Innovative trade union strategies
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Dirk Kloosterboer
Foreword

The world is changing fast, and these changes affect the position of workers and the unemployed. Globalisation, outsourcing, privatisation, capital mobility and restructuring of the welfare state cause employment and income insecurity. Historically, the trade union movement has played a crucial role fighting for decent wages, workplace health and safety, working hours, equal rights and a safety net for those who cannot work. As leaders of the trade union movement, we inherit this tradition. We have a responsibility to do all we can to make sure that our organisations will continue to help bring about social justice.

We must make sure that our organisations are ready to organise workers in the expanding services sectors; to take on multinational corporations; to create solidarity among people with diverse backgrounds; to forge coalitions with other organisations and to engage young people in the trade union movement.

These are not easy times for the trade union movement. We cannot just sit back and blame globalisation, or structural economic changes, or hostile governments, or the supposed reluctance of young people to be part of trade unions. We must focus on what we can do to adapt our organisations to the changing circumstances.

In a way, the trade union movement must reinvent itself in order to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. It is tempting to think of trade union renewal in terms of pilots and experiments, but that is not enough. We need to make real decisions on resource allocation, staff recruitment and training policies, strategic alliances. These will not be easy decisions.

Fortunately, we can learn and draw inspiration from a number of unions that have pioneered innovative approaches. Some of these have been surprisingly successful. Some unions have achieved substantial membership growth. More importantly, unions have built a position of power and have used that power to improve the situation of
workers, often vulnerable workers at the lower end of the labour market. The future of the trade union movement is not just a matter of national organisations; it is something that we have to deal with at the international level. In May, we will discuss organising and trade union renewal at the Congress of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). This will be a crucial opportunity for the European trade union movement to adopt an agenda of change. The present report describes successful examples of how trade unions across the world have taken on today's challenges. I hope these examples may serve as a source of inspiration.

Agnes Jongerius
President, Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV)
Innovative trade union strategies

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1 Summary

Unions in many countries have seen their memberships decline during the past years. In addition, their position has weakened as a result of factors including a globalising economy, erosion of workers rights and increasing labour market flexibility.

Some unions, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, have responded to this situation by running assertive organising campaigns at the workplace, engaging in strategic research, strengthening their position in local communities and launching internationally coordinated campaigns. Increasingly, such approaches are also providing inspiration for unions in Europe.

The new strategies have as yet not solved the problems of the trade union movement. In most countries, union density is still declining. However, some unions and some local coalitions have been surprisingly successful, gaining tens or even hundreds of thousands of new members and improving the conditions of millions of workers, often low-paid workers in the growing service sector.

The present report describes some examples of innovative trade unionism. At the moment, it is difficult to say what kind of approach will work under what circumstances: this is still very much a matter of trial and error. That said, there do seem to be some general characteristics that can be identified in many successful initiatives.
Organising new groups

Many initiatives focus on organising new groups, which are underrepresented among the unions’ membership: young people, ethnic minorities, and workers in the growing services sectors. Organising these groups is essential if the trade union movement is to remain a relevant social actor in the future.

Unions have developed systematic approaches to workplace organising and have set up institutes to train new organisers. Although organising campaigns generally do not specifically target groups such as ethnic minorities; some of the most successful campaigns have been in sectors with high shares of minority workers.

Bottom up and top down

Initiatives need to be bottom up in order to have real grassroots support and to reflect the issues that are of concern to the population. However, they also need a strong commitment from the top, in order to overcome resistance to change and to have the level of coordination that is needed to be able to take on large corporations and to influence government policies.

Local and international

At the local level, unions build community support and test innovative approaches. At the same time, international networks are crucial to be able to cope with the consequences of a globalising economy.

At the local level, unions have launched living wage campaigns, set up workers’ centres, created think tanks, campaigned for worker-friendly economic development policies and launched political campaigns, often mobilising low-income voters. Increasingly, campaigns are also being coordinated internationally.

Social justice

Opponents often try to depict unions as outsiders who are fighting for narrow self interests. In order to counter this, unions frame their objectives as social justice issues. For example, American unions have been able to win the support of Republican voters for initiatives that aim to ensure that every worker receives a decent wage.

Coalitions

Coalitions with community organisations strengthen the support for political campaigns, help unions get in touch with ‘hard to reach’ workers and help counter the image of unions pursuing narrow self-interests.

Long-term commitment

Some crucial campaigns have taken as long as twelve years before bearing fruit. It is important to convince union members (and staff) of the importance of investing time and resources in long-term objectives.

Partnership not without strength

Collaboration with employers and with governments can yield important results, provided that unions do so from a position of strength and actively involve their membership in what they do.

Battle of ideas

In many countries, unions have to cope with a political climate that is hostile to workers and their organisations. Some unions have successfully set up think tanks and worked with research institutes to regain the initiative and gather support for alternative economic and social visions.
2 Introduction

In the Netherlands, as in most other Western countries, the trade union movement is trying to find out how to cope with changing circumstances.

2.1 Developments in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has had a reputation for its polder model, in which social partners are actively involved in all kinds of consultative bodies, decisions are based on compromises, collective agreements are binding for entire sectors and strike action is rare. The trade union movement had a rather strong institutional position, which means that there was no strong necessity to organise and mobilise workers.

The social climate changed as a result of the 11 September 2001 attacks, and the murders of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn (6 May 2002) and film maker Theo van Gogh (2 November 2004). After eight years of government by a broad ‘purple’ coalition consisting of Social-Democrats, Conservatives and Liberal-Democrats, a series of centre-right governments was in power from 2002 onward, headed by the Christian-Democrat Jan Peter Balkenende. The Balkenende governments cut social benefits and tried to introduce labour market reforms. They also discussed abolishing the automatic extension of sectoral collective agreements.

The trade union movement launched campaigns against government policies, first in 2003 and then in 2004. The level of contention was unusual for the Netherlands, as evidenced by a headline on the front page of the International Herald Tribune: ‘Hey, look! A strike in Holland!’ On 2 October 2004, a demonstration was organised against...
a number of policy initiatives, most notably the plans to cut early retirement provisions. With over 300,000 protestors flooding the Amsterdam Museumplein, this was one of the largest political manifestations the country had ever seen.

Meanwhile, there have been some experiments with the adoption of methods developed abroad, especially among trade unions affiliated to the FNV Confederation. Most notably, Eddy Stam, the official at FNV Bondgenoten responsible for the cleaning sector, worked with the innovative American services union SEIU to introduce the organising approach, prioritising membership growth and member engagement. SEIU organisers have given training courses to FNV Bondgenoten officials active in cleaning, agriculture and other sectors. The SEIU also seconded one of its organisers to a project that aims to organise cleaners in The Hague.

Meanwhile, the FNV confederation made a number of visits to Britain to learn from the TUC confederation’s experience. Public sector union ABVAKABO FNV invited experts from the British TUC and affiliated union T&G, and sent a high-profile delegation to America to meet with SEIU organisers. Unions have started to introduce elements of the organising approach in the Netherlands, although these efforts are still limited to small-scale pilot projects. FNV Bondgenoten has further set up a training programme on organising for its own staff. ABVAKABO FNV is planning to introduce organising at a rather substantial scale. A pilot in the health care sector will start soon.

At confederation level, there has been a renewed emphasis on reaching groups that are underrepresented among the affiliated unions’ membership, such as young people and ethnic minorities. One initiative has been the creation of FNV Jong, a network of young activists that has had some success in putting issues on the political agenda, most notably unemployment among ethnic minority youth (§ 4.2). Another challenge is the increasing decentralisation of government policies. The FNV is in the process of forming local groups of activists who will be charged with forging coalitions with community organisations and influencing municipal policy (§ 4.9).

2.2 About this report

In April 2005, the FNV published the results of a desk study on trade union innovations in a report De vakbeweging van de toekomst: Lessen uit het buitenland (The Trade Union Movement of the Future: Lessons from Abroad). This report provided input to unions in the Netherlands that are trying to redefine themselves. Presently, unions across Europe are considering how to adapt to societal changes. In this context, it was decided to make an updated, English-language version of the report, in order to facilitate the exchange of information. A request for information was sent to researchers. Both the TUC’s Union Ideas Network (UIN) and the list serve of the ILO’s Global Union Research Network (GURN) proved very helpful in identifying relevant literature. In addition, information was collected through a series of interviews with officials of FNV-affiliated unions, carried out by Tonny Groen (policy advisor, FNV).

We would like to thank the many people who provided input for the report and who commented on draft versions. Special thanks are due to Paul Nowak (TUC), Amanda Tattersall (University of Sydney), Gabriela Portela (ETUC), Jana Fromm (TCO), Eddy Stam (FNV Bondgenoten), Annie van Wezel and Tonny Groen (both FNV Vakcentrale).

The present report does not pretend to give a complete or even a balanced overview of developments in the global trade union movement. Its objective is rather more pragmatic: to stimulate the exchange of ideas and experiences that may be helpful for unions and confederations that are trying to figure out ways to adapt to changing circumstances and to regain the initiative. The main focus is on material from Britain and especially America.
Why trade union renewal

Membership of a trade union may bring along practical benefits, but unions are not only important for members: how they operate shapes the entire society. For example, countries with high union density tend to have a more equal income distribution and a smaller share of low-paid workers. Trade unions also contribute to a properly functioning democracy, boosting voter turnout in elections and giving workers a voice at work. Further, how trade unions operate has an impact on employment – this impact may be positive as well as negative.

Trade unions can thus have an important impact on society. Much depends on the choices they make. Do they act only on behalf of a privileged group of workers who are already members, or do they try to involve new groups of workers? Do they prioritise job growth over environmental concerns, or do they advocate sustainable growth? Do they have transparent and democratic decision-making structures, or are decisions made in back rooms? Do they fight for equal rights, or do they leave it at symbolic good intentions? Do they actively involve their membership, or do they treat them as passive consumers?

Now that the future of the trade union movement is insecure, these questions gain added urgency. All the more so, because they are connected to developments such as the globalisation of the economy and the increasingly flexible nature of work. In many countries, therefore, a debate is raging about the role and the future of the trade union movement. This debate is fuelled by the innovations that some unions have carried out.
3.1 Crisis in the trade union movement

Recently, a German commentator declared the death of the unions (even though ‘the closest relatives are keeping it a secret’). While this is an exaggeration, there is no denying that trade unions in many countries are coping with serious problems. Union density is declining and the unions have difficulties organising young workers. Meanwhile, unions have a negative image. They get the reproach that they are too much on the defensive, obstructing the vitalisation of the economy and the creation of new jobs.

Unions further cope with the growing elusiveness of employers, who can transfer jobs abroad, outsource work, exploit vulnerable workers such as undocumented immigrants, and erode job security. These factors make it easier for them to play out groups of workers against each other. The position of workers is further undermined by cutting safety nets such as social benefits.

Meanwhile, many governments have become increasingly hostile to unions. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan took on the air traffic controllers and Margaret Thatcher the miners. More importantly, they introduced legislation that weakened the position of unions. Examples include regulations that make it more difficult to strike, to influence political decision-making and to carry out solidarity actions to support workers at other companies. In Australia, an economy previously marked by its European-like level of wage centralisation, enterprise bargaining and individual contracts are now legal, and can be offered to workers covered by a collective agreement, undermining collective bargaining. Even in Sweden, where the trade union movement has a very strong institutional position, it is feared that the new right-wing government may take measures to undermine union power.

Because of these developments, it has become easier for companies to take a tough stance towards unions. The most important symbol is the Wal-Mart Corporation (5.2), but the phenomenon is becoming ever more widespread. American companies hire union busting consultants to keep the union out. One of the most popular techniques is the one-on-one, during which an individual worker is subjected to a cross examination. Other techniques include showing anti-union videos and threatening to close a plant. Companies routinely fire union activists (this happens in a quarter of all formal recognition elections; every 23 minutes a worker is said to be fired or discriminated against for supporting a union). This is illegal, but the sanctions are minimal. Some British companies have started hiring American union busting consultants as well.

An important indicator of union strength is union density, that is, the percentage of the workforce who are union members. In the 1990-2003 period, union density has declined from 15.5 to 12.4% in the USA and from 33.1 to 26.3% in the European Union.

**Union Density in EU countries, 1985-2004**

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<th>Country</th>
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3.2 New ambitions

At the end of the 1980s, a counter movement began. A famous example is the Justice for Janitors campaign of the American services union SEIU, which managed to secure an important victory under circumstances that seemed very hostile to union success. The president of the SEIU, John Sweeney, was in 1995 elected president of the AFL-CIO confederation. His ‘New Voice leadership’ tried to get the new approach adopted by the entire trade union movement. This new approach consisted of multifaceted, strategic and assertive campaigns, in which publicity was actively sought after. American researchers have called the approach comprehensive campaigning. Campaigns emphasised not just workers’ direct material interests, but also issues such as human rights and social justice. Other important aspects include coalitions with community organisations, corporate campaigning, a strong presence at the local level; and organising the low wage service economy, with its high share of ethnic minority workers.

In 2005, a heated debate erupted on the course of the AFL-CIO. A group of unions headed by SEIU’s Andy Stern said that the federation was not doing enough to promote the new organising approach. Eventually, a number of large unions left the AFL-CIO to form the Change to Win federation. The impact this move will have on the American (and foreign) trade union movement is still hard to gauge. While there are definite signs of crisis, the split might also trigger necessary changes. In any case, the two federations closely collaborated in the 2006 Midterm Election campaign and are planning a joint lobbying effort to push for universal health insurance. Despite the split, the American union movement ‘had its best year ever’, the Change to Win chairwoman commented.

The American shift to union renewal has inspired innovations in Britain and Australia, where unions have also faced falling density and weakening social and political influence. In Australia, renewal strategies began in the mid-1990s after density levels had collapsed from 50% in the early 70s to 25% by 1995. Changes in Britain occurred later, given the higher and more stable density levels. Increasingly, continental European unions are also experimenting innovative approaches. At the European level, the ETUC will put the new organising approach on the agenda of its 2007 Congress.

While the trade union movement’s problems are in no way over yet, there have been some inspiring successes. In the UK, union density seems to have stabilised and even to have risen slightly, after having dropped from almost forty to less than thirty percent between 1990 and 2003. However, most commentators say that this is far from enough to regain union strength. More impressive is the performance of individual unions that have adopted an organising agenda. Through campaigns targeting companies such as Sainsbury’s and easyJet, as well as other recruitment efforts, T&G has organised 500 new activists and 11,500 new members.

An international campaign coordinated by the IUF organised 45,000 workers in Russia between 1997 and 2005. Before the campaign, IUF-affiliated unions did not have a presence in that region (§ 4.11). The most successful example of membership growth is the American services union SEIU. Ten years ago, it had 1.1 million members; today, the number is close to two million. While some of this growth is the result of other unions joining the SEIU, even more members joined as a result of organising campaigns. An example is a campaign organising 450,000 home care workers.

Membership growth is of course not a goal in itself. The real test of success is whether unions have been able to improve the situation of workers and achieve social justice. The T&G campaign at Sainsbury’s for instance won 70,000 workers a wage increase as well as four years back pay of unpaid holiday pay. American living wage campaigns are estimated to have increased the wages of 100,000 to 250,000 working poor, while recent campaigns to increase the minimum wage at state level are estimated to have benefited at least 1.5 million workers (§ 5.3). Another success was recently achieved by a coalition of French trade unions, students’ unions and other organisations, who managed to turn back legislation that would have worsened employment protection for young workers.

3.3 Barriers and opportunities

Proponents of change often try to create a sense of urgency by use of ‘scary graphs’: simple graphs that show that the trade union movement is doomed unless it manages to organise young members in growth sectors. However, an awareness of membership trends may not be enough.

It is no coincidence that many innovative approaches have started in the Anglo-Saxon countries: here anti-union government policies have been most severe. According to an international comparison, unions will only change if they feel a strong need to do so. Membership loss in itself may not be enough to create a sense of urgency, as long as the union movement still has an institutional position to cling to. Only when that is taken away is it likely that real change will occur.
Additionally, researchers have found it takes a certain type of leaders who are prepared to change and embrace new strategies. In the US, researchers have found that union leaders with social movement experience are valuable. In the UK and Australia, union leaders have similarly been found to be a critical component of organisational change in unions. But, others have also found that while leadership is critical, it is not sufficient – member support, participation and interest in the change process are vital for long term success.12

An interesting example is Britain, where there has been an anti-union atmosphere ever since the days of Margaret Thatcher. Inspired by the American example, the trade union movement started to take initiatives to strengthen its position, among other things through a stronger emphasis on organising workers.13 The Austrian ÖGB cites government attempts to weaken workers’ organisations as the reason to introduce a more militant, campaign-oriented approach. This new approach was inspired by the American AFL-CIO.14

During the 1960s and 1970s, the German trade union movement formed a successful alliance with protest movements and secured itself a strong institutional position. According to critics, it has since been ‘resting on its institutional laurels’ too much. It has been argued that German trade union movement was not desperate enough to introduce real change, and that it would not do so until a crisis erupts.15 However, promising new initiatives are now being taken, for example by services union Ver.di.

Social change often does not happen gradually. History knows short periods during which society goes through rapid changes. Often this brings along institutional changes that may have a long term impact on the organisations involved. As noted above, the German trade union movement strengthened its institutional position during the protest movement of the 1960s. For the American trade union movement, the social mobilisations in support of the new deal in the 1930s were crucial. Interestingly, in between such periods, the trade union movement is often written off, also by people who are sympathetic to it.16

While external developments may exert a strong influence on trade union renewal, internal factors play an important role too. Successful innovations often result from a combination of grassroots mobilisation and top-down support. Mobilising workers is indispensable to build a position of power, but the romantic idea that innovations flow spontaneously from below does not seem to apply to trade unions. As in most other large organisations, there is usually resistance to change. It takes top-down support to break that resistance. A good example is the Justice for Janitors campaign, which was forced on some locals by the national union (§ 5.1).17

Organising campaigns may sometimes take as long as twelve years before paying off in terms of increased strategic leverage. This ‘lag time’ may leave union leaders in a vulnerable position. They have to convince union staff and members to invest in changes, even though the fruits may be slow in coming.18

Holders of key positions do not always have an interest in changing the way in which the union operates and in organising new groups of workers: this might erode their own power base within the organisation. A study of American local trade union branches showed that innovations often did not occur until after an internal crisis, which put new people in key positions. Importantly, these were often people from outside the trade union movement, who had gained experience in other social movements, and who were therefore able to look at the way the union operates in a fresh manner.19

Trade union innovations are often spurred by lessons from outside the organisation. These lessons may come either from other social movements, or from trade unions abroad. For example, the British trade union movement actively used expertise developed by the American trade union movement, and, like the AFL-CIO, decided to recruit staff with no union background. Southern European unions have benefited from the experience of their Northern European colleagues when it regards social pacts with employers and the government.20

Innovations may also be spurred by outside pressure. At the end of the 1980s, the large Italian federations were criticised by ‘comitati di base’ (grassroots committees) for being too bureaucratic and not democratic enough. While it was unclear how many people these committees represented, they did show their mobilising capacities in a series of strikes. In a response to these actions, the federations decided to hold referendums on all important agreements they would reach from now on (§ 4.5). Incidentally, the competition of the comitati di base also urged the federations to set up unions of self-employed workers. In America, the Jobs with Justice coalitions sometimes are a catalyst of change.21
4 Themes

4.1 Ethnic minorities and migrant workers

Since ethnic minorities make up a growing share of the population, it is important for unions to organise these groups. In addition, there is a strategic interest. A classic means of undermining union power is by playing groups of workers against each other, something which is often done along ethnic lines. Unions can only counter this by actively organising solidarity on the basis of shared interests.

Some union members see immigrant workers as competitors on the labour market. There may be resistance to organising these workers, especially if they are undocumented. The British CWU has run an internal education campaign to convince branches that all workers have a right to be organised in a trade union. The T&G and GMB launched the Respect is a Right campaign, arguing that economic migrants should be welcomed.

Among many European unions, minorities, as well as women, have separate committees and secretariats. However, many experts say that such bodies primarily play a symbolic role and do not yield sufficient concrete results.

Most European unions have a rather strong institutional position, which does not rely on their capacity to mobilise workers. As a result, the incentive to organise new groups of workers is relatively weak. An interesting example is the British case, where racism amongst union members was not uncommon until the 1970s. When Thatcher introduced a union-hostile climate, there was a stronger incentive for British unions to
involve minority workers. Today, according to one study, the TUC is much more active when it regards equal rights than for example the Danish trade union movement, which still has a relatively strong institutional position.23

It is generally assumed that working with immigrants’ or minority organisations is an important means for trade unions to get in touch with ethnic minority communities. A British study among such organisations found that a large majority favour collaboration with unions, but that most are unaware of union efforts regarding minorities. “They are either doing nothing, or they are doing something and not telling anyone about it”, one respondent commented.

It was found that ethnic minority organisations did not perceive trade unions as being in competition for funds, which should make it easier to forge alliances with unions. The study further found that employees of ethnic minority organisations often are not members of trade unions. Respondents said that unions should more actively communicate with minority organisations and communities.24

Southern European countries receive large numbers of immigrants, including a considerable number of undocumented immigrants. In Southern Spain, unions have created centres that immigrants can turn to for support. They also support undocumented workers, because it is in the interest of documented workers to prevent groups of workers being played out against each other. In the agricultural sector in Murcia and Almería, eighty percent of members of the CC.OO confederation are of Moroccan descent.

Even though unions try their best to organise immigrants, there is criticism as well. For example, racist attacks on immigrants in El Ejido were condemned by national unions, but local branches kept rather quiet. Immigrants also felt let down by the large union federations when they tried to improve the position of agriculture workers through a successful strike.25

At present, there is a growing number of workers from Middle and Eastern European countries entering European labour markets. Union responses are sometimes protectionist, but there are also efforts to organise these workers, for example among unions in Britain. The TUC is collaborating with the Polish Solidarnosc union. North West TUC employed a Solidarnosc organiser in late 2005 and TUC-affiliated union T&G now employs six Polish organisers. The TUC has also sent a delegation to a jobs fair in Warsaw where UK employers were recruiting, in order to inform potential migrants about issues such as the minimum wage, working time regulations and the right to join a union. It is working with Solidarnosc to provide such information online as well.26

Labour migrants are often highly mobile. For this reason, they need quick solutions to problems such as underpayment, which implies that legal procedures are unpractical. In the Netherlands, there have been a number of wildcat strikes among Polish workers, after which unions have successfully intervened to negotiate a settlement between workers and the employer. In the agricultural sector, a project involving information meetings and approaching workers when they go home at the end of the workday has resulted in new members and activists.27 In Germany, the Europäischer Verband der Wanderarbeiter (European Migrant Workers’ Union, EVW) has been created. This organisation tries to defend the interests of Polish and other migrant workers by directly approaching the employer, using the fact that many employers want to avoid negative publicity.

British unions have found that immigrant workers not only seek advice on work issues, but also on housing and finance. Unions seek collaboration with local agencies to be able to provide wider support.28

In London, GMB organised 10,000 Asian workers through a community unionism approach. A study of a number of campaigns found that organisers with an Asian background played a crucial role, using methods that differ from common union practice. For example, “Zaheer will sometimes disappear for a couple of months and come back with 200 membership forms in his hand from some firm that we have never heard of. When you ask him how did it go – he said it was all done in front rooms, which is a different way of organising. We would never dream of knocking on people’s doors”. Events in mosques and community centres were organised to create community support. The union also used trained activists who had been involved in a successful campaign in their own company to talk to workers in another company, to tell them what can be achieved.29

In America, organising campaigns among immigrant workers date back at least to the 1930s. Assertive union campaigns helped immigrants secure a position in society, while immigrants in turn helped revitalise the trade union movement.30 However, after the Second World War, the American trade union movement found itself in a stronger position and became increasingly defensive. In the 1960s, some unions such as the
United Auto Workers supported the civil rights movement, while Martin Luther King helped organise a sanitation workers’ strike, but in general there was a conservative attitude among unions. Immigrants were often seen as competitors in the labour market.

In 2001, the AFL-CIO issued a statement that underlined the shared interests of workers: “Too often, employers have attempted to divide workers by race, ethnicity and immigration status, playing one group against the other to undermine solidarity and preclude workers from achieving progress together. History has proven that mistreatment of one group in a workplace will ultimately lead to the mistreatment of all workers”.

Progressive unions such as SEIU and HERE had already achieved successes organising workers at the lower end of the labour market, such as cleaners and hotel workers. In general, such campaigns do not explicitly target immigrants, but in practice these make up a large share of the workers in those sectors. Incidentally, unions need to be careful not to be perceived as the advocates of one specific ethnic group. In Los Angeles for example, relations with the black community where actively developed, in order to prevent the union being associated exclusively with Latinos.

Among unions, it is sometimes believed that immigrants are hard to organise, but that seems to be incorrect. In America, the most important successes have been achieved in sectors where many immigrants work. Interestingly, campaigns for formal union recognition are most successful at workplaces with large shares of immigrant and women workers. One extreme is a success rate of 35% at workplaces where the majority of workers are white males; the other extreme being a rate of 82% at workplaces where the majority of workers are non-white women. Researchers comment that immigrants are not passive victims, but form the core of worker activism.

Organising becomes rather more difficult when workers are undocumented. In half the American recognition campaigns, employers threaten to report undocumented workers to the immigration service. The success rate drops to 35% in campaigns that involve undocumented workers.

In a number of ways, trade unions try to improve the situation of undocumented workers. For example, an Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride was organised in the fall of 2004. Its objective was regularisation, but it was also a means to strengthen the ties with the Latino community. Since the Freedom Ride was inspired by a famous campaign of the 1960s civil rights movement, it was also a means to stimulate cooperation between the black and Latino communities.

Meanwhile, several unions try to include stipulations in collective agreements to make undocumented workers less vulnerable. In the cleaning sector, SEIU reached an agreement that states that employers must notify the union when they know the immigration service is planning an investigation. It was also agreed that employers will only provide the immigration service with information if they are legally obliged to do so. Hotel and restaurant union HERE reached an agreement that states that hotels must re-employ workers who have been deported and who manage to return within two years. If they do so within one year, their seniority will remain intact as well.

The European organisation PICUM has done an extensive study of how unions and other organisations in Europe and the USA protect undocumented workers. The researchers find that unions can play a crucial role in preventing the exploitation of undocumented workers. At the same time, organising undocumented workers is also in the interest of other workers. It is argued that unions should convince their members that “the only way to fight the tendency of worsening conditions and wage decreases is by working together and building strength as a workers’ movement”.

An illustration of how the interests of documented and undocumented workers are connected is a study among agricultural workers in The Netherlands. During the past ten years, the position of undocumented workers has weakened considerably, which eventually led to more flexible jobs and income insecurity for other workers as well.

4.2 Youth

Many unions have an ageing membership and have difficulties organising young workers. Young workers often have no standard jobs but have flexible contracts, or are self-employed. The kind of jobs they have might well reflect what the labour market of the future will look like. As long as unions are unable to organise young people, they must seriously ask themselves whether they are prepared for the future.

In Canada, teachers at a business school tried a rather unusual approach to get students to understand the value of organising. A substitute teacher told them that their bonus marks were cancelled and that their final exam would include all materials studied during the entire year, rather than only the second half of the year.
Subsequently, the students were presented with an opportunity to organise to fight the injustice done to them, which they eagerly did. Most students responded enthusiastically to the experiment. Although the initiators assert it was the ‘most effective classroom technique we ever used’ and suggest that the approach is ethically defensible, it will probably not be used again because of practical constraints. 40

In France, where density is low to begin with, only one percent of 18 to 29 year olds are members of a trade union. The person responsible for youth issues at the CFDT sees the problem as follows: “The relation between young people and the world of work has developed faster than trade unionism. Workers used to be anchored to their jobs, they made a career. Nowadays, youth have one insecure job after another, they struggle to get a fixed contract and when the contract has been signed, they are less than eager to join a union, because they are afraid to compromise their career perspectives. And apart from that, the union has an image problem ”. 41

Nevertheless, the CFDT has managed to stop the decline. One means to achieve this are campaigns in which the union goes to workplaces to inform seasonal workers of their rights. Further, the CFDT has introduced a joint membership for working students in both CFDT and students’ union Confédération étudiante (CE) at a reduced price. 42

Young people are not lacking in social engagement, contrary to what is sometimes thought. In France, they were involved in mass protests against Le Pen’s Front National in 2002, in protests against the war in Iraq and in the Ni putes ni soumises organisation, which works for women in the banlieues. Further, young people are involved in campaigns at companies such as the Ibis hotel chain; the Monoprix supermarkets, Pizza Hut and McDonalds (§ 5.10). More recently, students, social movement organisations and trade unions jointly forced the government to withdraw plans to abolish employment protection for young workers.

Various unions are looking for new ways to involve young people. In Sweden, three TCO-affiliated unions have created the Tria programme, offering a joint membership for students at a one-off price of about ten euro for the whole student career. Services offered to this group focus on the transition from education to work. They are provided with information, job interview courses, a mentor programme, statistics for salaries in different professions and a resume review service. After graduation, they are contacted by the local union organisation to ask them to become regular members of the union connected to the profession they have chosen.

The programme is run by student activists at the campuses, who may receive financial compensation. At its start in August 2005, Tria had 13,500 members; within a year this has risen to 18,000. The aim is to have 26,000 members by the end of 2007. Initially, the share of Tria members joining a regular union after graduation was 30%, by now, this has risen to 55%.

Five times a year, TCO publishes a students’ newspaper, produced by an independent editorial board and sent to all students who receive a government grant. The newspaper, which has a good reputation among students, combines articles on student life with articles on the transition from education to work.

The TCO has also developed materials that teachers can use, aimed at 15-18 year old students. These materials include a website, a teacher’s guide and a negotiating game. The materials have been designed in such a way as to be attractive to young people. As a result, at fairs, youth are drawn to the TCO-stand.

In the Netherlands, young members of the FNV held a manifestation at the 2005 Congress, resulting in the creation of FNV Jong. FNV Jong is a network of young (under 35 year old) trade union members that can express views independently of the FNV. Its chair, Judith Ploegman, has gained a rather high profile in the media. The aim of FNV Jong is to get youth issues higher on the agenda both within and outside the FNV, as well as to increase the visibility of the FNV among young workers. FNV further wants to get the 235,000 young trade union members more actively involved in the organisation. Ploegman has a seat on the Socio-Economic Council (SER), an official advisory body. At her initiative, the SER has published a high-profile advice on unemployment among ethnic minority youth.

The FNV-affiliated teachers’ union AOb has specific publications and a website with practical information on teachers’ issues, as well as volunteer teachers giving guest classes to students. It also offers a student membership of one euro per month. Since the introduction of this approach three years ago, the number of student members has risen from 300 to 1,800. 44

The American trade union movement has been organising Union Summer programmes since 1996, offering students an opportunity to gain experience with trade unionism. Students who participated have created new organisations, such as Students Against Sweatshops. In addition, some end up at key positions within the trade union movement (§ 5.6). As the union movement is spending less time in back rooms and...
In Canada, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) is critical of relying on legal procedures, because these force people to assume a passive role. Therefore, legal procedures are combined with direct action. For example, groups of activists may go to a social assistance (welfare) office to get staff members to consider an application. If this does not help, pressure is increased. This method has the advantage that people do not have to wait endlessly for their application to be processed, which is very important for people with low incomes. The methods seem to have been inspired by the American Welfare Rights Movement of the 1960s.

In Sweden, Denmark, Finland and to a lesser extent Belgium, union membership among the unemployed is relatively high. This is because social security is administered by trade unions. In countries that do not have this ‘Ghent system’, the unemployed tend not to be trade union members. The membership fee is certainly not the only problem. In Britain and Germany, membership is almost free for the unemployed (one euro per month or less), yet density among the unemployed is significantly lower than among those with jobs, and this applies to an even higher degree for the long-term unemployed. Apparently, the unemployed are not convinced that unions have something to offer them.

In Britain, the TUC has supported the development of Unemployed Workers’ Centres in the 1980s and early 1990s. These centres “give the movement an answer to those who claim that unions are only interested in helping people who already have jobs”, the TUC says. However, unemployment no longer being the key issue it was before, many centres are now finding it difficult to secure funding and are redefining their role, for example by providing advice and a venue for language courses for migrant workers.

In France, Germany, the Netherlands and other countries, Euro Marches have been organised by people who think that the trade union movement is not doing enough for the unemployed. This organisation campaigns among other things for a European social income. France further has autonomous unions that, like OCAP, engage in direct action, for example by occupying social assistance offices (§ 5.10). In Ireland, the government has chosen to include organisations of the unemployed and anti-poverty organisations in social pacts. These pacts have dealt with the indexation of benefits, among other things.

In America and Canada, and increasingly in European countries as well, social assistance recipients are forced to work in so-called work first or workfare programmes. For example, in the Netherlands, over ninety percent of municipalities claim to have more time campaigning on the streets, it becomes more attractive to young people. For example, the creation of local Street Heat teams is a means to engage youth in the trade union movement (§ 5.5). An SEIU organiser commented: “...I think the labour movement is becoming a little more dynamic, so young, progressive activists think that’s a cooler thing to do than maybe was true at another time".

Union Summer has been successfully adopted by other union movements. From 2001, the Australian union movement has run a union summer program. Since 2003, that program has been combined with the Working Students Union Network (WSUN), a network of student activists committed to union issues that seeks to work on university campuses to promote unionism and organise pathways to unions for students. These two programs provide training and an environment where young union organisers and future union stewards can test and develop their skills. Unions such as the Teachers union in NSW have also developed programs targeting students as future union stewards while still in university training, to reverse the trends of an ageing shop steward network.

It is sometimes said that declining density among young people would be a result of individualisation. Organisations, in this view, should treat young people more as consumers, for example by offering financial services to members. This type of approach has been tested by various unions in Britain in the 1980s, but had little effect. The underlying assumption that youth lack social engagement also seems to be incorrect. What is correct is that because of individualisation young people have other expectations of organisations. They want to be able to express themselves and they want to take responsibility.

4.3 Unemployed

American unions have little involvement with the unemployed, among other things because union membership is often tied to the company where people work. It has been argued that new forms of membership should be introduced that are not dependent on working at a specific company, which would make it easier for the unemployed to join as well. In Baltimore, the Solidarity Sponsoring Committee aims to organise the unemployed. It managed to block a plan to force young unemployed people to quit their education in order to accept a poverty job. After workfare participants had been used to replace cleaners at a large hotel who had a wage dispute with their employer, the Committee got the governor to sign an executive order banning such practices.
In some sectors, trade unions traditionally have high density, for example in telecommunications and in banking. However, privatisation, outsourcing and restructuring may cause membership levels to drop very fast. For example, a Norwegian union lost half its members in Telenor within a couple of years. In banking, the blurring of the boundaries with other forms of financial services may lead to a decline in membership.

Even faster membership decline than in Norway occurred in Central and Eastern European countries when companies were privatised after 1989.

It has been argued that modern employees are very different from the traditional manufacturing workers, whom unions are used to organising, and much more similar to the workers who were organised by the predecessors of the trade unions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These were guild-like organisations, which organised not only employees, but also the unemployed, the self-employed and foremen. These trades associations offered their members opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills; and also sometimes set up collective insurances. In addition, they performed a number of tasks that would today be considered those of employers. For example, they developed quality standards and sometimes acted as temp agencies. A negative aspect of these organisations is that they often advocated the interests of their members at the expense of outsiders.

Some aspects of how these trade associations operated are today being used to organise service sector workers. Examples include ‘guild-like clubs for dot.com workers’ and organisations of the self-employed. Increasingly, the internet is used to stay in touch with members. The German Ver.di uses text messaging to stay in touch with nurses who provide home care. This type of organisations seem especially successful at organising higher educated employees in the services sector.

In the Netherlands, two unions have been created specifically to organise the self-employed (these are the only unions with substantial membership growth). Sectoral unions such as the journalists’ union and the haircutters’ union also have a considerable number of self-employed members. In total, FNV-affiliated unions now have about 25,000 self-employed members. As substantial further growth is expected, it is likely that the preferences of the self-employed will increasingly affect how the entire FNV operates.

Self-employed workers join the union because of legal services provided (for example debt collection) but increasingly the new unions are also providing a community, in which members exchange information and help each other obtain contracts. In the

such programmes. Often, the unemployed have to do unattractive work that provides little relevant work experience, while still receiving social assistance instead of a salary. The programmes seem intended to push the employed out of social assistance rather than to offer them better opportunities at the labour market. It is feared that this will force them to accept bad jobs at poverty wages.

There have been attempts in America, Canada and European countries to campaign against work first and to organise the participants in such programmes. These initiatives have generally been coalitions of trade unions, anti-poverty organisations, and community organisations. Most of these efforts have started at the local level, and it has been difficult to connect them into wider struggles.

4.4 Service industry and non-standard work

In the Western world, job growth occurs mainly in the services sector. However, especially in commercial services, unions have difficulties gaining a foothold. The cause is not necessarily that workers are uninterested in trade unions, but work characteristics make it difficult for unions to organise them.

Workers are often scattered over many small workplaces, where they tend to be working closely with their bosses and are sometimes confronted with paternalistic labour relations. Many jobs are part-time and flexible, and turnover tends to be high, making contact among workers rather ad hoc. For unions, it is very time consuming to remain in contact with a large number of small workplaces, while workers are often in a vulnerable position. Many workers, for example in call centres, fast food chains or in supermarkets, work under strict control. For example, cashiers at the German Lidl supermarket have to scan forty products per minute.

One might expect that workers with non-standard contracts might be less inclined to join a union because they have weaker connections to the workplace. However, research in Spain has found that nonstandard workers are in fact more critical of the economic system and more inclined to become active in a trade union than workers with standard contracts. “Rather than asserting that outsiders are less likely to join a union, it is more accurate to say that unions are less likely to reach and organise outsiders as long as union organisational efforts are ineffective in the face of new challenges, including enhanced employers’ resistance to unionisation”.

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4.5 Activists and internal democracy

Some American unions spend significant parts of their budgets on organising new members, which leaves them with limited means to service existing members. Therefore, they aim to make organising committees self-supporting as quickly as possible. The support these activists receive is largely limited to training courses and specialist advice. In union recognition campaigns, the win rate increases by half if the rank and file are actively involved. An example is the Justice for Janitors campaign (§ 5.1), in which members were trained for active involvement in the campaign.

Besides practical reasons for actively involving members, this also contributes to the emancipatory power of the trade union. A union that focuses on providing professional services, by contrast, can achieve the opposite: this can create a feeling of dependence and powerlessness among members. This risk increases when all problems are interpreted as individual problems, and when they are dealt with through lengthy legal procedures.

Among trade union officials, there is sometimes reluctance to actively involve members. An SEIU organiser said about his colleagues: “They want to help people... It’s a lot easier to take care of someone's problem than it is to train them to take care of their own problem”. While this attitude has clearly changed, there are still union officials who do not see it as their task to represent people with non-standard work.

In America, it was found that ‘quasi unions’ – the term is used to designate both initiatives targeting high-educated flex workers and initiatives for contingent workers at the lower end of the labour market – can be successful in pockets of the labour market where conventional unions have little reach. However, they seem to have difficulty moving from successful local campaigns to broader and more structural power. Quasi-unions often have an insecure financial base and their life-span tends to be rather short: out of 30 initiatives identified in 2001, 26 were no longer operating five years later.

Agencies that provide legal advice to citizens can be an ally when it regards improving the situation of contingent workers and the unemployed. For example, the British Citizen Advice Bureaux worked with the TUC to promote greater awareness of part-time workers’ rights. In the Netherlands, a newly formed legal advice agency (Het Juridisch Loket) exchanges information with community organisations on undocumented workers’ rights, while social counsellors provided valuable information for an FNV study into the effects of stricter social assistance eligibility rules.

In Spain, works council elections are an important means for trade unions to show how much support they have. These elections further have a practical interest: the outcome
of Australian and New Zealand unions have raised membership fees by forty percent or more, to cope with diminished institutional support. Of course, when doing so, they must be able to convince members that the money will be well-spent. They have used extensive consultations to win their members’ support. This has been particularly successful when the membership fee rise has been part of a strategic response to a crisis.  

A branch of the Australian TWU first carried out a survey among members on how they felt about the union. When it became clear that the union had their support, members were consulted under the slogan ‘it’s in your hands’, on the need to raise fees in order to be able to wage a number of crucial campaigns. A majority of members did support the measure. A union ombudsman was set up to deal with complaints about the fee raise and other issues. The New Zealand Finsec union held a referendum among the entire membership about a proposal to raise membership fees. Local meetings were organised to discuss the issue. It managed to get over forty percent of the members to participate in these meetings.

4.6 Recruitment, organising and marketing

In many countries, unions are concerned about membership developments: even if membership is not declining, growth is often insufficient to match employment growth so as to keep density stable, let alone increase density. In America and Britain, some unions that have focused on organising new groups of workers have been surprisingly successful (§ 3.2). The choice to focus on organising may be met with resistance, because it means that fewer means are available for servicing the existing membership.

Whereas Italian confederations have strengthened their position through referenda among the membership, the French CFDT has experienced the opposite. On 15 May 2003, two days after a large demonstration involving a million protestors, the confederation reached an agreement with the government on pensions, even though the CGT confederation would have preferred to carry on the protests. For members, the agreement came as a total surprise. There was a lot of indignation and the CFDT found itself in an internal crisis. Within months, 35,000 to 50,000 members left the CFDT, some of them joining CGT or autonomous unions.

Referenda have also been used to decide on increases in membership fees. A number of Australian and New Zealand unions have raised membership fees by forty percent or more, to cope with diminished institutional support. Of course, when doing so, they must be able to convince members that the money will be well-spent. They have used extensive consultations to win their members’ support. This has been particularly successful when the membership fee rise has been part of a strategic response to a crisis.

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Over a one-year period, activists meet three times for one or more days to be trained in communication skills and in planning workplace campaigns. The dévelopeurs are further to contribute to a less ‘sombre’ atmosphere within the trade union movement.

The CFDT has been coping with substantial membership decline as a result of a social pact that was badly received by the members (§ 4.5). The développeurs are instructed to respect workers’ decision to leave the CFDT, but they are to try to find out the motives: has it to do with the union’s national policies, or with how it operates at the workplace? The développeurs have reportedly been successful, especially in service sectors ‘en plein boom’. For example, thousands of home-based child care workers (assistantes maternelles) have been organised.

The colleagues of the formerly communist CGT also want to focus on recruitment. However, it chooses not to train specialised développeurs, because it finds that all activists must be involved in recruitment.73

Within the German trade union movement, the accent in recruitment efforts is still very much on marketing campaigns. In addition, Ver.di and IG Metall have started to negotiate financial benefits for trade union members in collective agreements.74

Experience in Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Sweden and Britain teaches that offering financial services such as credit cards or insurances has almost no effect in terms of gaining new members. Services that are more clearly work-related do sometimes prove successful, especially with higher educated professionals and the self-employed. Such services may include career advice, training and support for job seekers. The Norwegian Grafisk Forbund even set up its own temp agency.75

In many countries, recruitment campaigns are hindered by the fact that unions use different names and that workers often do not know which union they should join. In a number of countries, confederations have tried to convince unions to use similar names and logos. For example, in the 1990s, local SEIU unions used no fewer than 143 different names. SEIU decided to adopt a new logo and to provide free stationery, T-shirts and redesign services to locals that decided to use it. By now all local unions are part of the ‘purple army’. Merchandise including bowling balls, megaphones and clothing yields $ 2 million per year.76

The Australian ACTU has recently created Unions Australia, a centre that aims to make union membership more accessible. People who want to join a union but do not know which union is active in their sector, can join through Unions Australia. For the first six months, they will pay a standard membership fee, which will be used to fund the centre. The centre makes sure that membership details are transferred to the relevant union. The unions will also receive organising and recruitment leads and suggestions as to potential activists.77

The extent to which unions engage in organising and recruitment is partly related to government policies. In countries where the trade union movement has a relatively strong institutional position, the need to organise new groups of workers is felt less strongly. Of course, there are risks involved in being dependent on government recognition as a trade union movement. Such a position can easily be lost when a new government is formed.78

While many unions at least in theory attach importance to organising and recruiting, the retention of members is often less prominent on the agenda. Research in Britain suggests that a stronger union presence at the workplace may be crucial for retention. A significant part of union leavers did so because they were dissatisfied with some aspect of union organisation.79

While the British study found that insufficient help for members with problems was an important reason why people say they leave a union, this does not necessarily imply that improving individual services and handling of grievances is necessarily the key to better retention. In Australia, it has been observed that only a tiny minority of members have individual grievances. The key motivator for membership is thought to be power: “Could members be seen to work together and achieve the improvement in what they wanted?”80

4.7 Organising

Some unions in America, Britain and Australia have been very successful at organising new groups of workers. Efforts are made to introduce the method in other countries as well, including the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Russia. Some hold that organising is nothing but a return to workplace trade unionism. Others point out that today’s organising approach is different because of its highly systematic nature and its emphasis on empowerment.

There is no doubt that organising is indeed a systematic approach. Key elements
An issue that unions have not yet completely resolved is how to maintain workplace organisation after or in between organising campaigns. Some think more or less permanent campaigning is the answer, others prefer setting up structures such as union learning centres (§ 5.12).

4.8 Corporate campaigns

While corporate campaigns may require substantial means and perseverance, they can be an effective means to take on powerful opponents. According to the Troublemaker’s Handbook, requirements for success include a focus on solidarity issues; mobilising members; research to identify targets; coalitions with community organisations and creative and daring actions.\(^2\)

It is important to understand the company, the sector in which it operates, and the network of investors, suppliers and customers. It is also important to know in what ways the company is subject to government regulations and whether there are options for legal action against the company. Further, foreign subsidiaries and relations should be included in this analysis. All this information helps to understand the company’s weak spots, which may provide the union with leverage. For this reason, the AFL-CIO and many American unions have created strategic research departments.\(^3\)

The SEIU invests heavily in training its staff, and it has contracted with the American Management Institute to provide it. It may seem odd to have the ‘opponent’ train your staff, but the idea behind it is that a union must learn to look at a sector from a business perspective. Of SEIU staff, it has been said that the Harvard Business Review was probably their single most important source of information.\(^4\)

Besides conducting research, a position of power must be built. This approach has been summarised as follows: “we issued reports that documented the disparity between the lives of the workers and the CEOs who managed the companies where they worked. We publicized company failures to meet product- or worker-safety regulations. We talked with members of the companies’ boards of directors. We submitted shareholders’ resolutions and mobilized community supporters. We asked elected leaders to intervene. And, of course, we also used effective old-school tactics: We demonstrated, picketed, and led strikes when necessary”.\(^5\)

The SEIU has developed a systematic approach to campaign design. Elements include identifying campaign issues; identifying and developing leaders and mapping the workplace. Confederations in America, Britain and Australia have created institutes where the organising approach is taught (§ 5.9).
In order to be able to create pressure, a ‘power web’ analysis must be made of the target and its relations with the outer world. Such an analysis can help to identify multiple points of leverage that may be used to get the target to move. The analysis should consider in what ways the target depends on:

- Financiers/investors
- Owners
- Suppliers
- Media
- Other business interests
- Workers
- Customers/clients
- Government/regulatory agencies
- The community

Examples of corporate campaigns include the Justice for Janitors campaign (§ 5.1) and the Steelworkers’ campaign (§ 5.7). Elements of this approach are beginning to be used in Europe as well. In Norway, the Hotell og Restaurantarbeiderforbundet managed to organise a number of companies through a combination of pickets, publicity, strikes and boycott threats by other unions. In France, cleaners and activists targeted the Accor hotel chain with a campaign involving an eleven month strike, protests at a shareholders’ meeting and handing out protest cards in the lobby of a number of expensive hotels. Among other things, they got the company to pay cleaners by the hour rather than by the room, which is important from a perspective of work pressure. 86

In Sweden, the commercial workers’ union Handels successfully forced the Toys ‘R’ Us company to sign its first collective agreement anywhere, after it had opened megastores in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö in 1994. Handels had little experience with this type of industrial conflict, but the Transport Workers Union advised a strategy of gradual escalation. Handels launched a strike and called for a consumer boycott. Sympathetic unions targeted the company by refusing to make store deliveries, to repair their buildings, to provide financial services and finally to accept press advertisements. Eventually, an international union body endorsed an international boycott and the value of the company’s shares dropped.

Toys ‘R’ Us tried to depict Handels as a third party that interfered with other people out of organisational interests, but this approach failed. Handels’ campaign found resonance with the general public, partly because of a concern about the presumed loss of ‘Swedish values’ as a result of joining the EU. Toys ‘R’ Us was further at a disadvantage because it had failed to study Swedish labour relations. Senior managers had little idea of how a collective agreement might work. The personnel handbook gave managers considerable power to change labour conditions as they saw fit, while limiting employees’ right of free speech and requiring them to inform on colleagues, who could be fired on the basis of a mere suspicion of theft (in contravention of Swedish labour law). The company’s lawyers had translated the personnel handbook, but had not bothered to adapt it to Swedish law and culture. Also, they had not anticipated solidarity strikes, because these are illegal in the USA. 87

4.9 Local initiatives

Until the 1930s, trade unions in many countries had a strong presence at the local level. Since that time, many unions have more or less neglected the local level, but recently there has been a renewed interest in local trade union initiatives. For example, the American AFL-CIO set up the Union Cities programme to revive local labour councils (§ 5.5). The French autonomous Union Syndicale Solidaires (§ 5.10) has decided to create local branches in which different sectors are represented and to make funds available for these branches.

In Norway, the confederation has gained success with local centres that support unions and engage in joint political campaigns. In Germany, several unions merged into IG BCE. The miners’ union contributed a strong local structure at places where members live. This local structure proved valuable as a means to remain in touch with members who change jobs more and more frequently.

The Dutch FNV is in the process of creating one hundred local groups of activists who are to form coalitions and influence municipal policies. An effort is made to include women, young people and ethnic minorities in these teams. One of the instruments to influence local government policies is the bi-annual FNV Local Work and Income Monitor, which compares the social policies of over two hundred municipalities. The
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Coalition research in North America and Australia suggests that coalitions are most powerful if they can operate simultaneously at the local level and at the state or national levels. Local organisation is effective for political influence as well as for sustaining and building member engagement. A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is required because unions need to deal with increasingly diverse small workplaces, but also with large multinational corporations. “The key, therefore, seems to be the ability to develop campaigns and structures which provide sufficient flexibility to incorporate local specificity, yet which also provide enough collective mass and centralized coordination as to allow workers to stand up to their employers.”

Developments at the workplace are indeed one of the reasons for the renewed interest in local structures among trade unions. Flexible contracts and outsourcing cause workers to be increasingly scattered over a multitude of small workplaces. Workers frequently change jobs, often moving from one sector to another. These developments make it increasingly difficult for unions to organise workers at the workplace. This explains why some unions not only try to organise at the workplace, but also in the neighbourhoods where workers live (often this approach is referred to as community unionism).

An additional reason for local trade union structures is the fact that many governments decentralise responsibilities to the local level. An example is the Dutch government, which has in 2004 transferred responsibility for social assistance and labour market policies to the municipalities, and is currently decentralising home care and social welfare.

Important instances of trade union revitalisation can be found at the local level. In America, coalitions of trade unions and other organisations have launched successful living wage campaigns (§ 5.3). In over one hundred cities, worker centres have been set up that support groups of workers who are difficult to organise; similar initiatives can be found in Europe as well (§ 5.8). In some cities, unions wage campaigns for worker-friendly economic policies, sometimes in coalitions with renters’ organisations (§ 4.12). Local branches are involved in political campaigns (§ 4.13) and some have created their own research institutes (§ 4.14). The Labour Studies Centre at Wayne State University has created a website containing valuable case studies of local trade union innovations in America.

Many local initiatives try to create coalitions of different unions. There are several reasons to do so. As was just mentioned, flex workers frequently change sectors, making it important to have trade union initiatives that bridge these sectors. On the other hand, the issues involved often require joint initiatives. Whether it regards living wage campaigns or negotiations on local economic policies, different sectors are involved and there would be no sense in unions acting on their own. This does not mean that local inter-union collaboration is always easy; often unions have their own agendas. On the other hand, successful initiatives often involve a joint union strategy at the local level, as for instance in Los Angeles.

4.10 Local economic policies

In Europe, all kinds of local or regional bodies have been created to stimulate the economy. Many of these initiatives aim to create new jobs in regions that suffer job losses because traditional manufacturing sectors are disappearing. Programmes are often subsidised by the EU and national governments. They can be rather substantial, for example, a programme in Dortmund has been awarded over 50 million euro for the next ten years, and 70 to 100 people are involved in the execution of the programme. The aim is to create 70,000 new jobs.

Not much is known about the effects of this type of programmes. There are positive evaluations, but the criteria are sometimes rather misguided. For example, the EU proclaimed a number of Italian programmes to be successful because they had succeeded in spending the money quickly and in a correct manner. By now, there are more and more independent evaluations, which are sometimes critical of how the programme operates.

The reason to involve social partners and sometimes other social organisations in the programmes is that they are supposed to be knowledgeable of what goes on in the local community. Critics say this view amounts to ‘community fetishism’. For example, various German programmes are very similar: they all aim to create some sort of Silicon Valley, regardless of specific local circumstances. A partial explanation for this uniformity is that all programmes used the same consultancy firm, McKinsey. Another
reason why local needs often play a secondary role is that programmes are often designed according to the preferences of the funding agency.96

Meanwhile, democratic procedures and transparency are not always what they should be. Often, the initiative is in the hands of a small group of ‘social entrepreneurs’ who know each other well and who know where funding is to be found. Among them, they take all the important decisions, without consulting the people they are supposed to represent.97

A study of large-scale urban economic development programmes found a conspicuous feature to be the ‘relatively low resistance and conflict they raise’. This was thought to be a result of “the establishment of (quasi) non-governmental and non-accountable institutions, the formation of ‘stake-holder’ interest networks, and the emergence of compensating – but unfortunately often low budget – social economy measures”. Key players in such networks are “Chambers of Commerce, associations of leading economic groups, real estate developers, pension and other large fund holders, and/or large international businesses”. These urban development programmes drain public resources from programmes that benefit all citizens.98

While the programmes seem to be lacking in transparency, another question is what results they yield for trade unions. Unions often cope with membership decline in the regions where the programmes are carried out. Jobs are disappearing in sectors where unions have a strong position, are disappearing. In its place, service jobs are created, which are more difficult to organise. In Germany, there are ideas about how unions might gain a position in these sectors, but these fail to be realised because service sector union Ver.di is not involved in the regional economic programmes.99

Another issue is that the trade union movement has failed to properly analyse its own position in the regional collaborations. The involvement in national social pacts has an economic logic to it: unions offer wage restraint in exchange for jobs. At the local or regional level, it is unclear what unions have to offer. The general impression is that unions and other social organisations get to participate in discussions but have no real influence.100

To the extent that European unions have insufficiently thought about how they can build a position of power to influence the local and regional economy, they can learn from their American colleagues. Of American union locals it has been said that they traditionally “focused on banquets, golf outings, breakfasts with local business leaders, and photo opportunities with politicians collecting a campaign check”, but in some cities this has radically changed.101 The way in which unions operate in these cities differs from European collaborations in that the union movement has created a position of power for itself. They have done so partly through public campaigns, thus solving the problem of the lack of transparency as well.

Unions have built local power through protests, coalitions with community organisations, research, and political campaigns. They use their power to get living wage ordinances passed, forcing companies using government funds to pay decent wages (§ 5.3), and to regulate minimum wages and conditions and standards for retail workers, including Wal-Mart (§ 5.2). In Maryland, unions succeeded in having twenty percent of the budget surplus invested in a fund to be used for job creation and training in times of economic downturn. In a number of cities, unions have campaigned successfully for community benefits agreements (§ 5.4).

4.11 International

One reason for unions to operate internationally is that the companies that they have to deal with often also have an international orientation. Unions in Europe find that it is difficult to get such companies to take responsibility for their role in the local and regional economy. In America, recognition campaigns have a lower success rate in companies that are active in more than one country. This is especially the case with multinationals that have their headquarters abroad. In such companies, unions win 29% of their campaigns, as opposed to 46% in other companies.102

Until recently, international collaboration among unions used to consist mainly of supporting trade unions in non-Western countries. However, this situation seems to be changing. Increasingly, unions are aware of the importance of international trade unionism in an environment of globalisation of capital, not just out of solidarity with workers in other countries, but also as a strategic necessity.

Sometimes in coalitions with the globalisation movement, unions try to get social standards included in international trade agreements. An important milestone of this approach was the involvement of the trade union movement in the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, in 1999.

According to some critics, trade unions pretend to stand up for workers in the South,
colleagues overnight. Under such circumstances, solidarity often remains limited to symbolic support.  

Nevertheless, there are examples of successful campaigns that mobilise workers in different countries. An example are the international corporate campaigns, such as those of the American steelworkers, who enlisted the support of unions in other countries to be able to exert pressure on the financiers of their employer (§ 5.7).

A first step towards international collaboration is the exchange of information. Dutch union FNV Bondgenoten sponsors the Company Monitor, an international research project into the treatment of workers by subsidiaries of multinational corporations ABN AMRO, Ahold, Akzo Nobel, Heineken, Philips and Unilever. The research is carried out in collaboration with local unions.

At its 2004 Convention, the SEIU launched its strategy to form sustained, international coalitions in the service sector, building on previous campaigns with British and Danish unions against firms such as Group 4 Securicor and FirstGroup. The strategy involves dedicated partnerships with hand-picked unions, most notably T&G in Britain and LHMU in Australia. Exploratory visits are made to other countries in order to select unions that can be worked with on the basis of common purpose.

In order to build strong ties with partner unions, SEIU employs local union officials who act as bridge builders between the SEIU and the local partner unions. It invests significant resources in regional offices and organisers in Australia, Britain, South Africa, India and Poland. In addition, membership and leadership exchanges are organised, in order to connect campaigns to the rank and file.

Through the international services union UNI, SEIU has set up an international initiative to organise cleaners and security staff. SEIU has invested several million dollars in organising campaigns that target international food-service, cleaning and security employers, and has assigned staff to Australia, Poland, Britain, India, France, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, South America, and South Africa. Following the example of the SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign (§ 5.1), T&G has launched a Justice for Cleaners campaign, and LHMU a Clean Start campaign.

The partnerships that grew out of the UNI initiative have helped mobilise international support for striking cleaners in Houston. Plans are being considered to set up a similar project in the catering industry in collaboration with the IUF.
Multinational corporations sometimes try to impose American labour relations on workers at their European subsidiaries, but these attempts are not always successful. For example, Toys ‘R’ Us was forced to sign a collective agreement with the Handels union (§ 4.8). Wal-Mart pulled out of Germany, where it had problems coping with strong unions.113

The trade union movement has had a rather strong institutional position in Europe. However, changing circumstances force the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to reconsider its strategies. New activities include the coordination of protests against the services directive. It has been argued that these protests may mark a new phase for the European trade union movement, the traditionally strong institutional position being replaced to some extent by a need to build power as well as fight a battle of ideas.114

Another indication of a changing role of the European trade union movement may be ETUC’s intention to discuss organising and trade union innovation at its 2007 Congress. General Secretary John Monks commented: “The ETUC is working with its European member unions to build a new strategy. It is unlikely that we will go to the lengths of some of the Americans and see organising as practically the only union strategy for growth. But that will clearly be an important part of our broader strategy”.115

4.12 Coalitions

In the spring of 2004, Wal-Mart spent over a million dollar on a campaign to get residents of the Californian city of Inglewood to vote for a proposition that would exempt the company of all kinds of regulations. Because Wal-Mart has a poor reputation as an employer (§ 5.2), the local AFL-CIO spent 110,000 dollar on a counter-campaign. Even though Wal-Mart thus spent almost ten times as much on its campaign as the labour council, sixty percent of voters voted against the retailer.116

This kind of ‘David and Goliath’ victories are not uncommon. Repeatedly, the American trade union movement has achieved success despite its opponents having much deeper pockets. A good example are the local living wage campaigns (§ 5.3). Such successes are to a large extent due to coalitions with clergy, immigrants’ organisations, neighbourhood associations and other community organisations.

It should be noted that some of the most powerful coalitions address not only issues of
union concern, but concerns that are in the mutual interests of both unions and community organisations. Unions should also be aware that coalitions come in various shapes and sizes, from ad hoc coalitions with community organisations around particular events to deep, long term coalitions around shared interests and values. It is important to recognise that coalitions vary, and ad hoc coalitions may be particularly useful in reacting to a harsh employer or political attack, whereas deeper coalitions may be more useful for building longer term proactive agendas. A framework of union-community coalitions developed by Amanda Tattersall has been reproduced as an appendix to the present report.

The fact that collaboration increases trade union power is an important motive, but there are also other reasons to form coalitions. By working with community organisations, unions show that they are not just defending narrow self-interests, but fighting for social justice. Collaboration can further be a means to get in touch with young people and ethnic minorities. Since coalitions can increase union power, they will often be used in situations in which workers have a weak position, or the opponent is very strong. Examples include campaigns for workers at the lower end of the labour market, and campaigns targeting multinational corporations.

Collaboration between trade unions and community organisations can sometimes be difficult. Community organisations sometimes feel that they are being used by unions. For example, clergy stress that unions should not have a ‘rent-a-collar’ attitude. Unions sometimes doubt whether community organisations can deliver on their promises. Generally, it takes time to build mutual trust and it takes respectful relations to negotiate coalitions that operate in the interests of both community organisations and unions.117

Public sector unions sometimes form coalitions with users of public services to stop privatisation, as for example in Britain in the 1980s. Such coalitions are not always easy to sustain. Users are not always organised, which can make it difficult to reach them. Also, they may be critical of public service employees if the quality of the services has deteriorated, for example as a result of budget cuts. Social work in London faced this problem, when clients wanted nothing to do with employees because they were dissatisfied with the institution.118 On the other hand, public service workers may face abuse from clients or clients’ families, which may in itself be an important organising issue, although this does not necessarily rule out the option of simultaneously forging coalitions with service users.119

One of the advantages of human service work is that the work has to be performed locally. Childcare workers, cleaners, homecare and most public services cannot be ‘off-shored’. Because this work is fixed to the local area, coalitions with consumers and other community organisations provide unions with an advantage against employers – because they can build public support for unions and community demands in the same space in which capital is fixed.120

Success has been achieved with campaigns against the privatisation of council housing, in which public sector union Unison collaborates with local Defend Council Housing groups. Unison has an interest in retaining decent jobs, while renters’ associations are concerned about the disappearance of affordable housing. Often, renters are blackmailed by the government, which says that overdue house maintenance will not be carried out unless renters approve privatisation. In a number of cities, coalitions have succeeded in blocking privatisation, and in this the support of the trade union movement has proved crucial.121

Coalitions can be a way to counter the image that unions only pursue narrow self-interests. For example, it would have been a ‘completely mistaken strategy’ to frame a conflict between the Austrian government and railway staff as being about acquired rights. Instead, an alliance with railway clients was formed, making it a fight against a ‘neoliberal and politically motivated’ attack on the railway service. In order to involve local communities, the national slogan ‘Austria needs the railway service’ was joined by local variants such as ‘Linz needs the railway service’.122

Effective coalitions require constant negotiation and a balancing of concerns between what is held in common between the groups, and the individual interests that unions or community organisations hold autonomously. An interesting example is a campaign initiated by the Australian Teachers’ union NSWTF in collaboration with parents’ organisations, to stop public education budget cuts (see also § 4.14). The campaign was primarily about maintaining the quality of public education, focussing on issues such as reducing class sizes, improving school maintenance, supporting quality teachers and professional development. However, union members wanted higher salaries to be included in the demands, something the parents’ organisation opposed because it feared that this would overshadow other issues. A compromise was reached by calling for ‘the development of strategies to attract and retain teachers in an era of teachers’ shortage’.

However, the government played the coalition partners against each other by offering a
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6% wage increase, which narrowed the teachers’ focus to the wage issue rather than public education more broadly. This was one of the reasons why the coalition with parents’ organisations all but fell apart. However, when the government threatened to pay the wage increase out of the general education budget, it shifted the issue back from a wage issue to a general education issue. In order to protect the education budget, unions and parents worked together, with parents taking the unprecedented step of supporting strike action by the NSWTF. As one newspaper commented, “this is not the usual fight by teachers over money; this has become a fight for the survival of a valued and quality public education system”. Eventually, the union won a 12.5% wage increase that was not paid out of the general education budget.123

Another potential union ally are organisations of health care users. In America, the handicapped and the elderly can employ home care paid by the government. The user of the service is at the same time acting as an employer. Caregivers, often immigrants, are hard to organise. They work in isolation and turnover is high. In addition, going on strike is not an option, because this would directly affect the elderly and the handicapped. In California, the SEIU aimed to form coalitions with organisations of health care recipients. Through intensive personal contacts with the leaders of these organisations, it managed to build trust. After a campaign lasting for ten years, SEIU managed to organise almost 150,000 home care givers.124

Similarly, health care coalitions have been a strong example of union and community organisation in Canada, with the Ontario Health Coalition operating for over 15 years in defence of public health care and against privatisation. Coalition work has been most successful against hospital privatisation, where the direct interests of hospital workers (to protect wages and conditions) match with the interests of the general public who want to protect the standards of their local hospitals.125

In the Netherlands, the provision of home care is being decentralised to municipalities, which are now outsourcing these services, sometimes to cleaning companies that are cheaper than professional providers of home care. Existing coalitions of unions, organisations of the elderly and organisations of health care recipients are being used to put pressure on local governments to set higher quality standards for companies that will provide home care.

When trying to form coalitions, it is important to be creative in finding approaches that underline common interests. This certainly applies to issues like the environment, where the interests of trade unions and environmental organisations sometimes clash.

Besides, there may also be cultural and class differences; for example, members of environmental organisations tend to be higher educated than trade union members.126 Despite these differences, it is sometimes possible to form coalitions on the basis of shared interests. For example, an American union suggested creating a fund to provide training to workers who would lose their jobs as a consequence of environmental policies. The idea behind this is that the entire society benefits from a cleaner environment and that therefore the costs should not be borne exclusively by workers who are employed in a sector that is not environmentally friendly. Also, in a number of cities there are coalitions that promote environmentally friendly project development that should simultaneously yield decent jobs and affordable houses (§ 5.4).127

An even more daring attempt at coalition building is made by the SEIU on Fisher Island, Florida, ‘one of the most concentrated pockets of wealth in the nation’. The union deliberately launched a campaign to organise low wage service workers here, because it is a ‘microcosm of the nation’s increasing social and economic divide’. With the help of the clergy, the SEIU is trying to engage some wealthy employers in its campaign, hoping they will be moved by the ‘contrast between their affluence and the meager existence of many of their workers’.128

Coalitions require organisations that have an eye for social issues. An interesting example is the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which organises low and moderate income families. The organisation, with 220,000 members, campaigns for living wages, for affordable houses, against cuts in education and against ‘predatory lending’ (loans with unfavourable conditions that are forced on people through aggressive marketing). In many campaigns, ACORN works with trade unions. ACORN is different from many other organisations in that it is largely independent from external funding. Eighty percent of its income is from members and activities such as lotteries.129

Another important trade union ally is Jobs with Justice (JwJ), an organisation with branches in forty cities. Both organisations and individual persons are affiliated to these branches. Activists are asked to commit to participate in actions at least five times per year. JwJ often supports trade union actions, such as strikes, but also supports workers who are not members of unions. In cities such as Denver, JwJ helped revitalise the local trade union movement. Initially, some within the union movement were critical of JwJ, because it was seen as a competitor, but now the AFL-CIO supports the organisation. JwJ often uses Workers Rights Boards, made up of prominent citizens, which organise
When the trade union movement tries to influence political decision-making, this usually takes the form of lobbying and negotiating social pacts. In addition, political actions sometimes occur. Sometimes these take on the form of strikes, but in countries such as Germany and Britain, political strikes are illegal. The trade union movement tends to be careful when it regards involvement in election campaigns, although the German trade union movement did wage a campaign in 1998 that helped the SPD and the Green Party secure a victory.

The American trade union movement has much more aggressive election campaigns. The fact that Al Gore in 2000 received more votes than George Bush was partly due to an intensive grassroots campaign of the AFL-CIO and affiliated unions. In 2004, the trade union movement spent 150 million dollar on an even larger campaign. Unions and organisations such as ACORN mobilised 40,000 volunteers, who staffed phone banks, made house calls, handed out leaflets and assisted with voter registration. The fact that Bush still won the elections can be explained in part by the fact that the Democrats had neglected socio-economic issues, in spite of the fact that there was broad support among voters for issues such as raising the minimum wage (§ 5.3). In addition, the Republicans had a much larger campaign budget, thanks to corporate contributions from companies such as Wal-Mart (the largest corporate contributor to political candidates’ campaign funds). Having learned the lesson of the 2000 campaign, they did not rely exclusively on television ads, but placed a strong emphasis on personal contact with potential voters. They used the infrastructure of the conservative churches and the Chambers of Commerce, while the National Rifle Association (NRA) helped them reach voters at gun clubs.

Despite the recent split in the trade union movement (§ 3.2), unions and community organisations again launched a large campaign for the 2006 Midterm Elections. It is generally acknowledged that this campaign has been instrumental in the Democrats’ victory. This time, propositions to raise the minimum wage were successfully put to the vote in six strategically important states, which had an important effect on turnout among low-income voters.

4.13 Politics

Traditionally, many European trade unions used to have close ties to the Social-Democrats. For example, the British trade union movement still makes important financial contributions to the Labour party. In France and Southern Europe, confederations with a communist background exist as well. Almost everywhere, confederations have distanced themselves from the political parties that they used to be allied with, and they now are involved with a broader political spectrum.

In Spain, for example, the Social-Democrat Prime Minister González failed to conclude a social pact, something his successor Aznar of the right-wing Partido Popular did manage. More recently, the French CFDT refused to join the CGT in protests against the privatisation of Gas de France. With presidential elections coming up, it was afraid to get mixed up in party politics. In Britain, Labour Party funding from unions declined from 66% in 1992 to 33% in 2001. Unions now spend more money on independent political campaigns. These campaigns often target Labour policies, such as the privatisation of public services. 132

The AFL-CIO has in 2003 created Working America, a ‘community affiliate’ that aims to organise people who do not work at unionised workplaces. Membership is free. By going door to door, organisers have recruited some 1.5 million members. Working America seems to have had a considerable impact on voter turnout in the 2006 Midterm Elections (§ 4.13).
they did vote in 2006. The same poll suggests that Working America effectively reaches traditional Republican voters: one-third are born again Christians and one-third are supporters of the National Rifle Association.

Now that the union movement has helped the Democrats win the elections, it wants them to deliver on union issues. High on the agenda are a raise of the federal minimum wage, access to health care and tougher legislation to stop employers obstructing union campaigns.133

At least as important as national election campaigns are the local activities of the American trade union movement. Unions judge political candidates by their position on important issues, on the basis of which they may or may not be endorsed. Through massive grassroots mobilisation, coalitions of trade unions and community organisations can effectively take on opponents who have much larger campaign funds thanks to corporate gifts. Some central labour councils go even further, engaging in the recruitment and training of political candidates. For example, a trade union institute in San José claims that half the council members have received training from it.134

Unions seem to become more critical when it regards giving their support to political candidates, because they feel they have been let down at times by candidates they had helped get elected. For example, the labour council in Seattle tries to get more specific promises from political candidates, subjects them to interviews by rank and file members, and has developed a scorecard system to hold them accountable when elected. Reportedly, this departure from the traditional approach to political deal making has made some politicians nervous.135 In Baltimore, the trade union movement and ACORN forced a council vote on a living wage proposal. They realised that the proposal would be defeated, but council members were forced to take a position. Subsequently, trade unions and ACORN campaigned against the candidates who had voted against the proposal.136

At the national level, the SEIU asked candidates for the 2004 presidential elections to visit local branches and to meet for an hour with regular union members, to see “if they could hang out comfortably” with these workers. Only Howard Dean accepted this procedure, thus gaining SEIU endorsement. Members wearing SEIU t-shirts visited political meetings to ask candidates where they stood on health care. “Candidates, accustomed to seeing purple-clad SEIU members at their events, would answer our members’ health care questions before they were even asked”. The SEIU has further set up an organisation “They work for us” to monitor whether elected politicians deliver on their promises to raise the minimum wage, improve health care, and to restore workers’ right to organise. If they fail to do so, “we’ll unelect them”.137

In the UK, the London Citizens coalition (§ 5.13) regularly organises meetings, typically attended by around 500 members of affiliated organisations, in order to hold politicians accountable. These politicians are presented with a ‘people’s agenda’, a short list of concrete demands set by the members, and asked to say yes or no to them. The large attendance makes it difficult for politicians to turn down the demands, especially since the attendees tend to be politically involved citizens, who are likely to vote. If politicians say yes to the demands, it will be monitored whether they actually deliver. For example, London Citizens has been holding regular meetings with Mayor Ken Livingstone after his 2004 re-election, in order to hold him to the commitments he had made prior to the elections.138

In a number of countries, trade unions are involved in campaigns to stop or turn back legislation that undermines workers’ and trade union rights. An example is Australia, where 300,000 people participated in protests across the country on 30 November 2006. Earlier actions included a ‘Has your MP been naughty or nice?’ Christmas card campaign; a campaign that got over 5,000 people to make an official submission to a Senate Enquiry; and a campaign encouraging supporters to send 500 letters to local, state and national newspapers, 50 being published the day after. The ACTU confederation is now preparing a campaign for the 2007 election. The campaign will involve setting up local groups and organising workplace discussions.139

Unions have a positive effect on political participation. In America, many studies have found that union members are more likely to vote than other citizens. A recent European study confirmed this, but also found indications of an indirect effect. Even employees who are not members of unions themselves are significantly more likely to vote if they work in a partly unionised firm than those in firms without a union presence. The researchers suggest that creating an institutional context that facilitates high levels of union density may be an effective means to improve political participation.140
4.14 Think tanks and research

In America, there is a strong tradition of think tanks that feed public debate with research and ideas. Both the left and the right are involved, but conservatives clearly have the upper hand when it regards the development of ideas. Half of the think tank experts quoted by the media are from conservative think tanks, while only sixteen percent are from progressive think tanks. Major conservative think tanks outspend their progressive counterparts by four to one. 141

Although the right thus clearly has the upper hand when it regards the formation of public opinion, there have been initiatives to counter this. An interesting example regards campaigns to attach social conditions to government support for private companies. Reflecting the right-wing criticism of ‘big government’, these campaigns criticise ‘big corporations’. While right-wing ideologists insist that welfare creates dependency, left-wing activists coined the expression ‘corporate welfare’ to draw attention to corporate subsidies. In Chicago, ‘tours of shame’ were organised to companies that pay poverty wages while receiving government support. 142

It is important to recognise that there are broadly two ‘think tank’ strategies in America. One is where progressive institutions have ‘in house’ researchers (for instance, many US unions have an internal research team), and the second is where progressive institutions build partnership relationships with public institutions (such as the Centre on Wisconsin Strategy, an organisation inside a university but acting with community partners).

In the San José area, the trade union movement has created the Working Partnerships institute, which receives support from charitable foundations and has a two million dollar budget. Working Partnerships has built a reputation by publishing reliable reports that have had an impact on public debate. For example, a number of studies have been done into the growing divide between rich and poor in Silicon Valley and the rising number of poverty jobs. These studies helped create support for a living wage ordinance (§ 5.3). Working Partnerships also did a study of the likely economic impact of such an ordinance.

The institute further published a report that laid the groundwork for a campaign that resulted in a decision that at least 5,000 affordable houses should be built at a newly developed location. It also laid the foundation for a public health insurance for all children of low income parents (including those who are undocumented). Meanwhile, labour councils in cities including Los Angeles, New York, Connecticut, Denver, Seattle and Cleveland have created similar research institutes. The Economic Policy Institute has provided technical support to new local think tanks. 143

In Denver, the Front-Range Economic Strategy Centre (FRESC) worked with a group of Asian small businesses to block the opening of a Wal-Mart store in an urban renewal zone, publishing research that revealed that it would be a ‘lose-lose’ deal both for the city and for property owners. It also helped getting stricter environmental regulations passed, publishing ‘smoking gun’ documents that revealed negligence both on the part of the government and polluters. 144

These institutions are not just ‘think tanks’ but self described think and do tanks, seeking to combine organising and ideas to achieve a research-driven campaign programme. Ideas must not only be developed and substantiated, but also disseminated. For that goal, Working Partnership in collaboration with the local university set up an eight-week course for leaders from trade unions, but also churches and community organisations. Participants are taught about the economy, regional power structures and how the government operates. In addition, the programme connects people with different backgrounds. 145 In other cities, similar courses have been set up as part of the Building Partnership network.

In Germany as well, the trade union movement works with research institutes that are sympathetic to its cause to influence public debate on regional economic development. The government promotes a vision that favours international competitiveness over workers’ interests. The trade union movement promotes another analysis, which puts more emphasis on employment. This results in ‘Deutungskämpfen’ (fights over interpretation) in which slogans play a key role. To counter the vision of a ‘fast Dortmunder’, the trade union movement presents the vision of a ‘social Dortmunder’. In Nürnberg, IG Metall introduced the expression ‘crisis region’ to draw attention to job losses. 146

Even though the German trade union movement is thus trying to develop its own vision at the regional level, critics say that it has no credible alternative to the government’s policy of budget cuts. In France on the contrary, social unrest in 1995 would have resulted in a ‘return of the intellectuals’. An extensive network was created of research groups, that publish critical analyses and that sometimes provide material for trade union campaigns. 147
In Australia, teachers’ union NSWTF in collaboration with a parents’ organisation responded to education budget cuts by setting up an independent inquiry into the future of public education. An independent academic was appointed to head the inquiry and was provided with a research team and an office. Through hearings at schools, teachers and parents were invited to give input. The inquiry helped put the quality of public education on the public agenda and strengthened the union-community coalition. At a later stage in the campaign, the ties between teachers and union members would prove crucial to secure a victory (see § 4.12).  

Also in Australia, Unions NSW, the central labour council in NSW, has set up a research-driven campaign centre, called Working NSW, to expand the capacity to promote research and organising across the union movement and civil society. The aim is for this institute to build bridges between academics, unions and community organisations around issues consistent with progressive values, and in organisations’ mutual interest.

In London, the Geography Department at Queen Mary, University of London formally affiliated to Telco, a local coalition of trade unions and community organisations (§ 5.13). In a way, this can be seen as formalising a situation that already existed in practice. The university has done a lot of research for the coalition. Besides doing research, students have been involved as activists in Telco campaigns, including a demonstration at Queen Mary demanding better wages for cleaners at the university. As a result, Queen Mary is now the first ‘living wage campus’ in the UK.

Besides commissioning academic research to support its campaigns, Telco’s umbrella organisation London Citizens also sets up public hearings and citizens enquiries. An example is a recent enquiry into Lunar House, the institution immigrants must turn to in order to apply for asylum or citizenship.

Responding to complaints about service quality, South London Citizens parked a caravan at the entrance to collect evidence from service users. In addition, statements from staff were collected and a public hearing was organised. In sum, testimonies were given by 350 individuals and 50 organisations.

The report found that clients had to wait outside the office for 4 to 6 hours, sometimes in bad weather. Facilities for parents with babies were inadequate, and there were many complaints about insufficient or contradictory information being provided. However, the report did find that some improvements had been introduced. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate has indicated that it will discuss with South London Citizens how to follow up on the recommendations.

At the national level, the TUC has recently created the Union Ideas Network (UIN), an initiative that aims to strengthen ties with researchers and policy makers. The UIN has created a website where papers and ideas are exchanged. It also organises conferences.

### 4.15 Partnership

Unions in continental Europe have historically operated in a climate of institutional support, with labour relations that focus on compromise rather than conflict. An example is the Netherlands, where strike action is relatively rare. While this system has produced favourable social outcomes, it has also made the trade union movement vulnerable to changes in government policies.

A recent study hypothesizes that such partnerships are most likely to emerge when governments are relatively weak, due to limited electoral support, sometimes aggravated by political scandals. Another contributing factor is thought to be a perception of a crisis that necessitates unpopular, neo-liberal economic measures. Finally, partnerships would need a strong union movement with labour market power and disruptive capacity, which is nevertheless willing to negotiate. In this respect, direct democratic decision-making procedures such as referenda (cf § 4.5) are thought to play an important role. Without such procedures, radicals who are against collaborating with the government can more easily dominate discussions and decision-making. The study finally found that the role of employers’ organisations in the emergence of social pacts is limited, but that their involvement is important for the durability of pacts.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, partnership is sometimes advocated as a means to create ‘high road’ economic development that benefits both employers and employees. Such high road approaches should focus on quality and training rather than cost-cutting. However, the idea is far from uncontroversial. For example, critics in Britain say that in many firms, “there is no high road or low road but instead a single road towards a new flexibility based on task accretion, reduced job security and the threat of competition between permanent and contingent workers”. The employers’ aim would be “to engender a new employee awareness of market realities through the prism of partnership”.  

Innovative trade union strategies
The British government actively promotes partnership approaches. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) used to have a Partnership at Work fund and has more recently created a £5-10 million Trade Union Modernisation Fund, to support innovative projects that help unions adapt to changing labour market conditions. While promoting partnership is not the main object of the latter fund, funding conditions do favour constructive union-employer partnership and promote non-confrontational roles for activists, such as ‘partnership champions’ and equality and diversity reps.153

While this might seem to be a text book case of co-optation, there is more to it than that. For example, the government supports Union Learning Centres through a £14 million Union Learning Fund, which strengthen unions at the workplace (§ 5.12). Also, the DTI acknowledges that vulnerable workers run a higher risk of mistreatment at workplaces where there is no union and provides funding for a TUC-led project on vulnerable workers.

In America, the SEIU is known for its confrontational campaigns. Nevertheless, its leader Andy Stern claims that he rather uses the ‘power of persuasion’ than the ‘persuasion of power’. He tries to make deals with employers, promising that the SEIU will not start negotiations until after it has organised a major part of the sector, thus removing the employer’s fear of unfair competition. In return, he asks employers not to obstruct the union’s efforts to organise workers. Recently, the SEIU has started to ask employers to serve as ‘reference’ to other employers the union seeks as a partner: “our current employers can vouch for our good-faith efforts to improve training or solve problems that are important for business success”.154

While the SEIU’s commitment to partnership is no doubt genuine, it is also clear that this union will not hesitate to fight when necessary. In Australia, it has been argued that partnership can only be a viable union strategy if unions operate from a position of power, and if they actively involve their membership; otherwise “workers will see unions as an external force doing things for them and to them”.155

4.16 Strategy and organisational change

Although many unions adhere to an innovation agenda, implementation often remains spotty and ad hoc. Decisions about renewal are made at conventions, but do not always translate into day-to-day decision making and resource allocation. “A basic task for decision makers concerned about ongoing strategic choice is comparing actual resource allocation (including allocation of staff time) toward major union objectives. These comparisons can often be very disconcerting”.156

Some unions do make choices. The British T&G adopted a strategy for growth and allocated £3 million to hire 100 organisers. In the 1990s, the SEIU decided to allocate 35 percent of its budget to organising. At the same time, the union all but abolished its health and safety department and cut services to affiliates, leading to considerable anxiety among its own staff.157

While appraisals of trade union strategy often focus on the share of resources spent on organising versus servicing, it is also interesting to look at the sectors resources are allocated to. In British unions for example, staff time is still mostly allocated to traditional trade union strongholds rather than new growth sectors. Thus, there are high concentrations of officers serving manufacturing and public administration, and low concentrations in hotels, restaurants and business services.158

British unions have introduced performance management to promote recruitment, organising and engagement with equality issues among their staff. Most union officers now report regularly to a line manager, undergo formal appraisal and set and review targets.

However, a study found that performance management did not have a decisive influence on officers’ behaviour, probably because their professional role involves high discretion. This seems consistent with the observation by an American researcher that a command-and-control hierarchical model is ill-suited to the needs of innovating unions. In the British study, it was found that training and advisory support are more effective management tools. Further, it was found that the officers’ attitudes play a crucial role. Since young officers were found to be more open to a change agenda, recruiting young staff is also seen as a way to get trade union renewal implemented.159

In the American SEIU, organising jobs used to be seen as ‘career-ending choices, a place for political losers and the uninspired’. Such views reflect union policies: “If a union recruits its staff from local unions on the basis of success in collective bargaining and servicing, promotes them on that basis, and provides primary access to political advancement via ability to serve existing members, one should not be surprised to find a large percentage of resources flowing toward traditional servicing activities”.160
5 Examples

5.1 Justice for Janitors

The flagship of trade union revitalisation is the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign of the SEIU, which started at the end of the 1980s. The position of cleaners had been weakened because large corporations had outsourced cleaning and because workers could easily be replaced by immigrants from Latin America. Some of these immigrants were undocumented, so if they joined the union, the employer simply called the immigration service. The union reached the conclusion that traditional methods were no longer working and started an assertive campaign to strengthen the position of workers.

Importantly, SEIU realised that there was no sense in taking on just the cleaning companies. Even if the union would manage to negotiate decent wages, the company would become more expensive and lose its contract, with the result that cleaners would lose their jobs. It was therefore important to deal with the clients of the cleaning companies, that is, the owners of the office buildings. SEIU employed a researcher whose task it was to analyse the sector and to find weak spots. This analysis was subsequently discussed extensively with workers, to make them understand the market and the leverage points for campaigns.

The SEIU's approach consisted of trying to get to the cleaning company and the owner of the office buildings in as many ways as possible. Companies were confronted with ‘guerrilla legal tactics’. A building owner was confronted with direct action at his golf club and street theatre at his favourite restaurant. Since the cleaning
than impressed by the methods employers used to intimidate them. In LA you risk losing a $4.25 dollar per hour job if you join a union; in El Salvador, you risk getting shot. The JfJ campaign was successful in cities with a high proportion of immigrants in the workforce, but also in Milwaukee, where almost all workers are black.

Meanwhile, the success of JfJ has proven durable. The model has been applied in many cities and the union has been successful in subsequent rounds of negotiations. Partly owing to the reputation gained through the JfJ campaign, the union managed to create a bargaining position for cleaners in supermarkets. Elements of the JfJ approach have further been used in campaigns to organise workers at LA Airport.

By now, JfJ also has a number of international spin-offs, including the British Justice for Cleaners campaign and the Australian Clean Start campaign (§ 4.11).

In 2005, the SEIU achieved an important victory by organizing 5,000 cleaners in Houston, in the anti-union South. A ‘community liaison’ had been sent to the city two years earlier, to enlist the support of the clergy, pension funds (to put pressure on building owners) and political allies. During the campaign, 25 Spanish speaking cleaners were flown in from other cities to organise co-workers. Despite the successful organising drive, employers have dismissed the union’s proposal as ‘unrealistic’. The cleaners had to go on strike and staged a sit in at a mall, resulting in 12 arrests. Solidarity actions have taken place in other American cities as well as in Berlin, London, Mexico City and Moscow. Eventually, the actions resulted in a victory for the cleaners.

5.2 Wal-Mart

Supermarkets try to reduce their costs, which sometimes leads to workplace abuses. For example, the German Ver.di has published a black paper on Lidl, whereas in the Netherlands, there has been a scandal regarding Aldi. However, this is child’s play compared to the American Wal-Mart corporation, with 1.4 employees the largest private employer in the world. Most workers do not receive a living wage. The company does all it can to keep the unions out. Generally, it succeeds.

Wal-Mart is known for its tight control of its corporate culture. Job applicants have to do a ‘personality test’ that seems to test primarily how compliant they are. Barbara Ehrenreich, who wrote a book about her experiences in low-paid jobs, found out that it raises some suspicion if you respond to the proposition “rules have to be followed to the
letter at all times’ by agreeing ‘strongly’ rather than ‘very strongly’ or ‘totally’. “When presenting yourself as a potential employee, you can never be too much of a suck up”, she concluded.

In addition, candidates have to do a drugs test, a rather common requirement in America. Such tests have little practical use but to find out whether the candidate is willing to undergo humiliations. If candidates pass the selection, they have to follow an introduction course. They learn that they are not employees, but ‘associates’, and that managers are not bosses, but ‘serving leaders’. They learn that Wal-Mart staff is really one big family, and that they therefore do not need a union. And of course, they learn the Wal-Mart cheer (‘Give me a W...’).164

If, despite all precautions, workers at a store still decide to organise themselves, the headquarters will send a ‘labour relations team’ by private plane, often the very day the call comes in. Sometimes subtle methods are used to frustrate organising attempts, such as giving employees who do not want a union buttons saying ‘I can speak for myself’. Sometimes, more drastic measures are taken. If necessary, the store will be closed in order to get rid of the union, even though this is illegal. In the United States, not one single store is organised.

In Canada, the UFCW nearly managed to secure a contract for one Wal-Mart store, which, however, was subsequently closed. Now it is close to securing a contract for another store. In the UK, where Wal-Mart operates under the name ASDA, there are trade union activists in stores, but there is no collective agreement. In Germany, Wal-Mart does have to respect sectoral collective agreements. However, the chain is unsuccessful here, and has decided to pull out. In China, the company has been forced to recognise the official state union ACFTU.165

In the USA, however, there is no question about recognising unions. An internal management handbook said: “Staying union free is a full-time commitment... The entire management staff should fully comprehend and appreciate exactly what is expected of their individual efforts to meet the union free objective... This may mean walking a tightrope between legitimate campaigning and improper conduct”. In the past, Wal-Mart has been convicted for forcing unpaid overtime on workers and for firing union activists. Recently, it reached a settlement in a case involving teenagers working with dangerous equipment, including a chain saw. A court ordered the company to pay $ 78 million in compensation to workers who have been forced to work during breaks. The company is further involved in law suits regarding wage discrimination of women and employing undocumented cleaners. Fines seem to be calculated as costs of doing business.166

During the past years, Wal-Mart has been under attack from groups such as Wal-Mart Watch and Wake Up Wal-Mart. In addition, a rather successful low budget documentary ‘Wall-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price’ criticised the company. This is a problem for Wal-Mart, because in order to expand in America it needs to target middle income and urban customers, who are sensitive to negative publicity. In fact, a poll found that 2 to 8% of Wal-Mart customers have stopped shopping at the chain because of negative publicity. Since 2000, Wal-Mart’s stock price has fallen by 27%, a drop said to partially reflect investors’ concern about the company’s image.

The company has set up a ‘war room’ with a ‘rapid response public relations team’ to counter negative publicity. An internal memo suggested ways to cut costs without giving ammunition to critics. In order to cut health costs, it was suggested to discourage unhealthy job applicants by including activities such as cart-gathering in all jobs. Another proposal was to hire more part-time workers, who are often not eligible to health insurance. The memo further expressed concern about the fact that workers who have stayed with the company for a number of years are more expensive, but not more productive.167

According to employees in Florida, the company suddenly barred older employees with back or legs problems from sitting on a stool when working for example as a cashier, despite the fact that they had been allowed to use them for years. The new policy was believed to be a means to get rid of older, more expensive workers. Changes in workers’ schedules led to a spontaneous walk-out of almost all employees at a Wal-Mart Super Centre in Hialeah Gardens, Florida. Even more remarkable than the protest itself was the fact that Wal-Mart immediately made some concessions.168

An important method to fight Wal-Mart are campaigns that aim to deny the company zoning permission or tax subsidies to open stores in big cities. In Chicago, unions, churches and community organisations formed a coalition to stop the opening of two stores. Wal-Mart hit back with a campaign for which it contracted the services of the mayor’s brother’s law firm. An important argument used by Wal-Mart was that it would create 600 new jobs. Opponents presented a study showing that more jobs would disappear than be created. In the end, the municipality decided to allow one Wal-Mart store.169
5.3 Living Wage

The living wage movement is one of the most successful initiatives the American trade union movement is involved in. In the USA a Federal minimum wage applies, but this is very low and not automatically adjusted for inflation; in fact, it has not been raised since 1997. Many people have to take more than one job to make ends meet.

In the California city of Inglewood, Wal-Mart tried to circumvent the city administration by asking in a referendum to be exempted from all kinds of local regulations. Here too, a coalition of churches, unions and community organisations campaigned against Wal-Mart. The union organised a protest involving ten thousand participants. Although Wal-Mart had invested ten times as much in its campaign as its opponents, the initiative was rejected by sixty percent of the voters.  

Although expansion into big cities is an important goal of Wal-Mart, the company recently gave up plans for New York (or at least for Manhattan) because of fierce opposition from unions, community organisations and politicians. A Wal-Mart spokesperson blamed the defeat on ‘snobbish elites’ in New York that would have something against the company.

Wal-Mart spends a lot of money on marketing campaigns that portray unions as the enemy of regular people. Unions are depicted as outsiders who look after institutional interests, at the expense of jobs and low prices for the local community. For low-income housewives, the chain is “an ally, an oasis of low prices in an unfriendly world”.

For trade unions, Wal-Mart is important because of the huge number of employees, but also because of the negative impact the company has on labour relations in other companies. Other supermarkets cut wages and health insurance, arguing that this is the only way in which they can compete with Wal-Mart. On the other hand, unionised groceries in Canada welcome the unionisation of Wal-Mart stores, because this will free them from unfair competition.

Living wage ordinances have the additional advantage for public sector unions that the pressure to privatise government services is reduced. Private companies can often work cheaper than government agencies by underpaying their staff; living wage ordinances makes such unfair competition more difficult. Sometimes ordinances include clauses that prohibit the obstruction of union organising efforts. In addition, they may require employers to have transparent personnel policies. In Pennsylvania, the living wage campaign further argued that social welfare budgets should be raised, in order to allow agencies to pay their staff a living wage.

In more than a hundred localities, living wage campaigns have succeeded in getting ordinances passed, while dozens of campaigns are still running. Successes have not only been achieved in progressive states, but also in the union-unfriendly south of the USA.  

Subsequently, the unions and community organisations ran a campaign for a living wage for large mega-retailers in Chicago. This campaign ran for two years, and passed an ordinance in July 2006. The ordinance was vetoed by the Mayor, and will now be a major issue in the Mayoral elections in February 2007. If the living wage campaign succeeds, it will be one of the most significant victories against Wal-Mart – but will have been achieved by running a campaign about workplace standards, not exclusively against this particular employer.
USA. According to a late 2002 estimate, 100,000 to 250,000 workers are covered by living wage ordinances. While this is a very small share of the total number of working poor, it is a significant number nevertheless. It has been argued that living wage campaigns, in order to be successful, need to be a combination of back room lobbying and public actions to build power. Community involvement, while not a guarantee, has been found to greatly increase the likelihood of success.

Of course, campaigns elicit resistance from corporate lobby groups such as the National Restaurant Association; large multinational corporations such as McDonalds, Philip Morris and Texaco; and smaller businesses. It is not unusual for living wage campaigns to be outspent by opponents ten to one. Opponents argue that a living wage ordinance is a ‘job killer initiative’; proponents will therefore have to be well-prepared to counter such claims (§ 4.14). They will have to take into account that local media will tend to be sympathetic to the point of view of businesses, because they depend on income from advertisements.

Getting an ordinance passed is one thing, getting it implemented is quite another. In Los Angeles, the trade union movement got the municipality to set up a new department to oversee implementation. Also, funds where made available to educate workers on the rights they can derive from the ordinance. LAANE, a think tank with ties to the union movement, monitored all city meeting agendas to see what contracts were coming up for bid and what subsidies were proposed.

It has been found that ordinances have the best chances of success if resistance to the campaign is strong. This will force the trade union movement and its allies to create a strong coalition to get the ordinance passed, which will subsequently be able to see to it that it is implemented as well.

A living wage campaign strengthens the position of the trade union movement through the coalitions it enters into and because it is an issue that contributes to a positive image. In addition, living wage campaigns can be used to organise workers in sectors that are difficult to organise. For example, SEIU and HERE strengthened their position at LA Airport through a living wage campaign. A further advantage of living wage campaigns is that they target the government. It is therefore possible to engage workers without making them subject to employer repression.174

Since many workers will not be covered by living wage ordinances, it is preferable to raise the minimum wage. At the November 2004 Presidential elections, referenda were held in Nevada and in Florida to raise the state minimum wage by one dollar. In both states, George Bush received the majority of the votes for the Presidency, but two-thirds of the voters supported the initiative to raise the minimum wage. The success in Nevada and Florida was largely due to an active campaign waged by trade unions and community organisations, including ACORN, which raised turnout among low-income voters. At the same time, it is clear that many supporters of Bush find that raising the minimum wage is the decent thing to do. Incidentally, Kerry failed to benefit from the popular support for decent wages, because he did not adopt the wage issue in his campaign.175

At the 2006 Midterm Elections, state minimum wage increases were successfully put to the vote in six states. According to ACORN, the increases in the four states in which this organisation was involved in the campaign will improve the pay of 1.5 million low-paid workers. The minimum wage initiatives further contributed to voter turnout among low-income voters.

5.4 Community benefits agreements

The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) has pioneered initiatives to get unions and community organisations involved in economic development through the strategy of community benefits agreements. These are legally binding documents that are part of the formal economic development agreement between the local government and the developer. The agreements may commit the developer to living wage jobs at businesses that are involved in the development. Further requirements may include providing affordable housing and childcare centres, setting up a youth centre, local hiring, creating a neighbourhood improvement fund and refraining from obstructing union organising campaigns. In one case, a developer himself approached LAANE because community support can make it easier to get a proposal approved.176

The model of the community benefits agreement has been applied successfully in other cities as well. In Milwaukee, for example, a coalition of unions, religious organisations, low-income women and families and neighbourhood organisations targeted a master plan for the redevelopment of Park East, a project in which the City of Milwaukee invests almost 20 million dollars. Through a combination of lobbying, research, and public actions, the coalition managed to get a community benefits agreement passed. The agreement sets wage requirements, mandates wage reporting, and requires green
design and job training and apprenticeship programmes. Further, employers are encouraged to hire local and minority workers and there is a commitment to building affordable houses.  

In Denver, Cherokee Investments needed zoning approval as well as $150 million in tax breaks to redevelop an old factory site and build a ‘$750 million village of offices, stores and apartments’. A local trade union-sponsored think tank helped launch the Campaign for Responsible Development, calling for a community benefits agreement that would include provisions on affordable housing, decent wages, neighbourhood parks and beautification, and an on-site child care centre. A Cherokee spokesperson commented that ‘They want 50 acres of labour utopia’. However, the campaign mobilised hundreds of community members and ended up securing a community benefits agreement. The agreement is seen as an important precedent for future development projects.

A variant of the community benefits agreement are project labour agreements in Seattle, applying to construction sites at the airport and the waterfront. Through these agreements, apprenticeship programmes, pre-apprenticeship programmes and a mentor network have been created. Community activists from outside the unions have been given a role in the monitoring and implementation of policies. Outside America, London Citizens has used a strategy resembling the community benefits agreement with regard to the 2012 Olympics (§ 5.13).

### 5.5 Union Cities and Street Heat

At the local level, the American trade union movement has central labour councils, consisting of different unions. These local branches receive dues from the affiliated unions, and sometimes also receive subsidies. Their income is generally limited, and they depend largely on volunteers. During the 1930s and 1940s, these councils were involved actively in politics, and they had strong ties to community organisations, but since, many councils have become dormant. The Union Cities programme, started in the 1990s, aimed to give the labour councils a role again in revitalising the trade union movement. One of the major successes of the programme has been Los Angeles, where the trade union movement gained a position of strength through an innovative approach.

Councils that want to participate in Union Cities must draw up a work plan based on a strategic analysis and stating concrete objectives. Activities include organising, creating Street Heat teams, forming coalitions with community organisations, waging campaigns to promote economic policies that create jobs, organising economics courses (‘so union members can understand why workers and their families are suffering, who did it to them, and what can be done about it’), lobbying for the right to organise and increasing the diversity of official union bodies.

Many councils see Street Heat as the most important component of Union Cities. The ambition is to recruit at least one percent of the local membership for teams that can be rapidly deployed, for example for solidarity actions to support unions that are active in sectors that are difficult to organise. The members of these teams can be deployed for demonstrations, picket lines, and campaign phone banks. The council also has to create a communication structure that enables the rapid mobilisation of the team.

An example of Street Heat is the Justice Bus in Denver, which is filled with activists in order to support unions or other local actions about ten times a year. Every summer, the bus makes a trip to the worst employers to present a ‘No justice here’ certificate. For balance, ‘Justice here’ certificates are presented to decent employers as well.

It appears that most councils have no trouble mobilising one percent of the membership for Street Heat teams. These teams have proven to be an effective means to engage youth, ethnic minorities and women in trade union activities. The teams also made an important contribution to the mobilisation for the WTO-demonstration in Seattle. However, the number of activities councils participating in Union Cities have to engage in is a bit much for smaller councils, making the programme especially suited to larger councils.

### 5.6 Union Summer

In the 1960s, students’ organisation SDS announced that it would send students to the factories to work there during the summer. At the time, the AFL-CIO did not applaud the initiative: a warning was sent to unions to be on the alert for infiltrators. By 1996, the attitude had clearly changed: the AFL-CIO itself took the initiative to organise a Union Summer to bring students into contact with trade unionism. The inspiration was not so much the SDS, but rather the 1964 Freedom Summer, during which over a thousand privileged students went to the south to help register black voters.
5.7 Steelworkers

Since the 1980s, employers in America have confronted unions ever more aggressively. An important milestone has been the conflict between Phelps Dodge, leader in the copper industry, and the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) in 1983. The company did not follow the usual pattern of threats and concessions, but entered the confrontation with the union head on. Striking workers were replaced, the company employed armed security guards and it convinced the government to bring in the National Guard. The union was not prepared for such a tough confrontation and lost the battle.

In 1990, a conflict broke out at the Ravenswood Aluminium Company, which followed a strategy similar to Phelps Dodge’s. This time, the USWA resolved to win the conflict no matter what. It was decided to run a campaign that combined a broad spectrum of methods: careful research, step-by-step escalation and continuous worker mobilisation.

Local trade union members followed the trucks that transported Ravenswood’s aluminium, to find out who the buyers were. They convinced companies like the Budweiser beer brewery not to use Ravenswood aluminium for their cans anymore. They also issued a complaint with the health and safety authority. The first successes did not make the union rest on its laurels, but instead it further escalated the campaign.

AFL-CIO researchers found out that one Marc Rich, an entrepreneur who had been involved in all kinds of shady businesses, was running Ravenswood behind the scenes. Rich had an interest in keeping his activities secret, so the union decided to follow him wherever he went, generating publicity all the time. Trade union activists visited Switzerland, the Netherlands, Britain, France and Rumania. They approached investors and protested at trade conventions.

Thanks to the support of the local community, the strike was kept going for twenty months. In the end, the strikers achieved a convincing victory. Laid off workers could return to the company, workers won a wage increase and health and safety issues would be addressed.

The USWA would continue using the strategy that had been developed during the Ravenswood conflict. At first, it was thought that the strategy could simply be copied at other companies, but that did not work. The union learned that every campaign must
always most of the work is done by volunteers. Often, charitable foundations are an important but uncertain source of income. Unions sometimes contribute as well, but have so far not decided to allocate resources to worker centres on a structural basis.

There is a risk that solving workers’ problems may encourage passivity: workers will put their trust in others to solve their problems, rather than taking action themselves. Many centres try to counter this by encouraging service users to become volunteers themselves. At a centre in Oakland, users can collect credit points by doing volunteer work, which entitles them to services provided by the centre. At a Long Island centre, people who want to follow a course must commit to spend at least ten hours organising and training other workers.

The Long Island centre is often approached by workers who have been underpaid or not paid at all by their employers. The centre has rather successfully pursued legal action against such employers, but it realised that this approach contributed little to organising workers. It was therefore decided to use a different strategy, visiting employers with a group of a few dozen workers and a video camera to demand back wages. Similar approaches have been used in Toronto and by anarchist activists supporting restaurant workers in Amsterdam.

5.8 Worker centres

Workers at the lower end of the labour market are often difficult to organise by traditional methods. Often, work is outsourced to small companies that go bankrupt, only to be replaced by new companies. Workers have weak ties to the workplace because jobs are often temporary and some workers have multiple jobs with different employers.

An answer to this scattering of workplaces is to organise people not where they work, but in the community they live in, an approach that is sometimes called community unionism. Often, this involves the creation of workers’ centres. At most centres, workers can get advice on labour and immigration law; sometimes advice on other issues such as housing is also given. Many centres also provide training and education, especially language and computer courses. Often, people who are not union-members can use the services of the centre under specific conditions.

Generally, worker centres are pragmatic when it regards the choice of activities to be offered. Some will for example organise bingo drives and other social activities to strengthen the ties with the local community. A centre in Winnipeg provides space for unions and an unemployed workers’ organisation, but also to a choir and an artists’ association, both with ties to the trade union movement. A centre in Los Angeles has set up football teams and a band, and has participated in the local marathon.

Some centres have been created by unions, but others by community organisations that felt that unions were not doing enough for workers at the lower end of the labour market. In the USA, there are 135 worker centres. The British Unemployed Worker Centres have a similar character. The Spanish CC.OO has created over one hundred Centros de Información para Trabajadores Extranjeros, where immigrants can turn to for advice and to follow courses.

Most centres have limited budgets. Some can employ a few staff members, but almost

5.9 Organising Academy

In the 1970s, the AFL-CIO did not attach much importance to organising new groups of members. “Why should we worry about organising groups of people who do not want to be organised?”, the then president George Meany said. Later, it became apparent that the trade union movement could not afford such an attitude, and in 1989 the Organizing Institute was created. The Institute was to analyse what factors contribute to the success of organising campaigns and to advise unions on the development of strategies. In addition, it was charged with training new organisers. The institute is paid by the federation and affiliated unions.

Following the AFL-CIO example as well as that of the Australian ACTU’s Organising Works initiative, the British TUC and some of the affiliated unions decided to create the Organising Academy. The initiative also aims to increase the diversity of trade union staff. The average trade union official was ‘pale, stale and male’, with years of experience as a trade union activist in a traditional sector. The academy has been able to recruit a different type of employees: a majority of trainees are women under thirty
The Organising Academy has further set up an advanced organising programme, offering courses on ‘busting the busters’ (how to counter union-busting tactics used by employers); organising beyond recognition (aimed at building sustainable union structures at the workplace); training skills for organisers; using new technologies; and strategic campaigning.

5.10 Autonomous unions in France

In France, besides the large confederations, smaller autonomous workers’ organisations are active. The most important is Union Syndicale Solidaires, which has 80,000 members. Within Solidaires, the so-called SUD unions play an important role. An important characteristic of these organisations are their close ties to numerous action groups. For example, key figures within Solidaires are also actively involved in organisations of globalisation activists (ATTAC), the homeless (DAL), the unemployed (AC!), and the undocumented. They also work with workers with precarious jobs at chains such as Pizzahut and ‘McDo’, as well as in cleaning and distribution.

The membership of Solidaires is only a tenth of that of the CFDT confederation, but organisations such as Solidaires are more influential than the size of their memberships might suggest. This is due not only to their coalitions with other organisations, but also to their direct action methods and use of publicity. For example, unemployed workers visit companies equipped with video cameras to leave their resumes. Organisations of the unemployed have also occupied a large number of branches of social security agency Assedic, to demand an additional allowance for the unemployed. Other methods include squatting buildings to provide housing to the homeless and providing church asylum to the undocumented.

Of course, the unions are active at the workplace as well. Most companies are not prepared for how young workers stand up for their rights. As one consultant put it: “Most larger companies are used to a Red Army-style CGT, in which the troops follow the commands coming from above. The young activists, they prefer direct action. They are prepared to zap, to change unions if they feel they are not listened to”.

While the formerly communist CGT sometimes has difficulties with the methods of young workers, this applies less to Solidaires. Solidaires does not have the traditional federation structure: it is in fact little more than a network of small unions that operate autonomously. They focus on practical workplace initiatives and do not want to build a
internet. It is emphasised that materials must look good: the objective is to “market an idea of radical union activity, to see if it is possible to make radical unionism attractive to the masses”.

The objectives of the movement include equal pay for agency workers; the right to organise for flex workers; a basic income for all Europeans; and free access to knowledge and information. Flexible work is not resisted but welcomed, on condition of income security and equal opportunities.

5.12 Learning reps

In an attempt to diversify its 200,000 workplace representatives, the TUC has been creating new roles for activists. A successful example are the learning representatives or learning reps, who provide advice on career development and learning opportunities at the workplace. The learning reps are partly funded by the government.

There are already 14,000 learning reps, a third of whom are new activists, who have helped over 100,000 people access courses in 2005. Among them are relatively many young people, women and ethnic minorities. The ambition is to have 22,000 learning reps and train 250,000 people per year in 2010. Although there are no data on the characteristics of the users of the services of learning reps, it seems that many are minorities, women, part-time and agency workers and workers at the lower end of the labour market.

Besides providing workers with learning opportunities, the learning reps are also a means to strengthen the workplace presence of unions and their ties with local communities. In order to achieve this, they work with organisers, and use techniques such as workplace mapping, workplace surveys and forming coalitions with community organisations.

The TUC has published a brochure containing case studies of learning rep activities. Some examples are listed below:

- In Lancashire, the GMB used learning services to build a reputation as a community union, with strong ties to the Asian community. Among the learning reps is an imam of a local mosque. Some workplace learning centres will be opened up to families and friends of union members, some even to the entire local community.
- The CWU was used to Royal Mail branches where 99.9% of workers were members,
but now also has to deal with data processing centres were no one is a member. It often regards low-paid, temporary jobs, and over half the workers have an ethnic minority background. At the Stockport centre, 360 out of 500 contract staff have been organised, partly through learning services. Among the courses on offer are language courses.

• Usdaw managed to increase density at a distribution centre from 54% to 99% thanks to learning services. At the distribution centre, 1,500 people do shift work, sixty percent of them women and 25% ethnic minorities. A questionnaire was distributed among staff in order to find out their learning needs. The union negotiated successfully for the wages of union learning reps to be paid by the employer.

• At a meat processing factory, T&G offers learning opportunities to Portuguese and Spanish workers. These include IT, maths and English courses, but also citizenship classes on how to access social services, register with a doctor and access legal services.

• In the financial sector, Unifi has recruited 1,000 new members in one year thanks to the learning services. These services are not only seen as a recruitment device, but also as a means to help workers deal with the consequences of globalisation (§ 4.11).189

5.13 Community unionism in London

The City of London is the richest region in Europe, but London also has hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers, often recent immigrants from countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. While unemployment remains the most important cause of poverty, over one in three children living in poverty reside in households where at least one person works.

The East London Communities Organisation (Telco) has campaigned successfully for living wages in the expanding local service economy. Telco is a coalition of over 40 churches, mosques, trade union branches, schools, student unions, hospitals and other organisations, founded in 1995. Collectively, these organisations represent at least 50,000 members.

Similar coalitions have been set up in other parts of London, under the umbrella organisation London Citizens, as well as in Birmingham. The Citizens organisations not only campaign for better wages, but also for issues such as affordable houses, safer and cleaner neighbourhoods and a humane treatment of asylum seekers. According to

many, an important characteristic of these coalitions is the commitment to a long-term, sustainable alliance, rather than ad hoc collaboration on specific issues.

In 2001, Telco started a living wage campaign, aimed at securing decent wages and conditions for low paid workers in East London. Following some initial research, the campaign started by targeting the wages and conditions of cleaners who work in hospitals, and the banking headquarters at the prestigious Canary Wharf complex. Pressure was built by mass attendance at hospital board meetings, demonstrations outside hospitals, a three-day strike at a hospital, demonstrations and share-holder attendance at HSBC’s Annual General Meetings, as well as the occupation of an HSBC branch in the City. The campaign gained support from the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, who has set up a living wage unit.

An important new phase in the campaign has been the involvement with the London bid to host the 2012 Olympics. “Often with such large projects, people complain afterwards that the local community has not benefited”, explained organiser Andrew Crossley. “In this case, we wanted to get involved at an early stage, in order to make sure that the local community does benefit”.

The efforts of London Citizens resulted in a letter of intent from the Mayor of London. If London was to win the bid, he would promote the use of local labour; ensure that workers are paid a living wage; train local residents for these jobs, especially in construction; build at least 4,500 affordable houses; and improve local services.

At that time, the Olympic bid chairman indicated that this commitment to the local community made the London bid ‘eminently more winnable’. Last summer, London did indeed win the bid.

However, the recently set up Olympic Delivery Authority refuses to live up to the living wage agreement. It claims that it would be illegal to make wage conditions on contractors. Community organisations are protesting the decision. “We won’t stop our campaign until we are sure that London 2012 will truly be a ‘living wage Olympics’,“ a London Citizens spokesperson commented.

The London initiatives can be seen as a successful instance of community unionism. A recent study found that 22% of London’s low-paid workers were members of a trade union, while two-fifths claimed to be active in a faith-based organisation. This suggests that coalitions with churches and mosques may enlarge the impact of trade unions’ organising efforts.
Coalitions with community organisations may have other advantages as well. For example, board members of hospitals may be members of churches and mosques affiliated to Telco. “Once these community organisations get involved, the whole dynamic changes” according to organiser Andrew Crossley. “It is no longer just workers versus management”.

Collaboration with faith organisations is not entirely uncontroversial among trade unionists. Some fear that achievements on women’s and gay and lesbian rights may be compromised. However, other trade unionists say that unions are afraid to lose control when they work with other organisations.

Public sector union Unison has worked with Telco organising in the health sector, while banking sector union Unifi supported the campaign at Canary Wharf. The collaboration with T&G has been somewhat difficult at first, but has improved, and a number of T&G branches have recently affiliated to Telco. T&G is actively organising cleaners in London. This is being done in collaboration with the American service employees’ union SEIU, famous for its Justice for Janitors campaign (§ 5.1).

The Citizens coalitions include not only faith organisations and unions, but also for example schools. School children participated in the Living Wage March as part of their citizenship classes. Concern for street crime around schools was one of the reasons for Telco to get involved in campaigns for safer and cleaner neighbourhoods.
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6 Conclusions

While trade unions in most Western countries face serious challenges, there is also an enormous variety of innovative initiatives to cope with these challenges. These innovations have not yet turned the tide for the union movement as a whole. Nevertheless, some major successes have been achieved by individual unions and by local coalitions. At present, it is difficult to say what kind of approach will work under what circumstances. It is still very much a matter of trial and error. That said, there do seem to be some general characteristics that can be identified in many successful initiatives.

Organising new groups: Many initiatives focus on organising new groups, which are underrepresented among the unions’ membership: young people, ethnic minorities, and workers in the growing services sectors. Organising these groups is essential if the trade union movement is to remain a relevant social actor in the future.

Bottom up and top down: Initiatives need to be bottom up in order to have real grassroots support and to reflect the issues that are of concern to the population. However, they also need a strong commitment from the top, in order to overcome resistance to change and to have the level of coordination that is needed to be able to take on large corporations and to influence government policies.

Local and international: At the local level, unions build community support and test innovative approaches. At the same time, international networks are crucial to be able to cope with the consequences of a globalising economy.

Social justice: Opponents often try to depict unions as outsiders who are fighting for narrow self interests. In order to counter this, unions frame their objectives as social justice issues.

Coalitions: Coalitions with community organisations strengthen the support for political campaigns, help unions get in touch with ‘hard to reach’ workers and help counter the image of unions pursuing narrow self-interests.

Long-term commitment: Some crucial campaigns have taken as long as twelve years before bearing fruit. It is important to convince union members (and staff) of the importance of investing time and resources in long-term objectives.

Partnership not without strength: Collaboration with employers and with governments can yield important results, provided that unions do so from a position of strength and actively involve their membership in what they do.

Battle of ideas: In many countries, unions have to cope with a political climate that is hostile to workers and their organisations. Some unions have successfully set up think tanks and worked with research institutes to regain the initiative and gather support for alternative economic and social visions.
7 Appendices

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7.2 Abbreviations

ABVAKABO FNV  Dutch public sector union.

ACI  Agir ensemble contre le Chômage. French organisation of the unemployed.

ACFTU  All China Federation of Trade Unions.

ACORN  Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. Organisation of people with low and moderate incomes.

ACTU  Australian Council of Trade Unions.

AFL-CIO  American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations.

AOb  Algemene Onderwijsbond. Teachers’ union in the Netherlands.

ASDA  British subsidiary of the American Wal-Mart corporation.


CC.OO.  Comisiones Obreras. Spanish confederation, originally communist.

CE  Confédération étudiante. Students’ union, France.

CFDT  Confédération Française démocratique du travail. French general confederation.

CGT  Confédération Générale du Travail. French confederation, originally communist.


CWU  Communication Workers Union, UK.

DAL  Droit Au Logement. French organisation that campaigns for the homeless.

DTI  Department of Trade and Industry, UK.

ETUC  European Trade Union Confederation.

EU  European Union.

EVV  Europäischer Verein Wanderarbeiter. European organisation of labour migrants.

Finsec  Finance Sector Union, New Zealand.

FNV  Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging. Netherlands Trade Union Confederation.

FNV Bondgenoten  Largest union in the Netherlands, private sector.

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GMB General and Municipal Boilermakers’ Union. UK.
GURN Global Union Research Network of the ILO.
HERE Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. America. By now merged with Unite.
IG BCE Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie. German energy union.
IG Metall Industriegewerkschaft Metall. German manufacturing union.
ILO International Labour Organization. UN organisation of trade unions, employers’ organisations and governments.
ISS Multinational cleaning and facility services corporation.
IUF International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations.
JwJ Jobs with Justice. American coalition that campaigns for social justice.
LAANE Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy.
LHMU Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Union, Australia.
NGO Non Governmental Organisation.
NSWTF New South Wales Teachers Federation, Australia.
OCAP Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. Organisation that uses direct action on behalf of the unemployed and other groups.
PSI Public Services International. Global union federation.
SDS Students for a Democratic Society. American students’ organisation in the 1960s.
SEIU Service Employees International Union. Innovative and fast-growing union in the USA.
SER Sociaal-Economische Raad. Socio-Economic Council, the Netherlands.
SPD Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Social-Democrat Party of Germany.
SUD Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques. Group of autonomous unions in France, now affiliated to Union Syndicale Solidaires.
T&G Transport and General Workers’ Union, UK.
TCO Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation. Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees.
TELCO The East London Communities Organisation.

TUC Trades Union Congress. British confederation.
TWU Transport Workers Union, Australia.
UFCW United Food and Commercial Workers, America.
UNI Union Ideas Network, UK.
UNI Union Network International. Global union for skills and services.
UNIFI British finance union, merged with Amicus in 2004.
UNISON British public sector union.
UNITE HERE American union, result of merger of textile union UNITE and hotel and restaurant union HERE.
USAS United Students Against Sweatshops.
Usdaw Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, UK.
USWA United Steelworkers of America. Organises metal workers, but also government and health care employees.
Ver.di Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft. United Services Union, Germany.
WSUN Working Students Union Network, Australia.
WTO World Trade Organization.
7.3 A framework of union-community coalitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalition elements</th>
<th>Coalition measures</th>
<th>Ad hoc Coalition</th>
<th>Support Coalition</th>
<th>Mutual-support Coalition</th>
<th>Deep Coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Concern</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org Common Interest</td>
<td>• Initiated by request to support a specific group's agenda/issue/event</td>
<td>• Issue or interest linked to a specific organization's agenda</td>
<td>• Mutual direct interest of participating organizations is the basis of coalition</td>
<td>• Issues are direct to interest of participating organizations and to a broader social vision for all working people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Frame</td>
<td>• Reactive message</td>
<td>• Specific concern linked to issue (rather than value)</td>
<td>• Issue either dominated by union members (union initiated) or not connected to union members</td>
<td>• Issues have direct connection to organization members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member engagement</td>
<td>• Issue not necessarily connected to union members</td>
<td>• Issue either dominated by union members (union initiated) or not connected to union members</td>
<td>• Union issues framed broadly as “community issues”</td>
<td>• Union and organizations actively engaging rank-and-file members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition dominated by initiating organization</td>
<td>• Significant buy-in and financial and staff resources committed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Org. Relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition dominated by initiating organization</td>
<td>• Deeper mobilization and participation of organization members</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment and apacity</td>
<td>• One organization requests others to support their strategy</td>
<td>• Coalition dominated by initiating organization</td>
<td>• Union issues framed broadly as &quot;community issues&quot;</td>
<td>• Deeper mobilization and participation of organization members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Strategy</td>
<td>• Break with episodic and tactical rather than strategic engagement</td>
<td>• Short term coalition</td>
<td>• Joint decision-making and strategy</td>
<td>• Decentralized structure based on deep connections between union and community groups at membership level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initiating organization develops strategy</td>
<td>• Formal organizational structure</td>
<td>• Involvement of research and planning</td>
<td>• Long term strategic plan to build power</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No joint decision-making or coalition organizational structure</td>
<td>• Informal union dominance of coalition or limited union engagement</td>
<td>• Organizations share similar political and cultural practices that lead to mutual interests</td>
<td>• Organizations share similar political and cultural practices that lead to mutual interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context and the scales of power</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Short term</td>
<td>• Shared power; orgs brings resources to coalition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Opportunities</td>
<td>• Reactive and short-term and limited to specific immediate opportunity or threat</td>
<td>• Formed around immediate opportunities or threats, but set medium timeframe for influence</td>
<td>• Joint decision-making and strategy</td>
<td>• Opportunities for engagement calculated and strategic and created by coalition/movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale / Power</td>
<td>• Engagement of power occurs at any level – can be at a level not related to actual decision-making</td>
<td>• Engagement of power occurs at the same level as the decision makers</td>
<td>• Engagement of power is sustained and long-term on level of the decision makers</td>
<td>• Engagement of power occurs on various levels including the level of decision making and the local level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths / Weaknesses</strong></td>
<td>• Tactical resources, boost campaign morale, can lead to longer term, more strategic coalition relationships</td>
<td>• Can effectively coordinate and direct resources to a reactive, single issue campaign but reflect a relatively superficial solidarity</td>
<td>• Deeper bonds may narrow the number of organizational partners</td>
<td>• Build upon a shared social vision – is decentralized and can be explosive, but difficult to “direct” because of decentralized actions on multiple levels of power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not themselves build powerful relationships</td>
<td>• Can be one-sided and make deep participation more difficult</td>
<td>• Easier to activate and mobilize membership due to direct interest connection – can open up deeper coalitions</td>
<td>• Require organizations to see themselves in a broad social vision beyond their own self-interest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• May create resentment over being “used”</td>
<td>• Can be one-sided and make deep participation more difficult</td>
<td>• Deeper bonds may narrow the number of organizational partners</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Many trade unions have seen their memberships decline, while having to cope with a globalising economy, the erosion of workers rights and increasing labour market flexibility.

*Innovative trade union strategies* describes how some unions have responded to these developments, by running assertive organising campaigns at the workplace, engaging in strategic research, strengthening their position in local communities and launching internationally coordinated campaigns.

Some of these initiatives have been surprisingly successful, gaining tens or even hundreds of thousands of new members and improving the conditions of millions of workers, often low-paid workers in the growing service sector.

“In a way, the trade union movement must reinvent itself in order to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. *Innovative trade union strategies* describes successful examples of how trade unions across the world have taken on today’s challenges. I hope these examples may serve as a source of inspiration”. Agnes Jongerius, President of the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation FNV