

The future of trade unionism in industrialised market economies

Synthesis report

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Introduction

Economic and political changes over the last ten years have placed a great strain upon established forms of worker representation and in particular upon trade unions. Although the picture was far from uniform across industrialised countries, the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s had seen a big, and apparently irreversible, expansion of the scope and influence of worker representation, everywhere except perhaps in the United States, so that by the latter part of the 1970s unions were not just the major advocates of workers' interests in the place of work, but increasingly they were also major actors in the political arena. However, since the late 1970s, in many industrialised countries, unions have been in retreat, faced with declining bargaining power in the industrial sphere, declining political influence and falling membership. Trade unions' fortunes have varied throughout their history, and their power commonly fluctuates with business conditions, but the economic crisis of the early 1980s has brought a number of qualitative changes in industrialised economies which pose new kinds of problems for the methods of representation used by unions throughout much of the post-war era.

These issues were debated at a symposium of trade union and academic researchers from a number of industrialised market economies organised by the International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS), and held in Turin on 9-11 December 1987. This synthesis of the discussion is not intended to be a detailed summary of what was an extremely rich and varied exchange of

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ideas. Instead, it seeks to draw out some of the main themes from the discussion, and especially those not raised explicitly in the articles by Kochan, Shimada, and Visser.

The discussion was organised around the following themes: the nature of the crisis or challenge facing trade unions in different countries; the changes in the environment in which they operate; the impact of these on unions and their response; and the nature of the intervening institutional factors underlying the different responses in different countries. This article brings together the main themes of the discussion and, in doing so, uses, as an organising framework, a model of the adaptability of worker representation to help understand the variety of union experiences reported within the group. The model was proposed initially by Kochan, and then elaborated during the discussion (see figure below). The model does not seek to provide a general explanation, but rather to offer a framework within which more limited, testable propositions can be elaborated and discussed.

The model seeks to bring out some of the key factors affecting the ability of worker representation to adapt to the pressures of the early 1980s, and possibly shaping the kind of adaptation achieved. A heavy emphasis is given to changes in the environment causing changes in patterns of representation. The key environmental factors identified in the discussion were changes in the structure of economic activity, globalisation of company operations, the increased diversity of the workforce, new technologies, and political and legal changes. Although there are numerous examples of patterns of worker representation affecting their environment, it was generally agreed that many of these environmental factors in the 1980s had not themselves been caused by union action. Although much of the debate about "crisis" in unions has regarded them as passive objects submitting to external changes, it neglects two important elements, notably, that unions are able to respond, and in different ways, and that they are also woven into a wider mesh of relations with employers which also conditions their scope for response. We thus identified a number of intervening institutional factors which shape the response of unions to environmental changes. These include: the business strategies of employers and unions' ability to influence them; management's personnel strategies; the scope of union strategies (such as political integration, enterprise bargaining and participation, and the provision of worker services); union structure; and finally, the influence of historical patterns of industrial relations, and their underlying principles and practices. How then do we measure changes in worker representation? Among the most important indicators of change are, firstly, patterns of union membership, the type and level of membership participation, and the degree to which unions can mobilise their members' support, and that of the wider community; and secondly, the development of alternative organisational strategies, and alternative forms of worker participation and representation, and of alternative influence processes. The adjustments also have certain wider consequences for worker welfare, economic performance, and for democratic and social values.

A model of adaptability of worker representation

<i>Environmental changes</i>	<i>Adjustment indicators</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
1. Structural changes	1. Trade union membership, participation, and mobilisation	1. Worker welfare
2. "Globalisation"		2. Economic performance
3. Workforce diversity		3. Democratic and social values
4. New technologies	2. Alternative worker representation and influence processes	
5. Political and legal changes		
<i>Intervening institutional factors</i>		
1. Business strategy		
(a) content/substance		
(b) worker/union influence		
2. Management personnel strategies		
(a) advanced human resource management policies		
(b) union avoidance intensity		
3. Union strategy (scope)		
- political integration		
- enterprise bargaining		
- participation		
- worker services		
4. Union structure		
(a) encompassiveness		
- centralisation		
- horizontal integration		
(b) new experiments		
5. Historical patterns of industrial relations		
underlying principles and practices		

In the longer run, by providing a number of testable propositions, the model is intended to provide a focus for further work on the adaptation of worker representation, either on countries not covered in the debate, or by looking in greater depth at those countries included at the symposium.

The nature of the crisis facing trade unions

Despite a widespread feeling that worker representation is in a state of crisis in many industrialised market economies, it would be hard to select a single indicator which would be valid for all countries, and it would be equally hard to pick a single key manifestation of "crisis". With the report of the Evolution of Work Committee of the AFL-CIO in 1985 that Confederation first officially recognised that the United States union movement was in severe difficulties in three areas in particular. First was falling membership figures and membership density in the United States to only one-fifth of employees in 1986; second was the increasing inability to take wages out of competition; and the third was the uncertainty concerning the role unions should take in the restructuring of the economic and social affairs of the United States. As Kochan argues, three broad sources of pressure on American unions can be identified, notably structural changes in the United

States economy, a change in employer practices, especially in placing less reliance on collective bargaining, and thirdly, a shift in workers' attitudes and in the nature of the workforce. Moreover, the combined influence of these is probably greater than the sum of the influence of each taken individually.

Several of these influences are also present in the other countries, but it would be wrong to suppose that the pressures for change are the same in all countries because of the variations in the structures of unions and employers' associations and in collective bargaining arrangements, and even in the extent to which labour movements use collective bargaining as the prime means of furthering workers' interests. For example, in the Federal Republic of Germany workplace codetermination is not strictly a collective bargaining relationship and yet is one of the key means for worker representation in that country. Likewise, the chief means used by Japanese company unions to further their members' interests within the company is more akin to joint consultation than to collective bargaining.

If we take membership decline, this has given cause for concern in the United States and Japan, and in the 1980s in the United Kingdom, France, Italy and the Netherlands. However, it has been far less serious in the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, and in the Scandinavian countries the decline in the traditional core of union membership (male manual workers in manufacturing) has been compensated by growth in other areas. Indeed, Swedish unions are not generally seen as facing a "crisis".

The decline in political influence could be another sign of crisis in the United Kingdom, the United States, and perhaps France, since the change of government, but it has to be recognised that the levels of activity from which the decline has taken place are very different. Unions in the United States and France never had the "neo-corporatist" aspirations of the British unions of the middle 1970s. In contrast, despite changes of government and a loss of influence by the social democratic left West German and more particularly Swedish unions have retained much of their consultative influence on government policies.

In the field of wage determination, the establishment of a "common rule" taking wages and conditions of employment out of competition has been eroded in several countries. Even in Sweden, a good deal more influence over pay determination has devolved to the industry level away from the centre, and in Belgium and the Netherlands, where centralised bargaining also played a major role, the pressures for greater wage autonomy at the company level have greatly increased thus calling into question structures which have held sway for many years. In Italy the involvement of the main union confederations in centralised wage fixing and in wider economic management in the 1970s have been partially responsible for the emergence of independent unions and of the "Cobas" (independent rank-and-file organisations) especially in the public sector. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the reduction in the legislative protection for low-paid workers has intensified this process.

Another aspect of crisis has been the labour movements' loss of position at the centre of political alliances forged earlier in this century, in which the labour movement became the natural home for issues concerning as much people's non-work life, such as community issues, and sex and race equality. In many countries these issues have been dealt with outside the labour movements. Sometimes, the unions being male-dominated, they have been accused of being conservative where the equality of the sexes is concerned. Similar problems have arisen with the representation of young workers and of workers from ethnic minorities.

At the same time, the issues of greatest concern to workers have changed, creating demands for a different focus of representation. In a period of slower inflation, wage increases have less urgency (and are also harder to obtain as companies find it harder to pass on cost increases), giving way to other issues, notably unemployment, pensions, working time, and flexibility. Some of these issues require action at the political and national level, while others need more action at the enterprise and plant level. This has reduced the importance of industry-level wage negotiations, which have been one of the prime focuses of union activity in several countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, France and to some extent also the Federal Republic of Germany. This weakening of industry-level bargaining relations has led to a fragmentation of union strength owing to the gap created between action at the political and the enterprise levels. Some union co-ordination of concession bargaining over flexibility at the enterprise level was felt to be necessary to prevent too many guarantees being conceded in order to save jobs.

The extent and gravity of the problems facing unions vary greatly from one country to another. However, almost everywhere, such representative institutions are always in a state of crisis. There was, therefore, some debate over whether pressures on organisation really signify a crisis of representation. For example, within some trade union movements, such as those in France, it is widely believed that too much organisation inhibits good representation, and as a consequence, variations in union membership figures are not a reliable guide to the health of union representation.

Environmental changes

The changes in the environment in which worker representation operates have been considerable, and provide a natural starting point for analysing the present crisis facing unions in many of the industrialised market economies. They can be grouped broadly under the following headings: economic and structural changes; "globalisation"; increased workforce diversity; new technologies; and political and legal changes.

(a) Economic and structural changes

For many years one of the chief bases of union membership strength, and indeed for much of our theorising about industrial relations, has been that of the manual male workforce in mining, manufacturing and related industries.

Large plants played a particularly important role on account of their strategic economic and organisational position. They also massed together large groups of workers with relatively homogeneous working conditions and a common base for union organisation and mobilisation. Yet in the last ten years employment has declined considerably in these sectors, the decline being particularly heavy in some of the older industrialised countries. Much of this decline has been compensated by increased employment in services sectors and in the public sector. The employment share of small firms and plants has also grown markedly, notably within manufacturing, and this has increased the need for unions to develop new representational and organisational strategies.

At the same time, women, and particularly married women, have increasingly entered paid employment. In several cases, these new areas and groups have been relatively weakly organised, so the shift in the composition of employment has had an adverse effect on overall membership density.

These developments, of course, do not fully explain the decline in union membership because they do not explain why unions have experienced greater difficulty in some countries than in others in extending union membership to these areas. For example, Canadian unions have experienced similar sectoral shifts in employment to those in the United States, yet union membership has generally not declined in Canada. In addition, there have been examples of successful union organisation in northern Italy (Lombardy) of private mail, and of fast food services, and of strong union organisation in small firms.

(b) "Globalisation"

Since the mid-1970s there has been a continuation of the gradual removal of barriers to competition between countries, a process which should be intensified by the planned removal of all internal tariff barriers within the European Community by 1992. The growth of international trade is further helped by the number of companies which now plan their production and sales operations on a world scale, as has occurred dramatically in the automobile industry. All these developments have reduced the extent to which employers could share local product market monopoly rents with their workforces, and in this respect have reduced the margin by which employers could concede benefits not justified by competitive market conditions.

The moves to open up stock markets and to create greater international competition in financial markets world-wide are likely to prove important in the future. For industrial relations, the most important implications are likely to be the increased frequency of management changes even in large companies, and hence in management policies towards such questions as union recognition, and in management acceptance that personnel issues should be handled by an independent representative body rather than through the management structure itself. Apart from affecting corporate personnel policies, the changes in financial markets may lead to a greater

fluidity in the financial and ownership structure of companies so that individual divisions and plants, and thus their workforces, may be sold to other companies. The crash in stock market prices in October 1987 could accentuate such changes. Company take-overs and restructuring have always posed a problem to worker representation, not least as concerns the transferability of "acquired rights", but with the liberalisation of financial markets such practices could increase, and involve many more large companies which could previously rely on their size for protection.

World currency markets have also displayed big fluctuations in major currencies. Between 1979 and 1980 the pound sterling rose by nearly a quarter against other major currencies, then it was the turn of the US dollar to rise, and subsequently of the Japanese yen. Although there may have been sound reasons for gradual adjustments based on underlying conditions in these economies, the size of the currency fluctuations can quickly turn a cost efficient plant and workforce into a source of major losses.

(c) Increased workforce diversity

The constituency of trade unions, and indeed of other forms of worker representation, has become more diverse because of the growth of employment in services and other non-manufacturing industrial activities, of "non-standard" forms of employment relations, and of employment in certain occupations, notably in the management and technical area. This has two main consequences. First, the sheer task of covering a more diverse membership imposes severe strains on trade union organisation to keep in touch with members and to keep them informed. Second, a more diverse constituency has a greater diversity of interests and of demands. In view of the low employment potential of many "high-tech" operations, it is unlikely that new forms of production organisation will generate a new leading category of worker in the way the rise of mass production with its large-scale concentrations of employment created the semi-skilled production worker who provided the basis for a form of "New Unionism".

This diversity is particularly difficult for union movements which have built up their organisations on certain kinds of interest aggregation and which, like the Italian unions in the 1970s, were able to mobilise widespread support around certain key issues affecting the great majority of their membership.

(d) New technologies

The introduction of micro-electronic technology into factories and offices, combined with the greater decentralisation of organisations that it makes possible, are having a considerable effect upon employment both quantitatively and, more important, qualitatively. It has been a contributory factor to the declining importance of large establishments (in terms of employment) in manufacturing as it has enabled considerable labour saving in many assembly and packaging operations, and in information processing. It has also made it possible to run organisations which are geographically

more dispersed, thus dispensing with the need for large employment concentrations, and so contributing to the increase in small establishments. In addition, the increased flexibility of many micro-processor controlled machines enables small firms to use them more effectively than older mechanical machines. This also contributes to the increased diversity of the workforce, and its increased dispersion.

Whatever the effect of new technology on the general level of skill required, it is clear that the structure of demand for skilled labour is changing dramatically, and that even where long-established occupations retain their position, they are doing so only by changing the content of the skills their members ply. This also poses considerable adaptation problems for unions, more serious perhaps for those representing groups of occupations than for those based on enterprises or industries. The effect on work organisation is also important as introducing change often enables, and indeed forces, management to challenge established patterns of workplace custom which can pose severe difficulties to enterprise-level representation which has been built around work group level job control, as has been common with shop steward representation for example in many parts of United States, British, and more recently, Italian industry.

(e) *Political and legal changes*

Political and legal changes in the 1970s, as part of a wider social climate, did much to favour the expansion of union representation. Since 1980, in a number of countries, the emphasis has changed. In the United States and the United Kingdom, and more recently also in France, the State has taken a much harder line against the unions representing its employees, such as the American air traffic controllers, and the staff of the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). In both the United Kingdom and France, public sector pay negotiations have been particularly tough with the employers challenging long-standing arrangements and pay rules. No longer does the State in these countries see itself as providing an example of good personnel practice to private sector employers.

A number of legal changes have also made it harder for unions to operate. Notable examples include the restriction of the freedom to strike in the United Kingdom by reducing the range of action and issues protected from liability for civil damages; in France, by the recent judicial decisions concerning the use of strike action during the air traffic controllers' dispute; and in the Federal Republic of Germany, with the restriction of social security benefits for strikers.

In the employment area also the State has disengaged itself from responsibility for maintaining full employment either by macro-economic policies or by acting as "employer of last resort" by bailing out large private companies in difficulties in order to preserve employment. In the United Kingdom the emphasis has shifted towards removing institutional protection for low paid and vulnerable workers on the ground that these create barriers to extra employment, and in several countries the State has encouraged the

development of non-standard forms of employment contracts for similar reasons.

Impact on and responses of trade unions and worker representation

The environmental changes have posed severe problems to unions and other forms of worker representation, but it is clear from the other three articles in this number of *Labour and Society* that the responses, and the ability to respond, have varied considerably from one country to another, and even from one union to another. First we look briefly at the impact of the environmental changes, and then at the union responses they have stimulated. Some of the environmental changes have mostly affected unions, but the shifts in bargaining levels and focus have also affected the corresponding employers' organisations.

The most striking and most often quoted indicators are the falls in union membership density and strike activity in many countries, as shown in the articles by Kochan, Shimada, and Visser. The diversity of the changes in membership over the last few years is as great as that in overall levels of membership.

In terms of membership participation and mobilisation the picture is as varied, but it is not necessarily in the countries in which unions have best retained their membership that membership mobilisation has been best sustained. For example, high membership has in some cases, such as that of Belgium, been sustained by the unions' role in the administration of social security. However, there has been a tendency for members to take this function for granted, and for the benefits to lose the significance they originally held as the fruit of a collective effort.

The importance of different levels of bargaining relative to one another has also been affected by the environmental changes, notably with the decline in the prominence of industry level bargaining in a number of countries, where the company level has come to assume a more important role. This has placed a strain on union organisation outside the enterprise. In Belgium, where industry-level bargaining has thus declined, it has been increasingly difficult for unions to co-ordinate the pressures emerging from the shop-floor, where management's need for co-operation in introducing change has meant that bargaining activity has increased. In Italy the attempts by the unions to defend earlier gains, notably on indexation and employment protection, by action in the political arena have contributed to rise of the "Cobas", and independent unions whose actions the official unions have had great difficulty in controlling. In France too, the enterprise level has been much more active than the industry level, and there too the unions have had considerable difficulty in developing any strategy which could be followed in a large number of enterprises so that management could not play too much on fears of unemployment.

Mostly, the unions are aware that they cannot solve their current problems by restoring a vanished status quo, and they are groping towards new ways of dealing with these new issues. In this search, there has often been

a positive attitude towards new forms of worker participation and influence processes. This is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the experiments the American United Automobile Workers (UAW) engaged upon during the rationalisation of the United States car industry, such as its participation in the Quality of Working Life (QWL) programmes and the forms of participation and employee involvement launched by Ford and General Motors management in the early 1980s. More generally, there has been a renewed interest, particularly among unions, in the forms of "co-management" practised in the Federal Republic of Germany and, in a different form, in Japan, as an alternative to both policies of the "neo-liberal" kind and those likely to increase labour market segmentation.

Other types of influence processes include action in the political arena, but unburdened of some of the expectations of the 1970s. In Italy this has been sustained over a wide range of social issues, including wage indexation and lay-offs, but abandoning some of the more ambitious goals pursued in the middle 1970s. Sweden provides another example of union involvement in a wide range of social issues, notably in education policy, and the "Australia reconstructed" campaign of the Australian labour movement provides another example of an attempt to shape the economic policy debate.

In Japan the need to co-ordinate action at the political level on some of the major new issues such as social security, pensions and taxes which could not be satisfactorily dealt with either at the company level or at the industry level has been one of the main reasons for the unification of the main trade union centrals. As in other countries the Japanese unions faced diminishing scope for more traditional types of wage demand. It was also hoped to set an example to the disunited parties of the left to unite for more effective action on these questions.

In Canada, joint political campaigns with other social groups, and government action, have gradually created new channels of influence for Canadian unions. At the industry level, joint union-employer committees have developed out of the organisations set up, for example, to act against the United States import quotas on Canadian steel, but later used for mutual information and action. At the company level, a form of joint consultation has been developing out of a series of government commission proposals on such issues as equal pay, pensions, and health and safety. Several reports have recommended the establishment of joint committees often supported by compulsory arbitration, providing thus the basis for a sort of limited works council. A common feature in both cases has been that both sides have recognised that collective bargaining is not necessarily the best approach to every issue, and that other initiatives may be necessary.

Intervening institutional factors

What factors then have conditioned or enabled these different responses to the environmental changes affecting worker representation in the different countries? The institutional factors likely to cause different outcomes can be

analysed under five headings: business strategies and workers' ability to influence them; management's personnel strategies; union strategies; union structures; and historical patterns of industrial relations, and notably their underlying principles and practices.

Business strategies

With the increased intensity of competition in recent years the business strategies of firms have been mostly determined by the need to respond to changing product markets. These strategies can influence union representation in a number of ways, for example, depending on whether the firm seeks to retain a core of essential activities and to contract out remaining work, or on how it wishes to locate its main activities in relation to markets it serves. One of the prime concerns of the United States unions has long been the effect of such decisions on representation, and the plant and enterprise focus of union recognition in that country has made location one means by which companies can seek to evade union presence.

Formalised employee influence on business strategy has mostly been limited, although there have been some notable cases, such as that of Volkswagen's decision on how to divide work between its North American and West German production facilities, in which it could be argued that they have had considerable influence. This influence was made possible by the Federal Republic of Germany's system of codetermination at works council and at board level. In Sweden, the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) exercised considerable influence on the macro-economic framework of business decisions, but such influence also depended on the unions having a clear view which was compatible with major business interests, notably by their strong emphasis on export industries and rising productivity as the key to real wage growth, and the strong intellectual case put forward by Rehn, Myrdal and Meidner. However, even in the heyday of the "Swedish model" in the 1960s and early 1970s, management prerogative was not greatly challenged by these policies, and when the 1976 Codetermination Act was passed, it was strongly opposed by private sector employers.

In both cases it could be argued that there has been a measure of employee influence on business strategy in such a way as to make it more compatible with employee interests as defined by their representatives. The more consensual way of formulating business policy may have contributed to the stability of patterns of representation in these two countries during the 1980s.

Management's personnel strategies

Management's personnel strategies have also had a considerable effect upon worker representation in recent years, and this has mostly come through the spread of union avoidance policies, and diffusion of ideas based on "human resource management". In the United States union avoidance policies have been the most widely used by management, and it is no longer generally felt there that good employee relations requires good union-

management relations. This has made the task of organising new plants, and of retaining recognition for collective bargaining in established ones, much more difficult. In this area, the contrast between employers' attitudes in the United States and in Canada is striking, and is possibly one reason for the greater resilience of Canadian unionism.

"Human resource management" is a very general term, but it covers a broad range of personnel policies designed to increase the output of an employer's staff by the judicious use of selection, training, assessment, remuneration and motivational policies. It places a heavy responsibility on management to discover and deal with employees' grievances, thus reducing, or even making unnecessary, the scope for union representation. Some writers argue that union representation is undesirable in such a context as it frames employee grievances and aspirations in an adversarial way whereas management is seeking, by these policies, to "win the hearts and minds" of its workforce. Such policies have also often been used by management in order to discourage unionisation among their staff.

Employer-run opinion surveys conducted among the workforce, plus frequent personal contact between managers and their staff, provide a challenge to union gathering and representation of employees' grievances. Although it is unlikely that management in Western firms has been able to shift quickly from an adversarial style to follow a human resource management approach, there clearly has been a shift in many firms towards more direct contact between management and workers, and an attempt to reduce the extent to which union representatives act as go-betweens. The importance of these changes is hard to assess because, as was noted earlier, in several countries in recent years an increase in the relative importance of plant-level negotiation and consultation was reported. Moreover, some argue that channels of representation which are independent of management are a necessary condition for effective communication, although resolving the question does not of itself tell us how much independent representation there needs to be. Nevertheless, it is at least possible that the greater popularity of human resource management among United States managers has made it harder for unions to reverse their membership decline as compared with some of the continental European countries.

Union strategy

The effectiveness of the union responses to these initiatives may also determine the resilience of union representation in the different countries. Three broad areas of union strategy can be considered: boosting political integration; boosting enterprise-level representation; and increasing worker services.

Action at the political level has become more important for a number of issues, such as social security policy as has been suggested above, but it is also critical for union participation in business and economic strategy discussions. The interest of business and government representatives in union involvement at this level is dependent upon the unions' ability to represent a

common position of its members, and this requires a careful integration of policy between different levels within the unions. Without such integration it is possible for the peak-level organisation to pursue one target while opposing policies are being pursued at the local level. For example, in France, while the union leadership was pursuing a national policy over steel restructuring, its position was being undermined by local branches of the same unions competing with each other for new investment.

Moreover, action at the political level often requires a clear philosophy capable of appealing more widely than just to interested union members. One recent example is given by the Australian labour movement's "Australia reconstructed" campaign proposing a shift from resource-based industries to high value added manufacturing activities.

How widely this kind of philosophy can be applied depends to some extent upon the reasoning on which it is based. There are two related, but analytically separate, paths to high value added activities. The first is through products which require highly skilled manual and intellectual labour. The second stems from the dynamic rents open to firms which develop a technological lead over their competitors enabling them to earn higher profits until the latter catch up. In theory at least, on the first path, there is nothing to prevent the whole workforce in one country (or indeed in several countries) from achieving high income through high skill. However, on the second, it is clear that high real incomes imply a degree of exclusivity, and hence that policies to achieve them are conducted to some extent at the expense of other groups.

At the enterprise level, different types of union strategy may prove compatible or otherwise with different management strategies, and this can affect the degree to which management seeks to work with unions. For example, job control unionism is as likely to conflict with a human resources management approach as with a more participative style of management. The survival of the UAW in the United States automobile industry was helped by the rapid adoption of a strategy of co-operation and bargained concessions with the management during the industry's restructuring. In doing so, the union conceded many of its former methods of job control, engaged in new forms of representation, and so retained its presence in the industry. Such shifts of representation strategy are not new, and a good illustration of a similar shift from an adversarial to a more consultative strategy at the enterprise level is provided by the unions in Japan's private sector during the 1960s. In the American case, there is still debate as to how successful these initiatives have been in halting union decline in the longer run.

The provision of new worker services is another possible strategy for unions to appeal to new members. One example of such services is the provision of social security benefits through the Belgian and some of the Scandinavian trade unions, but the Belgian case also reveals some of the dangers. In Belgium it is feared that many individual members have lost sight of the collective significance of such benefits. Moreover, several participants

pointed out that too great an emphasis upon such services would expose unions to the risk that other agencies could provide these services more efficiently and cheaply. Thus, one danger in the broadening services and of offering a kind of supermarket to members, is that unions may find themselves facing more expert specialist partners for each service. As the Italian unions have diversified their activities, with the accompanying commitments, they have seen some of their members turn to the more militant independent unions for job-related issues, and at the same time, at the political level, they face political parties which are better equipped than they are. Moreover, within the enterprise, management is often better equipped especially on the more technical aspects of participation. For this reason, provision of membership services could not be a substitute for more traditional forms of collective action. It is also ironic that unions should seek to appeal to workers' instrumental motives at a time when management in many companies is seeking to encourage a more ideological commitment to the goals of the enterprise.

Of a different nature are the services to members provided by some of the Swedish unions through participation in educational activities, and in seeking to influence the formation of public opinion. Initiatives in this area have grown as the unions have come to recognise more and more the importance of retaining the support of public opinion. These moves may also ensure a less passive and more committed membership.

Trade union structures

Trade union structure has emerged at several points in this discussion, particularly with the problem of integrating national-level political pressure with rank-and-file action. The idea of trade union "encompassiveness" seeks to combine the principles of centralisation of decision-making and control with that of horizontal integration (co-operation between unions and groups within unions). Visser argues that the more encompassive European union movements have generally better survived the pressures of the 1980s than the less encompassive ones. Unions which are highly centralised always run the risk of losing rank-and-file support when they need it most, whereas highly decentralised unions have great difficulty in consolidating locally gained advantages, and in mobilising support for demands which can only be met at a higher level of negotiation. Unions whose structure is more "encompassive" seem to have been better able to adapt to the pressures of the early 1980s and to have fared best in retaining their membership numbers and support. Examples of encompassive union movements maintaining membership density are provided by Sweden and Austria, and of less encompassive ones losing membership density, by France, Italy and the United States.

There is still some need to understand why some structures are more effectively integrated than others. How, for example, the unions in the Federal Republic of Germany have been able to co-ordinate works council strategies and to service them with advice and expert services, whereas in

other countries industry-based union organisations have been less successful. However, some participants objected that the effectiveness of the unions in the Federal Republic of Germany arose not from their horizontal integration, but from the articulation of multi-level representation, and argued that it was this rather than encompassiveness that explained their continued strength.

There have also been some experiments in developing new structures, although to date these have been more talked about than practised, such as special forms of representation for workers with non-standard employment contracts, and for the unemployed and retired. In Italy a large number of retired people are union members, although while this may help retain support for unions among the wider public, it creates a very passive form of membership. In the United Kingdom there have been experiments with new forms of representation, notably in single union agreements with some newly established subsidiaries of Japanese and other foreign-based companies, although the prime movers of such agreements have been management, and the unions find themselves competing for recognition.

Historical patterns of industrial relations, principles and procedures

One of the key principles influencing patterns of change lies in the type of norm governing relations with employers, for example, whether norms are of an agreed nature, as under traditions of "voluntarism", or whether they are legally grounded, as is common under the tradition of "juridification" (*Verrechtlichung*) in the Federal Republic of Germany. A simple contrast of the recent experience of unions in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States is enough to show that a legal foundation for industrial relations norms is not enough to protect unions in periods of recession and restructuring and that the content of these norms is vital. Nevertheless, the procedures for changing norms may also be important. Changing legally based norms involves the legislature, and thus reference to a wide range of interested parties, whereas changing voluntarily agreed rules can be undertaken in a more decentralised way as they only bind those who wish to be bound by them (British collective agreements remain voluntary agreements and are generally not legally enforceable). Thus voluntary rules can offer greater scope for experimentation with new forms of representation, although they also provide lesser protection should employers decide to withdraw from an agreement during a period of union weakness.

Just as important as the formal structures of unions are the underlying principles around which unions mobilise support, such as solidarity with other people in the same enterprise, or in the same occupation. The basic contours of worker collectivities vary considerably from one country to another, French workers, for example, mobilising more frequently around issues affecting the whole of their enterprise or branch, and those in much of British industry, more frequently around issues affecting their occupational group. In both countries, the importance of such collectivities is greater than in countries with more formalised representational structures such as the

Federal Republic of Germany or the Netherlands. Unions in both the United Kingdom and France have been quite strongly affected by the environmental changes particularly as changes in technology and work organisation threaten the traditional bases of mobilisation.

Consequences and conclusions

Although the discussion has not looked systematically into how each of the intervening institutional variables has helped to shape the unions' response to changes in their environments in each of the countries, this synthesis shows clearly that the potential influence of such factors is considerable, and may be even greater if they act in combination. It also shows that research on the future of unions and worker representation cannot be confined to an analysis of external changes. The direction of causation, from environmental changes to union responses, appears to have been the dominant one during the early 1980s, but this model has been concerned with analysing the changes seen in a particular historical period rather than aiming at a more abstract and general formulation.

Considerable work remains to be done on the last component of the model, namely wider consequences of changes in worker representation, and the symposium was only able to touch on these. Nevertheless, any assessment of the wider social desirability of these changes should take into account the effects upon workers' welfare (both employed and unemployed), on economic performance, and on wider social and democratic values. One does not need to look far for the reasons for the first two. To see the importance of the third, we need to remember the role of independent employee representation as one of the guarantees of democratic values. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was widely believed that democratic values could be supported in the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan and Italy by the encouragement of independent and healthy trade union movements in these countries, and there is good reason to believe that free unions have greatly contributed to the construction and maintenance of democratic societies in these countries.

The discussion and the background papers prepared for the symposium reveal that the problems currently facing unions and worker representation more generally in industrial market economies are quite diverse. In addition, the manifestations of "crisis" vary greatly between countries to an important extent because of differences in the intervening institutional factors, and it would be a mistake to generalise from the experience of one or two major countries. Nevertheless, it has also emerged that a number of common processes are at work in all of the countries, and are placing heavy strains on existing patterns of representation.

The purpose of this symposium was to stimulate further work on these issues among the trade union and academic researchers present, but it is also hoped that this first clearing of the ground will encourage other practitioners and scholars to contribute extending the work within the countries covered and to other countries.