cover the running costs of the union; as one interviewee puts it: '*I don't know whether there's any union that really can … operate just on their … their membership dues*' (Interview 9a: 32).

One reason could be the union membership fee, which is kept low – at S$9 a month (from 1st January 2006) – to make union membership affordable[202]. Another reason may be due to the disbursement of the union dues. According to one unionist: '*running the labour movement in Singapore is very expensive*' (Interview 10: 47); only 75% of the subscription due collected by the union is kept by the individual unions, the remaining '*25% [is paid] to the NTUC*' (Interview 9a: 32) as affiliation fees.

For this, unions get access to the services and information provided by the NTUC. These will include NTUC collated statistical information such as '*wage increases, bonus … benefits … terms and conditions [of collective agreements]*' (Interview 9a: 53), to NTUC

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[201] (Interview 9: 3) – Such as to '*have their own leaders engage in collective bargaining*'.
[202] Prior to 1st January 2006, the fee for union membership was S$8.
http://www.ntuc.org.sg/announcement_membership_fee.htm

administered benefits and programmes like 'job matching' – which is '*a very expensive thing*' (Interview 10: 47). In terms of how they use the funds, '*the union has total control*', complete '*autonomy over their funds*' (Interview 9a: 31) collected.

5.4.1 Financing the Union: Investment & Fund Raising

Unions cannot be just '*solely depending on revenue*' (Interview 9: 4) as '*75% [is] also not enough*' (Interview 4b: 39) for the union to support itself. As it is, '*rental [and] staff … are the two main*' (Interview 9a: 33) union expenditure – with '*staff salary [taking up over 30%]*' (Interview 10: 64) – and the remaining being spent on '*benefits, welfare [and] operating costs*' (Interview 10: 64), such as union administered '*grants*' (Interview 10: 64) (See Annex 5.14). Thus, unions need to look for other means of finance.

This typically involves soliciting donations from the management of unionised firms either directly or through '*major fund raising events [like] dinner and dance [or] golf friendly*' (Interview 9a: 36), both of which are '*very effective [ways] for raising fund*' (Interview 9a: 36). Depending on the union's size, an event can be expected to raise approximately S$50,000 to S$150,000. Donations also vary according to company sizes[203].

The funds raised are then used as '*seed money*' (Interview 4d: 35) and invested elsewhere to generate more funds. Despite having financial autonomy, unions are not at liberty to

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[203] (Interview 4d: 36) – It was stated that a Singapore-based global container, shipping and logistics company donates approximately S$50,000 to S$100,000 a year to their union.

invest freely. Investments are governed by strict guidelines and '*under the … trustees'
name*' (Interview 4d: 37). The latter's ensures the propriety of investment and prevent
'*abuse [from taking] place*' (Interview 4d: 41-42)[204].

Generally, the union '*only can invest in government stock, government bonds*' (Interview
4d: 37), they '*cannot invest in shares [and] can only buy blue chip*' stocks (Interview 10:
65)[205]. In addition, they also invest in NTUC cooperatives which offer higher returns and
pay out yearly dividends which are used to '*[take care of] the running costs*' (Interview
4b: 41) (see Annex 5.15).

5.4.2 Financing the NTUC: The SLF and the Government

Like the unions, the NTUC also requires revenue to function. Despite dues from their
affiliates, '*the subscription they collect only [covers] like 19% of their cost. The other
80% they also find money from elsewhere*' (Interview 10: 47). While the NTUC receives
support in the form of '*government grants*' (Interview 9: 4), which is not surprising given
the 'symbiotic relationship', what is surprising is the duration of the support, which has
persisted through the 80's till the present, albeit through the SLF (Singapore Labour
Foundation) (BT 1979, 7 Nov; ST 1969, 18 Nov; ST 1984, 18 Jul)[206].

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[204] (Interview 4d: 41-42) – '*You remember last time Peh Yew Kok case? … One person sign and [run], they
don't want that to happen*'.
[205] See Annex 5.14.
[206] (Business Times 1979: 'Seminar in 1969 a Turning Point for Union Movement', 7 Nov) – The
Singapore Labour Foundation was established in September 1977 by an Act of Parliament with the aim 'to
train cadres for unions and cooperatives'; and to provide social welfare – in the form of social aid as well as
recreational facilities – for union members and their families. (Straits Times 1969: 'Dependence on
Government for Money Criticised by Delegates', 18 Nov), (Straits Times 1984: 'Why is Dissent the Trend
Now?', 18 July) – It was noted that: 'the affiliates' contribution to the NTUC of a quarter of their members'

Taking the 63 NTUC-affiliated labour unions and 9 cooperatives as its members, the SLF funds or subsidises schemes managed by the NTUC to improve the employability of both ordinary union members and union leaders[207]. Support from the government to the NTUC has been expressed through allocating the site of the new NTUC headquarters located at One Marina Boulevard to the SLF (NTUC News 2003)[208]. Not only was the NTUC not required to pay for the development costs but the rent for its office space – from '*the 7th to the 12th floor*' (Interview 4d: 40) – would also be waived by the SLF (NTUC News 2003)[209].

While we do not know the extent of the NTUC's financial dependency or the SLF's financing of the NTUC, we know that the SLF contributes to the NTUC and its programmes; providing a yearly grant (which amounted to S$11.15m in 2006), and contributing to welfare schemes like the Public Transport Assistance and Back to School Project (NTUC News 2004)[210].

In addition, the SLF also finances NTUC-affiliated unions, giving a grant of $2 per member per year to unions, while providing subsidies on NTUC conducted courses –

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monthly subscriptions was barely enough to keep the NTUC going. With the intake of highly-qualified officers, expenses have gone up. The NTUC Research Unit received a $500,000 grant from the government.'

[207] (SLF) – Training and education schemes currently offered by the SLF: 1) Ong Teng Cheong Education Trust Fund, 2) SLF Incentive Study Awards and Bursary Awards for ITE Students, 3) SLF Educational Tour Awards for Model Workers, 4) Skills Save Account and Individual Saving Account.

[208] The site was purchased at the market price of $140.6m, and later developed at the cost of $282m.

[209] The NTUC occupies 26% of the total floor area, which amounts to $75m of the development cost.

[210] The SLF gave $1m to the Public transport Scheme, allocated $992,600 for union leaders' training programmes and tertiary programmes. It gave $17.5m for a five year project to encourage skills upgrading and to set up individual learning and saving accounts. (SLF 2006) – The SLF gave $1m to Back to School Project to match the NTUC's contribution to its Back to School Project in 2005. It also gave $500,000 to the Public Transport Fund and contributed to training schemes.

such as union leaders' or skills training – as well as programmes initiated at the workplace or union level[211].

While highlighting the close relationship between the SLF (a statutory board of the MOM) and NTUC, the above also shows the oblique relationship existing between the government and NTUC-affiliated unions, which suggests that the unions' 'dependence' on the government extend beyond leadership, raising the question as to their ability to operate without government support. This contradicts the vehement views of those who disagree citing the labour movement's [*ability to carry out any programme independently*] (Interview 16: 11)[212].

5.4.3 Division of Membership – Ordinary and General

Given the importance of membership, how does the membership trend look like? Overall, union membership is on the rise (see Table 5J), both in real terms and in terms of union density; in 1993 union density was 14.8%, by 2003 it had risen to 20.5%, suggesting that an increasing proportion of the working population are taking up union membership.

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[211] (SLF) – Workplace and union level programmes such as work excellence committees, conferences and seminars.

[212] Examples cited here was the Public Transport Fund and the Back to School Programme both of which were seen to be NTUC initiated. The public Transport Fund is a $4 million fund set up by the NTUC and the CDCs that aims to help cushion the impact of public transport fare hike in 2005 on low income families. The fund was to be disbursed in the form of a $50 voucher by NTUC, through its unions, and the CDCs through the Citizens' Consultative Committees, the vouchers can be redeemed at any transit link ticket office when topping up EZ-Link cards. The CDCs, Singapore Labour Foundation (SLF) and NTUC club contributed $500,000 each, while another $500,000 comes from ComCare Fund. The remaining $2 million came from the 2 public transport companies.
http://www.ntuc.org.sg/ntucunions/news/news_030605b.asp The Back to School programme is for families whose income is less than $1,500 per month. The $1.15 million programme will offer successful applicants $100 vouchers that can be used to purchase textbooks, and school uniforms. The programme was held in conjunction with the 'Used Textbook Programme'.
http://www.ntuc.org.sg/ntucunions/statements/statements_191005.asp

Table 5J: Overall Union Membership and Breakdown of NTUC Membership (1992-2003)

Year	Employed Persons (at mid-year)	Union Membership	NTUC Membership	Union Membership (Ordinary)	General Branch Membership	Union Density
1992*[#]	-	228,686	230000	226,993	1546[a]	-
1993*	1,592,000	235,723	236110	225,902	9125	14.8%
1994	1,649,000	232,927	234363	226,195	8461	14.1%
1995	-	235,157	237443	226,258	11248	-
1996	1,748,000	255,020	257815	226,399	31557	14.6%
1997	1,830,000	260,130	262484	228,529	36085	14.2%
1998	1,870,000	272,769	277507	228,764	48976	14.6%
1999*	1,886,000	289,707	293831	224,498	65067	15.4%
2000	-	314,478	312794	225,378	88296	-
2001	2,047,000	338,311	337387	239,572	112009	16.5%
2002	2,017,000	389,676	387278	242,249	147706	19.3%
2003	2,034,000	417,166	406449	-	164200[b]	20.5%

Figures: Employed Persons - MOM, Union Membership - 2005 Ordinary Delegates' Conference)

* Figures estimated for NTUC
[#] 1992 Introduction of General Branch
Membership

All figures are as at Dec each year (except [a] and [b]), taken from NTUC National Delegates Conference Oct 2003

[a] Figure from May 1992, [b] Figure from Jun 2003

Table 5K: NTUC (General & Ordinary Branch) Membership (1992-2003)

Year	NTUC Membership	Change in Membership (%)	Ordinary Branch Membership	Proportion of Ordinary Membership	Change in Ordinary Membership (%)	General Branch Membership	Proportion of General Membership	Change in General Membership (%)
1992*[#]	230000	-	222976	96.9%	3.1%	1546[a]	0.7%	-
1993*	236110	2.7%	226993	96.1%	1.8%	9125	3.9%	490.2%
1994	234363	-0.7%	225902	96.4%	-0.5%	8461	3.6%	-7.3%
1995	237443	1.3%	226195	95.3%	0.1%	11248	4.7%	32.9%
1996	257815	8.6%	226258	87.8%	0.0%	31557	12.2%	180.6%
1997	262484	1.8%	226399	86.3%	0.1%	36085	13.7%	14.3%
1998	277507	5.7%	228529	82.4%	0.9%	48976	17.6%	35.7%
1999*	293831	5.9%	228764	77.9%	0.1%	65067	22.1%	32.9%
2000	312794	6.5%	224498	71.8%	-1.9%	88296	28.2%	35.7%
2001	337387	7.9%	225378	66.8%	0.4%	112009	33.2%	26.9%
2002	387278	14.8%	239572	61.9%	6.3%	147706	38.1%	31.9%
2003	406449	5.0%	242249	59.6%	1.1%	164200[b]	40.4%	11.2%

* Figures estimated

[#] 1992 Introduction of General Branch Membership

All figures are as at Dec each year (except [a] and [b]), taken from NTUC National Delegates Conference Oct 2003
[a] Figure from May 1992, [b] Figure from Jun 2003

This rise can be credited to the NTUC. From 1993-2003, its membership rose at an average of 5.4% annually, this is due to the introduction of the GB (General Branch) membership scheme in 1992, which has since been rising at an average of 39.5% between 1994-2003, much larger as compared to the OB (Ordinary Branch) membership which averaged 0.7% for the same period, and in real terms has remained relatively constant (see Table 5K)[213].

GB membership appears to have:

> '*originally started as [an] idea of making more money [to] propagate union membership beyond the working class, to sell the idea of union membership … or privileges of union membership … to all categories [of workers] even management*' (Interview 9a: 39)[214].

But unlike OB membership where workers are conferred the 'traditional' coverage of representation, GB membership:

> '*you [the union] don't do any job you get membership … it's like a club membership, like country club kind of membership … you cannot found [sic] it as union membership you know*' (Interview 4b: 12)[215].

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[213] The average annual change in OB and GB membership from 1993-2003 is 0.8% and 80.5% respectively. The higher average for GB membership was due to the sudden rise following its initial introduction.

[214] (Interview 9a: 39) – Continued from above: '*maybe to, how do you, what do you say, ok a bit upmarket, that we just don't [just] fight for bread and butter issue, and we have membership in golf, country club, and some of these clubs you know, which can appeal to the executive type*'.

[215] (Interview 4b: 12) – Further it was stated that '*people feel that you go and internationally publicise general branch, and they know what is general branch, they will laugh at Singapore*'.

Table 5L: Union Density Rates (1993-2003)

Year	Union Density	Union Density (less NTUC GB M'ship)	NTUC Density	NTUC Density (less GB M'ship)
1993*	14.8%	14.2%	14.8%	14.3%
1994	14.1%	13.6%	14.2%	13.7%
1995	-	-	-	-
1996	14.6%	12.8%	14.7%	12.9%
1997	14.2%	12.2%	14.3%	12.4%
1998	14.6%	12.0%	14.8%	12.2%
1999*	15.4%	11.9%	15.6%	12.1%
2000	-	-	-	-
2001	16.5%	11.1%	16.5%	11.0%
2002	19.3%	12.0%	19.2%	11.9%
2003	20.5%	12.4%	20.0%	11.9%

Figures: Calculated from Employed Persons - MOM, Union Membership - 2005 Ordinary Delegates' Conference)

* Figures estimated for NTUC

However, GB membership has been defended on the grounds that it '*is also one way that allows [the union] to have some inroads into organising workers in [a] company*' (Interview 9a: 6), as long as the union know '*[they] have general branch membership above 50% [they] will easily serve a notice to the employer*' (Interview 9a: 5). Although admittedly, this does '*not [happen] very often*' (Interview 9a: 6).

In any case, the GB membership is significant because if it was not considered, overall union density would show a decline, registering 14.2% in 1993 to 12.4% in 2003 (see Table 5L). This is signification for the NTUC too. Without GB membership the density of NTUC membership shows a decline, from 14.3% in 1993 to 11.9% in 2003 (see Table 5L).

This appears to correspond with respondents' claim that the decline in OB membership began '*in the last eight or ten years*' (Interview 10: 23) due to, '*outsourcing, restructuring, corporate changes; mergers, takeovers. So [the union may lose members*' (Interview 9a: 28)[216].

5.4.4 Union-Government Relationship – Beyond 'Dependency'

However, simply describing the relationship between government and labour movement as 'dependent' does little to show the dynamism and complex relation that exists between unions and government. Support for unions is not done out of altruism, if anything, '*the*

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[216] This interview was conducted in 2005.

government have their own agenda' (Interview 10: 47) for supporting the union movement.

The most ostensible being to involve LUL in the policy-process, which may take place in various ways: having LUL attend government committees and having [*unions carry out policies*] (Interview 4b: 33-24), or by having them provide feedback '*to tell them what's happening at the ground [even] before any official statistics*' (Interview 10: 10) (see Annex 5.16).

Yet, even though in terms of '*national policy and guidelines [the unions] will take the cue from NTUC*' (Interview 9: 5):

> '*[the unions'] job is not to push policy through, it is to convince people … pushing policy through is unilateral … we want people to understand the policies and why we are doing it*' (Interview 4b:31).

What is suggested here is that unions have no say in determining policy direction, instead, their role and that of LUL is to explain and convince their membership of such policies. What was conveyed is the inevitability about the process, because no matter what, '*[the LUL] still have to convince the ground*' (Interview 4b: 32), which even if it accepts begrudgingly, '*ultimately they would all agree [with] you*' (Interview 4b: 32).

A point which deserves to be highlighted is the 'pragmatic acceptance' of policies by the union membership, meaning they comply because there is 'no realistic alternative' (Mann

1970: 425). However, should '*something go wrong*' (Interview 4b: 32) it is certain the membership will lay the blame on the LUL who is '*the one who [convinced them]*' (Interview 4b: 32).

Interestingly, the relationship between the NTUC and its affiliates may be more fractious than it appears. As noted previously, while the NTUC runs several welfare programmes, the benefits are distributed by the unions rather than the NTUC. According to an interviewee, this is because if:

> '*the union don't take credit … if suppose NTUC give direct to the worker … then [the] worker would say union useless one, NTUC identify me. Our bridge is gone you know, who will join union?*' (Interview 4b: 35).

This would challenge the perception that '*[unions] see no necessity to*' (Interview 9e: 3) prove their relevance.

While this may be true to the extent that there is:

> '*no [inter] union rivalry in Singapore [hence] there is no need for one union to up the ante against another union [and] generally the affiliates are happy with the organisation structure and the way things are run*' (Interview 9e: 3)

It also shows that unions still seek to preserve some form of (individual) organisational identity even as unions defer to the '*national body to look into national issues*' (Interview 9e: 3).

If anything, taking ownership of disbursing grants and administering programmes reflect the affiliate unions' struggle to differentiate themselves from the national body. Given unions' participation in national policies, it would certainly not be in the government's interest to have them be perceived as '*useless*' (Interview 4b: 35), as that would serve to deter people from joining.

Added pressure for unions to differentiate themselves comes from 'free riding' where union and non-union members enjoy the same benefits. This undermines the influence of unions and contributes to the low take up rates of the union membership:

> '*almost all companies give the same to everybody, whether they are union members or not … it would … not make sense for them to discriminate union members and non-union members because ultimately that would make the unions stronger, … if I favour union members, everybody will join … and then that would make the voice of the union stronger*' (Interview 11: 21).

As it stands, unions are '*not able to do anything about this … right now*' (Interview 11: 22), other than to '*get the company to positively discriminate [the] union members*' (Interview 11: 22) (see Annex 5.17).

5.5 Role of Labour Unions: Bargaining and Conciliation

The reference to the importance of the labour movement in the national policy process raises again the question of the functional role of labour unions, previously covered in

Chapter 1. This section will examine some of the specific areas covered in greater depth. One prominent topic with the onset of the AFC is retrenchment.

5.5.1 Retrenchment, Quantum Negotiation and the Globalisation Connection

The union prepares for the potential occurrence of retrenchment by getting two things stipulated in the CA; one is the '*contractual notice of termination*' (Interview 9f: 9), where the union's '*policy is to ask for 2 months*' (Interview 9f: 9) instead of the usual 1 month's notice. The second is the quantum to be paid out. As the 'union cannot stop retrenchment' (Interview 10: 58), when it occurs, the issue is '*always a question of quantum, what is a fair, equitable quantum*' (Interview 9f: 5).

It is reportedly increasingly difficult to get employers to stipulate the quantum in the CA since the AFC in 1997, this is because, '*in the past … retrenchment … was [a] very remote possibility*' (Interview 9g: 2), it is not so now. Employers '*don't want to commit to something which they think … they may not be able to … fulfil or rather … they would rather have a … free hand … to decide*' (Interview 9g: 3).

In addition, the motivation behind retrenchment is also changing. Previously, it was done when companies were '*suffering business losses and [needed] to cut headcount*' (Interview 9g: 3). Now '*it's more complex … restructuring [may be] due to mergers and acquisitions, [or because companies want to] concentrate on [their] core business [resulting in] redundancy and retrenchment*' (Interview 9g: 3).

The change has been specifically attributed to '*globalisation*' and the competitive '*restructuring of the economy*' (Interview 9g: 3), with '*companies relocating … to cheaper call centre. Manufacturing is a good example … even in the Services sector we see outsourcing*' (Interview 9g: 3) (see Annex 5.18).

In manufacturing, the textile and garment industry in particular has been greatly affected as '*the quota for manufacturing has been lifted since 1st Jan 2005*' (Interview 3: 7) (Nordås 2004: 1, 13)[217]. The '*lifting of this quota [has led to a drop in] the price of the order*' (Interview 3: 7), this means the value of the orders can no longer cover the production costs, and the only solution is either '*to shed labour*' (Interview 3: 7) or relocate elsewhere – which a lot of companies here did, resulting in '*a lot of retrenchment … from this sector*' (Interview 3: 7).

Apart from economic restructuring, these events precipitated by the AFC also indicate the shifting economic trajectory of Singapore towards what has come to be known as the 'New Economy' or 'Knowledge-based Economy' (Rodan 2001: 146, 154; Yeung 2001: 21).

Although Singapore's pursuit of growth is nothing new, as can be seen from it's earlier 'regionalisation' foray into regional ASEAN countries, and the emerging economies of

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[217] This refers to the liberalization of the textile and clothing sector; where import quotas will be lifted as subject to the general rule of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade from 1 January 2005.

India and China, the 'New Economy' is different in the sense that flow is now not only directed outwards, but also inwards (Rodan 2001: 152; Yeung 2001: 23)[218].

Globalisation push and the 'New Economy' defined by greater '*international competitiveness*' (Interview 6: 12), has also contributed to the '*restructuring of the economy*' (Interview 9g: 3); *companies [are] relocating*' (Interview 9g: 3), jobs are being '*outsourced to the lowest wage destination*' (Interview 6: 28), and [*labour intensive work is being phased out*] (Interview 8: 4).

This adds not only to retrenchment but also the loss of employment as companies downsize, leading to a (previously discussed) upsurge in retrenchment and unemployment, and a change in the distribution of employment (see Table 5D, 5E and 5G for trends).

What differed was the median duration of unemployment, which was rising, people were staying unemployed longer; in 1996 it was 4.9 weeks, in 1998 it was 8.9 weeks, by 2002 it took almost 3 months to find a new job (see Table 5E). The longer duration needed to find a new job is due just to higher rate of unemployment but also the lower re-employment rate (see Table 5Di), which suggests a general scarcity of jobs and that employers were not rehiring.

5.5.2 Collective Bargaining and the Strategies of Negotiation

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[218] The regionalization drive was declared in 1993, but had in fact begun much earlier. Countries of Singapore's regionalisation efforts include Indonesia (Bintan Industrial Park), Burma, Vietnam (Vietnam-Singapore Industrial Park) as well as India and China (Suzhou Industrial Park).

In Chapter 1 I discussed the process of collective bargaining, now I will look at how negotiations are conducted. While the negotiating process may resemble a haggling process and appear straightforward, the reality is more complex. This is due not only to the inexact and personal nature of its conduct, but also because while negotiation tries to locate a point deemed equitable by both the LUL and employer, the issue also hinges on whether or not what is offered and agreed on satisfies the 'minimum' demand of the other party.

To begin with, negotiations are usually initiated under four kinds of situations: '*when there's a collective agreement due for renewal, … when there's a wage increase due, [when negotiating for] bonuses or retrenchment*' (Interview 10: 4).

> '*The IR officer will be leading the negotiation, [he or she] will be the chief spokesman, and … the key officials from the branch, like chairman, secretary, treasurer will be there … basically to be … transparent with them so that they will know what the union is fighting for, the basis, the rationale, and for them to feedback to [the union] information in the company*' (Interview 9f: 15).

The process begins with the LUL serving a '*list of demands … to the company [from which the union will then] bargain*' (Interview 9h: 5) from. Depending on the negotiation process, the number of meetings required to conclude a collective agreement '*varies from 2 or 3 meetings to [up to even] 30 meetings*' (Interview 9h: 9); in terms of duration, '*it can vary from 1 month to 1 [or] 2 years or [even] more*' (Interview 9h: 9). However the

latter is '*very rare*', since '*by that time, the case would probably have ended up in [the] Ministry of Manpower*' (Interview 9h: 9) already[219]. Usually, negotiations '*should be concluded within a year*' (Interview 9h: 9).

The items up for negotiation are not arbitrarily determined, but are decided on several factors:

> '*If it is a renewal of a collective agreement – that means there is already an existing one [the IRO and the branch committee] will review all the terms together and getting their views and contribution [such as whether] they have any request to increase this or to add in something else*' (Interview 9h: 4).

Prior to the negotiations, the LUL of the branch committee will be given time:

> '*to go and study the collective agreement that they have at the moment and then … survey their members, whether members have any requests, any suggestions. Sometimes it may not be new requests but it may be questions on the application, interpretation or operation of the collective agreement*' (Interview 9h: 4).

It is after this that the prepared terms would be submitted to the management.

In addition, the terms and items included are also '*benchmarked*' against '*the employment market, [and] employment practices*' (Interview 9h: 8). This data can be obtained by affiliated unions from the NTUC, which has '*got a database [of] 200 over collective*

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[219] (Interview 9h: 9) – On the unlikelihood that negotiations would be long drawn out affairs: '*Because the minimum period for collective agreements is 2 years and [a] maximum [of] 3 years, and there is also a requirement in the Industrial Relation Act that … they would not certify any agreement which has a period shorter than one and a half years before it expires, [means that] there is already a constraint on the negotiating party to conclude collective agreement within a certain time frame*'.

agreements' (Interview 9h: 8), which the union can access so as to discern the '*general practice*' (Interview 9h: 8) in whichever sector or industry.

Having such data is crucial when negotiating with the employer; it allows them to '*speak with conviction what is the market practice*' and to justify '*why I'm not accepting this*' (Interview 9a: 49) offer from the management. This is necessary:

> '*Because today's collective bargaining is more about reasoning, persuading, justifying …. It's not like the old style whereby you don't have information … go in and give a ballpark figure … and engage in … "change alley"*' (Interview 9h: 21)[220].

However, a lot still depends on the management, LUL have:

> '*to size up the employer, is it a multinational? … do they see themselves as market leaders …? Some employer will just tell you straight "oh no [we] will not give this until the majority of the market give this, so we are followers …", so you size up the employers whether … what is their HR practice or philosophy …. If they want to position themselves as a good employer …, "we take care of the welfare of our members, we are prepared to venture into non-standard benefits", then you can put forward. Some … employers are very miserly, "we give what we have to give but we are not going to give more than what we have to give"*' (Interview 9h: 6)[221].

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[220] This refers to the style of bargaining where one begins bargaining from a high figure, lowering the figure each time until a compromise is sought.
[221] (Interview 9h: 6) – So the unions need to '*know how to package [their] demands [and] claims*'.

The LUL's strategy then is to '*pick the cluster leaders to negotiate first … the rest will then benchmark themselves [and see] what they can actually … pay*' (Interview 10: 13). For '*[companies not doing well the union will] keep them till the last*' (Interview 10: 13). This strategy is '*the most effective because, the companies that can afford to pay also want to settle early*' (Interview 10: 13)[222].

Nevertheless, despite trends and attitudes '*at the end of the day, it is still [about] affordability*' (Interview 9h: 6). The union can only try to get as '*good [a] deal as [the] company can afford*' (Interview 9: 10), which varies according to how well the company performs as well as the overall economic environment.

5.5.2.1 'Foot in the Door' – Other Strategies for Persuasion

The key rule during collective bargaining is to adopt a 'give and take' stance, wherein when '*[someone makes] a proposal [the other party] should make a counter proposal*' (Interview 5a: 22). To make no proposal or '*a negative proposal*', which is to offer '*[terms] and [conditions] worse than what [is] existing*' (Interview 5a: 3) is considered insincere and 'provocative', and would simply impede negotiation proceedings.

What sort of strategies can be used to 'encourage' employers to accede to their requests? First, it should be stressed that not all employers are unwilling to give in to the demands of unions. But their rationale for giving would not be as altruistic as because '*they want*

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[222] (Interview 10: 14) – Companies also want to settle early so they '*don't have to … compute back payment*' and allow the changes to take effect at the beginning of the financial year.

to be good employers' (Interview 9a: 49), rather, they do so because '*[they] want to be competitive, [they] want to have "Best Practices"*' (Interview 9a: 49).

Often, '*market leaders*' (Interview 9a: 49), like multinational firms or employers who are sufficiently '*enlightened*' and self-motivated such that the union:

'*don't have to tell them, or make the demand, [they] will give [because they] know, [they] have done [their] own survey and [they] know [what] is being given and … want to better it*' (Interview 9a: 49).

This group comprise about '*half*' of the employers' cohort, the other half are '*market followers*'; '*reasonable employers*' who are '*comfortable where [they] are, [they] don't want to be trail blazers [but] if more companies [were] giving [a] benefit then [they] will follow*' (Interview 9a: 50)[223].

There is however a minority group '*who are the scrooge*' (Interview 9a: 50); they '*are not enlightened, they sometimes don't have HR people, some … are maybe sole proprietors, so they really have a very vested interest*' (Interview 9a: 50) in not offering any benefits; '*some [are] our local Singaporeans, they are the people who do our own workers in*' (Interview 9a: 59).

While what to bargain for is dependent on how members [*prioritise*] (Interview 9h: 5) their demands, one of the union's strategies is to '*get something first, put your foot in the door … and then later on open it wider*' (Interview 9h: 13) (see Annex 5.19). This

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[223] (Interview 9a: 50) – Usually '*they give fairly good terms and they have good HR practices*'.

usually entails first accepting an offer which is less than proposed by the LUL and improving on it subsequently.

The second way is to establish precedence; by approaching '*those good [employers] that are willing to*' give first, LUL can then '*pick on the potential and build on the successes*' (Interview 9h: 16). This is useful when dealing with the follower-type of employers; LUL can cajole them by citing '*employers who have already given*' (Interview 9h: 15), and in some cases by appealing to their pride and vanity '*[telling] them [about] employers that give*', emphasise that '*[they] are good [employers]*' and that '*[they would] not want to be seen as a bad employer*' (Interview 9h: 16).

By citing employers who are giving certain benefits, LUL may encourage other rival unionised firms within the industry to match these benefits on the pretext of being '*competitive*' (Interview 9h: 16). The key here is for the unions to capitalise on the situation every time '*somebody [an employer] break ranks and give*' (Interview 9h: 16)[224].

However, despite the best efforts of unions to cajole or make use dissension to claim benefits from employers, in the end whether or not firms accede to the demands of LUL are influenced also by: 1) '*the nature of [the] benefits*' (Interview 9h: 16) being claimed, and 2) how significantly the employer views the benefit sought.

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[224] (Interview 9h: 16) – Even though employers have their Employers' Federation who would advise them not to give in to certain union demands, some employers – particularly multinational firms – might eventually '*break ranks and give*' because they are also under the jurisdiction of their headquarters, which might have their own set of '*best practices*'.

In both instance, cost is a factor; whether or not it is something the company is prepared to spend on, and '*[how significant] is the impact*' (Interview 9h: 16) of the benefit on matters like the firm's '*hiring policy [or its] retention impact on [their] workforce*' (Interview 9h: 17), are considerations that would influence firms' decisions.

For employers worried about incurring '*excessive or high charges*' (Interview 9h: 15) from the abuse of benefits, the unions would try to reassure them, for instance, to assuage an employer's fear of being overcharged for dental benefits, the union might propose using the service of an accredited NTUC-linked cooperative (Denticare), where the employer can be assured against any misuse.

5.5.3 Mitigation of Conflict during Negotiation

Negotiations are usually conducted in a '*close door*' format rather than in public or '*through the media*' (Interview 6: 37). The intention is to '*look for a win-win situation*' (Interview 6: 37), which is not possible once '*their position [is voiced] in the media*' as shifting '*once [one's] position is known [means] a loss of face*' (Interview 6: 37).

Sometimes negotiations **'***can be fiery, [they] can be explosive*' (Interview 6: 37), [*union delegates and the management may raise their voices and should at each other but outside of the room they can all go for coffee together*] (Interview 8: 6). This shows the

effort at [*keeping work and personal feelings separately*] because [*at the end, the aim is to reach a decision that can benefit everyone*] (Interview 8: 6) (see Annex 5.20).

In this respect it was expressed that it is:

> '*the sensibility of the issue which is more important. … most of us who are practitioners actually [go] into the issue not only for the present but [for] that long term relationship*' (Interview 6: 37)[225].

This raises several issues, the key theme being the mitigation of the intensity of conflict.

Firstly, commenting on the overall conduct of negotiations, conflict appears on the whole to be mitigated as a result of *individuals* being conscious of and delineating within themselves the persona carrying out a ('circumstantially') professional role, and in so doing, help prevent it from being carried over into a form of personal enmity thereby softening hostilities (Simmel 1955: 38).

However, our classification and explanation seems more of heuristic proximity than an accurate encapsulation of what happens, which judging by the descriptive is something more complex. Firstly, despite the potential for it to escalate into conflict, it does not appear possible to be emotionally detached from the negotiation process (Simmel 1955: 43-48).

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[225] See Annex 5.20.

This is due to the subjective and interpersonal nature of negotiations, wherein the individual's character, cultural background, personal preferences, and pride, are all factors which drawn into play rather than excluded:

1. [*Negotiations may be made more tough and tense according to how the management chooses to execute its prerogative, which is tied to the personal style of each management team*] (Interview 8a: 11).

2. [*Even in situations where the management may be in the wrong, the union still cannot just go up to them and tell them that they are wrong. A lot actually involves face saving for the management*] (Interview 8a: 11).

3. *'Old men and the Japanese are very funny people'. [Some of the older men and Japanese do not like to negotiate with IROs whom they see as] 'young girls', [they do not wish to speak to them as they feel that they are young, inexperienced and are wasting their time]* (Interview 8a: 11).

Similarly, while it is stipulated that the clear articulation of groups' goals and interests may help open the possibility to using 'less violent' means to achieving them, the 'closed door' nature of negotiations appear to contradict this (Simmel 1955: 39-41). Allow me to clarify. First, a distinction needs to be made between the 'specific' and 'general' interests or goals of groups. 'Specific' interests refer to clearly detailed demands and terms as opposed to 'general' ones which are more abstract and tend to refer more to a qualitative

attribute. In this sense, the specific interests of a group may differ from its general interests.

Thus, while clearly stipulating general interests and goals may be useful in preventing the escalation of conflict between groups, this is not the case for specific interests as represented by the 'closed door' nature of union-management negotiation, given their fundamentally opposing interests – where '*businesses are here to maximise profits and workers through their unions … basically, exist to maximise benefits*' (Interview 9: 9) – rigidly adhering to their specific demands by either party would only impede rather than resolve differences.

Making this distinction is not intended to contest Simmel's proposal, but rather to augment it. Just because conflict groups have shared interests does not necessarily negate or reconcile their fundamentally opposing interests. Further, the organisations' submission to the common 'general' interests is akin to '[the individual submitting to] a higher social purpose' (Simmel 1955: 195).

However, the submission to an acknowledged 'higher purpose' requires unions to compromise the extent to which they carry out the purposes for which they were conceived, which here refers to the need for unions to exercise restraint in demanding and pursuing benefits for their members (Simmel 1955: 195). This restraint may also be rationalised on the basis of the underlying 'functional interdependency' between the two

groups, as '*[there can be no] union if there is no company*' (Interview 4c: 20) (Turner 1975: 625).

The union-management 'competition' during negotiation also shows how an integrating end may result due to the nature of the competition, wherein both parties are trying to win 'without using [their] strength on the adversary' (Simmel 1955: 58). Here, the 'victory in the fight is not really the success of the fight itself, but … the realisation of values outside of it', as suggested that the aim was not to '*go for a zero sum game*' (Interview 6: 37) of 'mutual annihilation' (Simmel 1955: 59).

For society, the value of such competitive contest stems from the '[production of] objective social values' as a result of 'subjective motives' (Simmel 1955: 60). While from the viewpoint of the competing union and management, 'it uses the production of objective values as [a way to attain] subjective satisfaction' (Simmel 1955: 60).

5.5.4 Avoiding Structurally-based Conciliation

Despite the availability of arbitration as an avenue for conflict resolution, the reason why '*very few [cases] go to open court*' (Interview 4a: 10) is because neither LUL nor management want their cases heard in open court. For LUL, court holds a great deal of uncertainty; there is the '*risk [of] getting an award for less*' and '*[they] also don't want to risk [the] court setting … a new precedent*' (Interview 9f: 11) that may be unfavourable to the union.

For the management, aside from having '*to reveal their financial statements*' (Interview 9f: 11) there is the chance that '*their company name [may] get spoilt*' (Interview 4a: 10) since it may be featured in the newspaper. Thus, having it settled without arbitration would '*[save] everybody's time [and] a lot of unnecessary ill feelings*' (Interview 9f: 27)

Moreover, given that the NTUC and its LUL '*[emphasises] partnership with the employer*' (Interview 9f: 27), going for arbitration represents '*a kind of failing*' (Interview 15: 10) because:

> [*it showed that both parties were unable to compromise with each other and the issue has to be brought into the open, and when they head for mediation, it is very likely that one party would eventually lose out; there would have to be a winner and loser*] (Interview 15: 10)[226].

In addition, it also:

> '*entrenches this kind of feeling that the employer is not fair [and] if you don't demand and … fight for it, they will never give us, which is a bad feeling*' (Interview 9f: 27).

The establishment of a legal-structural arrangement wherein arbitration is compulsory, progressive and binding, not only sees the importance given to the peaceful resolution of industrial conflict but also the recognition of the legal structure's superiority and of both

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[226] (Interview 15: 10) – In this case, [*the loser is unlikely to feel good in the end knowing that they lost. So any issue brought to the IAC is likely to lead to one party feeling happier over the other*].

parties' 'equal subordination' to it (Simmel 1955: 37)[227]. It is the recognised objectivity and depersonalised subjection to the law that prevents emotional intensification and the escalation of conflict (Simmel 1955: 37).

If anything, compulsory arbitration suggests the impossibility and redundancy of a provision for industrial action (i.e. strikes) (Singapore Statutes Cap.333)[228]. Despite this, NTUC affiliates have affirmed that unions can still strike if they wanted to, even though an autonomous union official does not share this confidence, stating that even though:

> '*there is no word saying [NTUC unions] cannot strike [their] right is restricted, [they] have to surrender some of [their rights] to [the] NTUC, [who is] the one to make the final decision*' (Interview 5a: 39).

In this individual's view, strikes represents a union's willingness '*to take a firm stand*' (Interview 5a: 39), without which, employers [*would not give good benefits to workers*] (Interview 5a: 39) (BT 2003, 1 Dec; CNA 2003, 1 Dec; ST 2003, 1 Dec)[229].

In December 2003, a near strike involving ALPS-S (the Air Line Pilots Association – Singapore) appears to substantiate this, but its subsequent chastisement by the Singapore government, which in the wake of the incident changed the Trade Union Act to enable

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[227] Compulsory nature of arbitration see: Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 136) Section 18 20, 21, 23, 31, 32, 35.
[228] Trade Union Act (Cap. 333) Section 27 (15) – Definition of 'Industrial Action'
[229] (Business Times 2003 – 'Employers must play their role too', 2 Dec) – 'the government also took pains to urge SIA management to do its part on wage reform so that the staff could share in the rewards of improved corporate performance', (Central News Agency 2003 – 'Singapore Government to Amend Trade Union Act', 1 Dec) – 'A member of the ALPA-S executive committee… Captain P. James… said he SIA should treat its employees as partners… and not just something with a price tag that can be replaced'. (Straits Times 2003 – 'SIA Pilots: Law to be Tightened', 1 Dec) – This was said with specific reference to the Pilots' Union, Alpa-S (Air Line Pilots' Association – Singapore), which almost went on strike. A situation for which the 'management is not blameless'.

trade unions' EXCO 'to negotiate and commit to collective agreement without having to seek ratification from their members' gives credence to the difficulty in mounting industrial action despite its apparent legitimacy (BT 2003, 1 Dec)[230].

Despite the absence of strikes, union leaders have assured me that they were always a possibility. The importance of the strike or the threat of it is illustrated through two near-strike cases told to me during the course of my interviews. The first involved a prominent hotel surrounded the issue of bonuses, while the second case involved a 'multi-model public transport operator in Singapore'.

In the latter case, the [*the board of the corporation decided not to follow the terms and conditions stated in the collective agreement signed with the union, deciding instead to give less than what was originally agreed upon*] (Interview 8a: 13). Specifically, the management decided to renege on the annual increment agreed in the collective agreement.

Despite the best efforts of the union to negotiate, no resolution was possible because the '*management [were] very unreasonable*' (Interview 12: 22), this led eventually to the decision to take industrial action. In the end the strike was adverted only because of the intervention from the MP attached to the union.

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[230] (Business Times 2003 – 'Government acts to stem fresh tension between SIA Management, Pilots' – 1 Dec)

Nevertheless, the overwhelming view amongst the interviewed LUL is that strikes are '*the ultimate weapon*' (Interview 9: 12), given that they '*cause a lot of disruption and damage to the company*' (Interview 9: 12). As such, they '*should be the last resort*' (Interview 4c: 24), used only when '*the treatment given by the company [is] so untenable, that union has to put its foot down*' (Interview 6: 39) or if [*the other side is not amendable to meet for reconciliation*] (Interview 8: 13).

In addition, strikes damages worker-management relationships, and bring about [*negative repercussions for the nation*] (Interview 8: 14). This refers to Singapore's substantial '*[dependence] on foreign investment*' (Interview 9: 12) for job creation, and the desire not '*to drive away foreign investment by giving the image of a very disruptive labour movement here*' (Interview 9: 12) (UNCTAD 2006)[231].

In the view of some LUL, the difficulty rests not in getting approval for a strike but that even if one was called, [*workers would not follow them*] (Interview 8: 14). There are two reasons for this; one is the [*fear that they will lose their jobs*] (Interview 8: 14), the other is because workers today [*are not experiencing any deprivation of the basic, and are not subject to poor work conditions, and neither are they exploited as they were in the past*] (Interview 8: 14). Hence, they are unlikely to strike, as [*they would lose more than they would gain*] (Interview 8: 14).

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[231] FDI inflow as a percentage of GDP in 1990, 2003, 2004 and 2005 was 82.6%, 121.7%, 156.2% and 158.6% respectively.

The discussion in this section has illustrated two points: The first being, although it is legislatively possible to undertake strikes, the government's stand is clear, they would not countenance the conduct of industrial action, as it infringes on the 'national interest'. This places the government as the arbiter that designates what is acceptable and what is not. In so doing, it is indicating that labour unions and the extent of their action, is dependent on the support of the government, thereby cementing the subordinate position of the labour movement.

The second point has to do with how the system of industrial relations gains legitimacy with LUL. Rather than emphasises role typification, I attribute more importance in this case to the subjective experiences of LUL and how this 'fits' with the aims and outcomes of the system that they are located in (Berger et al 1966: 71-72, 74, 80, 87).

With reference to the system of dispute resolution, what this means is that this system is not legitimated simply through the participation of LUL in it. Its approach also has 'to be justified' and compatible with the subjective reality of LUL, which is how the 'reality of everyday life' is experienced (Berger et al 1966: 168-169).

In this case, through routine maintenance from the subjective everyday experiences such as: the experience in seeing how strikes can be adverted because of the intervention of MPs; conversations with employers who emphasise the importance of an '*efficient government machinery [and business transparency]*' (Interview 10: 26); witnessing the uselessness of strikes – '*organise strikes, all get sacked, next day they bring in another*

1,000 workers' (Interview 10: 26); and positive experiences during the conduct of collective bargaining (Berger et al 1966: 168-169). In this sense, crisis maintenance through negative criticisms and repercussions from the SIA debacle also help reinforce the institutionalised manner of resolution (Berger et al 1966: 174-175).

5.5.5 The Socialising Function of Negotiation: Role and Influence of Union leaders in the Determination of Benefits

Although the 'divisive' and 'destructive' effects of conflict are well known, it also has an 'immense sociating effect' as it encourages the opposing parties to rally together and consolidate amongst themselves (Simmel 1955: 61). This is particularly so in terms of the decision-making function, which is seen during negotiation sessions as both unions and management are led by their respective representatives (Simmel 1955: 61).

LUL, in particular the IRO exert a heavy influence on the proceedings. This is due to several reasons; firstly, although branch representatives also participate in preparing the demands for negotiation, they still need to consult the IRO in the event of a '*question of interpretation [or] ambiguity*' (Interview 9h: 4); or they may be '*quite vague about*' (Interview 9h: 12) national initiatives and need the IRO to explain and prevent employers from trying to '*bulldoze their way [on] government [recommendations]*' (Interview 9b: 15).

Secondly, although it is '*the committee themselves [that] drives [negotiations]*' (Interview 9i: 13), in the end, the IRO must be '*convinced, [then they] will put [the] proposal in [and] advocate for the members*' (Interview 9h: 12)[232]. This was explained as being due to the IRO having to '*justify why [and put up] supporting arguments to press for [a] claim*' (Interview 9i: 4), thus there needs to be a '*valid basis*' (Interview 9i: 5) in order to convince the management that what is being asked for is '*reasonable*' (Interview 9i: 5).

The consideration then of what is deemed reasonable and therefore '*realistic [or] unrealistic*' (Interview 9h: 8) is '*a matter of perception*' (Interview 9i: 5), which is best determined by [*benchmarking against current 'employment practices'*] (Interview 9h: 8). For instance, one employment trend following the economic downturn was to '*cut down benefits especially annual leave, sick leave, [and] retrenchment quantum*' (Interview 9i: 13). Thus, the IRO would discourage suggestions that wish to make improvements in those areas. However, this does not mean that the union would allow the employer to reduce the existing benefits, keeping with '*the principle … that existing benefit should not be reduced*' (Interview 9i: 14).

Nevertheless, IROs may find themselves representing members' demands even though they may '*not [be] very convinced*' (Interview 9h: 12) or if the chances of getting them is very slim (Simmel 1955: 61). The socialising effect being played out here involves the continued correspondence between IROs and members of the branch, with the former advising and explaining what might be possible to negotiate and what is not to the latter,

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[232] Driving the negotiations for enhancements.

and in so doing, places a 'scope' – thereby having the effect of 'socialising' – on the views and perspective held by the former.

Given that unions affiliated with the NTUC are obliged and '*take the cue from the national body*' (Interview 9h: 19) – because '*they are the planners*' (Interview 9h: 19) – raises the question if IROs may find themselves caught between representing what the union and its membership wants and the initiatives of the national body.

The view is that such a '*kind of situation would not arise because at the end of the day it is still up to … the union to negotiate with your own employers*' (Interview 9h: 20). However, it is expectable that '*if you are negotiating something that is [the] exception rather than the rule, [then] you can't get support*' (Interview 9h: 20). It was also emphasised that unions have a great deal of autonomy in this respect from the NTUC: '*they don't go into the nitty gritty of individual sector or company negotiation, that is left to [the] individual union. They only look at broad national issues*' (Interview 9h: 20).

Through their participation in advising and arbitrating over the sort of benefits that union members should push for, and their involvement in '*the whole negotiation and bargaining process*' (Interview 11: 28) LUL help maintain and are indirectly articulating the NTUC's objectives and approach to labour relations.

5.5.6 Collective Bargaining and the Flexible Wage System – A Microcosm of Tripartism and Union Autonomy

While collective bargaining is independently conducted by individual unions, it is still subject to the regulation of particular agencies, namely, the IAC (Industrial Arbitration Court) which has to certify all the collective agreements. For instance, as the law states that the '*company [is] not allowed to pay more than 1 month of [annual] wage supplement*' (Interview 9a: 7), even if the company was willing to pay more and have it stipulated into the agreement, it would be rejected by the IAC (Singapore Statutes Cap.91)[233].

Restricting the stipulation of the AWS heralds the '*[move] towards what the government is recommending, [a] flexible wage system*' (Interview 9b: 15). This '*flexible wage system*' (Interview 9g: 6) represents a departure from '*a rigid wage structure*' (Interview 9g: 6) to one wherein companies are encouraged to '*moderate wage increase*' (Interview 9g: 6) in favour of bonuses which represent a '*self-adjusting … variable payment [tied] with the company performance*' (Interview 9g: 7)[234].

Introduced in 1985, the flexible scheme had by the 1998 Crisis seen monthly salary to constitute 80% of annual wages with 20% in variable form (Interview 9g: 8)[235]. The current '*recommendation is that [of the] 80% monthly, we should take out 10% and make*

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[233] Singapore Statutes Employment Act Cap. 91 Section 48 (3) – Because it contravenes the Employment Act.
[234] (Interview 9b: 15) – However, '*there is also a qualifier that [the] company come [sic] up with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), measurable standards of the company performance*'. The shift towards a 'flexible wage system' was made in 1987.
[235] (Interview 9g: 8) – '*The 20% include your 1 month [AWS] – the thirteenth month – and maybe another 1 or 2 months bonus*'. The AVC (Annual variable Component), which is based on the individual's work performance should not be confused here with the AWS, which is based on the performance of the company.

it [a] monthly variable' which together with the year end AWS make annual wages a 70-10-20 ratio (Interview 9g: 8).

> *'The rationale for making this monthly 10% variable is, there is no longer going to be any CPF buffer in the future should we [Singapore] hit another recession. So it is up to individual employers to build up their own buffer*' (Interview 9g: 8)[236].

In addition, a monthly variable is justified on the grounds that it helps '*to save jobs*' since '*it may not be … possible for companies to hold on until the year end to cut the [AWS]*' (Interview 9g: 8), which leaves only the option of cutting headcount.

The inability to stipulate more than 1 month of AWS into the collective agreement, wage structuring (and move towards a flexible wage system) on the ostensible pretext of [*rewarding individual performance*] (Interview 8: 10), and justified '*from the national point of view, [to] make our country more attractive … to … investors*' (Interview 11: 32), illustrate that unions are either subject to legislature or have had to align themselves according to national initiatives.

5.5.7 Cooperation without Loss of Autonomy

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[236] (Interview 9g: 7-8) – During the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis and the subsequent SARS and September 11 attacks led the government to slash employer CPF contributions from 20% to 10%. Although it was subsequently restored to 16%, shorter economic cycles and the financial downturn has meant that '*even the CPF is no longer a sacred cow*', and may have to be [*tinkered*] again in future in order to moderate wage costs.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than the NWC, a tripartite body '*which meet every year to discuss on the national wage guidelines, [which is] important because it affects the investment climate of Singapore*' (Interview 6: 34). Its facilitation by the government suggests the latter is of central importance in setting the industrial climate and in maintaining the priority of economic investment.

This apparent dominance of the government confirms the labour movement here as being of an authoritarian conception wherein labour unions an extension of the state are used to push '*national agendas*' (Interview 9h: 11) (Martin 1989: 51). However, despite this dominance and the willingness of unions to '*push for [policies like the flexible wage scheme]*' (Interview 9h: 12), the push stops short of coercion wherein acceptance still hinges ultimately on the willingness of the employer.

More importantly, supporting national initiatives and doing so while exercising labour discipline is not perceived as a loss of trade union autonomy (Martin 1989: 74, 76, 79). In this case, even though the implementation of a flexible wage scheme is nationally directed, unions do not carry it out at the expense of their members' interests.

This is reflected in how unions assess the shift. Even though '*a lot of employers … wanted to jump on the bandwagon*' with the announcement of the flexible wage scheme (Interview 9b: 15), unions were not always willing to make the switch especially when the newer terms and conditions were not spelled out clearly and gave the employer too

much discretion, or when the newer terms were seen as being unfavourable to the members (see Annex 5.21)[237].

On the part of the union, any shift to a flexible scheme must be backed by figures according and the union must be satisfied '*that … it is achievable [and that] the benchmark is realistic*' (Interview 9b: 16). This means that there has to be '*information sharing [the company] must be transparent …, and [they] must be prepared to open [their] audited results*' (Interview 9b: 16). It addition, it was emphasised that unions do not adhere blindly to tripartite recommendations nor will they tolerate employers who flagrantly take advantage of national initiatives (see Annex 5.22).

Thus even if unions would '*take the cue from [the] NTUC*' (Interview 9: 5) '*national policy and guidelines*' (Interview 9: 5), and even though '*labour policies tend to be pro-employer*' (Interview 13: 24), LUL still view themselves as autonomous possessing the necessary discretion when it comes to the discussion and setting of terms on matters such as collective agreements[238].

Further, they have demonstrated that they were willing and able to exercise this. For example, unions have managed to avoid the call from the NTUC and the NWC to '*rationalise the benefits*' (Interview 9h: 18) in their collective agreements by simply '*not*

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[237] In such instances, unions also had the backing of the government (see Annex 5.21).
[238] (Interview 9: 5) – Using annual leave as the example, what the interviewee means when referring to autonomy is that they need not follow guidelines established by the NTUC, so even though the law (Employment Act Cap. 91 Section 43), may state that a maximum of 14 days annual leave, the union may formulate something different and need not keep within the bounds of the national standard.

[stating] in the collective agreement' (Interview 9a: 54) some of the terms that they were able to negotiate for[239].

5.6 Labour Union Leaders (LUL)

In this last section I will examine the role performed by LUL within the labour unions. In particular, attention will be paid to how LUL impart and perpetuate the ideological beliefs of the NTUC as they perform their role. In addition, I will examine how LUL come to possess these schemes and the process for their acceptance.

5.6.1 Union Delegates

There are two types of LUL. The first are union delegates, they enter the union as a result of being a unionised employee at a unionised firm. They are elected or chosen from amongst the membership of a unionised firm, to hold positions within the union, and comprise the majority of the members within the union EXCO. Often they are [*volunteers, part-timers*] (Interview 8: 2) – usually with the exception of the General-Secretary and the President, which are usually full-time positions – who have taken on this appointment on top of their primary occupation.

Union delegates are usually motivated to take on the appointment for several reasons: some join out of curiosity, [*to see how things work then they drop out*] (Interview 8: 11),

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[239] (Interview 9h: 18) – To '*rationalise the benefits*' means to '*standardise*' them such that '*the benefit must … have some relation to the work*'.

while others do so because they wish to contribute [*new ideas*] (Interview 8: 11); [*a lot of it is really about the self-satisfaction that comes about from helping solve other people's problems*] (Interview 8: 11).

To perform their role, delegates need to be able to be 'sincere', be trusted and have good rapport with other members, and be willing to represent their concerns should they have any (see Annex 5.23). However, it is '*not easy to draw people into the committee*' (Interview 9c: 2), as being a union delegate is a rather [*thankless job with little perks*] (Interview 8: 11), it often demands '*commitment after work to attend the meetings and functions [and] there is also a lot of pressure*' (Interview 8: 11), with the [*high turnover rate*] (Interview 8: 11) being testimonial to this.

But these are not the only reasons. For some who '*are able but unwilling*' (Interview 9c: 2), their rationale is that being a [*union leader gives them too high a profile*] which '*may jeopardise their promotion prospect*' (Interview 9c: 2) plus '*they know that it would make demands on their personal time*' (Interview 9c: 2)[240].

As such, current union officials have '*to try to talent spot [to] renew leadership*' (Interview 9c: 2), looking for individuals who are [*mature, good at handling human relations*] (Interview 9c: 3), and who are interested and willing to help others, help disseminate information and generally '*to be problem solvers for the members*' (Interview 9c: 5).

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[240] (Interview 9c: 2) – In such cases, '*it [also] depends on the company culture and the company's attitude, the management's attitude towards union*'.

Still there are some who join '*for their own personal benefit*' (Interview 9c: 5). These individuals will just '*be concentrating on what affects them, not generally speaking for [the] general membership [and are] quite laissez faire*' (Interview 9c:5) (see Annex 9.24). Faced with incapable or selfish leaders, unions are more likely to retain them if they '*need them*' (Interview 9c: 3) or if there are no alternatives, particularly in a large organisation[241].

5.6.2 The IRO (Industrial Relations Officer)

The other type of LUL is the professional IRO (Industrial Relations Officer). IROs '*are representatives from the NTUC. They can work at the union and take charge of matters*' (Interview 4: 3). Except for larger unions who hire their own IROs, most IROs, who '*are all graduates*' (Interview 10: 18), are hired and trained by the NTUC and later '*seconded to the union*' (Interview 10: 18). There, they attend to '*individual [grievance] cases [and they] do collective bargaining*' (Interview 11: 8), which constitutes the bulk of their work, taking up approximately 90% of their time (Interview 11: 9).

Other than this, IROs also play a consultative role, '*gathering feedback*' (Interview 9h: 4) from members, listening to their comments, and [*conduct visits to various companies to see the branch committees*] (Interview 8a: 10). But unlike union delegates, IROs need not

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[241] (Interview 9c: 3-4) – '*… once it's like this, we'll talk to the committee, whether you want to continue to serve or make way for others, and sometimes, we need them, we don't want to drop them, but if they are there just occupying a seat we also don't want to have that you know*'. See also Annex 4.3.

stand for elections, they need '*only [to] be appointed*' (Interview 9a: 60) to the union's EXCO[242].

However, the services of the IROs are not free, with the union having to 'reimburse' the NTUC for the services of the IRO; the cost varying according to the experience of the IRO; [*IROs from the NTUC possess different amount of experience, those who are newer will be paid less*] (Interview 4: 4). Thus, the number of IROs a union have depends on [*each union's size and how much money it has*] (Interview 4b: 19).

Amongst the IROs, the Executive Secretary is the most senior. Within a union they have about the same authority as the General Secretary; '*with the absence of the G.S. [General Secretary], he can run [the union] exactly like a G.S. … and he is not [an] elected leader*' (Interview 4a: 22) but possess voting rights within the union EXCO.

5.6.3 The NTUC and Government Joint

In some cases the Executive Secretary of the union is an MP. The position represents the key link between the NTUC and the political party; since MPs cannot enter the EXCO of the union in the way as union delegates, their only option is to be appointed into the EXCO, by '*[becoming] E.S. of a union … then they can come into NTUC*' (Interview 4a: 23).

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[242] Not all IROs are appointed into the union EXCO, usually only the very senior ones.

The Executive Secretary can be appointed into the union with the sanction of the NTUC Secretary-General and the approval of the union's General-Secretary. From here on, if the Executive Secretary was an MP, he or she would be able to enter the NTUC as a delegate from the union as long as the union's General-Secretary appoints them as a union delegate. If they '*don't create E.S. then not even one MP can sit in the EXCO of NTUC*' (Interview 4a: 27).

The above suggests that in 'exchange' for taking in the MP, the latter will 'take' the union's General-Secretary along into the NTUC Central Committee '*because without his union he [the MP] cannot be here*' (Interview 4a: 24). For the non-MPs entering the Central Committee '*no one is going in because of pay, only name and privileges only*' (Interview 4a: 25).

This would be in the sense of getting '*first hand information … if there's a convention [they may] ask you to go, [or you may be asked to sit in a board as a director]*' (Interview 4a: 25). It was mentioned that some may '*go to the union and say "see I'm in the NTUC central committee I'm so powerful, you cannot pay me this allowance, pay me double"*' (Interview 4a: 25)[243].

5.6.4 The Sacrifices of Appointment

As a delegate from the ranks, the General-Secretary of the union is fundamentally still an employee of the firm although (most) work full-time at the union. In this situation, '*if*

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[243] This statement however is uncorroborated.

[there is] a arrangement with the employer, [the] employer [will] continue to pay you salary' (Interview 9a: 45-46) even though the individual is doing the work of the union.

However, the individual is:

> '*still subject to election after three years, if you're not elected you go back to your former job. Then [it is a question as to] whether the company still have a vacancy for you or not*' (Interview 9a: 46).

But '*during that three years you might lose out on what's happening in the industry in the business*' (Interview 9a: 45), although the '*[employers] are obliged to take you back [but] by then you [could be] too far, too long away from your job to fit [back] in*' (Interview 9a: 46), that's the risk. '*So these are the sacrifices*' (Interview 9a: 45) and it is a reason why workers are unwilling to join the union as a delegate.

5.6.5 Professionalizing the Field and Maintaining the 'Inner Consistency'

Representing the professionalisation of industrial relations IROs are seconded to the union primarily because its members are either unable or [*just not qualified to run it*] (Interview 4b: 20). Their presence will ensure the smooth running of the unions such that '*no matter what happen to the leaders, the union will [continue to] run smoothly*' (Interview 4b: 20). And because IROs are not subject to elections, their presence allows for a '*continuity*' (Interview 4b: 20) not just within the union but also in the dealings with employers.

The use of IROs when negotiating with the management represents a desire to establish a more stable system, given the perceived objective position of the IRO, who perceivably does not have an immediate stake in what is being discussed, can help [*avoid misunderstandings and escalations in conflict*] (Interview 4c: 12-13).

In this way they function as arbiters, not only do they look at the demands of workers to determine what is achievable and what is not but they also have supervisory role such as ensuring that the '*company [is] paying according to their key performance indicators*' (Interview 9i: 17). However, arguing that the acceptance of ideological schemes is rooted in everyday practices and interaction, the main difficulty is also trying to show how these practices play out without coming across as convenient or forced.

For IROs, socialisation into their role (through training) begins at the point of joining the NTUC. This represents an attempt at 'partial-transformation' wherein they are inducted not only into the interpretive schemes and understanding of the NTUC's organisational goals, but also the skill training necessary for them to carry out their assigned roles (Berger et al 1966; 158). The '*biggest role*' of which is [*to implement the policies of the NTUC*] (Interview 4b: 30).

This socialisation is maintained and reinforced through the rudiments of 'reality', the everyday experiences found within routines (in this case, their job), as one interviewee

said the '*only way to learn IR [Industrial Relations] is when you're on the job*' (Interview 10: 32) (Berger et al 1966: 168-169).

This encompasses not only the processes of conducting collective bargaining, why it is done and the manner in which it is carried out, but also more mundane and seemingly unimportant methods such as the role played by both IROs and union delegates in keeping correspondence with branch members, which helps affirm both the routine of the 'taken-for-granted world' and by extension, the taken-for-granted reality (Berger et al 1966: 173-174).

Apart from routines, subjective reality is also maintained through crisis maintenance (Berger et al 1966: 174-175). Aside from the 'what not to do' lessons that may be gleaned from the SIA debacle, interviewees have tended to be dismissive towards 'alternative' and more confrontational approaches of industrial relations, which are seen as '*western conception of trade unions*' (Interview 17: 2).

The sanctions whether through direct government intervention, chastisement or ridicule represents the 'explicit and intensive' measures deemed necessary for extraordinary situations, aimed at keeping the 'subjective-reality' from breaking down till such time when more permanent remedies may be established (Berger et al 1966: 175-176).

The most ostensible being the process of selecting and renewing leadership. While there is currently no '*conscious effort*' (Interview 9c: 1) to renew the leadership at the branch

level, IROs working with the branch do look out for suitable people possessing the right qualities and try to initiate them into the union, in this sense the union does '*make a conscious effort … to nurture … leadership*' (Interview 9c: 4)[244].

In this way, the IRO acts as the '*mentor*' whose role is to help '*develop their leadership potential*' (Interview 9c: 10-11) to '*coach them how to handle problems [and guide them on] how to approach [the] management*' (Interview 9d: 7). With the exception of '*technical matters [such as] labour legislation***'** (Interview 9c: 14), the IRO tries to keep a '*light touch on the committee*' (Interview 9c: 14) as much as possible. This stems from the belief that '*the [IRO] should be unbiased, [and] take whoever is elected …, work with the committee [and] develop them*' (Interview 9c: 15).

But despite this, IROs still (sometimes) exercise influence and '*are expected to*' (Interview 9c: 29) to when deciding who gets elected into the branch committee. This means:

> '*eliminating [who they] think have ulterior motives; not so much as to be so selective or elitist [but] more [because] we don't want people who come in with bad motives, or self-interest*' (Interview 9c: 29).

This applies to individuals with '*have some hidden agendas*' (Interview 9c: 29) and wish to further their own agenda through the union, this is especially so for individuals with

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[244] (Interview 9c: 4) – In the case of workers who are '*willing to serve but they … don't know how to organise themselves*' the IRO would '*help them [by organising] regular committee meetings at a common place, [helping] them to maintain communication*'.

'*political motives*' (Interview 9c: 29)[245]. In this context, people who are members of the opposition party will not be permitted. Although there are no legislative restrictions, this is rationalised as being for '*internal housekeeping*' (Interview 9c: 30) since:

> '*the labour movement has identified itself with the ruling party … if you want to be a union leader under a union that is affiliated to NTUC you should similarly subscribe to the same ideals*' (Interview 9c: 29).

> '*So if you [don't] subscribe to this philosophy [of] tripartism and working with the ruling party… you shouldn't even be a union leader – if you are a member of an opposition party whose philosophy may you know not be in sync*' (Interview 9c: 31)

In this way, IROs help to maintain the norms and values as well as the inner consistency of the system.

Training however is not confined only to IROs, union delegates are also sent for training[246]. The view is that this '*will help [change the mindset and attitude] of these workers*' (Interview 9d: 11). Although what we have here is not 'alternation' – where there is [total re-socialisation] – as it lacks the same intensity, it does run in a similar vein given that it appears as an attempt to either maintain or further entrench the LUL's (in this case union delegates') subjective reality (Berger et al 1966: 166-167, 176).

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[245] See also Annex 5.5.

[246] The introductory industrial relations course which introduces the concept of unionism covers the following topics: 1) History and development of the labour movement in Singapore, 2) Organisational structure of unions, 3) Fraternal relations with other overseas unions, 4) IR framework in Singapore, 5) Process of collective bargaining, negotiation and arbitration, 6) leadership, roles and responsibilities, 7) Handling grievances, 8) Topical issues, current affairs and challenges to workers – e.g. seniority wage system, older workers etc.

For both IROs and union delegates, their subjective view and understanding of what trade unions are and how trade unionism should be, is constantly reinforced during their interaction with each other through their routine of carrying out their union work (Berger et al 1966: 168-169). This reality is further reaffirmed through their interaction with significant members (labour MPs) who embody this subjective reality and in similar fashion reinforce it during their participation within union affairs, thereby creating an overall socially integrating effect (Berger et al 1966: 170-171).

5.7 Summary

The aim in this chapter is to present the empirical data collected during the course of research with respect to the role and function played by NTUC-affiliated unions and their LUL. To this end examination was made of how the NTUC and its labour unions are organised internally as well as in terms of the legislative structural framework governing labour unions and what they do[247]. In addition, the role and function of LUL and the manner in which they carry out their work is also explained.

All this is done with the intention of addressing and supporting the primary thesis, which is that labour unions contribute on the overall social integration and stability. Our argument being that this is as much the result of legal-structural norms as it is due to the everyday practices. Structurally, the legal system helps greatly in containing conflict. By

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[247] With occasional references to earlier chapters e.g. Chapter 1.

legislating arbitration and emphasising conciliation together with tripartite cooperation enables the peaceful resolution of conflicts but also help prevent their escalation.

More importantly, our argument is that the function of integration is found in the day-to-day practices performed by LUL, who in the course of performing them not only reinforces the socialisation process but also serve to legitimise the initial conception. As we explained in the previous chapter, this view hinges on the thematic duality between structure and agency wherein the continued maintenance of the system of industrial relations is only possible if there is support from those who inhabit the structure, which are the LUL, the practitioners. To this end, the function of social integration performed by labour unions is rooted and tied to the socialisation process of LUL.

These processes which we have pointed out throughout the chapter are not obvious given that they are part of the everyday take-for-granted. With the exception of more ostensible methods such as the careful selection of LUL and training, routine aspects like role performance are all part of the routinised everyday aspects[248]. It is this everyday taken-for-granted factors which aid in the socialisation process and the integration of the individuals within it.

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[248] This includes the participation in negotiation, mediation of conflicts or dissemination of news and information to union members, interaction with others, witnessing chastisements which indirectly validate the current system, the absence of alternative systems, and the personal experience of individual LUL.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Focused contextually on the labour movement in Singapore, this thesis asserts that labour unions function primarily as conduits for social integration. This assertion is made in relation to the support given by the dominant coalition of labour unions under the aegis of the NTUC to the government and its principle practice of adopting a 'non-confrontational' approach to industrial relations.

While historical-structural linkages have undeniably played a role in its establishment, it is the views and attitudes of LULs (labour union leaders) that have enabled the non-confrontational system of union practices to persist. This was shown to be possible because of the support from LULs, which results from a conscious decision-making process wherein the decisions and views of LULs are shaped not only by the existing objective set of social-structural conditions but also by their own subjective experiences, rooted in the routine day-to-day practices.

In chapter 1, I examined the organisation of the NTUC, focusing on the leadership system as well as the system of collective bargaining and conflict resolution. Chapter 3 traced the historical development of Singapore's current labour movement and identified the key events and development within the broader political-economic framework and the NTUC which influenced the nature and trajectory of the labour movement's development. Theoretically, tracing these [*historical forces*] (Interview 16: 12) helps us understand how

the current institutional structure of the labour movement and the 'habitualised actions' of its social actors is legitimised (Berger et al 1966: 71-72).

The examination of union typologies in chapter 4 identified Singapore's labour movement as an authoritarian state-ancillary type that is subordinate to a dominant political party. Following this, I identified the salient features of Simmel's conception of conflict which enable conflicting groups to respond in a way that leads to an overall socially integrative effect.

While this underlines the importance of practice and the roles played by individuals in the maintenance of the structure, it also raises the issue of 'value consensus' and the question as to why a particular value (embodied by the system) comes to be accepted in the first place; a query which invariably carries the accusation of 'false consciousness' (Mann 1970: 423).

This was addressed through the adoption of Mannheim's conception of ideology, which focuses on the 'inner consistency' of thought systems rather than their 'relativistic' aspects (Mannheim 1991: 64-66). This returns focus to the individual, and calls for an examination of how individuals understand and interpret their reality, a theoretical gap filled by Berger and Luckmann's treatise on the construction of reality.

Stating the people understand reality through their experiences, Berger and Luckmann's treatise examined how individuals create and interpret meaning within the context of

everyday life, which possesses both objective and subjective forms of reality. While objective reality is legitimated through institutions, it still needs to be understood and interpreted through the subjective experiences of the individual, which applied to our consideration, comes through the socialisation of LUL to the meanings, goals and interpretive schemes of the labour movement.

In the last chapter, I used the empirical views and perspectives of LULs towards the structural features than encourages social integration to address the thesis's concern, as well as to capture both the objective reality and the routine day-to-day activities that LULs are engaged in, which aid in their 'acceptance' of the NTUC's views and interpretive schemes.

Thematically, the (structural) constraints and limitations labour unions and LULs work under, makes it enticing to claim that the quiescence and compliance from LULs as well as union members (i.e. workers) results from 'pragmatic acceptance', which is where individuals '[comply] because [they] perceive no realistic alternative' (Mann 1970: 425).

Such a statement is difficult to refute, but it is not possible to agree with it totally either; although there is a noticeable dearth of choice and options, agents have been shown to be able to work within the limitations of the system. In addition, it appears to apply more to union members, for whom there is little chance to take a 'non-NTUC' option, than it does to LULs (particularly IROs), who have shown at times a willingness to capitalise on structural ambiguity to pursue their aims. If anything, the charge of pragmatic acceptance

has served to highlight the importance of LULs, whose role aids in the maintenance of the system. If change is to occur, it needs to take place from within.

However whether or not this is possible remains questionable, especially since Singapore's labour movement is an authoritarian state-ancillary type, which prioritises 'national interests' and economic productionism. While it is difficult to dismiss the consternations of vulnerability, it should also be recognised that excessive top-down control and restriction in focus will discourage any counter status quo initiatives and weaken the labour movement's organic ability to renew itself, thereby weakening in the long term, its ability to respond to changes and new challenges.

Organised Labour's Relation to State in Singapore

	Labour Structurally Weak	*Labour Structurally Strong*
State Politically Confident	Subordinated 'Partnership' Phase II (1969-1979)	Dependent 'Partnership' Phase III till present (1980 ~)
State Politically Insecure	Cooperative 'Partnership' (and Autonomy) Phase I (1954-1968)	Null

How then can we situate the Singapore labour movement, particularly in its relationship with the development-oriented state? Adapting Eva Bellin's matrix of mapping state-labour relation based on the state's 'political confidence' and the 'relative strength of labour's structural position', we can map a periodic state of state-labour relation based on the different development phases (Bellin 2002: 87)[249].

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[249] See Chapter 3.

In pre-independence Phase I, which predates the formation of the (developmental) state, political parties leveraged on organised labour to jostle for power. This might be considered a period of 'genuine' cooperative partnership. Come post-independence in Phase II, the ascendancy of the state and its development focus, also spelled the subordination of labour. By Phase III a dependent relationship had emerged.

If anything, the matrix shows that the developmental state's relationship with labour is characteristically complex, since labour's goals, in particular that of 'economic distribution' clashes with the 'developmental state's logic of accumulation' (Bellin 2002: 86). And labour's 'organisational agenda' to develop 'capacity for collective action' threaten the developmental state's aim to keep an 'uncontested grip on power'.

But despite this, organised labour's 'capacity to deliver organised political support' makes it a crucial 'political ally' for the developmental state, who would wish to sponsor and leverage on it to 'deliver social peace' and achieve wage restraint at the same time, (Bellin 2002: 86). It is this balancing act that characterises the relationship between the developmental state and organised labour within Singapore. The issue is the extent of the balance.

While Phase II established the subordination of labour, Phase III onwards was focused more on sponsoring organised labour's development in a way that complemented the state's corporatist development strategy. This 'simultaneous embrace of sponsorship and

repression' has since characterised the relationship between state and organised labour (Bellin 2002: 86).

It is unlikely that this relationship would change in the near future given Singapore's embrace of globalisation and dependency on FDI (foreign direct investment), which makes private capital more autonomous and independent, placing pressure on the state to enact policies that guarantees capital's interests and give it confidence (Bellin 2002: 47, 49).

The successful modernisation and reinvention of the labour movement along corporatist lines and its acceptance of economic neoliberalism – which the West belatedly mooted as 'The Third Way'; a way to meet the demands of the new global economy – may have made the labour movement a victim of its own success (Blair et al 1999; Giddens 1998: 6-8). This is due to the successful management and containment of conflict having led to the 'ossification' in its ability and motivation to innovate and respond creatively (Coser 1957: 197).

If anything, the current unionised group of workers occupy a relatively privileged position, given that they enjoy the benefits of representation such as protection and collective bargaining, such that they may be regarded as a 'labour aristocracy' – 'skilled, unionised and [better off]' than most other workers (Lummis 1994: 1). Certainly they are in a better position than the rising class of 'contingent workers' that have been spawned

as a result of market liberalisation and the endeavour '*not to introduce rigidity to the labour market*' (Interview 6: 21)

Several reasons have been given for the employment of 'contingent workers': [*relieving costs, to supplement current staff and to 'maintain jobs'*] (Interview 8: 4), the latter – which is essentially achieved by [*giving the company flexibility without having to increase staffing*] (Interview 8: 4) – being ironic since it is a perspective offered from point-of-view of the union.

Yet, despite the acknowledgement that [*outsourcing will weaken the unions*] (Interview 4: 2) as it results in the loss of union members, and the potential pool of new members that the burgeoning pool of contingent workers represent, not to mention that these tend to be the most vulnerable '*[and] are living from hand to mouth*' (Interview 9a: 16), there has been little response from unions to this trend.

From the point-of-view of the union, this is a '*grey market … that is difficult to unionise*' (Interview 9i: 23) primarily because the tenure of workers are not fixed. The need however is unmistakeable, not only does [*this group of workers not know their rights*] (Interview 9i: 23), but because they can be so easily laid off, they cannot even protest or make complaints when they do not receive the '*basic benefits that workers are supposed to receive*' (Interview 14: 2), putting them in a doubly disadvantaged position.

The need to give representation to this group of workers stems not only from their obvious vulnerability and tendency to be exploited but also because '*contract labour is going to be very common and [will not just] apply to the low skill*' (Interview 9i: 25). However, efforts should '*not just [include] the local workers [but should also include] foreign workers*' (Interview 5a: 39) as well.

This represents the new challenge for the NTUC and its labour unions, a test not only of its efficacy as a social-policy platform but also of its continued institutional relevance to give voice and represent workers' concerns, while balancing the demands of the 'national interest' and global capitalism (Coats 2005: 54).

If anything, this thesis has shown that unions still have a relevant role to play, and barring any unforeseen events are likely to continue to operate and exist. The issue is what would be its form and scope. While it is tempting to attribute this responsibility solely to the state and the political leaders, the fact is it is also dependent on union leaders, how they respond to the changing industrial landscape and their social aspirations.

While state sponsorship might have provided an initial motivation for organised labour to ally with it, the continued support the state enjoys from organised labour despite its pro-capitalist stance does suggests that the state addresses the social aspiration of organised labour, who has decided that its long-term interests is aligned with that of the state rather than in opposition to it.

Annex

Annex 1.1

Summary: The excerpt below shows the difficulty and frustration faced by an interviewee when trying to provide evidential and verifiable documentary wrongdoing by the employer to the Industrial Arbitration Court. In this case, the difficulty lay in proving that workers were coerced into working overtime, and the difficulty in negotiating legal interpretations. Figures have been replaced by 'x' to preserve anonymity.

Interview Excerpts:

The worker they have a reporting time, going off time. Also, there is a card for the management to compute all these. Compute all these and calculate the working hours. Now, this is the number of [days] and then … the total number of hour worked and then the total number of overtime. But … when this go to the dispute … the registrar you know, he say "where the evidence? How you are saying that the worker work overtime?"

I say it's the punch card. … Now, supposing, you know … the management … have forward all these to the union … to compute, … then … I manage to calculate … and work out the total number of hours they work, the total amount of overtime …. This is by itself an evidence that the worker has been working here is x hours.

Worked … by the workers during a period of x years.

[By] x workers.

And these x workers have been working x, the average is roughly about x hours. The average per year is x [hours]. x hours is roughly about … x month working hours is x, x months. Now, x month, … the overtime rate is more and then you have to at least x months …. But the management is not paying them, and then … the management produce all this evidence you know, to show the court saying that, … they work by themselves. That's the thing, they work by themselves.

The management just make them to sign and produce to the court as evidence. … Then the court accept it. … at first I thought the court won't accept it, but the court still accept it. If the court accept it, … because it is arbitration court, I cannot challenge. I can't challenge because it is arbitrate. … they [make] the worker … sign two time or three times you know, all the time … saying that … the management not asking them to work overtime….

… they make the worker sign all those document, then they show to the court. This is the evidence by the management show to the court. … this is the thing! [It asked if] the hotel management ask [the worker to work], then they make the worker to answer "Chong lai mei you", that means [they have never].

… "Does the hotel owe you any payment or overtime money? Chong lai mei you", that means never. They make all the worker sign, it's written by them, they make the worker all sign. … You see? And then they produce this as evidence. They produce this as evidence to the court.

(Interview 5a: 15-16)

Annex 1.2

Interview excerpts:

'…you know about this Industrial Relations Act? You know this law … under the provision there are referee, in the older day I know who are the referee because they send me a list, nowadays there is no referee. Maybe they have I wouldn't know, they don't send. Now [there are] a lot of rules and regulation, previously, we know what step to be taken, nowadays even though I go to see the registrar, the registrar wouldn't know. Then he ask me why you know about it? I said I have taken up this law in the past, … I know that under the law you can apply to the court, ask them to appoint a referee to help you to dispute and all these sort of thing, but if you don't have all these then what happen? …

Like suppose certain rules and regulation supposing you have a piece of collective agreement and if you look into … the provision of the Industrial Relations Act, you need to rephrase it … for the worker to read but now you can go to various company and see if any management has done it or not, none. Now … even certain thing you want … there is certain rules and regulation like making application and this and that … if you don't go through you wouldn't know. And then now, if the court is not coming out for hearing, even the format how to make application also no one know how to do it you see.'

(Interview 5a: 30)

Annex 4.1

Summary: The excerpt below is a response from a unionist renouncing the use of industrial action as a means for improving working benefits such as wages and working conditions.

Interview excerpts:

'…the way is not to strike, the way is not to, you know, go on the streets. It's not to confront. The way is to find some, find some platform, sit down, talk about it, put forward. Any employer want to see a happy workforce. No employer want to waste time over know a workforce that is very unhappy. So if there are unhappiness, and they can address the issue and it cost them not very much, they will go ahead and address it. So that's the most pragmatic way to do it. I have seen you know all over Barcelona everywhere you know people organise all kinds of funny things, but when I ask them what

they have achieved? They have achieved very little. And they marvel at the kind of things we have achieved. Although in a official platform they will say that oh you know oh no we, we are not doing what we can you know as a trade union you know. …They say we listen to government, we work too closely with employer, but when you ask them in terms of unemployment, in terms of benefits, in terms of assistance, they have very little what compared to us.'

(Interview 10: 63-64)

Annex 4.2

According to Mannheim, ideology may be separated into, the particular and the total (Mannheim 1991: 49). The particular conception of ideology expresses scepticism over ideas and representations presented by people, viewing them as a guise for the 'real nature of a situation', because the true portrayal would not be 'in accord with his interests' (Mannheim 1991: 49). This conception takes the individual's psychology its level of analysis, and designates only a part of the 'opponent's' claim as ideologies; the view being that it was a deliberate act carried out through lies, distortion and the concealment of factual circumstances to further the individual's self-interests (Mannheim 1991: 49-52). But such falsities and distortions can be identified because both parties share 'common criteria of validity' (Mannheim 1991: 50-51).

The total conception of ideology on the other hand, which is more inclusive, refers to the ideology of a group within a particular socio-historical milieu (Mannheim 1991: 49-50). What is questioned here is 'the opponent's total *Weltanschauung*' and 'conceptual apparatus', which needs to be understood as an outcome of his 'collective life' in which he engages in (Mannheim 1991: 50; Mannheim 1993: 140-141)[250]. Unlike the particular conception of ideology, differences in thought-content here occur at the noological level, and arise because of 'fundamentally [different] thought-systems and widely differing modes of experience and interpretation', which results in different perspectives (Mannheim 1991: 51).

However, entire though-systems are not as easily discerned as group ideology, wherein individuals react similarly in similar circumstances. The integration of individual experiences would not reveal a thought-system – which is the 'systematic theoretical basis underlying [individual judgements]' – because individuals do not experience all the elements of an outlook, only particular aspects of it (Mannheim 1991: 52). Hence at the level of the individual, we can only hope to uncover ideological conceptions that deal

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[250] Mannheim 1991: *Weltanschauung* may be interpreted here as 'world view'; Mannheim 1993: The concept of *Weltanschauung* is an extremely complex one, with the 'entity that it denotes [lying] outside the province of theory'. 'The global outlook of an age is or of a creative individual is wholly contained in their philosophical and theoretical utterances; you need only to collect these utterances and arrange them in a pattern, and you have taken hold of a *Weltanschauung*'.

with specific content – that would allow us to point out lies and falsehoods – rather then whole thought-system (Mannheim 1991: 52-53, 57)[251].

Annex 4.3

Summary: Interviewee is describing how the union tries to convey information to members. Figures and the description of organisations have been replaced by 'x' to preserve anonymity.

Interview excerpts:

'*It is a big organisation you cannot have just x committee, x reps, for x especially you know, … the x professional is one big group and then the non-x professional, … so all these uh we need different people to take care … either base on occupational groupings to take care of them or on department grouping, you know, you take of the laboratory, you take care of store, you take care of the kitchen … So you need a big committee … these are more challenging than say a small office, a small trading office, everyone is on one building, on one level, … I need just three person you know, and even if three out of two, two out of three are not active, one person could still run the show, because most likely you can just see everyone, and … probably all with desktop and email you know, one message you just broadcast to everyone.*

Whereas [in some] organisation, sometimes people don't work at their desk, no, no email account you know, today not all company provide staff with the email account, so you still need people, to reach out to the people, … people to people contact is very important.

Big and diverse group and sometimes companies whereby there are different … so they will need people from each store, even the store you have different levels right? And they work shifts right? Morning afternoon shift, … so you will need more … committee members and it is a challenge also to get this committee to come together, to meet regularly. So as the industrial relations person in charge, we have to make a conscious effort to nurture the leadership … getting them in is one thing, sometimes you can get them in they are interested they are willing to serve but they don't know how, they don't know how to organise themselves together. So we have to consciously help them to have regular say committee meetings at a common place, help them to maintain communication.'

Interview (9c: 4)

Annex 4.4

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[251] The close interrelation between psychological perceptions and noological level of worldviews means that the distinction between the particular and the total conception of ideology is more easily done at the conceptual level than in reality where they are often intertwined. (p.53, 57)

Summary: Interviewee is describing the attitude of union members; union members who have more interest will make the effort to seek out more information and participate within the unions and its activities. Our expectation is that union leaders who are 'more involved' are likely to identify more closely with the objectives of the union and of the labour movement compared with those who are more 'apathetic'.

Interview Excerpts:

'… *unless I have a need, if I am the type of uh active person and I [am] really interested I join this union, I want to find out what is really happening, what are the activities, then I will make the effort to check out with my branch officials and if they don't know, sometimes they don't know, then I will ask them to give me the contact number and I will call up you know and make enquiries. We have members like that, they will call up, "and what kind of courses can I attend?", "what kind of benefits?". So it's more a personal thing that people depend on their own needs and their own motivation, generally most people just go about life, if I don't need I don't go and call and I don't even want to attend if you call a meeting, it doesn't matter who is the chairman. It's that kind of, you call it apathy … we don't have that kind of strong activism you know at the individual level la.*

… those who are really interested, they will take an effort, they will go and attend the rally, go and listen, they will go and visit the website, the blogs and participate. Other than that the rest, apathetic. Whatever will be will be.'

(Interview 9d: 5)

Annex 5.1

Summary: The following two excerpts illustrate the relationship between the NTUC and individual labour unions. In the first, the interviewee discusses the role played by the NTUC in establishing broad national agendas, while the second highlights one such example.

Interview Excerpts:

'*We will take the cue form the national body, basically why? Because they are the planners, they are the people who look ahead and see what is going to happen five years down the road and they think that you know they should start taking action now. For example, extending retirement age*'

(Interview 9h: 19)

'*Flexible wage system is another … big topic that is being promoted by the government and that is in the National Wages Council recommendation every year, for employers to move towards a more flexible wage system.*'

(Interview 9g: 6)

Annex 5.2

Summary: The interviewee is describing the circumstances under which union members decide to take up union membership and the circumstances that would draw them to act together as a concerted group.

Interview Excerpts:

'*[They] just join for the benefits. Unless they, usually they are galvanised by some issue, work issue, if there has been some sacking recently and they feel that it is not right then they all will [join], … it will bring people together, it may be me, it may be you the next time round, let's do something. And they will, … they themselves will activate. Other than that it's like, hey it's ok you know, no need for union, you know.*'

(Interview 9b: 3)

Annex 5.3

Summary: In the excerpt, the interviewee describes the how heated negotiations between union leaders and management can get. But yet, both parties try to separate personal feelings from official duties.

Interview Excerpts:

[*The union delegates and the management talk like friends, yes they may raise their voices and shout at each other even when negotiating but outside of the room they can all go and 'lim kopi' [have coffee] together. This he explains is keeping work and personal feelings separately. He believes that at the end, the aim is to reach a decision that can benefit everyone. The industrial relations committee which comprises of members of the union EXCO meets once a month and is the body that decides on any agreement made between the union and the management. In addition, the union's EXCO will meet with the management once a month as well, whether or not there is anything to discuss. The reasons for this he explains is to show to the management and vice versa that 'yes, we are with you*]

(Interview 8: 6)

Annex 5.4

Summary: In this full excerpt, the interviewee shares how investors make feedback through government bodies when they are unhappy with the unions. This seems to substantiate the concerns of the union.

Interview Excerpts:

'… you publish and tell people that you have 4,000 over cases settle at the union level, then the investors will say, actually sound problem you know dealing with unions. So there's always a flip side. We are too small a country, we always worry, worry that the investors don't come.

It is true, we have investors who actually you know through EDB have got to us, sometimes you know to tell us their concerns. And EDB sometimes also will call us and say that "this company complain to us you know, they are very unhappy you know this issue cannot resolve with you all".'

(Interview 10: 40-41)

Annex 5.5

Summary: Here, the interviewee is responding to the question of the basis of judging who gets elected into the branch committee, and the role played by the IRO in the selection process.

Interview Excerpts:

Question: '*… in terms of having say influencing the who gets in and who doesn't, into the branch committee …, what is the basis of uh judging who gets in and who shouldn't? The IRO to, you know, exercise some kind of influence over the process?*'

Reply: '*They are expected to … They are expected to. … We should be on, basically it's uh more a case of eliminating we think have ulterior motives, not so much as to be so selective or elitist or whatever, what more we don't want people who come in with bad motives, or own self interest or now, nowadays of course the other question is whether they have political motives or not … political two things, you can talk about political in terms of the wider politics, whether they are people who are members of opposition party … yah that can be dicey situation. The other political thing I think we can put it generally as bad motives, you know that they have some hidden agenda. Yah, they have some hidden agenda, they probably have some issue with the management, and they hope to advance their cause for their own interest through the committee.*'

(Interview 9c: 29)

Annex 5.6

Summary: The rationale for the close relationship between the union and government can be traced to the 1970s.

Interview Excerpts:

'In the 1980s, the NTUC will have a more difficult role in an economy grown more complex and sophisticated, and with organising a workforce which is better educated, better trained, and with higher expectations. To do this, more talent must be inducted into the leadership, men with ability and dedication, men who can work closely and patiently with grass-root union leaders to bring the Singaporean worker up to world standards of skills and professionalism.

The progress of the past 20 years was made possible because of the close, almost inseparable, ties between the leaders of the PAP and the NTUC. In fact they are one leadership'

(Lee 1980: 5)

Annex 5.7

Summary: The emplacement of MPs in unions is also driven by internal pressures faced by the unions, especially since there is no leadership renewal as workers themselves aspire for upward social mobility.

Interview Excerpts:

'But the reality of it is that where, as the economy as we develop and our life improve, unionised workers also want a better life for their children, so they want their children to go for tertiary to have a profession, a better life. So the better ones don't stay in the working class to that extent there becomes a dearth of leadership, in that sense, that kind of calibre. So there has to be something done to fill this vacuum, which is why government has step forward injected labour MPs from outside to represent workers. We still do have workers rep as labour MP but a number of them are now like seconded to the labour movement.'

(Interview 9: 23)

Annex 5.8

Interview Excerpts:

'In the nature of union organisations, as compared to that of political parties, a curious contradiction has arisen between the PAP and the NTUC; it is one which has the seeds of potential conflict if the present PAP-NTUC relationship is not institutionalised and made durable before a younger generation of leaders has taken over charge of both organisations.

… In Singapore, only the overriding authority of the political leadership saves the country from unnecessary conflict; for if challenged, the union leadership knows it must fact the collision of wills; few union leaders can doubt the outcome of such a clash, … if the union leadership challenges the political leadership, political leaders must triumph,

… by changing the ground rules to thwart the challenge, using legislative and administrative powers, and, when necessary, backed by the mandate of the electorate.'

(Lee 1980: 5-6)

Annex 5.9

Summary: Interviewee is making a comparison between the union leaders of the past and those of the present. While the government is complicit in its development, it also faces its own constraints.

Interview Excerpts:

'I think we are living in a state, very difficult to state you know, … we have really don't have these what you call union leaders anymore in the older days … I can say only when I work, during the first 10 to 15 years that … have the leader from the ground, then after those union leader disappear. That is first generation leaders, and then after that we don't, we don't seem to be there anymore. Very difficult to have leaders.'

… the government definitely want to build the image that … the labour movement in Singapore is under control, and they don't want to give the impression … that they are going hard on those management … I think also very difficult for the government to help, to build, when the workers have no leader, how the government can provide a leader? … I'm quite sure you know … very few people are still aware of the practices, a lot of practices which have gone'

(Interview 5a: 13)

Annex 5.10

Summary: In the excerpt below an interviewee discusses the rationale for the acceptance of how the labour movement is organised in Singapore and the industrial relations model, premised on the symbiotic relationship between government and the labour movement under, which they operate.

Interview Excerpts:

'… the proof if it is what you see, is the working population worse off than it would have been if we had modelled ourselves on the west rather than you know, fashion our own unique model of IR in Singapore working in synergy with government and employers, because our destiny as a small nation is very vulnerable.

… how long is their [the West's] history? How long is our history? So when we first gain independence in 1959 and without the reform, without the cooperation, tripartism, we could have easily gone the way of a lot of other newly independent countries, they are not thriving as well today as Singapore right?

Yah they could have government leader who become corrupt and self-serving. …, they have free democratic union, how free? After a time, working class is the one who suffer, when the economy goes down, the country gets impoverished because of corrupt leaders. So good and bad, but overall I would say it is the good over the bad, that we have a close working relationship and we a government that also works towards elevating the status of labour. And you'd be surprised that the fact that we have a cabinet minister in NTUC and all it helps with certain employers'

(Interview 9: 22-23)

Annex 5.11

Summary: The interviewee discusses what it means to be a popular leader, comparing NTUC leaders of the present with those of the past. By so doing, the interviewee is also capturing the change in the *type* of leaders that appear nowadays in the union.

Interview Excerpts:

'*Popular is different, like from the old days, like Devan Nair is popular as a leader, just thrown up, these are the real true blue labour leaders … he was from the Teachers' Union and … they are themselves from the grassroot, and that sense of comradeship, understanding workers' woes and their needs and concern. Today the top leadership are more inducted that they are at different level, they are scholars*'.

(Interview 9c: 25-26).

Annex 5.12

Summary: The strategic importance of the larger unions does not seem to be lost on political nominees who wish to enter the labour movement. The excerpt sees an interviewee describing why it is difficult for a Secretary-General designate to the labour movement to lose or fail to be elected, while also discusses the powers of the Secretary-General in particular to appoint individuals. There is the suggestion that entering large unions is helpful for this purpose.

Interview Excerpts:

'*… hard for him not to win. You see the thing is, he get all the exposure, he has been slotted to vote and to sit now as a deputy, the constitution allow Sec Gen to appoint, that again constitution allow to appoint deputy Sec Gen without going through voting. You say "not fair you know, the constitution is approved by the delegate last time". Unless we challenge, change the constitution, then all the delegates vote for it, change the constitution. We need to mobilise so many people to support your motion. Say you have to do a lot of work to change the system. Say that Sec Gen don't have the power to appoint Deputy Sec Gen. …*

Secondly they also want the right people, if not, the image of the union is gone. So they do a lot of education. And big big unions I go and serve, I help them, they remember you you know.'

(Interview 4c: 37)

Annex 5.13

Summary: Interviewee discusses the importance of finances for the union.

Interview Excerpts:

'... *financial viability, leadership, it is important. So if you have shrinking membership size, shrinking numbers of members of course the union finances, the revenue is also affected, then their ability to continue to provide the level of service to members. We are big in the sense in terms of membership size and we are one of the unions that able to employ full time officers, full time staff in fact to provide the whole range of service including collective bargaining, other social, recreational even training for our union leaders and members. So if your membership size is small, your revenue is small, your capacity to hire full time staff, then the demand is on the membership themselves to have their own leaders, engage in collective bargaining.'*

(Interview 9: 3)

Annex 5.14

Summary: Interviewee discusses the typical breakdown of union expenditures and what unions do to raise funds.

Interview Excerpts:

Question: *So how would you describe the breakdown of the finances? What would be the most amount of thing that you all spend on?*
Interviewee: *In any service oriented organisation, it's staff salary.*
Question: *So how much will that take up?*
Interviewee: *30 over percent.*
Question: *30 over percent. Then the rental?*
Interviewee: *This is rental free what, we bought the place.*
Question: *Oh. Then the rest will go to operating costs?*
Interviewee: *Benefits, welfare, operating costs.*
Question: *Benefits in what kind of benefits?*
Interviewee: *Organise activities, book grants, ... study grant, hardship grant.*
...
Question: *So at the end of the year you collect revenues?*

Interviewee: *We net, fortunately our union every year we have net surplus because we are, we are very prudent in the way we spend money.*
Question: *Then how does, what does this money go into? Savings fund?*
Interviewee: *We do other things…*
Question: *Invest…*
Interviewee: *We do investments and uh we also introduce uh other new schemes la. If you net surplus then you can do more the following year.*
Question: *Is there uh, restrictions on how you spend the money? So you can go and invest in shares and things like that?*
Interviewee: *No, no, no, there's a trustee fund, there's a trustee act, there are certain funds that you cannot invest in. You cannot invest in shares, you can only buy blue chips and then bonds. The trustee's act, will tell you what are the thing you can or cannot.*
Question: *Ok so is this tied to any government approved things?*
Interviewee: *Ya, trustee's act. RTU will come after you, every year you need to declare, the registrar of trade union will come after you.*

(Interview 10: 64-65)

Annex 5.15

Summary: Interviewee discusses how unions use their money to generate more money.

Interview Excerpts:

'On top of that I will give to NTUC this much, my commitment over. But you want you can actually become shareholder of all these cooperative, so what we do our money we have is put into Fairprice, put into Comfort, we put into Childcare, we put into Thrift and Loan, and they give 3 to 5% return. … Every year.

… you see, you put in a bank, bank only give you 1% or 2, NTUC gives more, and they have to give more because they don't pay tax, their 22% they save. And they must make sure they make profit, if they make loss then nothing to talk, if they make profit they save 22% of profit right? They don't have to pay tax, maybe 15%, 1-2% I give to union then here I give dividend and all that, so … They make more than the, the 22% isn't it? They make in millions, they don't pay tax, the running cost is all taken care.

Question: *But how does the money get back to the union then?*
Interviewee: *By investing.*
Question: *Ok, so every year there will be dividends paid out…*
Interviewee: *Paid out, that's how we survive…*
Question: *And that helps to fund the union…*
Interviewee: *When we have excess cash we put into these cooperatives …, we put out some money in bank fixed deposits that one give you dividend.'*

Annex 5.16

Summary: Interviewee discusses how the unions obtain information from the ground, and how this information passed on which contributes to their feedback role. '*x*' is used in place of the specific industry in order preserve respondent anonymity.

Interview Excerpts:

'*So you know the trends, you know what are their so called their practices and things like that. … And they are the experts, they will be able to tell me like if I say I talk about x industry, so my officer handling the x industry will going to tell me what is happening in the x industry. And if I want to do something in this industry, I will get her to sit in to coordinate. Ya, then she will get all the employers in this industry together with the workers and then you know we will usually partner with the NTUC or WDA you know to work out schemes la for specific industries la.*'

(Interview 10: 10)

Annex 5.17

Summary: Interviewee discusses how positive discrimination is carried out and explains why the union is reluctant to discriminate against non-members.

Interview Excerpts:

'*get the company to positively discriminate, discriminate the union members in the form of contribution to the, to the union fund, to the special branch, special branch fund. Because every branch, they have some kind of fund and for certain branches some management actually put some money into this fund for the branch committee to play around with, organise activities whatever, but it cannot be for the own pocket one, it's for organising activities and who governs this fund is the union headquarters, so they also cannot anyhow take out the money to use or what, so it's for them to [organise] activities for the workers. We will always say workers because we, the union also don't want to discriminate non-members and members and uh …*

In the sense that the union actually is for, works for the workers, and who supports us are the members, but we work for the welfare of the workers so … it's not in our good stead [to] say that we, we want to exclude non members. We include them but we subsidise members. That is how the, the EXCO of the union, that's how the management of the union wants to positively discriminate [the] members. So when it comes to like let's say the branch organise some kind of like dinner, so the members go they need to only pay $5, then the non members they need to pay for the whole meal that kind of thing so this has been held among our branches la, for a very long time already, the, the branch officials usually take this money to organise some kind of activity where they invite all the workers and then, but the non members will have to pay a higher, … the actual price, instead of the subsidised price. So even in our, even in our headquarters level where we organise like Bangkok trips for all members we also don't say that non members cannot join, they can join, but they pay a higher price.'

(Interview 11: 22)

Annex 5.18

Summary: The following excerpt discusses the reality of globalisation and its effect on outsourcing and relocation in particular industries.

Interview Excerpts:

'Oh it's quite real what, we see it in the last 5 years what. Companies relocating … to cheaper cost centres. Manufacturing is a good example, in the last 5 years we've see a lot of electronics firm, Seagate and all that, latest being Maxtor they relocate, for all this low end low skill production jobs. And then even in the services sector we see outsourcing, some global companies they might out, they might decide to do part of their pack end operations in China or in India, call centres'.

(Interview 9g: 3)

Annex 5.19

Summary: Interviewee discusses how the union prioritise and negotiate with employers.

Interview Excerpts:

'At the end of the day it is still a list of demands that we serve to the company and we just bargain and see the employer what they are able to give, and if they still insist on it, but you come a point where ok this you narrow down, what are the things that you give priority to you know, what you can, what are the trade offs that you can accept what you can't, what you are prepared to let go. It's all part of the negotiating process, and then part of the strategy ok. You may send on a request for 10 items but you know you only 5 items are priority, it's a bargaining process. If the employer give this I will let go of that, a trade off.'

(Interview 9h: 5-6)

Annex 5.20

Summary: The interviewee here is describing what happens during a negotiation process, and that despite how heated negotiation can sometimes get, at the end of the day both unions and employers would take an objective approach to the problem so as to maintain good relations.

Interview Excerpts:

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'I mean it there can be major disagreement you know. Say for example over pay issue, over bonus payout, yah? There can be disagreement say over the treatment of trade union official for that matter. So it can be fiery, it can be explosive but at the end of the day I think the idea is that rational thinking will prevail la. Yah, so in other words you don't, you just don't hammer the guy or whack the guy for the sake of wanting to win you know. At the end of the day I think it's the sensitivity and then the sensibility of the issue which is more important. I think most of us who are practitioners actually goes into the issue not only for the present but the preservation of the future. So we are always very conscious over the fact that whatever we do, we should not, should not damage the future relationship. Because it's a long term thing. That's why [I] mention in certain instances we could have win all the way. Alright? But sometimes we don't want to win all the way, for reason that we wanted, we value that long term relationship.'

(Interview 6: 37)

Annex 5.21

Summary: Interviewee describes the considerations of the union whether deciding whether or not to implement the flexible wage scheme. Even if the scheme is nationally directed, unions appear to take into consideration member's views and possess some degree of discretion in deciding whether or not to accept the conditions.

Interview Excerpts:

'It depends, it depends on the company, and it depends on our employees, in our members' sentiments la. If a company wants to take out one month and put into a variable bonus formula, they must tell us what is the carrot, you're taking one month of my fix to put into a gamble. You must be prepared to top up with another two months or another one month, so that my variable is not my fourteenth month from there, for you to take away. Ok? So company will come up with bonus formula, a minimum of one month to maximum of three months. So you take out your fourteenth month fixed to gamble you can get fifteen month or fourteen point five or whatever.

But we will also look at the criteria, what kind of profit level before we can reach that fifteen month. If they dangle the carrot so high, even I can't reach, can't take my fourteenth month huh, with that kind of profit, then we are not going to reject it and say my members are quite happy with the fourteenth month, they are not greedy for fifteenth month, so we don't change. Yah.

… Yah, so as long as there is a union, there is a collective agreement, it's guaranteed. So we have uh, I have one company where we have a unusual situation where company say, actually we are moving towards what the government is recommending, flexible wage system, and we will cut down to thirteenth month and the other one month we will put in a, to a bonus plan. But for your union members because you reject it, they will stay on the fourteenth month, they will not take part and participate. But for our management, executive we are going to implement this.

… Yah that's why, one way, but there are some companies will try to bulldoze their way and … the government is already recommend, NWC recommending flexible wage you know, why is your union uh not abiding but this? Actually … At the tripartite level again there was all these announcement that we should move to a flexible wage system and if possible reduce our AWS to a thirteenth month and put the excess into a flexible bonus scheme ok, and we should, if you are the employer you would support this won't you?

… Yah, so there were a lot of employers who wanted to jump on the bandwagon and go this direction and uh it came to a point where the union had to bring up to the minister, the new minister Mr Ng Eng Heng, to a point where he had to make a public speech; if you have an agreement with your union uh for a fixed AWS more than one month and you're happy with the way it is, don't have to change[252]. So to us that is because of the union representation, it's a message to the employer, you don't push it, government, tripartite may have said that you try to you know, move towards the thirteenth month, but you still have a contract there, you still have to honour it and unless your union is prepared to change, happy to change because as I say it depends on individual company, you come out with the proper bonus sharing scheme ok, how you want to pay half month, how you want to pay 1 month, the KPI, nowadays we talking of it.

When the tripartite body recommended a flexible wage system, pay according to company performance, there is also a qualifier, that company come up with Key Performance Indicators (KPI), measurable standards of the company performance, you know. Not some blur blur idea you know; in my CEO reckoning I think this year we can afford to pay one month so we pay one month. You, so employers conveniently ignore this part, part of the recommendation, so if you are not ready how you want to measure your company's performance, what do you, what indicators to use, sales figure, sales revenue, turnover or profitability? You don't know what you are measuring your performance against, how do you expect us to agree with you to uh to implement a flexible bonus scheme when everything becomes discretionary in the employer's hand, we have no control. So that is the, the other part of it.

(Interview 9b: 14-16)

Annex 5.22

Summary: The interviewee cites a case of dealing with an employer who was found to be 'jumping on the bandwagon' and taking advantage of national initiatives to benefit at the expense of workers. 'X' was used to maintain the industrial field of the company.

Interview Excerpts:

'… 1998 crisis, every company is suffering generally, and already government, the National Wages Council also make a unprecedented recommendation that employers can

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[252] This arrangement is in fact permitted under an exception clause under the Employment Act Cap. 91 Section 48 (1) and (2).

cut wages, on top of CPF cut. We call it a wage reduction. Alright? And so this particular employer decide that that was the opportune time. Since NWC recommend wage reduction, why don't we just cut the AWS, we are not going to pay increment, that's not good enough for us, let's cut their AWS. And they cut, they didn't pay, and they didn't tell us, they didn't disclose any information, they just cut, so I have no choice, I have to take them to the Ministry of Manpower to explain why they cut you see. And so they have to go there and show their P and L and so on, and ended up, you know X practise they are not affected by Asian Financial Crisis, maybe during SARS, that is years later, it's still profitable, they just jumping on the bandwagon, so they finally agreed, first they offered pay oh we pay half a month, we said no and they finally agreed to pay the full AWS. But because they disclosed their accounts and so on, I then went after them for bonus for 1998.'

(Interview 9b: 24)

Annex 5.23

Summary: Here, the interviewee describes the sort of qualities that are deemed to be necessary in a union delegate.

Interview Excerpts:

[*It is extremely important that union delegates were trusted by their members. Otherwise, the delegates would not be able to perform. Thus in that sense delegates have to know the workers very well and communication and networks are important. For workers it is important that the union delegate is able to help them in their working lives. They would raise questions to the delegates for the delegates to raise to the EXCO and from there the EXCO to raise to the management if it is necessary. Rapport in this sense is very important. Members will usually know when a delegate is not working, they can tell from the way in which their issue is handled by the person. Whether or not they try and make effort to help solve their problems. A lot of the time, what is crucial is not that the problem gets resolved, rather, it is in the way that help is given to the members. The outcome may be negative in the end, but the delegate must try. If the delegate is not good and not sincere, word will get around and people will come to know about it, because people know other people and they will tell. I was told of a an example whereby people because of their job have access to walkie talkies or PA systems, used them to broadcast their dissatisfaction to everyone. A singular complain made in such a fashion can reach a lot of people all at once and very publicly. And such a method can be very effective. After people come to know, the delegate may have to step down.*]

(Interview 8: 10-11)

Annex 5.24

Summary: Interviewee explains and describes the behaviour of union delegates who participate in the union for the sake of their own interests, and indirectly explains the sort of role expected of a union delegate.

Interview Excerpts:

'*Just basically, they just want to know for their own personal benefit, and then when I come in for negotiations on salary or position, I look at my position what is my salary range will I be affected you know, that kind of thing la. It will become quite evident, how does it benefit me.*

… Sometimes, you notice they seem to be concentrating on what affects them, not generally speaking for the you know general membership, for the rest of the thing they you know quite laissez faire, you know, nothing, they don't really go out and say survey members how do you, what are your problems, what are your issues you know, so the more committed and active ones they will come back with a, they will feedback, can we look at you know Lee or this group of workers, you know does the union have any financial assistance scheme for this uh person you know, whose husband is out of work, that kind of thing, so you get feedback from people who are more, more people oriented. And actually it is a lot of expectation and demand, we also expect them to be problem solvers for the members. You know, members come with problems to them, if they can help solve it at their, at their level less involvement for us.'

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