

MAKE SOME NOISE! MEMBER MOBILIZATION IN TRADE UNIONS AND  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

A Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines member mobilization using a British community organization and a British trade union as exemplars. Although there has been substantial work on union revitalization on the one hand, and the emergence of alternative, community organizations on the other, no study has compared the challenges these organizations face, in encouraging member mobilization. The focus is on member commitment and the organization's legitimacy: the trade union gains merely pragmatic legitimacy from its members and the relationship between the member and the union is mainly instrumental, based on a negotiated exchange. The community organization, in contrast, gains moral legitimacy from its members and exemplifies a productive exchange between the members and the group.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maite Tapia was born in 1981 in Bruges, Belgium. Before coming to the US, she graduated in Law at the University of Ghent (Belgium), pursued a Master in European and International Law, and a Master in International and European Relations at the University of Parma (Italy). After her studies she worked at the Institute of Labor in Bologna (Italy), focusing on European labor relations. She entered the MS/PhD program in August 2007, majoring in international and comparative labor.

To Paulien

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before coming to Cornell, my professor in Parma gave me the following advice, taking a book from her shelf: ‘If you want to study labor relations in the US, this guy [pointing at the author of the book] is the best in the field’. A couple of months later I found myself in the office of ‘this guy’, who soon enough became my advisor: Professor Lowell Turner. Lowell has been the single most important person throughout my graduate studies. His ongoing support, optimism, and mentorship have been fundamental in developing this thesis.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I first came to Cornell University, I started working with my advisor, Professor Lowell Turner, on an innovative US trade union campaign called ‘Hotel Workers Rising’. The campaign was led by the union Unite HERE and took place mainly at a national level. Through my research on this hotel campaign, however, I discovered a collaboration between this big American trade union and a small community-based organization in London that I’d never heard of, London Citizens (LC).

I started to conduct some phone interviews to see what London Citizens was all about and took a closer look at the literature on social movements, organizational studies, and the debate around trade unions versus alternative forms of workers’ representation. What did this tiny organization in London have to offer a massive organization such as Unite HERE? My curiosity only grew, so I decided to spend six weeks with London Citizens during the summer of 2008 to figure out what kind of organization it was.

Rather than start off from concrete hypotheses or research questions, I went into the field collecting data on this organization which I hoped would allow me to generate a new theory or at least contribute to the current theoretical debates; in other words, I took a so-called grounded theory approach. I learned as much as possible about LC’s emergence, campaigning strategy, organizational structure, challenges and role in society. As a participant observer, I attended LC meetings, followed the training sessions, and was involved in the campaigns. I immediately knew this wasn’t going to be a desk job. On July 11, 2008 we held a ‘Zimbabwe Action’: within five days of the training, I found myself in the middle of Parliament Square, singing and dancing, surrounded by thousands of Zimbabweans and Britons; since the majority of

the Zimbabweans are refused asylum-seekers living clandestinely in England, London Citizens called for them to have the right to work. I was amazed by London Citizens' dynamics, its energy, and its capacity to mobilize thousands of people.

During my time in London, I conducted many interviews, not only with LC staff, organizers, and members, but with union representatives and influential scholars, as well. In these interviews I heard the same thing over and over again: whether the interviewees agreed or not with London Citizens' politics, they were all amazed at the organization's mobilization capacity. This is what spurred this Masters Thesis question: what explains the astonishing member mobilization of this tiny community organization? Or to what extent and how have community organizations been able to develop an active grassroots base?

### ***'Representation Gap'***

Over the last three decades, the system of worker representation based on trade unionism and collective bargaining has been eroding, raising concerns about the emergence of a 'representation gap' (Towers 1997). In the UK, the majority of employees are no longer covered by collective bargaining, and a unilateral decision taken by the employer is now the most frequent method of setting the terms of employment (Cully et al. 1999). Even the German Metalworkers Union (IG Metall), a powerful 2.3 million member organization, has been confronted with a declining membership (Turner 2009).<sup>1</sup> With globalization and the loss of unionized manufacturing jobs, trade unions are facing a special challenge trying to represent low-paid service workers. Their difficulties organizing these and other workers can be

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<sup>1</sup> In the US, overall union membership dropped from 23.5% in 1973 to 12.4% in 2003. Concerning the UK, the union density dropped from 50.4% in 1980 to 29.3% and for Germany from 34.9% in 1980 to 22.6% in 2003. For the US 13.8% and for the UK 35% of the workforce were covered by collective bargaining agreements in 2003. For Germany 63% of the workforce was covered by collective bargaining agreements in 2006 (Bispinck 2008; Visser 2006).

ascribed to factors such as the change in the economic structure; the transition from goods-producing to service-producing industries, resulting in outsourcing and subcontracting; the increase of 'born' non-union jobs; and employer hostility towards trade unions.

These external factors, however, are not the only reason for union decline. Unions face internal challenges as well. First, unions suffer from a loss of legitimacy (Chaison and Bigelow 2002). They are often perceived as vested interests groups based on purely pragmatic legitimacy. Their actions are narrowed down to workplace related issues, falling short of the wider social world vision (Moody 2007). Allan Flanders (1970) wrote 'trade unions have always had two faces, sword of justice and vested interest. But it is the second, rather than the first, that is now turned most frequently to public view' (15). One of the challenges for the unions is to win back their legitimacy, to 'revive and to redefine the role as sword of justice' (Hyman 2004). Second, unions suffer from membership disaffection and low levels of member commitment, which in turn affects member mobilization (Lawler et al. 2009; Lévesque et al. 2005). Many members consider the union an institution providing protection, their contribution a mere payment for a service. According to Flanders (1970), trade unions must be a mixture of movement and organization, providing the vitality and power needed to survive. Indeed, an active layer of members is needed to keep the movement alive, keeping the union dynamic, able to adjust to a changing environment.

This mutual reinforcement of the internal and external challenges has strongly contributed to the decline in union membership and density, leading to the so-called 'representation gap'. Facing this dilemma of representation, scholars have proposed two types of solutions. Revitalizing unions, and thus maintaining the role of collective bargaining and of trade unions to represent workers, is one way to fight the decline;

this has spurred a plethora of literature covering trade union revitalization (e.g., Frege and Kelly 2003; Heery, Kelly and Waddington 2003; Johnston 1994; Turner, Katz, and Hurd eds. 2001). Another way is by emphasizing alternative forms of worker representation, such as community-based organizations and worker centers; a growing body of literature covers the emergence of these alternative forms and the difficult collaboration between these organizations and traditional trade unions (e.g., Fine 2005, 2006, 2007; Osterman 2001, 2006a; Tattersall 2005; Tattersall and Reynolds 2007; Wills and Simms 2004).

My approach is novel. I start off from what seems to be a paradox: Trade unions have numerous members and resources, but find it very difficult to mobilize their members. Community organizations, on the other hand, have much smaller memberships, don't have as many resources, but display a tremendous capacity for mobilizing their bases. By comparing both organizations, I show that managing legitimacy and nurturing member commitment are critical in explaining sustained member mobilization. Based on data gathered in the UK, I examine the challenges of London Citizens, the oldest, largest, and most important community-based organization in the UK, and of Connect, a small British union for professionals in communications.<sup>2</sup>

My main argument is that community organizations' capacity for developing strong member commitment and gaining moral legitimacy from their members and the public will lead to sustained member mobilization. Trade unions, on the other hand, encounter difficulties in cultivating member commitment and are granted only

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<sup>2</sup> In comparing trade unions with community organizations, I try to control for size as much as possible. Trade unions can be million member organizations, whereas community organizations go only into the thousands. In this case, LC is the broadest community organization, with over 120 institutional members. Connect, on the other hand, although a small union, still has about 20,000 members. In terms of sheer size, comparing these two organizations thus makes sense.

pragmatic legitimacy from their members, resulting in short-term member mobilization.

The layout of this thesis is as follows: In the first chapter, after describing my methodology, I discuss the similarities and differences between trade unions and community-based organizations, stressing for both the importance of mobilization. In chapter 2, I will describe in more detail my theoretical argument, showing how critical it is for organizations to manage legitimacy and nurture social commitment. Chapter three and four will be case studies, illustrating the structure, strategy, and organizing campaigns of one community organization, London Citizens, and one British union, Connect. Chapter five will provide a comparative analysis. In my conclusion, I stress the importance for organizations of gaining legitimacy and cultivating social commitment. I then make some recommendations and suggest ideas for future research.

Please note that I use the name London Citizens, although the organization started out as The East London Citizens Organization, or TELCO. The organization expanded to the West and the South of London and its umbrella name became London Citizens.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

I collected the data for this study in 2008-2009, conducting over 40 interviews. My research methodology has been qualitative, gathering data mainly through participant observation, interviews, and examination of archival documents. In the summer of 2008, I spent six weeks with the community organization London Citizens. This involvement gave me critical insights and deepened my understanding of how the organization works. I interviewed not only LC staff, organizers, and members, but union officials and influential scholars, as well.

In June 2009, I attended the Trades Union Council (TUC) Organizing Academy Summer School at Ruskin College, Oxford, on ‘Organizing in Economic Downturn’. This four-day workshop, offering perspectives on campaigning methods and providing tools for strategic decision-making for capacity building and union growth, was aimed at twenty union officers and organizers from diverse UK trade unions. This event gave me the opportunity to closely examine their organizing strategies and led to many informal conversations with the participants from six different UK unions on the themes of trade union challenges, union decision-making, organizing, and member commitment.

I conducted over 40 interviews, mostly recorded, with LC community members and organizers and with British trade union officers and organizers on the subject of organizing strategies, member commitment, and the power and influence of the organization in the society. I had multiple meetings with scholars from LSE, London Metropolitan University, Queen Mary, and the University of London (Birkbeck College), who shared their expertise on the matter, leading to interesting discussions.



Regarding the Connect case study, I interviewed union representatives of different positions within the union: the union president, union officers, the director of organizing, union organizers, and lay representatives. However, to strengthen the external validity of my case, I conducted interviews with national and regional officers of Unison (UK's largest public sector union); union organizers of Britain's biggest union, Unite; and national and regional organizers of Britain's trade unions' umbrella organization, the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Furthermore, I analysed documents concerning the strategies of other UK unions such as the transport union (RMT), the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). These additional sources gave me an accurate picture of the overall situation in the UK concerning British unions' internal struggles on issues of member commitment and organizing strategies.

London Citizens was selected for this study because as a grassroots organization it derives its fundamental power from mobilizing its members. In addition, it is the oldest, largest and most important community-based organization in the UK (Wills 2006, Holgate 2008). Connect was selected for the following reasons: this rather small union puts a strong emphasis on organizing. The union has a dedicated organizing team and is on an ongoing basis involved in different high-profile campaigns. As their website announces, this is a 'campaigning union' which currently is trying to get recognition at Vodafone, T-Mobile, and O2. Moreover, the union structure allowed me to compare newly set up branches, for example at Vodafone, with well-established branches, for example at British Telecommunications, to examine the similarities and differences regarding member mobilization.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A union 'branch' in the UK is the equivalent of a US local union.

I use the case study as my main research strategy. According to Yin (2003), the case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly delineated (13). In chapter one I will draw analogies between trade unions and community organizations.

## CHAPTER 3

### TRADE UNIONS AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

In this section, I illustrate why it is useful to compare trade unions with community-based organizations and why member mobilization is important in both cases. I do not argue that trade unions should become community organizations or vice versa, since each type of organization has its own specificities and role in society, and it is clear as well that neither of the organizations aspires to fully become the other. Nonetheless, I show that there are significant similarities between the two, providing the opportunity for new insights and laying the ground for mutual learning.

How different are community-based organizations from trade unions? The term community organization has been used throughout the literature in different ways, for example, according to Milofsky (1988) community organizations are “generally small, loose structured, voluntaristic, and heavily democratic organizations that identify themselves with a specific geographic area of a city, town, or rural area” (3); Marwell (2007) defines community-based organizations as operating only in that local area, having as their mission to attend to the needs of disadvantaged community members and drawing on significant community members participation. I focus on a specific type, the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation) model, the origins of which go back to Saul Alinsky’s model in 1930s Chicago. Today there are over 59 IAF affiliates organizing in 21 US states, as well as in Canada, Germany, and the UK.

The main characteristics are the following: These organizations are deeply rooted in geographic communities. Their dues-paying members are civic society institutions such as churches, schools or trade unions, providing the organization a certain level of stability and making it a membership-based organization rather than a charitable institution (Zald and Denton 1963). These broad-based organizations

revolve around multiple-issue campaigns, considering labor market concerns a by-product of their larger agenda (Osterman 2006a). Their goal is to accrue power and bring social change, mostly through the use of public advocacy and collective action in order to improve the living and working conditions of the community and beyond. Finally, their core activity for gaining power and strength is leadership development and training. I argue that these organizations fall somewhere between full-blown bureaucratic organizations and social movement organizations (SMOs).<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, they have dues-paying members, paid professional staff, and offices, but on the other hand, their goal is to bring about social change and build capacity in their communities principally through the use of public policy, leadership development, or (disruptive) collective action.

A central focus of community-based organizations is indeed leadership development and their engagement in building ‘relational power’<sup>5</sup>. One key activity is to identify and develop activists and organizational leaders from within the ranks of low-wage workers or other institutions, so that the workers/members develop their own voice within the organization itself, resulting in direct participation in the decision-making process and the capacity to speak and act for themselves. According to Fine (2006), this emphasis on leadership development leads to high staff commitment and low staff turnover. In addition, the organization focuses on trust and cooperation between and among people to get things done. Lead organizers of community organizations have many one-to-one conversations with leaders from the

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<sup>4</sup> A social movement organization can be defined as a complex, formal organization; there must be a degree of temporal continuity; movements are change-oriented; movements have at least one target; most current definitions acknowledge that movements must use some extra-institutional tactics (e.g., protests or demonstrations); they are characterized by a collective identity; and finally, there is some form of leadership (e.g., Jenkins 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Relational power is a term used by the Industrial Areas Foundation to describe the type of power the organization seeks to build, namely, the power to act collectively together through the initiation and multiplication of “effective public relationships” (e.g., Orr 2001).

member institutions to strengthen their relationship. Increasing the ‘relational power’ is considered the key factor in community building.

Community organizations differ from traditional trade unions in the following ways: first, community organizations are non-bargaining actors (Givan 2007) and therefore have less economic power. These organizations are not part of the collective bargaining process and thus their main strategy for achieving change is not workplace related; rather, they work through advocacy and mobilization, putting pressure on the employers or the policy makers through local community organizing, thus bridging the traditional work/home gap, and building coalitions with organizational allies. Case studies have shown that a key to their success lies in their ability to mobilize thousands of people (Osterman 2006a, Holgate and Wills 2007).<sup>6</sup> Second, community organizations are composed of civic institutions, trade unions of individual members. This institutional membership base gives the community organization a certain degree of stability (even when people move away from town, the church or school will still be there), bestows legitimacy (Suchman 1995), and provides much needed resources (Osterman 2006a).

These organizations, on the other hand, show important similarities as well, making a comparison fruitful. First, community-based organizations, just as trade unions must be seen as drivers for economic and social change seeking improvements in the members’ living and working conditions. Although community organizations don’t exclusively focus on labor issues, for many IAF organizations, the living wage campaign has been one of their key activities.<sup>7</sup> It is clear, therefore, that certain goals, such as higher wages, are absolutely in line with those of the trade unions.

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<sup>6</sup> If I take into consideration the entire group of civil society organizations, service delivery rather than mobilization comes in first place. The specific model of community organizations I look at (i.e., the IAF model) clearly prioritizes mobilization over servicing members.

<sup>7</sup> Other issues are affordable housing, safety in the streets, etc.

Second, shifting the lens to the unions, although collective bargaining is essential to a union's success, stress is increasingly being put on mobilizing members: Some scholars have emphasized the need for 'rank and file' renewal, focusing on the development of active and participatory workplace unionism (Fairbrother 1996, 2002). Member participation and mobilization are considered key in reversing union decline.<sup>8</sup> In the US, for example, there has been a shift from a 'servicing model', or business unionism, to an 'organizing model' of trade unionism (Blyton and Turnbull 1998, Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998, Fletcher and Hurd 1998). As many authors have shown, this US model of organizing has been adopted in the UK (e.g., Fiorito 2004; Heery 2002). The concept of 'organizing model' emphasizes organizing workers, empowering them through campaigns and mobilization. There is a "union building" approach to membership growth, in which the union will foster activism and leadership, a crucial element of community organizing as well. Furthermore, unions will not only show their effectiveness in improving employment conditions, but they will emphasize moral discourse, using language of "justice", "dignity", and "respect." They stress the "qualitative" function of unionism in providing protection and voice within the workplace (Hyman 1997). This path of renewal focuses on union revitalization by such means as comprehensive campaigns, coalition building, and demands phrased in terms of social justice. Turner, Katz and Hurd (eds. 2001), for example, have shown how trade unions successfully won their campaigns by framing the debate in broad social justice, rather than narrow economic terms.

Other scholars, however, emphasized a 'managerial' form of renewal (e.g., Heery 2003), focusing on a more top-down approach to revitalize trade unions. According to this strategy, union leaders at the national level would, for example, apply performance management systems in order to achieve a certain number of new

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<sup>8</sup> For an opposing argument see Hickey, Kuruvilla, Lakhani (2009).

members per year.<sup>9</sup> A strong national, centralized union leadership would monitor the progress toward these goals. A growing body of literature (Bach and Givan 2008, Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004, Milkman 2006), nonetheless, suggests that this dualism between ‘rank and file’ and a ‘managerial’ form of renewal represents a false dichotomy. In order to revitalize, unions should adopt a ‘hybrid’ approach: combining grassroots participation with strong, national level union policy, in other words, combining bottom-up with top-down strategies. Following this rationale for trade union revitalization, it is clear that workers’ mobilization is pivotal. In addition, since mobilizing campaigns can go on for years (e.g., Connect’s Vodafone campaign took 15 years), developing sustained mobilization is crucial.

In sum, first, there is a striking similarity between the union renewal elements – leadership development, social justice framework, and member mobilization – and the characteristics of community organizations mentioned before, allowing for a constructive comparison. Second, it is clear that workers’ or members’ mobilization is critical to trade union revitalization as it is to community-based organizations. In the next chapter I will describe my theoretical framework, focusing on the concepts of legitimacy and commitment.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Unison, UK’s largest public sector union, establishes specific aims and goals each year that cascade down to the shop steward and worker representatives (Bach and Givan 2008).

## CHAPTER 4

### SUSTAINED MOBILIZATION

Mobilization, according to Tilly (1978), refers to ‘the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action’ (7), or the ways in which individuals are transformed into a collective actor. Following Kelly’s mobilization theory (1998), worker mobilization will most likely occur when these five elements are present: 1) there is a sense of grievance or injustice 2) you can attribute that directly to the employer 3) the presence of an effective organization 4) confidence that the action will be effective 5) the right ‘framing’ of leaders. Kelly’s theory, however, is workplace limited, focusing on a specific form of mobilization: the engagement of members in local, on-site struggles alongside fellow workers. As a consequence, member engagement will fade away if, for example, the sense of injustice disappears. I take Kelly a step further and show how organizations can maintain a level of member engagement over time, even if all five conditions are not met.

In *Organizing Urban America* (2008) Heidi Swarts compares different styles of organizing between faith-based and secular movements. According to Swarts, mobilization capacity, or the ability to mobilize members, is the result of an organization’s resources, mobilizing culture, and strategic capacity. First, considering ‘resources’: scholars of the resource mobilization paradigm (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1973) rejected Piven and Cloward’s thesis in *Poor People’s Movements* (1977), illustrating that at least a minimal form of organization is required as a tool for mobilizing.<sup>10</sup> According to resource mobilization scholars, however, if social

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<sup>10</sup> In *Poor People’s Movements*, Piven and Cloward argue that poor people’s organizations and mass disruption are irreconcilable: the logical consequence of a formally structured organization with a mass membership, will be the abandonment of oppositional politics.



movements become too institutionalized, they manifest only weak conservative tactics. With my case studies I will illustrate how London Citizens, despite a certain level of institutionalization, still manages to mobilize their grassroots. Second, Swartz defines “mobilizing culture” as “shared meanings, norms and practices...tacit norms and values that are nonstrategic and underlie more conscious strategic framing of group identity and issues” (xviii). It is not always clear, however, how such culture has been created. By bringing in social commitment theory I illustrate the ‘relational culture’ of London Citizens, versus the more ‘service-driven culture’ of Connect. I show how London Citizens, by emphasizing joint tasks and shared responsibility, is capable of developing high levels of member commitment, whereas trade unions display only low levels. Third, to mobilize the members strategic leadership is critical (Ganz 2000, Hyman 2004). I illustrate the importance of leadership choices for organizational legitimacy. London Citizens is able to gain moral legitimacy from its constituents because it focuses on broad-based social issues. Connect, on the other hand, tries to mobilize its members around narrow workplace-related issues, securing merely pragmatic legitimacy and therefore short-term member mobilization. Finally, Swartz uses the term mobilization *capacity*, which implies the potential to mobilize rather than actual mobilization. In this thesis I use ‘sustained mobilization’ to illustrate not only an organization’s ability to mobilize, but under which conditions actual long-term mobilization is most likely to occur. I argue that the following two processes are critical in developing ‘sustained mobilization’: cultivating social commitment and managing legitimacy.

### ***Cultivating Social Commitment***

The literature on union commitment (Gordon et al. 1980) shows that the greater the commitment, the greater the actual participation and activism (Bamberger, Kluger and

Suchard 1999, Fullagar et al. 2004). Union commitment is measured through beliefs about unionism, loyalty to the union, willingness to work for the union, feelings of responsibility towards the union, and faith in the objectives of organized labor. In addition, research has shown that some workers do join a union for ideological, rather than purely instrumental reasons (e.g., Heshizer and Lund 1997; Fullagar et al. 1997; Sverke and Kuruville 1995; Sverke and Sjöberg 1997). These studies distinguish instrumental (reward based) member commitment from normative (ideologically based) member commitment. The results show that union members with high levels of normative commitment will be more participative than members with high levels of instrumental commitment. Although there is extensive literature on union commitment, it is often treated in very static terms: something that is present, at a high or low level, or absent. But why do members feel loyal or responsible to the organization in the first place? Where does this commitment come from, or how was it formed? Does social identity theory provide satisfying answers?

According to social identity theory, people will categorize themselves as similar to some, the in-group, and different from others, the out-group (Hogg 2006). They identify themselves as members of a particular category, for example, as trade unionists or as members of a community organization. If people have a sense of belonging, defining and evaluating themselves in terms of properties of the group, they will behave as group members. This process of social identification, then, will increase the probability of social action and collective protest (Stürmer and Simon 2004). Brewer and Silver (2001) take the social identity theory a step further and show how social identification becomes a crucial factor in collective mobilization. According to their survey, there is a direct, positive correlation between the strength of members' identification with a particular group and group loyalty. Although they do a good job in explaining how a group-based identity will be manifested, their argument

is less clear regarding how group identity is formed. So again, social identity is perceived as a static phenomenon: it is present or absent. But if feelings of social identity towards a group are weak or absent, how can they be strengthened?

I argue that answers can be found by looking at social commitment theory linked to different forms of social exchange. This approach offers a more dynamic perspective on how strong levels of commitment or social identity can be formed. Social commitments are conceived as direct ties between individuals and larger social units, which may comprise local groups or organizations as well as larger and more distant communities or nations. Such ties involve feelings and sentiments about the group or group affiliation and beliefs about its normative or moral properties (Lawler et al. 2009). A commitment to an organization can be based on purely instrumental considerations, in which case people give to the group and receive benefits in return. This transactional tie can become relational or group-oriented, however, through an emotional or affective process.

Thus, according to the social commitment theory, when people work together on joint tasks repeatedly over time they will develop affective ties to the group. Indeed, people are emotional/affective beings (Damasio 1999) and will attribute their individual feelings to the group. They will generate and sustain shared affiliations in a work organization, and are most likely to promote collectively-oriented behavior under the following two conditions: when the task involves joint activities and when there is a sense of shared responsibility. In addition, these affective ties will be strengthened if the sense of shared responsibility generates complementary emotions directed at self and others; when people communicate or share their emotions with each other; finally, when structures give people a strong sense of control and self efficacy. For example, Lévesque et al. (2005) illustrate the linkage between union member disaffection and social identity. Using Canadian data gathered from local

union leaders and members, they show how union democracy leads to less membership disaffection, on the one hand, and strong feelings of union identity and commitment on the other. According to the study, members who felt that they were consulted over union policy and had opportunities to shape union direction thought the union was relevant.

I focus on the different forms of social exchange as one of the core structural dimensions generating feelings of group affiliation. Different structural ties will generate different degrees of group-like behavior or group-affiliated feelings. Indeed, different forms of social exchange have different propensities to produce stronger or weaker social commitments to social units (Lawler 2001). The fundamental idea of social exchange is the following: two or more actors can produce a joint good by contributing their individual resources or talents to the collective endeavor. There are four different structural forms of exchange: negotiated exchange, involving the explicit trade of goods or services based on well-defined and binding agreements; reciprocal exchange, involving sequences of unilateral giving between two actors over time; generalized exchange, a unilateral form of exchange separating giving and receiving, in which person A helps person B, person B helps person C, and so on; and finally, productive exchange, the most group-oriented form, which actors seek to produce a valued result through their joint collaboration. According to the literature, productive exchange will result in the enhancement of positive emotions and the reduction of uncertainty, two distinct mechanisms crucial to explaining commitment and social order. This form has indeed the greatest capacity to produce person-to-unit ties.

I argue that the trade union can be seen as a model of negotiated exchange, and the community-based organization as one of productive exchange. First, trade union members pay a membership fee in order to belong. There is a specific trade of

benefits: if you pay the fee you enjoy the services of the trade union, ranging from help with administrative procedures to the coverage of the collective bargaining contract. The absence of task jointness or the perception of shared responsibility towards the trade union leads, however, to weak person-to-group ties, since purely instrumental ties, without affective or emotional ties between the worker and the trade union, are not likely to generate group affiliated commitment.

Community-based organizations, on the other hand, are clear models of productive exchange occurring around a collective or group project. People will devote time and effort to the group and in turn receive valuable benefits from the organization (Lawler et al. 2009). As the most group-oriented form of exchange, the community organization involves high degrees of interdependence, or joint control over outcomes (Molm 1994). For example, whenever a major demonstration is planned, turnout is very important. The community organization will set a target of, for example, 5,000 people, and will hold the leaders of the institutions accountable for showing up with their members. Every demonstration ends with an evaluation among the members in which the event is being discussed. If the goal for turnout has been reached, the members will applaud and congratulate one another. This positive outcome will enhance positive emotions, strengthen group solidarity and feelings of accountability and shared responsibility.

Another important link exists between the type of social exchange and trust. Trust, according to Molm (2000, 2003), is defined as “expectations that an exchange partner will behave benignly, based on the attribution of positive dispositions and intentions to the partner in a situation of uncertainty and risk”. Molm shows empirically that reciprocal exchange produces stronger trust and affective commitment than negotiated exchange. In negotiated exchanges, known terms and binding agreements provide ‘assurance’ that one will not be exploited, without requiring trust.

Following Molm's rationale, I argue that trust in a productive exchange is stronger than in a negotiated exchange. Community organizations are group-oriented institutions, in which social commitment is highly present. Strong feelings of group cohesion and solidarity generate a high level of trust among the actors, which further strengthens the group feelings.

Finally, it is important to take into consideration the structure of trade unions and community organizations. According to Lawler (2009), under hierarchical governance, meaning the presence of strong vertical control, there will be little opportunity for individuals to solve joint problems through collaboration, thus reducing the sense of shared responsibility necessary for social commitment. Trade unions can be million member organizations, with local or regional offices spread all across a country. To maintain internal unity and order within the organization there is a definite vertical control, with formal decision-making procedures, and clear lines of individual responsibility. As a result, however, the individual member does not develop strong emotional or affective ties to the organization, exhibiting rather a weak social commitment. Community organizations, on the other hand, are based on institutional membership, generating a certain level of stability. I argue that this form of governance can be compared to a network structure. It is a cluster of independent institutions whose transactions are coordinated by long-term collaboration, bringing mutual benefits, and are linked together through relational, trust-based ties. This governance structure provides greater opportunity than does hierarchy for individuals to solve joint problems through cooperation and thus develop the sense of shared responsibility necessary for social commitment (Lawler et al. 2009).

In conclusion, different types of commitment and organizational structures will lead to different levels of mobilization. However, cultivating social commitment within the organization is necessary but not sufficient: legitimacy matters, and

managerial initiatives affect the degree to which organizational activities are perceived as pragmatic versus morally legitimate.

### ***Managing Legitimacy***

The concept of legitimacy has been used to explain union decline (e.g., Lichtenstein 1999; Murray and Reshef 1988), but often without a common understanding of what legitimacy is and why it matters for unions. In organizational studies, the foundational work of Weber (1968) and Parsons (1960) has described it as the “result of a relationship between an organization and its environment, with legitimacy conferred upon an organization when its goals are consistent with or support widely shared values and expectations” (Chaison, Biglow, Ottensmeyer 1993). As a consequence, legitimacy is considered critical, as it affects the organization’s ability to secure and mobilize monetary, political, or social resources and hence its very survival (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978, Meyer and Rowan 1977). Legitimacy matters in institutional environments, or environments “characterized by elaborate rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy” (Scott and Meyer 1991: 123). Since a trade union operates in a predominantly institutional environment, its organizational survival will largely depend on the legitimacy it confers.

Suchman (1995) further elaborated the organizational legitimacy research by defining the concept and identifying three main types of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. Chaison and Bigelow (2002) then applied Suchman’s theoretical foundation of the concept to trade unions.<sup>11</sup> First, legitimacy is defined as “a

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<sup>11</sup> Although Chaison and Bigelow (2002) apply this concept of legitimacy in the American context, I argue that the same results can be found for British unions. As mentioned earlier, British trade unions follow a ‘life path’ similar to that of their American counterparts: since the 1980s, they have been suffering a huge decline in membership, and they are currently focusing on ‘organizing’ as a way to revitalize the labor movement.

generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman 1995: 574). In the literature, three forms can be detected: The first form, pragmatic legitimacy, is considered the most narrow and elementary; it is based on the self-interested calculations of an organization and its constituencies; the organization gives something and receives something in return. This type of legitimacy is very weak, lacks ideological foundations, and is therefore often transitory: if constituents no longer find net value in supporting the organization, its legitimacy is threatened. Moral legitimacy, on the other hand, is conferred by constituencies because they perceive the activities of the organization as “the right thing to do”, promoting societal welfare as defined by the socially constructed value system. Finally, cognitive legitimacy is the most powerful source, since it is conferred by the constituencies’ “mere acceptance of the organization as necessary or inevitable based on some taken-for-granted cultural account” (Suchman 1995: 582). Whether or not the activity benefits the constituents, or reflects positive social valuation, the organizations are simply accepted as necessary or inevitable. Suchman argues that the power of this form of legitimacy can be explained as follows: “alternatives become unthinkable, challenges become impossible, and the legitimated entity becomes unassailable by *construction*”. In sum, these three forms of legitimacy can be linked; according to Suchman, “as one moves from the pragmatic to the moral to the cognitive, legitimacy becomes more elusive to obtain and more difficult to manipulate, but it also becomes more subtle, more profound, and more self-sustaining, once established” (585).

Chaison and Bigelow (2002) use the concept of legitimacy as a frame of reference for “understanding the sources of union strengths and weaknesses” (96). Unions’ loss of legitimacy has been detrimental, as can be observed in declining



membership, union density, power, and influence in society (Chaison, Bigelow, and Ottensmeyer 1993). The authors illustrate, first, how unions have been most successful in winning recognition campaigns or strikes when they managed to maintain pragmatic legitimacy with their members (e.g., offering concrete outcomes for strikers) while pursuing moral legitimacy from other constituencies, such as the public or nonmembers (e.g., by framing the strike in broad terms of social welfare). According to the authors, pragmatic legitimacy alone is unsustainable and will not be sufficient for institutional growth or survival. Rather, both moral and pragmatic legitimacy are necessary, in which the former will strengthen the latter. Thus, to gain new constituents or maintain old ones, unions need to be perceived as socially valued institutions, going beyond merely serving the self-interest of members; or else, the survival of the organization will depend on an instrumental cost-benefit analysis and is likely to be rejected. According to the authors “[p]ragmatic legitimacy cannot be assumed in the absence of a shared view of the moral legitimacy” (57).

The authors continue by showing how unions gain moral legitimacy from coalition partners or the general public when engaging in particular actions or campaigns (e.g., anti-NAFTA campaign), without thereby gaining moral legitimacy permanently as institutions. Indeed, the public confers moral legitimacy on their actions when they “do the right thing”, but not on the unions themselves. As a consequence, unions must constantly seek to renew moral legitimacy on a situational basis and “show that their traditional activities transcend parochial concerns. At the same time, unions must respond to pressure from their members to maintain pragmatic legitimacy” (89). Chaison and Bigelow conclude on a rather pessimistic note, arguing that unions’ neglect of the pursuit of moral legitimacy, while assuming the presence of continuous pragmatic legitimacy, leads to their inability “to attract new members, to retain present ones, and to maintain an influential position in the economy” (95).

Chaison and Bigelow have not only shown the importance of legitimacy for unions' survival, but have argued as well that gaining or maintaining legitimacy does not occur passively, depending rather on the unions' strategic decision-making. This argument clearly draws on Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (1986), who emphasize the strategic choices made by leaders of management, labor and government that shape the transformation of industrial relations.

In conclusion, the leadership greatly influences the type of organization. Will it be an 'insurance' organization, protecting 'vested interests' and thus merely feeding into the instrumental needs of its constituencies, or will it act as a 'sword of justice', standing for deeper ideological social values, acting as the 'social fabric' of society? In line with Chaison and Bigelow (2002), I argue that trade unions are having difficulties in gaining moral legitimacy from their constituents, but are rather perceived as vested interest groups based on pragmatic legitimacy. Community organizations, on the other hand, are pushing to gain moral and even cognitive legitimacy as they strive for social justice and social change.

The following table illustrates the effect on mobilization, linking the form of commitment with the kind of legitimacy:

Table 1. Member Mobilization

	LEGITIMACY	
COMMITMENT	PRAGMATIC	MORAL
Negotiated	Short-term	Conflict: non-existent
Productive	Short-term	Long-term

First, I argue that moral legitimacy and productive exchange between the members and the organization will lead to long-term sustainable member mobilization. When pragmatic legitimacy is combined with a mere negotiated exchange between the group and the members, mobilization will not be sustainable over time. When, however, pragmatic legitimacy is combined with a productive exchange between the members, member participation might be more intense than in the previous case, but it will not be sustainable over the long term. Finally, members are left in an ambiguous state when the organization wants to be a more morally ‘minded’ organization, while the members have joined out of pure self-interest: member mobilization will be virtually inexistent.<sup>12</sup>

In the following two chapters, I illustrate how the organizations exhibit their different forms of legitimacy and member commitment, as well as the consequences in terms of member mobilization.

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<sup>12</sup> As I will explain further, this is especially the case when an organization ‘shifts’ from a pragmatic to moral type of legitimacy.

## CHAPTER 5

### LONDON CITIZENS

Our job as organizers is to challenge this culture, where people *don't* meet.

At the beginning of every Assembly it is important to recognize the institutions that are present. 2,500 people were in the room; at the end there was a 'roar' in the room that felt like power, like it never felt before.

(London Citizens Organizer)

On July 11, 2008, over a thousand Zimbabweans and Britains gathered at Parliament Square: the Zimbabwe Action was about to take place. Since the political situation became dangerous, many Zimbabweans fled to England. The majority are refused asylum-seekers living clandestinely in England; they changed their names, lying about their identity in order simply to survive. Recognizing the dire conditions of these exiles, the community-based organization London Citizens called for them to have the right to work. They organized a Mass at St Margaret's church, followed by speeches on Parliament Square and a rally in the heart of this vibrant city, crossing the Thames and passing Big Ben, with the goal of handing a letter to Gordon Brown, UK prime Minister, explaining their call for action. The Action Day was a big success: over 1,000 people showed up, singing and dancing; people felt inspired and empowered to make a change.

It was during that summer that I joined London Citizens' Summer Academy School. For about six weeks I was immersed in LC's organizational structure; I took part in its campaigns, attended its meetings, and was involved in daily activities. As of today, December 2009, the British government has not yet made any firm decision on the situation for tens of thousands of Zimbabwean immigrants. On the other hand, the

ties between the Zimbabwean Catholic Community and London Citizens have grown significantly, encouraging the former to become a member of LC.

In this chapter I examine London Citizens' origins, its strategies to develop strong membership commitment and to gain moral legitimacy, and finally, its structure.

### ***The Origins of Community Organizing in Britain***

Community organizing is relatively commonplace in the US. In Britain, however, broad-based organizing didn't fully develop until the late 1980s. If we go back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British trade unions were based in the communities, playing critical roles in shaping those communities. Communities were 'places in which people could walk to and from work, ... places where work, home, leisure, industrial relations, local government and home-town consciousness were inextricably mixed together' (Hobsbawm, 1987: 40). The urban and industrial areas displayed a distinct working-class culture, and trade councils were established in all the major towns and cities. In 1868, activists of the trade unions, grounded in local communities, formed the Trade Union Congress (TUC). This period of 'community-based trade unionism' evolved into a 'representational community unionism' during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Labour Party was formed (Wills and Simms 2004). The trade unions, through the Labour Party, were represented in local and national government, working on issues of public policy and the redistribution of wealth. The trade unions were able to shape community life directly through worker representation or indirectly through the political power of the Labour Party. Historically, the labor struggles in Britain, such as the London Match-girls' strike of 1888<sup>13</sup>, the London

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<sup>13</sup> Due to poor working conditions at the Bryant & May's match factory in Bow, London, women and teenage girls, led by socialist activist Annie Besant, went on strike. This led to the establishment of the first trade union for women in Britain.

Great Dock Strike of 1889<sup>14</sup> and the Poplar Council revolt in the 1920s<sup>15</sup>, promoting workplace-based solidarity and community support, were key events leading to the first Labour Party majority in the House of Commons in 1945 (Weinbren 1998).

Labour-controlled councils, a new form of local governance, mushroomed.

During the 1960s and 70s, although it was a period of remarkable social movement activism, ‘no mass community ... developed’ (Twelvetrees, 2002: 6). According to Miller (2001), this failure was linked to the institutionalization and/or bureaucratization of community organization. Lowe (1986) argues that the local, grassroots mobilizations became bureaucratized either once they had met their demands or when the campaigns turned into organizations. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the trade unions’ legitimacy greatly weakened: the transformation of the economy, such as the de-industrialization and rise of global competition, and eventually, in 1979, the electoral victory of the Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher, were part of the blame. And although the Labour Party tried to use its control of the local councils, its struggles failed, most spectacularly in London where Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council in 1986 (Livingstone 1988).<sup>16</sup>

The arrival of community organizing in Britain during the 1980s was thus energized by several factors (Jamoul 2006). First, Thatcherism dismantled the safety nets of the welfare state, eroding the representation of the working people. The policies of the New Right were directed towards economic regeneration at the expense of community or social welfare. Second, the Church of England, acknowledging that it was failing as an institution to support the neighborhoods, became a major initiator of

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<sup>14</sup> The dock workers, mainly unskilled, poorly-paid and casual workers, of the port of London went on strike. This resulted into a strong trade union among the dock workers.

<sup>15</sup> During the 1920s, in Poplar, one of the poorest neighborhoods in London, a major tax protest took place. This revolt received wide support from the general public as well as from the trade unions.

<sup>16</sup> Not all the local councils were abolished, but they were combined with other councils. The Conservative Party had pure political motives, since by doing so, they robbed the more radical inner-city councils of much of their power.

community organizing projects. Its 'Faith in the City' report documented the political and economic deterioration of the urban areas, leading to the formation of the Church Urban Fund. The main task of this fund was to assign resources to city-wide broad-based to support projects responding to the decline of these urban areas and to the powerlessness that people felt. The Church Urban Fund is still a critical funder of community organizing projects. Finally, recognizing the seriousness of the situation, social workers and senior clergy from the UK went to the US and attended the IAF training course. It became clear that the American model of building power and doing politics through the community was not only viable but also necessary.

### ***London Citizens***

London Citizens, launched in 1995, is the oldest and largest broad-based community organizing association in Britain. The organization is a unique alliance of over 120 institutions. Based on Saul Alinsky's model, London Citizens focuses on skill and leadership development of the community members and takes collective action for social change through forceful streetlevel campaigns. London Citizens has been able to survive and thrive on a budget of less than £400,000 per year: The bulk of its income, about 85%, comes from donations or grants from external foundations. The remaining 15% comes from its membership dues.<sup>17</sup>

While roughly 120 institutions are part of London Citizens, the organization has only about seven paid community organizers and a total staff of 12. Although this number seems very low – trade unions can have hundreds of people working for them – actual member mobilization is impressive.

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<sup>17</sup> The total funds for the year 2008 were around £380,000 (about \$630,000) (source: London Citizens, Annual Report 2008).

### *Cultivating Social Commitment: Relational Culture*

They [London Citizens] don't have much money so the power is from people; ... if you can get enough people from different communities ... to form relationships with each other, that then gives you the potential to mobilize power to change things in the community; ... in practice that means that you have to foster relationships between very different groups and people to get the business done.

(Interview LC member)

Community organizers believe in the power of individual relational meetings, the so-called one-to-one conversations. A one-to-one is a face-to-face conversation with the aim of exploring or strengthening the ties between the community organization and the particular institution. These conversations focus on asking 'why' more than 'what' and are the means to build and maintain relationships, aiming to understand the other person's reasons and motivations and to build trust. As one organizer explained, 'you listen and tell them about you, not about your lives at Oxford'. As a general rule, a community organizer should undertake ten to fifteen one-to-ones a week. These relational meetings are the backbone of the organizations and vital for all the member communities. The community leaders believe that without these conversations, the relationship with the individual members will be weak and superficial and, as a consequence, the institutions will flounder and fail. Thus, the main aim is to build relational power.

In addition, community organizers believe in the "Iron Rule" - never do for others what they can do for themselves (Alinsky 1971). The organizations will create the context for leadership development, offering training in the art of politics and organizing, which can range from intensive 10-day training to shorter periods or evening programs. The members are not reduced to 'clients' or 'categories of need,'



but are considered active citizens with strength and talent, democratic and entrepreneurial potential. The issue of skill development and capacity building is highlighted through the Summer Academy Training program and other leadership training sessions throughout the year. The Summer Academy, for example, held each summer since 2003, trains student organizers undertaking action and research tasks, focusing mainly on living wage issues and low wage sectors. This training program has proved to be an excellent recruitment base for new London Citizens organizers. Finally, every year London Citizens holds a major assembly in which all the institutions come together, evaluate the past year, and decide which issues they will tackle the following year. At the beginning of the assembly, a representative of each institution goes on stage and says “we pay the dues to the community organization”. This symbolic gesture is significant in many ways: publicly paying dues enforces the commitment and accountability of each single organization; but more importantly, when one institution after the other comes on stage and lays down the money, a feeling of power and strength goes to the group as a whole. The single institutions feel part of something bigger, something powerful. Moreover, the politicians who are often invited to attend the assembly remain astonished by the public display of commitment and total power. London Citizens, however, doesn’t set an increase in sheer membership numbers as its main priority. Thus, if an institution pays its dues but never shows up at an assembly, it is hardly considered a member (Interview LC trustee).

### ***Managing Moral Legitimacy: Campaigning on Broad-based issues***

London Citizens works on multiple issues, such as living wage, jobs and skills training, affordable housing, immigration and asylum rights. London Citizens started the first living wage campaign in Europe, inspired by ground-breaking living wage

campaigns in the United States (Luce 2007; Holgate and Wills 2007). Rather than replace unions, the campaign demonstrated that unions and community-based organizations can work together for mutual advantage (Wills 2004). LC leaders decided to target the hospitals and health sector first, then the banks, later the universities. These campaigns received good media coverage and resulted in huge successes for the city's low-wage workers. The campaign 'Our Homes, Our London' called for affordable housing through community land ownership. London Citizens augmented the pressure and pulled out a major, highly visible stunt that was all over the mainstream media. In July 2007, over 100 families camped out in red tents by City Hall, urging immediate action. Another campaign, 'Strangers into Citizens', calls for a new asylum policy, implementing an 'earned regularization' model as a 'pathway into citizenship for long-term migrants' (London Citizens 2009). As a result, on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, over 10,000 people marched from Westminster Cathedral to Trafalgar Square to put the issue of undocumented migrants in the UK back on the political agenda. Moreover, every action is followed by a moment of reflection or evaluation: What did we do right? What did we do wrong? How can we improve? Discussing among the members whether the goals have been achieved is an important element, spurring feelings of accountability and control. It is part of the internal democracy of the organization.

The Living Wage Campaign, 'Our Homes, Our London' or 'Strangers into Citizens' are shining examples of collective action campaigns strategically deployed by London Citizens to achieve its goals, which at the same time also strengthened its membership base and increased its legitimacy among the broader public. Indeed, a key to its success has been the ability to mobilize thousands of people.

***Dynamic Structure: ‘Paralysis of Overanalysis’***

During my training at London Citizens, the Director would often mention ‘the paralysis of over-analysis’. As one member put it, ‘there is that kind of energy and flexibility to say yes we’ll do it and see where it goes; we will not think about it for a year.’ Indeed, as a community organization, LC focuses on direct action rather than on endless discussions of ideas or theories.

London Citizens’ small and flexible structure allows it to be dynamic, making it easy to adjust to environmental changes. When an action or idea does not work, it will be discarded. For example, in 2006, the members voted to target the hotel and hospitality sector. Since the Olympics are coming to London in 2012, and many hotels are being built, it is important to ensure that the hotel workers have good employment conditions. As a result of hard lobbying and negotiating with the former Mayor Ken Livingstone, a statement of economic guarantees was signed at City Hall to include payment of the London living wage to all workers on Olympic projects. This was a tremendous victory for London Citizens. An additional outcome of the hotel campaign was the creation of the ‘London Citizens Workers’ Association’ (LCWA), a unique attempt to organize London’s low-wage migrant workers. Although the main purpose of the LCWA was to eventually bring the workers into a trade union, tensions between these two organizations began to grow. As a result, London Citizens decided to drop this project and shift its focus again towards negotiations with management.

Decisions are made democratically through regular Strategy Teams and large Assemblies, increasing the feelings of shared responsibility and the sense of control. These meetings are quite different from traditional union meetings. First, someone is given the honor to open the meeting with a reading, or a profound reflection. Then, they go around the room and ask who you are, and which institution you represent.

“Who you are” is part of the organizational culture, fostering again a sense of accountability and loyalty towards the group.

Furthermore, these institutions work as a ‘check’ on each other. In that way, the organization tries to guard against becoming too bureaucratic or oligarchic as this would undermine its ‘movement’ ability. According to an LC member, ‘when too much focus is on a certain action, to get a grant, other people may say ‘wait a minute, that is not our objective and steer it back in another direction’. This can be tied to the concept of goal displacement, or how an oligarchic leadership structure will lead to a loss of member commitment. Community organizations learn how to get around goal displacement (e.g., Osterman 2006b).

In conclusion, the case of London Citizens illustrates, first, how the relational culture within the organization has been key in building trust and solidarity among the members and towards the group. One-to-one conversations are LC’s main tools in cultivating intense feelings of social commitment among the members. Second, the different campaigns demonstrate its broad, multiple issue agenda, rather than a single, narrowly defined one, gaining thereby moral legitimacy from the members and the public. Finally, the dynamic structure enables London Citizens to increase member participation and to avoid oligarchy or goal displacement.

What are some of the similarities with or differences from a trade union? What kind of campaigns do unions engage in, and how could we describe their underlying organizational culture? In the next chapter, I discuss the case of the trade union Connect.

## CHAPTER 6

### BRITISH TRADE UNION CONNECT

Before going more into detail on the Connect case, let me provide some background information on the origins and the current state of affairs of the British trade unions in general. Traditionally, the system of industrial relations in the UK has been characterized by voluntary relations between the trade unions and the employer organizations, with minimal state interference (Eurofound 2009). In 1868, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) was formed; in 1871, the Trade Union Act recognized trade unions as legal entities, granting them the right to strike. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period of economic prosperity, was conducive to the development of trade unionism. This system, in which collective bargaining was far more important than legal regulation, grew remarkably in the post-war years, highlighting the role of the trade unions in securing industrial peace and efficiency.

During the 1960s and '70s, however, as a result of the economic crisis, both industrial conflict and trade union militancy grew. This culminated in the election of a conservative government, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in 1979. Her anti-union and neo-liberal agenda contributed to a catastrophic decline in trade union membership: legal restrictions were placed on trade unions' ability to engage in industrial action; the majority of sectoral collective agreements were dismantled; and many areas of the public sector were privatized.<sup>18</sup> In 1997, a 'New Labour' government under Prime Minister Tony Blair was elected. As a way of offering a more conciliatory approach to trade unions, the Employment Relations Act (ERA) 1999 was introduced. This statutory procedure for union recognition, involving the

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<sup>18</sup>Currently, collective bargaining occurs mainly at the company level, spurring high levels of decentralization. According to Visser (2004), the degree of bargaining centralization in the UK stands at a mere 13%.

Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), can oblige an employer to recognize a union that can demonstrate a certain level of employee support.<sup>19</sup> According to Brown et al. (2001) a central aim of the ERA is to promote voluntary recognition agreements, while using the statutory route as a last resort.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the ERA Act, the Labour government, and some occasional small rises in membership since 1997, trade union density in 2008 stood at a historic low of 28%, or about 6.5 million members; there are about 200,000 union reps and 3,000 full time officers and organizers (Interview TUC organizer). As a result of this decline in membership, many British trade unions have merged: in 1988 there were 326 unions; this went down to 238 in 1998, and finally to 167 in 2008 (Eurofound 2009). Since the mid 1990s, to reverse the decline, British trade unions have increasingly engaged in recruiting and organizing new members based on the US ‘organizing model’ (Gall and McKay 2001; Heery et al. 2000). In 1998, the TUC Organizing Academy was established to train union organizers and help unions that are organizing for growth (TUC 2009). In September 2008, the TUC introduced a new initiative, the Activist Academy, to develop the skills of union reps and workplace activists and provide support and resources to build stronger unions in the workplace (TUC 2009).<sup>21</sup> In the following paragraphs, I will lay out how Connect is facing challenges of membership decline and member ‘disaffection’. Although the focus is on Connect, I include some quotes by other trade unionists addressing similar issues.

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<sup>19</sup> This process is similar to the system of certification under the National Labor Relations Board in the US.

<sup>20</sup> According to Gall (2005a), however, the number of voluntary recognition agreements has fallen from a high of 685 in 2001 to 239 in 2004.

<sup>21</sup> In the UK, the trade union movement created the Labour Party in 1901. As a result, British trade unions considered the Labour Party their main tool of power: everything gets done through the political machinery, so there are fewer mass union demonstrations than, for example, in France. Today, however, many British trade unions realize how the political landscape has changed: the Labour Party is no longer merely the expression of the labor movement; second, there is a real chance that the Tories will come to rule again. This is not to say that the British trade unions will start mobilizing their members on the streets; however, they do realize that power must come from within, that workplace activism is needed.

Connect is an independent trade union, affiliated with the TUC, representing workers in the telecommunications industry. Its origins, like that of the industry itself, lie in the publicly owned Post Office. From its foundation during the First World War until British Telecommunication's (BT) privatization in 1984, there were only two employers for which its members worked: the Post Office and Kingston Upon Hull Telephones, both public sector. Although the union started off by representing first line engineering managers, it gradually increased its scope to cover all workers in supervisory, technical and managerial roles. In 1984, BT was privatized, which meant that the union had to change its 'ethos' from public service to private company (Connect 2009). The union is now dealing with global companies in a free market. As a consequence, it has slimmed down its bureaucracy, centering its activities on members' needs, developing e-based systems, and taking a professional approach to organizing members. In 2000 it was named Connect, representing about 20,000 members in over 600 companies, from multinationals to self-employed consultants. Currently, negotiations are ongoing concerning a merger with Prospect, which would create the UK's largest professional and managerial union. Prospect represents about 102,000 engineers, scientists and managers working in the private and public sectors in fields such as energy, the civil service, heritage, agriculture, defense, shipbuilding, transport and the environment. Connect would become part of a dedicated sector for communications workers within Prospect.

Since Connect is a rather small union, gaining membership is absolutely critical to its survival. As one officer puts it, 'it is important to have the income stream going'. The bulk of Connect's membership comes from BT. Immediately after the post-privatization, however, there was a massive membership reduction. At its height, Connect had about 30,000 members, but by the mid 90s this had come down to 17,000. Different factors can be highlighted: BT downsized drastically, offering many

unionized workers very good voluntary redundancy packages; furthermore, the union moved from the public to the private sector. In the UK, union density in the public sector is still very high or about 59%. Joining a public sector union seems almost a natural thing, or a 'right thing to do'. A big contrast can be found in the private sector, with only about 16% union density. As Connect shifted to the private sector, it was no longer a given that workers would join a union.

As a result, the union found itself with two options: manage the decline or go after growth in new areas. Connect decided upon the latter: their strategy for reversing the decline was to 're-brand' the union. First, they put increased resources into organizing, engaging a professional organizing team. Second, they expanded the range of offered services, creating their own job search service and advice service, thereby attracting people who didn't know anything about unions. According to the Director of Organizing, the new people who came into the industry did not match the 'traditional union member' profile anymore. Many were young and female, rather than middle-aged white men, and often they came in without a union background. In addition, the job search service, helped to retain many of BT's redundant workers. During the last five years, the union recruited about 3,000 members, becoming actively involved in organizing drives in O2, Vodafone, T-Mobile, and Ericsson, while at the same time trying to improve their membership base at BT.



### *Service-driven Culture*

The deal was: I join the union, I pay my subs [dues], there is no other expectation; if I need you [the union], you will be there. So when we start to talk about our curriculum to our members, it is like turning around an oil tanker: We told them one message when we brought them into the union and now we bring another... If we believe in collectivism and participation then we need the courage to say this to people; because at least the people will be recruited on a genuine basis.

(Organizer TUC)

One issue Connect and other unions struggle with is the problem of ‘service-driven recruitment’. Workers will join mainly to get protection; they don’t join to become active in the union. Indeed, the union is portrayed as an insurance company, and, unless the individual is immediately affected by a certain issue, tends to be just ‘something that is there’. One TUC organizer said that the union has been called ‘the fourth emergency service’: First you have the police, the ambulance, and the fire brigade, then the union. Just as you hope you never need to call the police, you hope you don’t need the union. Although servicing its members is part of what a union is all about, that is not the only message Connect wants to get across. The union aims at fostering activism as well under a ‘union building’ approach to membership growth: Both servicing and organizing are crucial; indeed, the ‘servicing’ versus ‘organizing model’ is, by many trade unionists, considered a false dichotomy.<sup>22</sup> Union officers underscore the importance of the link between individual membership, member participation, and the effectiveness of the union, creating, in other words, a membership that is conscious of its collective contribution.

At Ericsson, the management unilaterally tried to change the terms of the contract without consulting any of the employees. As a result, one union member

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<sup>22</sup>As Fletcher and Hurd (1998) argue as well, these two ‘models’ should not be considered mutually exclusive.

called the Connect organizer and asked what the union would do about it. The organizer kicked the ball back into the member's camp, saying 'what can *you* do about it?' Rather than accept the changes to the contract, their explicit strategy was to mobilize and collectivize what seemed to be an individual issue by getting the members and non members to say 'no' to the new contract. The workers established an *ad hoc* committee and had weekly meetings by conference calls with other workplace reps to discuss the union strategy. According to the organizer, 'I gave input, but it was more done by them. They set the agenda, wrote newsletters, they were persuading colleagues... Everyone who was affected knew exactly what the union's position was and what we were recommending. This gave clarity and confidence.' When the employer wanted people to sign up for changes in benefits and conditions, 95% of the employees, including non members, refused to sign the agreement. Eventually, the company backed down. Even though Connect doesn't yet have a recognition agreement with Ericsson, this case demonstrated to the workers that a union, by working together, can effectively defend their interests.

### ***Workplace related, Issue-based Organizing***

As mentioned before, between 1979 and 1997 the British trade unions were under attack, ideologically and politically, and as a result faced a massive membership decline. The easiest option was therefore to sell membership as an individual service (Interview TUC organizer). Since 1997, however, many British trade unions shifted more towards an 'organizing approach', emphasizing collective action and participation in order to reverse the decline. There is a strong belief among the organizers that a latent pool of workers is out there that can be activated. Their passivity is not due to apathy; but the question then becomes how to go from passivity to activity, how to find a way to inspire or agitate them, a way to encourage them and

to support them. According to the trade unionists, the most effective way is to recruit around an issue. The next step is to collectivize that issue, start campaigning around it, identifying ‘leaders’ among the workers, and eventually building a strongly organized community.<sup>23</sup>

Connect, although a rather small union, has been heavily involved in two types of organizing campaigns: Greenfield organizing, in workplaces where no union is present, as well as Brownfield or Infill organizing, expanding the membership where there is already a union in place. The next three scenarios illustrate different leadership strategies and relationships between the union and the workers: a failed recognition campaign at T-mobile; a successful campaign at Vodafone; and finally, building ‘Industrial Relations (IR) Committees’ in the well-established BT union branch.

In late 2000, Connect, together with the Communications Workers Union (CWU), engaged in a recognition campaign at T-Mobile. Owned by Deutsche Telecom, one of the largest telecom companies in the world, T-mobile employs about 6,000 workers in the UK. Although both unions had members in T-mobile, this base was rather small and fragile (Gall 2005b). By early 2003, the unions thought they had the majority of the workers behind them, but when they held a recognition ballot, they lost. The Director of Organizing comments, ‘we had an over-optimistic view of where we stood in relationship to coverage and membership support’. In 2007, on the other hand, Connect won a recognition campaign at Vodafone after years of fighting. According to the national officer, Connect learned from the T-Mobile experience and adopted a different strategy. First, the T-mobile campaign was led mostly by professional organizers, without really engaging the workplace reps: the recruitment

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<sup>23</sup> Another way to attract this layer of activists is by creating new union roles at the workplace, such as union learning reps or environmental reps. These reps are more likely to be women, blacks, young, or recent hires. Currently in the UK there are about 24,000 union learning reps, and they are paid by the employer. (Interview TUC Director of Organizing).

was ‘organizing-led’ and was all about ‘getting the numbers in’. The Vodafone campaign was led in a different way: the strategy was to have a team of reps rather than a team of organizers. The union was able to create momentum by fostering active relationships between the reps and the union on the one hand, and between the reps and the workforce, on the other.

According to the national officer:

We tried to get a team spirit going. It wasn’t just me saying ‘do this’; I gave the sheets themselves to the reps; it is about running at people’s own speed; don’t give too many negative messages like ‘we didn’t achieve this or that’, but concentrate on where we were winning; concentrating on shared success is really important and that helped to build the momentum up.

(Interview June 2009)

Second, T-mobile hired the Burke Group, an American anti-union consulting firm. In his study on union organizing in the ‘new economy’, Gregor Gall (2005b) shows how employer hostility is one of the major explanatory variables in accounting for variation in the outcome of union recognition campaigns. Gall argues, however, that employer hostility is not ‘necessarily decisive in creating barriers between the union, its members and non-members’. According to Gall, what is critical is the employer hostility vis-à-vis union strength. Indeed, in the T-mobile case, the level of member commitment was very low, exhibiting a weak workplace unionism incapable of fighting the Burke group. During the Vodafone campaign, on the other hand, the number of lay activists grew, making the campaign less dependent on outside professional organizers, while nurturing strength and power from the reps and the workers themselves. According to the national officer, Vodafone also obstructed the campaign, but the union was able to keep the organizing drive under its control without allowing it to be dependent on the good will of the employer.

Vodafone has been used as a success story within the British labor movement: a small union wins recognition from a giant multinational. A few words of caution, however, are needed: the campaign absorbed huge amounts of resources, as it lasted 15 years, intensified over the last three years; the recognition affects only a couple of hundred workers; finally, only a few years after the union ‘victory’, this group of workers got transferred to Ericsson. According to a Connect organizer, ‘the recognition itself, therefore, doesn’t mean that much. It is about having a different mobilizing approach; it is about keeping them active.’ On the other hand, what the leadership hoped for was to establish a good relationship with Vodafone and increase the company’s understanding of what the union was all about, eventually enabling the union to get more groups recognized. This approach, however, was not successful.

We try to approach the company, saying we are a union who operate in the industry, we understand the industry, we’re pragmatic, we understand our members, we don’t have to persuade our members, we are in touch with our members.

(Interview Director of Organizing, June 2009)

Thus, the Vodafone campaign, although initially appearing to be a successful case, proved hard to sustain in the long-term. The union did not manage to foster a ‘win-win’ relationship with the company and now that the group of recognized workers has been transferred to another company, the organizing work has to be done all over again.

Finally, Connect’s relationship with British Telecommunications is deeply rooted in history. The workers didn’t have to fight for recognition, since the union was always there, ‘part of the furniture’. The members are also different, as they are managerial, unlike the engineers or technicians at, for example, Ericsson. To avoid ‘apathy’ among the members, the leadership came up with ‘Industrial Relations

Committees' (IRCs) targeted at workplace reps as a way to democratize the decision-making policies. Rather than deciding everything from Connect's central headquarters, or top-down, the union aims at motivating the reps to play a bigger role in that process. Since the reps are the main artery between the workforce and the union, it is critical to make them more visible and participative. About 12 people serve on the IRCs and each of them has a different task such as, talking to the members, setting up meetings, etc.

The national officer explains,

We need to work out how we can be more visible. Saying to them [the reps], 'you will organize a meeting in your building, you will set it up, and run it'. It is important to get their confidence... If we want good reps, and we need good reps to organize, it is not going to happen from behind a key board writing charts, that is not going to work. There is a people thing, a people's skill here.

(Interview national officer, June 2009)

### ***Structural Challenges***

When Connect decided to add an organizing team to its traditional union structure, different challenges arose. First, many interviewees discussed the tensions that occur between the young, excited, 'looking to stir up the place' organizers on the one hand, and the full-time union negotiators trying to maintain a good relationship with the employer, on the other. This tension lies again at the heart of the debate between unions taking up an organizing approach and thus enabling people to do things for themselves, versus a more traditional servicing role, where the full time officer negotiates for the members.

The following example illustrates this challenge:

In Ericsson, despite being a Greenfield site, we are trying to gain recognition. But last May a group of unionized workers from Vodafone have been transferred into Ericsson. Now... the national officer wants to be on good terms with Ericsson. But that is problematic for me, because I don't wanna be on good terms, but I try to mobilize people to demonstrate what a bunch of bastards these people are.

(Interview Connect organizer)

Second, the leadership stresses the importance of 'social partnership' between the union and the employer, striving for a 'win-win' outcome, maintaining peaceful relations with the employer and thereby emphasizing the role of the negotiator. This seems counter to the idea of campaigning and mobilizing the workers. According to a TUC organizer, one of the problems is that organizers are trained to have a relationship with the members and the union reps but not with the employer. Although Heery (2002) makes important suggestions for how to attenuate the tensions that arise from combining a partnership and an organizing approach, in practice it is not always that easy, as the Ericsson example above shows.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, tensions arise as well between the organizers and the workplace reps. Workplace union reps are considered the 'glue' between the workforce and the union,<sup>25</sup> they are indeed the primary contact between the union and the members and are accountable to the branch structure and to the members. The strategic decision on

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<sup>24</sup> According to Heery (2002), one way to manage the tensions is to 'conceive of partnership as the end-point of organizing' (32). By so doing you draw upon the strengths of both models: partnership might be constructed on the collective power of workers within the firm (rather than neglecting the issue of power and assuming union-management collaboration) while broadening the agenda of representation (rather than focusing on narrow union functions which often happens at the end of organizing).

<sup>25</sup> Union reps are the equivalent of US shop stewards. They are paid by the employer and elected by the members or appointed if there are not enough members at the workplace.

where organizing should be focused, however, happens at the top level (in case of Connect, the director of Organizing), and then cascades down to the branches. For union reps, however, increasing the membership at the workplace can be problematic: first, many reps are already swamped with individual casework, and more members would just mean further augmenting their workload. Second, union reps might be worried about losing their union position. As it is an elected job, it might be on the line if suddenly a lot more workers can vote on it. Finally, if the rep has a good relationship with the employer, an organizing campaign might jeopardize that position. As a consequence, in many cases the rep will have no incentive to initiate an organizing drive, so tensions between the organizer and the reps occur. The union officials claim it is important to increase the role and participation of the reps since they are the visible manifestation of the union in the workplace.

According to a TUC organizer:

We have to promote the role of the reps. Increased time for union representatives should be on top of our list. I think members value what reps bring: if you got a problem with your workload, or if you got an idea about how the job can be done better, and no one from management listens to you, you want someone in the workplace from the union to whom you could go to. So I think members understand the deal, but I think we need to find the language, about the importance of them [reps] becoming more active and participating in the union. I think this is a fundamental principle of organizing.

(Interview June 2009)

In reality, however, many reps consider individual case work their main role, whereas organizing should be done strictly by outside professionals. In terms of organizing workplaces, however, union leaders realize that these workplace reps are key to member engagement. As a national officer puts it, ‘trust between the members and the reps is vital; without it you don’t progress, you can’t achieve recognition’. As



a way of dealing with this issue, the TUC started the Activist Academy in 2008, aimed at redefining the role of union reps within the workplace. Connect is eager to participate in this new program.

In conclusion, the case of Connect illustrates, first, how its ‘service-driven culture’ makes it more difficult to develop strong membership commitment. Second, trying to mobilize a significant number of workers over strictly workplace-related issues is not sustainable in the long-term. Even though the Vodafone campaign seemed successful, it took huge amounts of resources to get the momentum going, and once these recognized workers were transferred to Ericsson the union had to start from the beginning: identifying the issues, collectivizing these issues, seeking leaders among the workers, and so on. In addition, little support can be expected from other social actors in the larger community, such as faith organizations or schools, as these issues are framed too narrowly. Finally, structural challenges come to the forefront as well: tensions between the professional organizers on the one hand, and negotiators, workplace reps, and Connect’s leadership on the other, make sustained member mobilization difficult.

Now, considering the case studies of London Citizens and Connect, what can we learn?

## CHAPTER 7

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

How can these organizations be compared? To what extent is the organizational structure different? What are the different strategies in terms of cultivating social commitment and managing legitimacy? What can be learned from this? These questions are addressed in the next paragraphs.

#### *Organizational Structure*

Diverse institutions compose London Citizens' membership, providing the organization with the necessary resources, legitimacy, and stability. This network-based organization, with LC as the central point, has a horizontal decision-making process: every member institution attending the yearly Assembly will vote on the issues LC will take on or the policies it should address. LC, as an organization of organizations, has a dynamic structure, in which actions are taken up instantly and unsuccessful projects will be discarded. Attending staff meetings, I was impressed by the lively participation, the energetic brainstorming, and the immediate action that followed. Indeed, this dynamic structure encourages sustained mobilization.<sup>26</sup>

Trade unions, on the other hand, are rather bureaucratic, with clear hierarchies and slower decision-making processes. Although Connect is a rather small, centralized union, there is still a hierarchy in place. Important decisions, such as where to mobilize, come from the top and cascade down to the branches. Internal contradictions, moreover, come to the forefront: as shown in the case study, the new

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<sup>26</sup> Although some organizations can be part of LC for pragmatic reasons rather than moral, and some member organizations might be more hierarchical than others, eventually, under the London Citizens umbrella, this difference disappears. Indeed, LC can be seen as a two-tier organization, or an organization with two 'hats', which makes this model sustainable in the long-term.

role of organizer – Connect has put enormous amounts of resources into organizing and employs a team of 12 dedicated organizers – can clash with the long, well-established role of negotiator or workplace rep, again decreasing member mobilization.

### ***Sustained Mobilization***

Considering both organizations I argue that two main differences can be found. First, in terms of cultivating social commitment: for London Citizens, the main goal is to build relational power among the institutions and the members. LC emphasizes the value of having one-to-one conversations between its organizers and a priest, an imam, a school principal and other institutional leaders, to build mutual trust and cooperation. As LC's Director puts it, 'the fight is the development of people, rather than winning the next struggle. There will always be struggles, but if you don't have enough informed citizens, if you don't have enough allies, then you won't get very far'. Indeed, for LC, 'first comes power, then program.' According to LC organizers, to engage in sustainable, 10-year long campaigns, the most important element is to build an organizing base; this base is the power base from which the campaigns will flow. For trade unions, often the opposite is true: they start by identifying the issues, engaging in campaigns before power in the organization is built. As a consequence, they might win that one campaign – as the Vodafone example shows – absorbing an enormous amount of resources, which in the long run is not sustainable. In addition, London Citizens will organize around talent and aspiration, not around need; the 'Iron Rule' is never to do for others what they can do for themselves. This rule goes back to the notion of building power among the members, rather than treating them as victims. Trade unions, on the other hand, will often perceive the workers as 'clients of special needs'. Many trade unions find it hard to move away from 'service-driven

recruitment' towards emphasizing the importance of an active role of members and reps in the workplace. Connect is trying to change this by emphasizing shared success, union visibility and member participation.

Second, in terms of managing legitimacy: Connect focuses more on narrowly workplace-related issues, including pay or working conditions, whereas London Citizens frames its campaigns in broad social justice terms, such as living wage, adequate housing, or immigrant rights. This is not to say that other unions don't engage in broadly framed, social justice campaigns. As a consequence, LC members and its coalition partners will confer moral legitimacy on the organization's actions, which will result in an active grassroots base (e.g., over 10,000 people participated in LC's 'Strangers into Citizens Campaign'). Connect, on the other hand, seeks to gain merely pragmatic legitimacy from its members (e.g., the union tried to 'sell' its service during the T-mobile and Vodafone recognition campaign) and from the employers (e.g., during the Vodafone campaign, the union hoped that the employer would see the benefit of having a union in the company). This pragmatic legitimacy, however, turns out to be ephemeral and transitory. It does not sustain a high level of mobilization in the long run. For example, the employer Vodafone doesn't confer any legitimacy on the union but rather obstructs any union presence. In addition, during these recognition campaigns Connect did not attract any support from other social or political actors, as the subject of the campaign was too narrowly focused.

Now, going back to the figure, what have the case studies shown?

Table 2. Member Mobilization

	LEGITIMACY	
COMMITMENT	PRAGMATIC	MORAL
NEGOTIATED	Short-term <i>e.g., T-Mobile Campaign</i>	Conflict: non-existent
PRODUCTIVE	Short-term <i>e.g., Vodafone Campaign</i>	Long-term <i>London Citizens</i>

First, London Citizens, as a result of its moral legitimacy and productive exchange between the members and the organization, illustrates a high level of member mobilization, sustainable over the long-term. Second, Connect's T-mobile campaign is an example of pragmatic legitimacy combined with a mere negotiated exchange between the group and the members. As a result, the level of member participation will not be as high and will not be sustainable. Third, the Vodafone campaign represents a case of pragmatic legitimacy with a productive exchange between the members. Member participation was more intense than in the T-mobile case, but it was not sustainable over the long term. Finally, a conflict emerges when the union tries to combine a more morally 'minded' organization, while the members joined out of pure self-interest: member mobilization will be almost absent.<sup>27</sup> The following example illustrates this conflict: In 2004, Unison, UK's largest public sector union, took a firm position against the war in Iraq and urged all of its members to

<sup>27</sup> In my interviews with Connect, I focused mainly on the three campaigns mentioned above: the failed T-mobile campaign, the successful Vodafone campaign, and the formation of IR Committees at BT, all about trying to show the union's pragmatic function. I did not come across a Connect campaign framed around social justice issues or, in other words, a case in which the union would demand moral legitimacy from its constituents.

come out and demonstrate. In March 2004, millions of people came out on the street and demonstrated in London. Although many members turned up, they did so not because they felt part of the union, but rather because of individual, political concerns. As a Unison rep puts it, 'they were not with the branch, not with the branch banner, but they were amorously in the demonstration; if they get engaged, they do so because they are personally interested in it already, not because the union asked them to do it.' (Interview Unison rep, June 2009).

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

Is there a paradox? At the outset of this paper I asked why trade unions are experiencing difficulties in mobilizing their members. These organizations have numerous resources but struggle to achieve new or active commitment. Community organizations, on the other hand, have to survive on a much smaller pool of resources but manage nonetheless to exhibit a high degree of member engagement through collective action.

Drawing on social commitment theory, I argue that community organizations represent a productive form of exchange, generating positive emotional responses from members to the organization, thus leading to a high degree of social commitment. These organizations focus on building “relational power” among their members, bringing the values of loyalty, trust, and collectivity to the forefront. In addition, their network-based structures are likely to produce strong person-to-group social commitments. Trade union membership, on the other hand, represents a form of negotiated exchange. Trade unionists perceive their membership rights as direct compensation for their dues. This form of exchange entails less task jointness than does productive exchange, so members are less likely to ascribe their positive feelings derived from task activity to the group. Individual casework takes up the bulk of union representatives’ time, substituting individualization for collectivism in union work; this low degree of social commitment results in a low level of participation. The hierarchical structure is moreover likely to produce weaker person-to-group social commitment than do network forms of organization.

Social commitment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for obtaining sustained mobilization. It requires, as well, leadership capable of making strategic

choices as to whether to act and which tactics to use. Community organizations, focusing on broad political, social, or ideological, rather than narrowly defined issues, are able to gain ‘moral legitimacy’. As a result, they feed into a large, active layer of members, gain support from outsiders, and remain sustainable in the long run. Trade unions, on the other hand, behaving more like insurance companies than a labor ‘movement’, have pragmatic rather than moral legitimacy. Their campaigns focus on narrowly defined workplace issues and as a consequence, the level of member participation remains low and the support of outsiders is lacking.

In conclusion, I believe trade unions should take a step back, cultivate member commitment and its ability to (re)gain legitimacy, instead of focusing only on organizing campaigns. First, I believe the TUC’s recently established Activist Academy is an important step in the right direction. It might be better, however, to ‘merge’ the Activist Academy with the Organizing Academy rather than keeping these structures separately. Second, Connect, as shown in the case study, is making efforts to increase member commitment and mobilization as well (e.g., the IR Committees at BT). I believe, however, that focusing on workplace by workplace recognition campaigns will not be sustainable for Connect or other British unions. Instead, the British labor movement needs to gain back its moral legitimacy by rekindling its identity as a ‘sword of justice’.

Further research could analyze differences between countries. If my findings show that in the UK there is a lower degree of commitment and mobilization among the trade unions than among the community organizations, is this also the case in the US, or in continental Europe? What differences come into play when comparing across countries? Second, what if we look at different types of trade unions, comparing a ‘servicing model’ with an ‘organizing model’, or a less hierarchical with a very tight hierarchical union structure, or a union which engages in broad coalition



campaigns, framing its actions in social justice terms, versus a union which doesn't? Will we find differences in commitment or mobilization? These are still unanswered questions that can spur future research.

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