Article

"Perceptions of Trade Union Members and the Social Action Perspective"

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Perceptions of Trade Union Members and the Social Action Perspective

Michael POOLE

This paper aims at presenting the results of a study of trade union members in the United Kingdom and at establishing a central theoretical framework which will facilitate a systematic accumulation of knowledge on this subject.

It is scarcely surprising than the post-war accretion in influence of the trade union movement in the economic, political and social structure of modern Britain has been matched by an expansion in both empirical and theoretical investigations into the phenomenon in question. But although in key areas such as determinants of aggregate union growth[2] and patterns of union administration and government[3] an impressive array of scholarship has now materialised; in other contexts, systematic and well-researched inquiries are much less common[4]. The perceptions of ordinary trade unionists are an interesting case in point, for although as a by-product of a variety of studies of workplace relations specific attitudes of the rank-and-file have

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1 It is intended to extend these researches to cover a wider sample of members in different locations in Britain and also over a broader range of trade unions. The author would also like to express his thanks to Professor R. MANSFIELD for some helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 BAIN, G.S., and F. ELSHEIKH, *Union Growth and the Business Cycle*, Oxford Blackwell, 1976, and G.S. BAIN, *The Growth of White Collar Unionism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970. But see also R. RICHARDSON's review article on the first mentioned work, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 15, 1977, pp. 279-82; and F. ELSHEIKH and G.S. BAIN, "Trade Union Growth: A reply", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 16, 1978, pp. 99-102, coupled with R. RICHARDSON, "Union Growth: A rejoinder", *Ibid.*, 103-14.

3 Notably the classic study by J.D. EDELSTEIN and M. WARNER, *Comparative Union Democracy*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1975, and for an alternative 'contextual' approach R. MARTIN, "Union Democracy: an Explanatory Framework", *Sociology*, Vol. 2, 1968, 205-20.

4 Probably the best general attempt has been by J.A. BANKS, *Marxist Sociology in Action*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970. See also R. HYMAN and R.H. FRYER, "Trade Unions: Sociology and Political Economy", in J.B. McKinlay (ed.) *Processing People*, London, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1975 and T. LANE, *The Union Makes us Strong*, London, Arrow, 1974.

quite frequently been recorded[5], in the main, these contributions have been insufficiently focused to permit the identification of other than rather general signposts to the degree of commitment of members to their unions and their propensity or otherwise to sustain conservative or radical initiatives in the enterprise itself. Moreover, even in the United States, where, during the 1950's and early 1960's particularly, a comprehensive and influential range of accounts and surveys of the views of ordinary trade unionists were undertaken[6], in the last decade there has been a noticeable slackening of tempo in this regard[7].

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[5] These include J.A. BANKS, *Industrial Participation*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1963; E. BATSTONE, I. BORASTON and S. FRENKEL, *Stop Stewards in Action*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1977, pp. 115-30; H. BEYNON, *Working for Ford*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973; H. BEYNON and R.M. BLACKBURN, *Perceptions of Work*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972; R.M. BLACKBURN, *Union Character and Social Class*, London, Batsford, 1967; R.K. BROWN and P. BRANNEN, "Social Relations and Social Perspectives Amongst Shipbuilding Workers I", *Sociology*, Vol. 4, 1970, 71-84; R.K. BROWN and P. BRANNEN, "Social Relations and Social Perspectives Amongst Shipbuilding Workers II", *Sociology*, 1970, 197-211; N. DENNIS, F. HENRIQUES and C. SLAUGHTER, *Coal in our Life*, London, Tavistock, 1976; D. GALLIE, *In Search of the New Working Class*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978; J.H. GOLDTHORPE, D. LOCKWOOD, F. BECHHOFER and J. PLATT, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, Chapter 5; S. HILL, *The Dockers*, London, Heinemann, 1976, Chapter 7; M. MORAN, *The Union of Post Office Workers*, London, MacMillan, 1974; T. NICHOLS and P. ARMSTRONG, *Workers Divided*, London, Fontana/Collins, 1976; T. NICHOLS and H. BEYNON, *Living with Capitalism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977; K. PRANDY, *Professional Employees*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965; B.C. ROBERTS, R. LOVERIDGE, J. GENNARD, J.V. EASON and others, *Reluctant Militants*, London, Heinemann, 1972; K. ROBERTS, F.G. COOK, S.C. CLARK and E. SEMEONOFF, *The Fragmentary Class Structure*, London, Heinemann, 1977; and D. WEDJERBURN and R. CROMPTON, *Workers' Attitudes and Technology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 101-4.

[6] CHALMERS, W.E., M.K. CHANDLER, L.L. McQUITTY, R. STAGNER, D.E. WRAY and M. DERBER, *Labour-Management Relations in Illini City*, Illinois, University of Illinois, 1954; N.W. CHAMBERLAIN, *The Union Challenge to Management Control*, New York, Harper, 1948; L.R. DEAN, "Social Integration, Attitudes and Union Activity", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 8, 1954, pp. 48-58; L.R. DEAN, "Union Activity and Dual Loyalty", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 7, 1954, pp. 526-36; W.H. FORM and H.K. DANSEREAU, "Union Member Orientations and Patterns of Social Integration", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 11, 1957, pp. 3-12; W. GALENSON and S.M. LIPSET, *Labour and Trade Unionism*, New York, Wiley, 1960; T.V. PURCELL, *The Worker Speaks his mind on Company and Union*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1953; H. ROSEN and R.A.H. ROSEN, *The Union Member Speaks*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1955; L.R. SAYLES and G. STRAUSS, *The Local Union*, New York, Harcourt Brace and World, 1967; J. SEIDMAN, J. LONDON, B. KARSH and D.L. TAGLIACOZZO, *The Worker Views his Union*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1958; and S.H. SLICHTER, J.J. HEALY and E.R. LIVERNASH, *The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Management*, Washington, The Brooking Institution, 1964.

[7] A routine survey of articles in the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* and *Industrial Relations* in the 1970's revealed only three articles of any relevance here, notably R. DUBIN, "Attachment to Work and Union Militancy", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 12, 1973,

In view of this lacuna in recent knowledge, it seemed apposite that the first objective of this paper should be to present results from a study of trade union members; results which, in certain fundamental respects, differ from findings in previous investigations. But a second aim, of no less importance, will be to identify a series of cardinal theoretical principles associated with an interpretation of the Weberian categories of social action and their appropriate modification to permit their use in research within industrial locales. The study itself concerns an analysis of responses from a systematically selected sample of members from two branches of the Transport and General Workers' Union in the Sheffield region, the first of which consisted of employees in the public works department while the second covered bus drivers and conductors in public transport. But in order to ensure a measure of congruence between the theoretical and empirical premises of this inquiry, it is necessary to proceed by examining the relevance of the social action perspective for the genesis of members' perceptions before presenting this material of a more substantive character.

PERCEPTIONS OF TRADE UNIONISM AND THE CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL ACTION

In Weber's interpretation, trade unions were classified as specific types of economic organisation[8]. Hence, on such assumptions, the trade union constituted a major example of an 'economically regulative organisation' (Wirtschaftsregulierender Verband) in which the 'autocephalous economic activity of the members is directly oriented to the order governing the group' and in which regulation of ends and procedures of economic activities are sought by the directing authorities[9]. Nonetheless, Weber himself considered it vital to distinguish between *economic action* (or a conscious primary orientation to economic considerations) and *economically oriented action* in which both political struggle and power conflict could be discerned[10]. Thus, in this latter respect, two main cases were cited in which a direct concern for economic objectives was not necessarily predominant; namely, action which though oriented to other ends takes account in the pursuit of them of economic considerations, and that which, though oriented to economic ends, makes use of physical force as a principal means[11].

pp. 51-64; and also J.A. ALUTTO and J.A. BELASCO, "Determinants of Attitudinal Militancy among Nurses and Teachers", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 27, 1974, pp. 216-27; and D.E. THOMPSON and R.P. BORGHAM, "A Case Study of Employee Attitudes and Labour Unrest", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 27, 1973, pp. 74-83.

8   WEBER, M., *Economy and Society*, New York, Bedminster Press, 1968, p. 74.
9   *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.
10   *Ibid.*, p. 64.
11   *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

In short, in *Economy and Society*, Weber defined and interpreted trade unionism in a manner which was clearly sensitive to both economic and political purpose, even though his emphasis was unmistakeably upon the former consideration. But, in any comprehensive modern analysis of trade unions, such propositions have to be modified and refined in order to encompass three central explanatory dimensions.

1. At a structural level, the impact of economic, organisational, political and technological change upon union growth and character.

2. At a level of values, the subjective perceptions of members insofar as these inform and guide union activities to given goals, objectives and purposes.

3. The powers of 'actors' in industrial and labour relations including not only that of employers and trade unions but also the legislature, political parties and the state.

Contemporary accounts of trade unionism thus differ from Weber's own formulation in three major aspects. Hence, in the first instance, economic movements and technical changes are usually construed as structural variables which constrain social action itself; a view sharply at odds with Weber's view of such developments as either the outcome or means of social action. Indeed, Weber referred to the latter particularly as the 'technique' of an action; "to the means employed as opposed to the meaning or end to which action is in the last analysis oriented"[12]. Secondly, the bulk of sociological interpretations eschew any notion of essentialism and, while countenancing the role of structural variables, seek to discover union purposes in terms of the goals of leading 'actors' within the labour movement. And third, modern analyses are more likely to include references to the environing influence of agencies of the state upon union growth and character than is immediately apparent from within the corpus of the Weberian treatise.

But, at the same time, Weber's sensitivity to the issue of power in industrial and labour relations and his awareness of its significance in social action should in no way minimised. On the contrary, in this regard, Weber was especially concerned with the 'power of control and dispersal' (Vertfügungsgewalt), which included the possibility of control over the actor's own labour power[13]. Thus, on one view, he clearly anticipated a series of contemporary discussions on the nature and possibility of industrial democracy and of the associated practices of autonomous working groups

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12   *Ibid.*, p. 65.
13   *Ibid.*, see notably discussions pp. 136-7.

and of self-governance of enterprise itself. Moreover, Weber's ultimate recognition of the analytical distinction between but practical envelopment of economic and political purpose could be clearly discerned in his familiar delineation of social action categories. These, in turn, permit the comprehensive classification of *ideal-typical* patterns of members' perceptions as follows[14]:

General Categories of Social Action	Perceptions of Trade Unionism
1. *Instrumentally rational* (Zweck rational) that is, determined by expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as "conditions" or "means" for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends.	1. Instrumentally rational orientation to a variety of union objectives such as safety and welfare, wages and working conditions, job regulation and control and the democratic governance of industry itself.
2. *Value-rational* (Wertrational), that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other form of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success.	2. Value-rational orientation to the principle of trade unionism as an end in itself and even to the advancement of workers' rights through socialist political and economic action.
3. *Affectual* (especially emotional), that is, determined by the actor's specific affects and feeling states.	3. Affectual orientation to the community and solidarity of union and workgroup.
4. *Traditional*, that is, determined by ingrained habituation.	4. Traditional orientation to union activities and to the habituation of 'custom and practice' in the workplace itself.

Yet, to what extent, it may be reasonable asked, does such an approach to members' perceptions possess sharply defined analytical and empirical advantages over other taxonomies? To begin with, its very basis in Weberian scholarship not only facilitates a secure anchorage in classical sociological literature, but also, more especially, enables general properties to be enunciated that can be applied to a whole class of instances of the phenomenon under review. This, in turn, avoids the problem intrinsic in the very nature of those *ad hoc* categories of 'grounded theory' that have emerged in much of the empirical literature so far, since, their specificity

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14 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

prevents a systematic accumulation of knowledge on this subject. Similarly, the identification of ideal-typical properties allows the comparative method to be used to locate strategic variations in members' perceptions both between different industrial countries, and in any one enterprise, nation or workplace, over periods in time. Furthermore, so long as the analysis is sufficiently flexible and encompasses, for example, the effects of structural variables, it becomes possible, in turn, to evaluate a variety of expectations of unions which may surface in a complex fashion on account of economic or technical change, the internal structure of unions, the initiatives of the legislature, political parties and the state, and alterations in the balance of power between 'actors' in industrial and labour relations more generally. And finally, of paramount importance, the absence of any postulated antithesis between such union goals as improvements in wages and working conditions on the one hand, and workers' participation in management on the other, enables the analyst to interpret the recent parallel concern for both so-called "economistic" and "control" issues.

Nonetheless, there are of course a number of central problems occasioned by the use of these general categories of social action. After all, a fundamental issue here is whether such formulations constitute mutually exclusive 'ideal-types' or whether, on both analytical and empirical counts, there remain considerable points of overlap. This is apparent particularly in the instances of *Wertrational* and of *affectual* action since solidarism and emotional involvement may well be induced by the very commitment to wider ethical values and precepts in the first place. Moreover, insofar as traditional orientations are concerned, these undoubtedly coexist in trade union affairs, with a general emphasis on change as indicated by the espousal of long run economic and social transformation coupled with the engagement in so-called 'custom and practice' at workplace level. And finally, even if such dilemmas are satisfactorily resolved, it may well prove to be possible to design further general categories of social action which have an equal claim to comprehensiveness.

But, as we have also observed, the merits of the distinctive analytical properties of a classification of members' perceptions rooted in Weberian scolarship are indeed substantial. At this juncture, therefore, it is appropriate to introduce data from our own researches in order to highlight these issues which are of course fundamental in theoretical and empirical sociology.

Instrumentally Rational Orientations to Specific Trade Union Objectives

In the first place, therefore, members' perceptions may be interpreted in terms of a rational calculation of the advantages of unionism in respect of issues such as welfare and safety, hours and holidays, wages, working

conditions, job regulation and participation in management. Nonetheless, although such an account suggests that we cannot base our analysis of member's perceptions upon the assumption of the existence of any one dominant orientation; equally, it is vital to distinguish between the reasons for joining a union (a step fundamentally influenced by 'aggregate' structural variables) and subsequent expectations of union objectives, priorities and policies by the members themselves. After all, as Blackburn[15] and Lockwood[16] have both noted, there is a basic difference between factors affecting union growth and union character respectively, a judgement clearly supported by our own researches.

Thus, our sample of trade unionists were asked how they came to join the union, and for the most part, external pressures occasioned either by 'closed shop' provisions or by an approach from an official or representative appeared to be the dominant influence (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Reasons for Becoming a Trade Union Member

Condition of employment / 'closed shop'	32
Approached by official / shop steward	11
Own volition, on principle	11
Own volition, as a solution to a specific grievance	2
Other / no reply	10
Total	66

Indeed, it is of interest in this context that recent studies of members' attitudes are consistent with this evidence, for, as Roberts and his colleagues, in particular, noted, 49% of 'blue-collar' workers in their sample declared that union membership had been the result of the 'closed shop' and as the authors commented trade unionism is sufficiently entrenched "in many manual occupations to have become, in effect, a condition of employment"[17]. Hence, the power of the individual 'actor' in industrial and labour relations is by no means substantial — although not necessarily in ways conventionally understood — and, in consequence, actual membership may well be induced either by structural pressures which ensure high levels of union density in a given industry or service in the first place or by the stipulation that membership is a condition of employment by manage-

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15 BLACKBURN, R.M., *Union Character and Social Class, op. cit.*
16 LOCKWOOD, D., *The Blackcoated Worker*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1956.
17 ROBERTS, K., *et al, op. cit.*, p. 130.

ment and union officials alike. These arguments and data, however, appear to contrast with findings in certain earlier investigations[18] and are also by no means consistent with the familiar argument propounded, for example, by Wigham[19] that:

> "Men and women join unions for various reasons. The most important is that they think that by combining together they are able to increase their negotiating power and so obtain better wages and conditions. There is also the desire to play a part in controlling their working lives, sometimes the desire to become a leader of men. Large numbers simply join because it is the line of least resistance."

Indeed, it is almost certainly the case that, as unions have become firmly established at enterprise level, the propensity for new members to be recruited for the last of these considerations has become very marked; a situation exacerbated, of course, particularly in the public sector, by the gradual extension of 'closed shop' agreements within the enterprises in question.

However, this argument should not necessarily be taken to imply the existence of a substantial proportion of 'unwilling' unionists in this country, even if there are doubtless members, who, whatever their personal convictions about unionism in general, will have accepted their union cards on the entirely rational grounds of securing employment in the first place. It is to suggest rather that at least insofar as perceptions of unions are concerned, in industries where the closed shop is enforced, there is often little to be gained from asking people why they have joined unions since if 'all manual, clerical and supervisory or managerial employees are required to be members' then not only will the action of enrolment itself provide virtually no worthwhile guide at all "to the nature and extent of people's involvement in their unions"[20] but also this will in turn constitute an inadequate index of commitment to union objectives themselves.

The cardinal importance of drawing a sharp analytical and empirical distinction between union membership and perception of legitimate union activities was evident, therefore, in the support of our respondents for a very wide range of union goals encompassing not only safety and health coupled with improvements in working conditions, but also a range of 'economistic' issues and a substantial measure of penetration into managerial decision making functions as well. Hence we asked members of our sample to indicate to what extent they supported a variety of main union aims and, as may be seen on Table 2, an exceptionally wide range of issues were countenanced.

18   See especially J.H. GOLDTHORPE, *etalia, op. cit.*, p. 97, and H. BEYNON and R.M. BLACKBURN, *op. cit.*, p. 117-22.

19   WIGHAM, E.L., *Trade Unions*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 52-3.

20   HILL, S., *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Thus it was clear that whatever pressure had been brought to bear upon members to join the union in the first place, this in no way appeared to produce any commensurate hostility to the objectives of unions or the repudiation of union involvement in a series of concerns of relevance to work activities. Moreover, it was also evident that our sample of trade unionists could not be classified and pigeon-holed into sharply differentiated categories upon the basis of a dominant orientation to say, 'business', 'economistic' or 'ideological' objectives of unionism[21], a finding which may in turn help to explain why the prediction that 'militancy directed towards such ends as greater worker control may well become more difficult to sustain among home-centred employees... greater aggressiveness in the field of 'cash-based' bargaining as a very probable development'[22] proved to be inconsistent with the major forays and ventures in worker involvement in the 1970's.

But equally our date are not in accord with the primary thrust of the Oxford[23] and later Warwick[24] view of the 'essential' functions of unions as being concerned principally with job regulation and control; a position which was once eloquently expressed by the late Allan Flanders[25]:

> "the essential task of trade unions and, by inference, their primary appeal to workers is (a) to establish a broad basis of right and (b) to give workers some sort of influence in government and management of firms — and above all protection against the arbitrary use of managerial power."

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21 Such categories of this *ad hoc* character have appeared frequently in the literature of course. See for example FORM and DANSEREAU, *op. cit.* who identified five main orientations to unionism embracing 'political', 'economic', 'social', 'apathetic', and 'hostile' respectively. Similarly, PURCELL distinguished between the following member orientations: 'a voice in the affairs that affect the worker', 'a wage instrument', 'seniority and job protection', 'protection from unfair dismissal by foremen', 'better working conditions' and 'grievance and hospitalisation'. SEIDMAN and his colleagues, too, noted differences between 'the ideological unionist', 'the good union man', 'the loyal but critical member', 'the crisis activist', 'the dually-oriented member', 'the card carrier or indifferent member' and 'the unwilling unionist'. In the Brisith literature, GOLDTHORPE and his colleagues identified among reasons for becoming a trade unionist, 'coercion through the existence of a union shop', 'belief in unionism in principle or in worker's duty to join', 'advantages of friendly society benefits and legal assistance', and lastly that 'all workmates were members'. Similarly, BEYNON and BLACKBURN distinguished between 'the ideological unionist', 'everyone else joined', 'the business unionist', 'the problem' (in the sense of joining a union to obtain satisfaction over a particular grievance) and 'asked to join'.

22 GOLDTHORPE, J.H., *et alia*, p. 177.

23 FLANDERS, A., *Management and Unions*, London, Faber, 1975 and *Trade Unions*, London, Hutchinson, 1968.

24 See especially G.S. BAIN, D. COATES and V. ELLIS, *Social Stratification and Trade Unionism*, London, Heinemann, 1973.

25 FLANDERS, A., *Management and the Unions*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

TABLE 2

Perceptions of Union Objectives

'The union should...'	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No	TOTAL
1. *Safety, health and conditions of work*							
'make sure the workplace is safe and healthy to work in'	52	12	0	0	0	2	66
'get best possible working conditions for the men'	50	13	1	0	0	2	66
2. *'Economistic' issues*							
'get best possible wages for the men'	46	17	1	0	0	2	66
'fight for longer holidays'	32	22	8	1	1	2	66
'fight for shorter hours'	31	19	10	2	2	2	66
3. *Issues of job regulation and control*							
'fight against redundancies'	42	14	3	5	0	2	66
'get workers a say in management'	31	19	7	7	0	2	66
'have a detailed knowledge of the firm's profits'	25	20	9	4	1	7	66
'have a say when new machines are brought in'	21	24	8	6	3	4	66

Yet, it is clear from our evidence that both 'instrumental-pecuniary' and job-regulation issues are considered to be legitimate union objectives and hence to regard one type only as essential does scant justice to the broad expectations of unions of the bulk of the membership. To be sure, by the use of forced-choice questions it may be possible to obtain an artificial index of priorities in this regard[26] but our data are consistent with the view of Batstone and his colleagues that "while the wage effort bargain may be an important focus of union goals it is not the only goal. The role of the union is seen in much more general terms than this to ensure some system of justice"[27]. Yet equally — and this is of fundamental importance — "workers may fluctuate between different types of analysis", depending, in part, upon their perception of the immediate balance of power, with the consequence that "workers' courses of action may not be logically consistent with their basic analysis of the cause of particular problems[28]."

This argument was further suggested by the strength of support among our respondents for union involvement in issues concerning safety, health and working conditions. Indeed, these matters were consistently recorded as being of vital concern; more so, indeed, than either wage-related questions or aspects of job-regulation and control. This is in part because of the significance of such problems to the ordinary member[29]; but their prominence may also reflect a recognition that managerial opposition to reaching agreements in these areas is usually of only a token character. And, at all events, these data not only further highlight the broad compass of union objectives, but may also help to illuminate the continued rank-and-file support for the principle of joint consultation[30]. By inference, too, the demise of joint consultative committees may well be explained rather less by membership antipathy and hostility than by the emergence of 'tough-minded' representatives and leaders amongst shop stewards, for whom such issues appeared comparatively trivial, and whose own emergent organisational structures were in any event incompatible with consultative institutions. And the upshot was, of course, that the agendas of consultative committees were ultimately subsumed under a broader conception of the appropriate range of bargaining issues in the enterprise itself[31].

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26 ROBERTS, K., et al., op. cit., p. 133.

27 BATSTONE, E., et al., op. cit., p. 120.

28 Ibid., pp. 126-7.

29 For a review see M. POOLE, Workers' Participation in Industry, Revised Edition, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 77-81.

30 Ibid.

31 For the demise of joint consultative committees (at least in industries with strong union organisation) see W.E.J. McCARTHY, "The Role of the Shop Steward in British Industrial Relations", Research Paper 1, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, London, H.M.S.O., 1967, and A.I. MARSH, Industrial Relations in Engineering, Oxford, Pergamon, 1965.

Rational Orientations to Absolute Values

But if it is clear from the foregoing that the majority of trade union members have a comprehensive range of expectations of the legitimate functions and objectives of their associations, an issue of no less importance is whether orientations to such 'discrete individual ends' are concordant with wider perceptions of the role of unions as agents of social change in modern society. Certainly this dual identity has been emphasised periodically in the literature and not least by Herberg's classic observation that[32]:

> "A modern labor union is, at one and the same time, (1) a business-like service organisation, operating a variety of agencies under a complicated system of industrial relations; and (2) an expression and vehicle of the historical movement of the submerged laboring masses for social recognition and democratic self-determination."

Indeed, in one sense, trade unions have always embraced wider political purposes, not least because of their early vulnerability to the hostile enactments of the legislature and the proclamations of a far from sympathetic parliament. But, of course, in the different milieu of the twentieth century, the extent to which broader political projects and the maintenance of a close link with the Labour Party are still widely upheld is of considerable significance in contemporary sociological debates[33].

To be sure, on the basis of our date alone, it would be unreasonable to draw other than tentative conclusions in this regard. Yet our evidence is indicative of an ongoing modification and even of a mutation of values in this key respect. However, this development is best interpreted in terms of an evolving trade union consciousness in which general objectives — while far from disparaged — are incorporated into an enveloping philosophy grounded primarily in industrial experience. Thus although the commitment of our respondents to the Labour Party and to its historical links with the unions had in no way been vitiated; a modification of outlook was apparent on the question of nationalization along the lines intimated by G.D.H. Cole[34]:

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32 HERBERG, W., "Bureaucracy and Democracy in Labour Unions", *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 3, 1943, p. 406.

33 For an analysis of this issue see J. CHILD, R. LOVERIDGE and M. WARNER, "Towards an Organisational Study of Trade Unions", *Sociology*, Vol. 7, 1973, pp. 71-91.

34 COLE, G.D.H., *The Intelligent Man's Guide to the Post-War World*, London, Gollancz, 1947, p. 38.

> "By Socialism I mean fundamentally not a particular economic arrange-
> ment by which the State owns and runs industry, but the entire body of
> principles...[35] The public ownership of the means of production... is a
> means towards making them effective, not an end in itself save to the ex-
> tent to which it is a means. There is nothing sacred about nationalization;
> but... without a high degree of economic equality, we cannot have either
> freedom and self-government for all, or a satisfactory standard of living
> for all."

In empirical investigations in industry, too, these ideological or moral
underpinnings of unionism have been commonly identified. To be sure, in
the American context, over half of the respondents in, for example,
MacKenzie's sample did not 'discuss the functions of trade unions in terms
of advancing or protecting the interests of any collectivity or group as a
whole' and, above all, did not "envisage the role of unions as being one of
engagement in any form of class struggle" or as having "anything to do
with changing society"[36]. But although this is in all probability represen-
tative of 'business unionism' in the United States, even there, earlier resear-
ches (and notably by both Form and Dansereau[37] and Purcell[38]) had reveal-
ed a rather more extensive imprint of ethico-political philosophy upon
union character. Moreover, in Great Britain, Beynon and Blackburn[39],
Goldthorpe and his colleagues[40], and more recently Batstone et al[41] and
Roberts et al[42], have all identified a substantial proportion of members com-
mitted to trade unionism in principle, regardless of the specific advantages
of membership in terms of the issues examined in the previous section. In-
deed, even in the affluent worker studies, a higher proportion of members
gave reasons for belonging to trade unions in terms of the "belief in
unionism in principle or in the worker's duty to join"; rather than in respect
of "advantages of union representative on wages, conditions of service,
grievances, etc.[43]" Furthermore, from a 'forced-choice' question designed

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35 COLE's socialist principles encompassed: Standard of living of ordinary people, per-
sonal and political freedom, canons of social conduct, the duty of service, the right to go one's
own way, morality, the brotherhood of man, truth, freedom of speech, freedom of associa-
tion, freedom of will, and visions; pp. 35-7.

36 MacKENZIE, G., *The Aristocracy of Labour*, Cambridge, Cambridge University
Press, 1973, pp. 144-6.

37 FORM, W.H. and H.K. DANSEREAU, *op. cit.* See also J.A. BANKS, *Trade
Unionism*, London, Collier-MacMillan, 1974, Chapters 6 and 7.

38 PURCELL, T.V., *Blue Collar Man, op. cit.*, p. 174.

39 BEYNON, H. and R.M. BLACKBURN, *op. cit.*

40 GOLDTHORPE, J.H., *et al., op. cit.*, pp. 93-115.

41 BATSTONE, E., *et al., op. cit.*, pp. 120-1.

42 ROBERTS, K., *et al., op. cit.*, p. 133.

43 GOLDTHORPE, J.H., *et alia, op. cit.*, p. 97.

to elicit similar information, Roberts and his colleagues found an approximately three to one predominance of emphasis upon former considerations[44]. Hence alghough this is not to argue that class-based forms of consciousness are especially prevalent amongst rank-and-file union members or indeed to claim, as has Spinrad, for example, that "ultimately union activity is a result of the acceptance of work, workplace, workmates and working class as somehow constituting a very meaningful part of the union member's life"[45], it is to suggest that trade union consciousness or perhaps what Beynon has termed 'factory-based consciousness'[46] is, if anything, of mounting significance. Referring, then, to the shop stewards in Halewood, Beynon noted[47]:

> "The shop stewards within car plants may be militants but they are not revolutionaries... Their equipment is their industrial expertise — the source of their strength and the chink in their armour... They can see no obvious salvation in the nationalisation of the car industry, be it under workers' control or not... As far as changing the nature of society goes, or even the organisation of industry they don't know."

Indeed, there was clear evidence among the majority of our respondents of an evolving trade union consciousness. Turning more specifically then, to material from our own survey, it was not surprising that Labour voters outnumbered Conservatives by a ratio of approximately 4:1[48], and, of rather greater significance, was the maintenance of support for trade union links with the Labour Party. Indeed, there was on balance an agreement with the view that there was not much wrong with the Labour Party and that any unpopularity was in part occasioned by the 'prejudice of the Tory Press' and by influence of the wider mass media of communication. Similarly, comparatively few respondents displayed any sympathy with the disembodiment of their union from the Labour Party, and the majority clearly supported the view that whatever the imperfections of this political institution there was no need to 'get a divorce' between political and industrial wings. Moreover, there was strong support for more union-sponsored M.P.s to ensure that the political activities of the Labour movement was responsive to and *even directly controlled by the industrial section* rather than vice versa (see Table 3).

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44   ROBERTS, K., *et al., op. cit.*, p. 133.

45   SPINRAD, W., "Correlates of Trade Union Participation: A Summary of the Literature", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, 1960, pp. 237-44, 244.

46   BEYNON, H., *op. cit.*

47   *Ibid.*, pp. 318-9.

48   Sheffield is in any event the strongest Labour-oriented English city.

TABLE 3

Trade Unions and the Labour Party[49]

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Answer	TOTAL
Any unpopularity of the Labour Party is a reflection of the prejudice of the 'Tory press'	15	19	5	11	10	6	66
Unions and the Labour Party should separate	4	7	3	24	21	7	66
There should be more union-sponsored M.P.s	17	22	6	8	5	8	66
'Labour may have done things against the working man but doesn't mean you want a divorce'	11	26	5	8	8	8	66

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49   The exact questions were: (1) 'Clearly there's nothing wrong with the Labour Party: its unpopularity is more because of the prejudice of the Tory Press rather than anything else'. (2) 'Enough is enough is what I say — Labour's proved itself to be against the workingman and union shouldn't have anything more to do with it'. (3) 'What we need is more control over the selection of Labour leaders. In particular we could have more union sponsored M.P.'s to ensure the workers' interests are kept'. (4) 'Whereas its true that Labour's done a lot against the workingman, the way I look at it is like marriage — your partner may do things you don't like but that doesn't mean you'll get a divorce'.

Our findings, however, sharply contrast with those of S. Hill on dockworkers among whom it was found 61% agreed that trade unions ought not to support the Labour Party (see S. HILL, *The Dockers, op. cit.*, Table 7.4, p. 221).

That the wider consciousness of members of our sample was predominantly industrial in character was also supported by ambivalence over the question of public ownership and by evidence of hostility to the conduct of 'politically-motivated' activists within the labour movement itself. Thus on the issue of nationalization our respondents were fairly evenly divided although a sizeable proportion even of Labour voters abjured further extensions in the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange[50]. Moreover, it was common for members to argue 'that both workers and unions should remember the cost at which unions were formed in this country', and to voice criticism of the minority of representatives who were seen to introduce an illegitimate political dimension into what were regarded as 'purely' industrial disputes. That is to say, the trade union, workplace-based consciousness of respondents in our sample was at times so pervasive that it clearly constituted a major bulwark against the incorporation of trade unions by external agencies and the subsumption of their wide-ranging functions by political parties and organised factions within union themselves.

Affectual or Solidaristic Orientations

But, of course, in Max Weber's classical account, social action was construed not only in terms of the pursuit specific objectives and as the reflection of broader values and ethical purposes, but also in respect of solidaristic and emotional loyalties, and especially to the 'actor's specific affects and feeling states'[51]. Furthermore, although such modes of action were not regarded by Weber as entirely rational in the specific sense of reflecting an integration of behaviour and orientations within a means-end relationship, this does not invalidate their potentially far reaching importance within any given industrial milieu itself.

To be sure, as we have already argued, there are a number of analytical as well as empirical objections to drawing too rigid a distinction between *Wertrational* and *affectual* orientations since in certain forms of collective trade union action, in particular, these 'subjective elements' are inexorably fused. But it was, nonetheless, of considerable interest to discover the extent to which the latter formed a prevalent part of the day to day experience of our respondents and to evaluate the degree to which trade unionism more generally captured the emotions of the membership as a whole.

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50 The exact numbers in each category were: strongly agree with nationalisation 15, agree 11, indifferent 13, disagree 12, strongly disagree 13, no answer 2.

51 WEBER, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.

As it happens evidence from previous investigations provides no une-quivocal conclusions on such questions. After all, whereas Goldthorpe and his colleagues argued that, on the basis of their data, it was difficult to gain-say the view that trade unionism had lost its 'emotional appeal'[52], studies of miners[53] and dockworkers[54] have revealed very strong occupational loyalties with communities displaying elements of gemeinschaft societies[55]. To be sure, some 'secularisation' of union affairs is almost an inevitable concomi-tant of the structural division of work and non-work activities associated with industrialization itself; but nevertheless, this general condition is en-tirely consistent with the incidence of major variations in different trade unions and occupational groups.

For the most part, however, amongst respondents in our survey there appeared to be a gulf between union allegiance and emotional identification with the union, as indeed Sayles and Strauss have argued[56]:

> "A distinction can be made between "intellectual acceptance" of the union and "emotional identification" with it. Almost all workers were convinced of its value as a form of job security. Only a majority showed "emotional identification" with its organisational goals."

Indeed, our data in support of the so-called 'secularisation' thesis encom-passed participation in union affairs, commitment to 'social' functions in unions, the use of grievance machinery and attitudes to solidarism in union action. Thus one means of delineating the degree of commitment of a member to the union is to determine the extent of participation in branch affairs, and here it was perhaps scarcely surprising that the bulk of our res-pondents that they attended such meetings infrequently, rarely or never. In similar vein, too, as may be seen from Table 4, the majority displayed no apparent interest whatsoever in becoming an official or representative.

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52 GOLDTHORPE, J.H., *et al., op. cit.,* p. 114.
53 DENNIS, N., *et al., op. cit.*
54 HILL, S., *op. cit.*
55 *Ibid.,* Chapter 9.
56 SAYLES, L.R. and G. STRAUSS, *The Local Union, op. cit.,* p. 132.

TABLE 4

Interest in Trade Union Posts

Interested in becoming an official or representative		15
Not interested in becoming an official or representative		51
Reasons given:	Not enough time	14
	Not interested in union affairs	12
	Not sufficiently educated, able, confident	9
	Tankless task	4
	Good enough officials already	2
	Other/no reply	5
	Total number	66

Similarly, the reasons proffered for this dearth of interest in participation in the union were of special interest since these focused particularly upon an unwillingness to sacrifice 'free' or 'leisure' time. The extent, then, to which members were prepared to offer unstinting personal support for their unions was clearly limited and appeared to be conditional upon the activity in question. And, at all events, there was undoubtedly a marked constrast between solidary commitment and emotional involvement within domestic and union spheres respectively[57].

Further indications of the validity of this prognosis were apparent if reference were made to data on social events within unions. Indeed, information was elicited on the extent to which respondents were prepared to view unions as central points of conviviality and sociability over and above the series of objectives outlined in previous sections; and again, consistent with the 'secularisation' thesis, there were distinctive signs of at best lukewarm enthusiasm in this regard. For although it would be incorrect to suggest that there was any concerted opposition to unions developing such arrangements as clubs, parties and so on, it was clear that, at least in the context of unionism, for the most part our respondents had no personal interest in involvement in such activities. And as a consequence, of all the positively ranked functions of unions, the sponsorship of social events attracted least support overall, while the 'marketing' of unionism through advertising was even abjured[58].

57   YOUNG, M. and P. WILLMOTT, *The Symmetrical Family*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.

58   The totals were 'The union should...' (1) develop social arrangements such as parties, clubs, etc.; strongly agree 12, agree 21, indifferent 16, disagree 11, strongly disagree 3, no answer 3 (2) 'sell unionism advertising'; strongly agree 14, agree 9, indifferent 12, disagree 21, strongly disagree 8, no answer 2.

This absence of a marked 'affectual' loyalty to the union was reinforc-
ed by the limited use of grievance machinery and by attitudes to solidarism
in action itself. To be sure, a high rate of, say, lodging complaints with a
steward is itself no guarantee of emotional loyalty since these actions may
be occasioned by *Zweckrational* or *Wertrational* motives, but on the other
hand it is not unreasonable to infer that a low level of involvement in this
respect is indicative of only a limited personal commitment to the union as a
whole. Taken in conjunction with other data, therefore, it was of signi-
ficance that only one-third of members reported that they had ever asked a
steward or representative to take up a grievance on their behalf.

Another means of measuring loyalty to the union it to guage the extent
to which members consider that representatives should 'always take the side
of the men' regardless of the merits of the case in question and of the degree
to which it is likely to enhance union objectives such as those outlined in the
previous sections. After all, as Dennis and his colleagues noted in Ashton,
the appeal of unionism was so 'powerful' there that not only was 'an indis-
pensible attribute of a union official... a reputation for an unswerving
loyalty to his members', but also the view was widespread that he should be
'sound to the point of being dishonest on behalf of the men'[59]. Amongst our
respondents, however, it was difficult to detect such sentiments: indeed, as
may be seen on Table 5, only a third of the sample supported this type of
conduct from among their representatives.

TABLE 5

Union Solidarism

'Do you think the steward should always take the side of the men?'

Yes	24
No/Depends on occasion	30
Don't know/Other reply	12
Total	66

Of course it is quite consistent for the rank-and-file to have a low level
of solidary involvement in their unions for the most part, but, during the
pursuit of a claim widely considered to be just, to experience an intense
commitment to the cause in question, and to accept without demur the
necessary sacrifices to accomplish their given trade union objectives.
However, even in such instances, as Batstone and his colleagues have
recently noted, during strikes and stoppages there is clear evidence of 'the

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[59] DENNIS, N., *et al., op. cit.*, pp. 84-93.

management of discontent' by leader stewards in particular, with the conse-
quence that, although in moving towards industrial action, 'workers create
a rationale that justifies such a course of action', equally this consciousness
can be in part attributable to their officials who could take many weeks to
nurture these very conceptions in the first place[60]. Notwithstanding major
occupational variations, therefore, the 'secularisation' of union activities
seems to be widespread in a great many industries and services in contem-
porary Britain.

Traditional Orientations

But if it was difficult to discover solidaristic orientations to trade
unionism among members of our sample there was evidence of firmly-
established traditional forms of action and behaviour occasioned by 'habi-
tuation' of 'custom and practice'[61]. Thus turning our attention to Weber's
fourth main category of social action enables us to focus upon such con-
cerns even though these, in turn, may be understood in two rather different
senses. There is, then, first of all, adherence to established workplace prac-
tices (such as demarcational rules, manning levels and seniority in promo-
tion to shop floor and supervisory posts), but of no less importance is the
propensity for union membership itself to be a long-established mode of
conduct which may be traced back within individual working-class families
over a number of generations.

Nonetheless, in British trade unionism, a twin commitment to the pre-
servation of traditional 'job rights' and an affirmation of the desirability of
social change associated with *Wertrational* orientations has long been evi-
dent. Moreover, it is a phenomenon with deep historical roots identifiable
not just at the time of the formation of 'new model' unions in the 1850's,

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[60] BATSTONE, E., I. BORASTON and S. FRENKEL, *The Social Organization of
Strikes*, Oxford, Balckwell, 1978, p. 207.

[61] CLEGG, H.A., *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, Oxford,
Blackwell, 1976, pp. 4-6.

but also at other key phases in the development of the labour movement. Thus as Hinton has recalled in the context of the emergence of the first shop stewards' movement in the 1910's[62]:

> "The shop-stewards' movement was primarily a movement of skilled engineering workers, their militancy reflected the breakdown, in wartime conditions of vastly expanded demand for the products of their labour, of their traditional security as a privileged section of the working class... The leaders of the movement were revolutionaries who saw in the craftsmen's militant revolt against bureaucratic trade unionism the germs of a revolutionary spirit on which they could build. But the movement contained, as well, the germs of a merely sectional struggle for the restoration of lost status. Its development hung between these possibilities."

Yet insofar as the maintenance of traditional practices are concerned, it was once assumed that these were largely a reflection of craft union consciousness. Indeed, as Turner emphasised in his familiar distinction between closed and open unions, members of the former associations characteristically have enforced a series of 'restrictionist' practices encompassing not only the recruitment and training of new members but also their deployment to specific enterprise tasks themselves[63]. Nonetheless, from the evidence of the Fawley researches onwards, it has become clear that workers in open unions are by no means averse to establishing demarcational rules; a finding which received further support from our own survey[64].

Hence, although the T and GWU is of course and archetypal open union, there was unmistakeable evidence of a commitment by the membership to customs and practices more usually accredited to skilled artisans. Thus, we asked members of both branches what their views were concerning the desirability of union determination of the apprenticeship system as well as the establishment of seniority rules in promotion to shop floor and supervisory positions. After all, the first represents a key aspect of the control of the supply of labour associated with the exclusiveness of skilled artisans and their early ascendancy is the so-called aristocracy of labour; while seniority practices represent traditional forms of behaviour which are distinct from both selection on meritocratic *Zweckrational* lines or on the basis of, say, political or other *Wertrational* criteria. And, as may be seen on Table 6 the majority were clearly in favour of such practices.

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62 HINTON, J., Introduction to J.T. Murphy, *The Workers' Committee*, London, Pluto Press, 1972, p. 3. See also J. HINTON, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1973.

63 TURNER, H.A., *Trade Union Growth Structure and Policy*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1962.

64 FLANDERS, A., *The Fawley Productivity Agreements*, London, Faber, 1974.

TABLE 6

Attitudes to Apprenticeships and to the Practice of Seniority

'The union shoud...'	Stongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other/ No reply	TOTAL
'have control over apprenticeships'	15	22	12	10	4	3	66
'ensure seniority in promotion for shop-floor jobs'	18	13	10	15	7	3	66
'ensure seniority in promotion for super-visory jobs'	17	10	11	18	7	3	66

These data, then, are clearly consistent with the view that traditional practices are firmly rooted in trade union consciousness in general; a proposition which could be justified further from evidence on our members' own trade union experience within family and community. Hence approximately three-quarters of our respondents affirmed that they had fathers who had been trade unionists, while almost all reported that their friends and relatives were also members. Indeed, it was only among the minority of immigrants in the sample than an absence of intergenerational union experience could be discerned. Of course, on certain assumptions, these very attachments to traditional aspects of union behaviour have been identified as a major stumbling block to efficient utilisation of manpower and to the emergence of those radical initiatives in, say, the socio-technical system design of work practices at shop floor level[65], but this in no way invalidates their significance insofar as the perceptions of ordinary trade unionists are concerned.

CONCLUSION

In our introduction to this paper two main objectives were established; namely to present results from a preliminary investigation of members' perceptions of their unions and to develop the general theoretical analysis of this important area of scholarship. But our arguments have wider significance, of course, to ongoing debates in industrial relations and industrial sociology and it therefore remains to restate those points to which we attain special salience, while recapitulating and extending the central propositions of this review itself.

Insofar as the substantive aims of this inquiry are concerned, therefore, the evidence in support of the idea of an expanding and enveloping trade union consciousness seemed to be by far the most significant of our various findings. Thus, notwithstanding the limited impact of *affectual* or 'solidaristic' orientations outside industrial action itself it would appear that during the 1970's the expectations of rank-and-file members of unions have risen substantially and now embrace, not only a wide range of 'discrete' objectives, but also principles of social justice coupled with the determination to maintain a series of traditional customs and practices at workplace level itself. As such, therefore, our evidence was far from consistent with those previous arguments in which a sharp cleavage has been identified between an emphasis on, say, instrumental-pecuniary goals of unions, job regulation and control, and broader ethical perspectives.

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[65] PASMORE, W.A. and J.J. SHERWOOD, *Sociotechnical Systems: A Sourcebook*, La Jolla, California, University Associates, 1978, esp. pp. 61-72.

But equally, despite signs of an apparent escalation in industrial con-
flict during the past decade, our data by no means lend support to the view
that the overt political consciousness and activism of ordinary trade union
members had expanded markedly during the period in question. On the
contrary, as we have already emphasised, the degree of solidary involve-
ment in unions is very restricted, while the validity of our analysis was fur-
ther highlighted by the resolution of the rank-and-file to ground the polit-
ical objectives of unionism in industrial policies enshrined once again in the
notion of an expanding trade union consciousness itself. That is to say,
although there was no evidence to suggest any decline in support for the
Labour Party or for the wish to terminate the link between political and in-
dustrial wings of the Labour movement, there were signs both of opposition
to further extentions in public ownership and of antipathy to the conduct of
political activists within unions themselves.

Of course, insofar as long-term economic, political and social move-
ments are concerned, the attitudes of rank-and-file members constitute only
part of a complex of explanatory variables, which include not only general
structural changes and patterns of internal organizations within unions, but
also the distribution of power and the possession of different resources by
unions and management at enterprise, industry and national levels respec-
tively[66]. Thus although it would be unreasonable, therefore, to draw other
than rather modest conclusions on major societal processes and develop-
ments, nonetheless, if in the post-second world war period we have witness-
ed a marked diminution in so-called 'scarcity-consciousness', then this will,
in turn, almost certainly continue to have far reaching implications for
economic and industrial policy.

More specifically, then, this phenomenon has almost certainly been
cardinal in accounting for the unwillingness of rank-and-file union
members to support those forms of social contract in which a sacrifice of
'discrete' objectives is expected in return for political action on social
security and welfare benefits and on the opportunity for union officials to
exert a direct influence upon governmental decisions. Again this would be
expected to be particularly acute in unions such as the T and GWU in which
a deliberate programme of decentralization has been effected and in which

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66 See for a general account R. HYMAN, *Industrial Relations*, London, MacMillan,
1975; and in the case of white-collar unionism see G.S. BAIN, *op. cit.* For the issue of power in
trade union and labour relations see P. ABELL (ed.), *Organisations as Bargaining and In-
fluence Systems*, London, Heinemann, 1975, P. ABELL, "The Many Faces of Power and
Liberty: Revealed Preference, Antonomy and Teleological Explanation", *Sociology*, Vol. II,
1977, pp. 2-24, and M. POOLE, "A Power Analysis of Workplace Labour Relations", *In-
dustrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 7, 1976, pp. 31-43.

ordinary members have been able, therefore, to augment their control over intra-union strategy via domestic electoral procedures. And at all events, the very wide compass of union aims which now appear to receive membership support reflect a development more consistent with guild-socialist and syndicalist philosophy than with the maintenance of the so-called 'compromise' of 'liberal-collectivist' industrial relations, or with an evolution towards corporatism, or yet again to the subsumption of the escalating demands of 'trade union consciousness' under the aegis of a fully-fledged political programme of a revolutionary party. To be sure, it must re-emphasised that rank-and-file perceptions are only one ingredient in a matrix of causative factors affecting industrial and social change and, therefore, several possible outcomes remain on the agenda. But on present evidence, the unwillingness of trade union officers, government and legislature alike to appreciate to the full the significance of a rising level of expectations in a milieu of low-growth economic policies will almost certainly be reflected in the relatively high levels of industrial conflict in Britain during the last decade becoming a fairly permanent feature of industrial relations in the 1980's.

But our enquiry also focused upon a series of theoretical considerations and it is therefore of importance to draw out a number of central analytical and conceptual inferences in this final section. It was clear first of all, therefore, that the social action perspective possessed several valuable properties which ensured a firm anchorage in classical scholarship, a basis for classifying orientations to union activity, and the possibility of making systematic comparisons between members' perceptions in a variety of workplace locales. Nonetheless, as we have already emphasised for optimal explanatory effect, such an analysis should be combined with a careful delineation of structural constraints upon action and an appropriate evaluation of the power of the major bargaining parties within industrial relations. That is to say, while the orientations of actors are of the utmost significance in focusing social action, they offer no exclusive guide to the origins of behaviour at workplace level, let alone to broader processes of societal change themselves.

Moreover, our analytical and theoretical approach also highlights certain deficiencies in traditional debates within industrial relations and industrial sociology between the 'orientations of actors' and 'situational

determinants' schools[67]. For although we would not necessarily wish to dispute the view that 'both blue and white collar workers are willing to support either individualistic or collectivistic action, or a combination of both, depending upon the strategy that best fits their situations'[68], these very situations are themselves in part the product of action informed by given sets of values and by the wider influences of social structure upon behaviour. That is to say, the contexts in which members find themselves are by no means random events and incidents bur are rather profoundly shaped by a series of forces both within the wider sociocultural environment and within the broader nexus of industrial relationships at enterprise level.

But equally the evidence and material presented in this review in no way lend support to one-sided structuralist interpretations of society and history. After all, the social values of participants in industrial relations underpin action and behaviour and at the very least help to account for major cultural variations within labour movements in societies with roughly similar political and economic formations. Hence, the propositions developed in the foregoing analysis are entirely consistent with the pressing objective of developing comprehensive explanatory models in which there is full cognizance of the complexities of interaction, conflict and change within organizations and in which no foreclosure of argument and debate is occasioned by unwavering commitment to any one major set of propositions which have been stripped from a sound anchorage in empirical scholarship itself.

67 GOLDTHORPE, J.H., et al., op. cit., W.W. DANIEL, "Understanding Employee Behaviour in its Context", in J. Child (ed.), Man and Organisation, London, Allen and Unwin, 1973. R.K. BROWN, "Sources of Objectives in Work and Employment", in J. Child (ed.), op. cit., has provided an invaluable further review here. For recent studies see R. BENNETT, "Orientations to Work and Organisational Analysis: A Conceptual Integration and Suggested Application", Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 15, 1978, pp. 187-210; D. SMITH, "Control and Orientations to Work in a Business Organization", Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 15, 1978, pp. 211-22, and C. WHELAN, "Orientations to Work — Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems", British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 9, 1976.

68 ROBERTS, K., et al, op. cit., p. 134.

Comment le syndiqué du rang perçoit-il l'action sociale

Cet article a pour objet de présenter les résultats d'une enquête visant à connaître la perception qu'ont de l'action sociale les syndiqués tout en établissant un cadre théorique qui soit de nature à favoriser une accumulation systématique de connaissances sur le sujet. Le cadre choisi pour l'enquête se fonde sur les quatre catégories de l'action sociale établies par Max Weber, celles-ci étant modifiées de manière à tenir compte de certaines dimensions nouvelles.

L'enquête s'est faite auprès des membres d'un syndicat britannique dans le secteur des transports et les répondants étaient au nombre de soixante-six.

On pose d'abord une première question en demandant à ces syndiqués du rang pourquoi ils ont adhéré à un syndicat. Les réponses données sont les suivantes: l'adhésion est une condition préalable d'emploi: 32; le salarié a été vu par un délégué syndical: 11; le salarié a adhéré de son propre gré: 11; l'employé a adhéré à la suite du règlement d'un grief: 2; enfin, 10 n'ont pas répondu à la question. Le résultat de l'enquête confirme sur ce point les découvertes de certaines autres enquêtes. Toutefois, on peut en retenir qu'un grand nombre de membres n'ont pas donné volontairement leur adhésion, mais qu'ils ont agi ainsi en vue d'obtenir leur emploi.

Ceci n'empêche pas, cependant, qu'une fois l'adhésion donnée, les membres recherchent des objectifs divers: sécurité, santé, bonnes conditions de travail, meilleurs salaires, vacances plus longues, durée du travail plus courte, contrôle sur l'emploi. Ainsi, 64 sur 66 syndiqués veulent que le syndicat protège leur santé et veulent que le syndicat protège leur santé au travail; 63 estiment qu'il doit viser à leur procurer de meilleures conditions de travail; 63, qu'il s'efforce d'accroître leur traitement; 54, qu'ils obtiennent des vacances plus longues; 50, que la durée du travail soit plus courte, etc.

Il est clair que la recherche de ces gains est considérée par les syndiqués comme un objectif légitime. Toutefois, le désir de gains plus élevés n'est pas le seul but recherché par les syndiqués. Ceux-ci se préoccupent de bien d'autres choses, notamment de la santé au travail.

Ceci ne veut pas dire que les syndicats sont considérés par les membres uniquement comme les défenseurs de leurs intérêts immédiats, mais ils tiennent également à ce que ceux-ci soient des agents de changement dans la société, ce qui se manifeste en Grande-Bretagne par la fidélité des membres au parti travailliste. 4 travailleurs donnent leur appui à cette formation politique contre 1 au parti conservateur. Sur les 66 membres, 34 estiment que l'impopularité du parti travailliste est attribuable à la presse tory; 45 s'opposent à ce que les syndicats rompent les liens avec le parti travailliste; 38 veulent qu'il y ait plus de députés patronnés par les syndicats; 37 ne veulent pas qu'il y ait divorce entre eux et le parti travailliste, même si ce dernier n'agit pas toujours favorablement aux travailleurs.

D'autre part, ce ne sont pas tous les syndiqués, loin de là, qui adhèrent aux syndicats par militantisme ou pour des raisons affectives. En effet, l'intérêt des membres pour les fonctions syndicales est plus que mitigé. Sur les 66 répondants, il n'y en a qu'une quinzaine qui soient disposés à accepter cette responsabilité. Ce fait est confirmé par une autre constatation: les membres, en majorité, ne croient pas que le délégué syndical doive inévitablement se ranger du côté du réclamant en matière de griefs.

Les membres des syndicats sont cependant attachés aux orientations traditionnelles du syndicalisme. Ceci ressort nettement lorsqu'on leur demande ce qu'ils pensent de l'apprentissage et de l'ancienneté. Par exemple, 37 estiment que le syndicat doit favoriser le contrôle de l'apprentissage et de l'ancienneté. Ceci montre que, parmi les membres du syndicat, les anciennes préoccupations du syndicalisme de métiers prédominent encore.

En résumé, on peut retenir de cette enquête que la conscience politique et l'activisme des syndiqués du rang se sont accrus en Grande-Bretagne au cours des dernières années. Ainsi, malgré l'impact limité des orientations de solidarité et d'émotivité, les aspirations des syndiqués du rang ont pris de l'ampleur et elles embrassent maintenant, non seulement un grand nombre d'objectifs «discontinus», mais aussi des principes de justice social associés à la volonté de maintenir un ensemble de coutumes et de pratiques traditionnelles en milieu de travail.

En dépit des signes apparents d'une escalade dans les conflits industriels durant la dernière décennie, les données recueillies ne confirment en aucune façon l'opinion que la conscientisation politique manifeste et l'activisme du syndiqué du rang ont pris de l'ampleur au cours de cette période. Au contraire, le degré de solidarité dans les syndicats est très restreint étant donné que le caractère valable de cette analyse fut mis en lumière par la volonté du syndiqué du rang de fonder les objectifs du syndicalisme sur des politiques industrielles encore enchassées dans la notion d'une conscience syndicale qui va s'accroissant. Bien qu'il n'y ait pas d'indice d'un déclin quelconque dans l'appui accordé par les syndiqués au parti travailliste non plus que de la volonté de mettre fin au lien entre les ailes syndicale et politique du mouvement ouvrier, il y a à la fois des signes d'opposition à un accroissement de la propriété publique et d'antipathie à l'égard des activités politiques à l'intérieur des syndicats.

En autant que les mouvements économiques, politiques et sociaux à long terme sont concernés, les attitudes des syndiqués du rang ne constituent qu'une partie de variables complexes qui incluent non seulement les changements de structure à l'intérieur des syndicats, mais aussi le partage du pouvoir et la possession de ressources par les syndicats et les patrons au niveau de l'entreprise, de l'industrie et de l'économie.

Ce phénomène a été capital pour justifier la répugnance des syndiqués de la base à appuyer des formes de contrat social dans lesquelles l'espérance d'objectifs immédiats est sacrifiée à l'action politique en faveur de sécurité et d'avantages sociaux en retour de la possibilité pour les dirigeants syndicaux d'exercer une influence directe sur les décisions gouvernementales. Ceci indique que, dans un état d'économie à faible croissance, la multiplication des conflits industriels sera une caractéristique permanente des relations professionnelles durant la décennie 1980.

Mais cette enquête a aussi mis en lumière une série de considérations techniques. Il en ressort d'abord que, si les orientations des «acteurs» ont beaucoup de signification, elles ne sont pas le guide exclusif pour juger le comportement des salariés en milieu du travail et délaisser les autres forces de changement social. De plus, le contexte dans lequel les membres se trouvent ne repose pas sur des événements ou des incidents qui se produisent par hasard, mais ils sont façonnés profondément par une série de forces provenant à la fois du milieu socio-culturel au sens large et de rapports ou relations au niveau de l'entreprise. Ces faits, enfin, ne sauraient donner ouverture à une interprétation unilatérale des sociétés et de l'histoire.