

# Solidarity Whenever?

A framework for analysing when unions are likely to practice collaboration with the community

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*In Seeking Solidarity, Turner et al consider the opportunities and choices that make city-wide union movements more or less likely to shift towards community unionism and practice labour-community coalitions (Turner and Cornfield forthcoming). This paper takes a narrower frame of analysis – the single local union – and considers the opportunities and choices that influence likely community unionism practice. Community unionism is defined as the range of strategies that involve unions ‘reaching out’ to the community. These include labor-community coalitions (reaching out to community groups), broadening the frame of union campaigns to embrace ‘community concern’ (reaching out to community issues), and campaigns that seek to control place (reaching out to local communities). The paper builds a typology of factors that suggest when community unionism, or union collaboration with the community, is likely to develop. It first considers an ‘opportunity structure’ including environmental/economic context, union identity, structure and characteristics and union relationships. Secondly it considers the internal choices that unions make, noting the organisational, identity/interest and scale dimensions of union agency. I conclude that a union is most likely to undertake collaboration with the community when it accesses and embodies the ‘attributes of community’ in both its opportunity structure and choices. It explores this framework with reference to the shift to community unionism using examples from the Australian and US union movements.*

There is a hopeful belief that union renewal is possible. Terms such as social movement unionism, community unionism and organising unionism try to envisage what a renewed union movement would look like. Yet indicators of when the shift to renewal is likely or possible are less apparent. Within the broad ambit of union renewal literature, it is suggested that labor-community coalition practice or union collaboration with community partners, is a sign of union movement renewal (Turner forthcoming). This paper focuses on the question of union collaboration with the community and considers one question in particular: what are the circumstances under which union collaboration with the community is more likely to develop. It focuses on the scale of a local union, and develops a framework that tries to predict the circumstances that makes a local union likely to participate in coalition practice with the community.

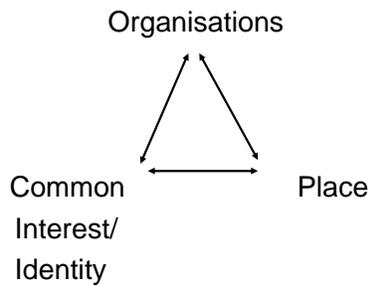
To explore the concept of collaboration with the community, I first define the concept of community. Then, building off existing literature on the formation of coalitions, I use Turner's opportunity/choice framework to analyse the various circumstances that make collaboration likely (Turner forthcoming). Within this opportunity/choice framework I use a threefold definition of community to structure this discussion, and also use examples from union practice in Australia and the United States to demonstrate the applicability of this predictive framework. I conclude that a union is most likely to undertake collaboration with the community when it accesses and embodies the 'attributes of community' in both its opportunity structure and choices.

## 1. What is Community?

Community is an ambiguous 'keyword' of sociology (Williams 1976). It is a populist adjective that conjures up the idea of generalised public support (Kling and Posner 1990). In a period of collapsing union density and influence, union practice and union scholarship has turned to the community as a possible life saver. Union rhetoric often features the language of community. However, 'actual existing' collaboration with the community is much less common than this desire for community support. Furthermore, the amorphous definition of 'community' it makes it difficult to even assess what collaboration with the community looks like. For this reason, concretising the definition of community is an important pre-requisite for assessing when collaboration is likely to develop.

While the use and meaning of the term community is loosely deployed across the union renewal literature, there are some consistent themes. Most commonly, the term community is used as a surrogate for the phrase community organisation. Indeed the slippage is so widespread that it is built into the term labour-community coalition, which refers to coalitions between unions and community organisations (Brecher and Costello 1990; Tuffs 1998). Secondly, community is used to describe a group of people who have a set of common interests or identities, such as a community of women or environmentalists (Cranford and Ladd 2003; Fine 2005). Thirdly community is used to mean place, as in a defined geographic area such as a local neighbourhood community (Ellem 2003). Yet while these definitions are often used exclusively in scholarship, they can be seen as complementary and supplementary, providing a framework for the diverse attributes of community that occur in practice. The three fold attributes of community are represented in *Figure 1*.

*Figure 1: The threefold dimensions of community*



This definition provides a framework for understanding what union collaboration with community looks like. Collaboration can be one of three practices. It can include working with community organisations. It can also include acting with a broad ‘community’ common interest, or acting with groups of a specific identity, such as immigrants or women. Or, community can include acting with a place-specific strategy where unions seek to work across a specific geographic area, using local support to enhance union influence. I call these three different examples of union collaboration with community – community unionism (Tattersall forthcoming).

## **2. When are unions likely to collaborate with ‘the community’**

Union strategies, including collaboration with the community rarely develop evenly across national or international union movements. Rather, there are many internal and environmental factors that affect when these strategies unfold. Community unionism and coalition practice in particular has an uneven development, revealing variation within nations and between them. Yet this variation has received little attention, making it difficult to explain why for instance, community unionism appears more prevalent in the United States compared to the United Kingdom, or in the service industry rather than traditional blue-collar industries.

To structure this discussion I use two analytical devices. Firstly, I borrow from the recent approach of Turner that categorises the pressures that generate union change as arising from both opportunities that surround unions and choices internal to unions (Turner forthcoming). Secondly, I structure these different opportunities and choices using the threefold definition of community. Thus I argue that there are three different community-based factors that create environmental opportunities and influence internal union choices that make union collaboration with the community more likely. When unions share these attributes of community, I argue that community unionism is most likely to develop.

### **a. Opportunities**

A union’s environmental and organisational context shapes the types of strategies that they are likely to develop. US social movement theorists stress the importance of the external environment as creating a context for social movement practice. (Tarrow 1994;

McAdam, Tarrow et al. 2001). They develop the term ‘opportunity structure’ to help explain the emergence of a social movement cycle (Turner forthcoming). Opportunity structure is defined as a set of signals and processes that make new kinds of action plausible to actors, including openings to access power; shifting of alignments, availability of influential allies and cleavages among elites (Tarrow 1994; Greer, Byrd et al. forthcoming).

There is a widespread interest in explaining why union revitalisation and coalition practices appear to have been spurred in part because of the ‘opportunities’ created by union membership crisis (Bronfenbrenner, Freidman et al. 1998; Turner, Katz et al. 2001; Reynolds 2004; Turner and Cornfield forthcoming). This section uses the term opportunity to explain the pre-existing factors that may assist or encourage particular unions to embark on collaboration with the community. There community-based features are stressed – the political, economic and social environment (place), inter and intra union organisational opportunities (organisation) and pre-existing union identities (identity/interest). The section explores the scholarship on these factors and supports it with examples from Australian and US union practice.

### **(i) Political, Economic and Social Environment**

The modern crisis of unionism, and the political, economic and social environment that incubates it, is said to seed opportunities for new strategies. The crisis in density and power is well documented (Kelly 1998; Peetz 1998). As Hyman argues, there is a correlation between declines in density and union renewal:

Only when unions have been forced to come to terms with their decline in their autonomous influence have they contemplated broader alliances (Hyman 2001).\*\* 62

Three environmental elements are said to create opportunities for the practice of community unionism – political, economic and social.

The political infrastructure in which unions operate varies significantly across national boundaries and across time. Political variations have two key dimensions, firstly the degree to which unions have productive relationships with political parties, and secondly the extent to which the state provides regulatory structures for resolving union disputes and assisting unionisation. Hyman stresses that the state’s relationship with unions can vary between a coercive or accommodating frame (Hyman 1975). The Keynesian state, with relatively supportive labour parties provided a vibrant environment for unionisation in the industrialised world (Crouch 1977). However, this political support was transient and has been wound back, relationships between unions and left of centre political parties have declined in most liberal market economies, and there has been an employer-led transformation of regulatory bodies such as the National Labor Relations Board and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (Carter and Cooper 2002).

The shifting relationship between unions and social democratic parties may create opportunities for collaboration with community as traditionally powerful relationships with the state need to be replaced with an alternative source of power. Wills suggests that unions face a crisis in political power, as social democratic parties distance

themselves from unions at the same time as pursuing fiscally conservative policies reducing their commitment to the social wage (Wills 2002). Wills notes that this crisis has led to some unions to respond by building relationships with community organisations, notably UNISON the UK public sector union pursuing the London Citizens project (Wills 2002; Wills 2003). In studying community unionism in the United States, Fine suggests that the relatively high level of coalition practice may be partly attributed to the poor relationship between unions and the Democratic Party (Fine 2003). Similarly, in Australia, several public sector unions have begun experimenting with community relations in the face of deteriorating relations with the State Labor Government (Tattersall 2004; Tattersall forthcoming).

It is argued that the need for union political power creates pressure to replace declining influence within political parties with a movement-based power to rebuild political influence through collaboration with community organisations. Union collaboration certainly is capable of building political influence. The experience of union collaboration in Los Angeles demonstrates how community collaboration and coordinated electoral mobilisations can not only build political influence but transform what the Democratic Party looks like (Frank and Wong 2004; Hauptmeier and Turner forthcoming). Yet established political relationships can also act as an obstacle for community unionism development, if collaborative practice is unevenly pursued it can leave those who are rejecting political parties as outsiders with diminished influence (Markey and Nixon 2004; Hauptmeier and Turner forthcoming). Also the dialectic of political power may diminish collaboration with the community as well as build it. In South Africa, the social movement unionism of the Congress of South African Trade Unions significantly diminished once political party power had been created (von Holdt 2002).

The legal structures that support industrial relations practice may also influence whether unions are more or less likely to engage in community collaboration. In Australia and the United States legal infrastructure for unionisation has weakened, often prompting unions to use community collaboration to increase their leverage. In Australia, the demise of binding arbitration has seen unions turn to community pickets as an industrial tool to pressure employers to bargain. For example, the Morris McMahon dispute in 2003 and the Maritime Union of Australia's Waterfront dispute each involved long community pickets as an important element of pressure outside the legal system. Similarly, the comprehensive Justice for Janitors campaign seeks to go outside the NLRB structure and use community pressure and corporate campaigning to create employer neutrality for unionisation (Savage 1998). Traditional courtroom processes for union disputation do not provide a space for community influence. In the NSW Public Education campaign in 2003, the decision by the NSW Teachers Federation to campaign for salaries within the Industrial Relations Commission contributed to a weakening of their connection to their community partners (Tattersall forthcoming). However, as Turner notes, the existence of some legal alternatives for action may also be an important element of union leverage, without which (such as in 'Right to Work' states) union collaboration may remain difficult (Turner forthcoming).

The economic context of a union may also create opportunities for union collaboration. It is commonly argued that 'neo-liberalism' or the economic environment of international competition, privatisation and contracting out is causing a shift to coalition practice (Brecher and Costello 1990; Robinson 2000). In the US, the wave of plant closures and community coalitions against them document a connection between economic restructuring and union community collaboration (Haines and Klein 1982; Lynd 1983; Craypo and Nissen 1993; Nissen 1995; Swinney 1999). Many of these campaigns had spatial as well as an economic context as they were often fought to protect jobs in small towns. More recently, scholarship on high road economic strategies has argued that union collaboration with the community is a vital component for creating high skilled, high paid jobs and improving social infrastructure in a city (Reynolds 2002; Greer, Byrd et al. forthcoming). Similarly, scholarship on public sector unions notes that the economic crises of fiscally conservative budgeting and privatisation may influence public sector unions to collaborate with service consumers (Carpenter 2000; Terry 2000; Tattersall forthcoming).

The economic context of a union can be measured by union density, and union density can provide a ripe opportunity structure for community collaboration. The struggle to organise in traditional employer-employee contexts has created an impetus for comprehensive campaigning in labour unions. This style of campaigning is most advanced in the US, where density is very low, and employer anti-union strategies are most aggressive. Comprehensive campaigning seeks to use multiple points of leverage against employers to create employer neutrality for organising. These strategies include capital strategies, political leverage, strategic research and reaching out to community allies (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998). Where density is low, and employer aggression is high, there may be opportunities for community collaboration to develop as a tactical instrument to advance an organising agenda. The establishment of relationships between union and community organisations provides fertile ground for stronger, more mutual relationships to possibly develop. For instance, in the US organisations such as Jobs with Justice have evolved as permanent union-community coalitions to create a space for community collaboration because of the difficulties in the organising environment (Banks 1990).

A union's economic context also includes its industrial context and labour geographers argue that certain industries have distinct opportunities for collaboration with community. They argue that labour's relative connectedness to place provides opportunities for community outreach where capital is also tied to place. Labour may be able to manipulate the power of capital, and find enhanced power through community collaboration in industries where capital has a geographic fix to a specific location (Herod 1998). Ellem notes that resource extraction has a spatial-fix, and arguing that a union's community collaboration was a powerful tool against a mining company the mining company was tied to the local community (Ellem 2003; Ellem 2003; Ellem 2005). Walsh argues that in the service industry, where the labour market and product market of a service or good are contained by roughly the same geographical boundaries, that union capacity for place-based action such as collaboration is strong (Walsh 2000). Thus in public services such as education, or in private service work such as building services,

childcare or homecare, there are opportunities for coalition action that seek to dominate and control place (Johnston 1994; Savage 1998).

A union's economic context is also affected by the decentralisation of work, and labour geographers also argue that this provides opportunities for community collaboration. Practices such as contracting-out and labour hire create small workforces that are difficult to organise using traditional hot-spot organising techniques (Savage 1998; Walsh 2000). The suburbanisation of capital also spreads workplaces across cities, rather than concentrating work in central industrial areas (McLewin 1999). The decentralisation of work creates opportunities for organising workers at the scale of community rather than the workplace. Unions can be an object for creating a collective identity out of a decentralised and alienated work environment, by organising workers across workplaces within a specific geographical area (Wills 2003). The Service Employees International Union's techniques for homecare and childcare organising in the United States are based on this kind of geographic strategy. They divide a city up into zip-codes and then organise across the zip-code, creating networks of workers in a local geographic region (Author interview, SEIU 880 Organiser, August 2005). Similarly, the Teachers Federation in NSW was able to use the fact that schools are embedded in local communities to create local relationships with parents and principals as part of their strategy to influence electoral politics. Connecting workers to their local community opens up opportunities for collaboration with other place-based organisations (Wills 2002).

In addition to the economic and political context, a union's social context creates opportunities for collaboration depending on the availability of community partners and the diversity of the workforce. Union collaboration with community organisations requires community partners; thus opportunities for collaboration depend on the availability of allies (Tarrow 1994; Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Johnson argues that public sector social movement unionism has a strong social context as these unions have the ability to form collaborative relationships with the users of social services (Johnston 1994). Similarly public sector union writers argue that consumer/employee relationships provide an opportunity for collaboration (Carpenter 2000; Terry 2000; Pastor 2001). In the private sector, the Justice for Janitors campaign collaborates with faith-based organisations who morally oppose poverty wages (Clawson 2003). The potential for community partnerships also varies nationally. The US, with a strong history of civil society organisations and organisational practices such as Alinsky style community organising furnish many potential community partners (Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Yet in Australia, Government funding and the tendency for service provision in many NGOs can limit the range of partners and limit what action partner organisations are prepared to take. These horizontal community relationships can be strengthened if union members are simultaneously members of the partner organisations. Indeed, many unions build into their organising approach surveys of union members to identify where possible dual union/community membership exists (Author interview, SEIU 73 Organiser July 2005; Author interview, NSW Union organiser, April 2005).

The emergence of tightly knit identity-based networks, particularly among immigrant workers can provide an important social opportunity structure that supports community collaboration. In accounting for the rapid and successful rise of coalitions in Los Angeles and San Jose, Turner argues that a large, common ethnic group – Latinos – spread across low wage workplaces, created opportunities for union collaboration within a regional economy (Turner forthcoming). The existence of a homogenous non-traditional identity group may provide opportunities for collaboration as it provides a rich connection of social networks across organisations that can be used for unions to interlink with community organisations. For instance, in the Justice for Janitors campaign, collaboration between Latino dominated churches and immigrant welfare groups was facilitated by the common identity base of the Latino workforce, connecting community organisations to the campaign through this common identity (Savage 1998; Clawson 2003).

## **(ii) A Union's organisational relationships**

A union may have pre-existing relational and organisational opportunities for collaboration with the community. Relational opportunities include the influence of peak councils and other unions, and internal organisational features include the size of unions and their resources.

The kind of peak councils surrounding a local union can play a vital role in creating opportunities for union collaboration. Ellem and Shields argue that peak council have a role as an agent of mobilisation, and may play a social role in facilitating the growth of labour-community alliances (Ellem and Shields 2004). This social role is likely to develop when there is cohesion and inclusiveness of affiliates – a sense of unity over fragmentation. This sense of unity may be enhanced, for example, by place consciousness (such as in a rural town) or a common ideology (Markey and Nixon 2004). A peak council's organisational scale contributes to its ability to create opportunities for collaboration. (Ellem and Shields 2004). They are more likely to play this social role when there has not been a history of strong relationships with political parties or where relations with political parties have broken down (Tattersall 2004; Turner forthcoming). Turner and Terry suggest that union collaboration is more easily formed at higher levels of union organisation where unity can be forged over fragmentation because the redistributive costs of policy are less likely to be felt (Terry 2000; Turner forthcoming). Thus, central labour councils can create opportunities for local union collaboration by creating a context for local collaboration and organising success; where productive relationships with community partners are cultivated by the central labour council, individual union collaboration is easier (Robinson 2000; Rudy 2001). Central labour councils can also legitimise strategies such as collaboration, which may lead other unions to try collaboration (Cooper 2003; Tattersall 2004) There is a wide scholarship in the United States that describes how renewed central labour councils in have created favourable opportunities for union collaboration with the community (Ness and Eimer 2001; Byrd and Rhee 2004; Frank and Wong 2004; Luce and Nelson 2004; Reynolds and Ness 2004). However, a supportive peak council is not necessary for collaboration, for

example city-based collaboration developed in Buffalo New York without a supportive labour council (Greer, Byrd et al. forthcoming).

Union revitalisation writers suggest that relationships with other unions can also play a role in generating opportunities for collaboration (Garner 1989). Cooper and Heery, in analysing the 'shift to organising' have noted that relationships with other unions, either at the same scale or a national scale can highly influence a local union's internal practice (Heery, Simms et al. 2000; Cooper 2002). Voss and Sherman argue in a US context that the support and resources of union (inter) nationals are critical for supporting shifts in union strategy (Voss and Sherman 2000). Opportunities for union collaboration may be created by their peers. It appears that this could happen either through cooperative relations or through competitive relations. Unions may learn tactics like collaboration if the relationship is with a similar union, such as one organising in the same industry or with a similar identity (Obach 2004). This passage for change is evident cross the Change to Win unions, where unions such as the Teamsters have developed more aggressive campaign units in light of their partnership with aggressive campaigning unions like the SEIU. However a shift to union collaboration may also be likely to develop when union relationships are competitive, with competing unions seeking collaboration to legitimise their status within a contested union environment. Thus jurisdictional disputes have sometimes been used as opportunities for garnering community support (Author interview, Canadian union official, June 2005).

In addition to inter-union relations, community organisations can also be a site of influence and opportunity. Indeed, social movement union scholars argue that community organisations can cause change in unions, including influencing them to practice collaboration (Waterman 1991; Clawson 2003). Fine suggests that collaboration is often community initiated, where community organisations seek union support and become agents for inducing collaboration (Fine 2003). Rose, amongst others, insist that community organisation and union relations can create a dialogue for mutual exchange, where cross-organisation learning can occur over strategies and issues (Rose 2000; Cranford and Ladd 2003; Fine 2003; Obach 2004). Ad hoc relations between community organisations and unions can become fertile ground for deeper relations, as trust and respect develop, and as organisations learn about each others issues, interests and priorities (Tattersall forthcoming).

### **(iii) Union identities**

Pre-existing union identities may also create opportunities for collaboration depending on whether a union has an ideological or attitudinal commitment to collaboration or if a union has had past experience with community collaboration.

Unions with a history of militancy, ideological radicalism or broadening interest representation may be more likely to engage in collaboration with the community. Robinson and Hyman suggest that union identities that have a social, open, outward-looking agenda are more likely to engage in collaboration with community partners

(Hyman 1975; Hyman 1994; Robinson 2000; Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Similarly, Obach argues that unions with broad organisational range are more likely to engage in collaboration (Obach 2004). Frege, Heery and Turner note that UK unions commitment to 'work-family balance' broadened the interest representation frame of the union movement, creating opportunities for alliances with womens groups. Similarly, the desire for democracy of southern union movements in Korea, Brazil and South Africa created easy alliances between unions and other organisations in the democratisation movement (von Holdt 2003). Bramble notes that in Australia, unions that had ties with the Communist Party and were influenced by ideological practices such as the united front have a strong history of union collaboration and engagement in social movements (Burgmann and Burgmann 1998; Bramble 2001). When a union has a pre-existing progressive ideological social justice framework it is more likely to be able to establish a common interest with community organisations. Frege, Heery and Turner note that coalitions are often supported in the US by critics of business unionism (Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Indeed, both Hyman and Waterman emphasise that stable union collaboration with the community is more likely if a union already has a broad social identity, beyond simple vested interest (Waterman 1998; Hyman 2001). Thus the NSW Teachers Federation's history of campaigning on public education in the 1950s and 1960s, combined with the broad progressive outlook cultivated by generations of left-wing and communist activists created a rich opportunity structure for future community unionism strategies (O'Brien 1987; Tattersall forthcoming)

Furthermore, if union collaboration has been used in the past by a particular union, it is more likely to be used again as a strategy in the future. Social movement theorists use the phrase 'repertoires of contention' to demonstrate how social movement organisations tend to engage in similar types of action (Tarrow 1994). Using this insight, Frege and Kelly argue that without a 'crisis of historic proportions union movements are likely to respond to problems by drawing on familiar forms of action' (Frege and Kelly 2004). If a union has a history of collaboration with community organisations, the familiarity of this practice as a repertoire of contention creates opportunities for it to be repeated in the future. Thus, for the 50 years before the NSW Public Education Campaign, the Teachers Federation and two state-based parents groups had been meeting irregularly as a group called the 'Three Federations' (Author interview, Parent Representative, February 2005). Familiarity of collaborative relationships and in particular the trust that developed between the organisations created a rich opportunity structure for community unionism.

### **(iii) Framing opportunities for collaboration**

Thus the opportunity structure for union collaboration with the community can be structured using the definition of community. Firstly, opportunities are available for collaboration from the political, social and economic environment. These opportunities arise from the union's spatial location (place). Secondly, opportunities may arise from a union's organisational relationships. Thirdly, opportunities may arise from a union's identity including its ideological commitment and its history of collaborative practice. This opportunity structure is outlined in *Figure 1*. These opportunities derive from a

union exhibiting definitional attributes of community. The opportunities for a union to align with community are most readily available when a union shares attributes with ‘community.’

**Figure 2: Opportunities for Union Collaboration with Community**

| Place   | Organisation                            | Common Interest / Identity  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Political, economic and social environment</b>   | <b>Union relationships</b>              | <b>Pre-Existing Union Identities</b>  |
| Political:<br>- Political parties<br>- Regulation<br><br>Economic context<br>- crisis<br>- industry location<br>- decentralisation of work<br><br>Social context<br>- availability of partners<br>- surrounding social Networks | Peak Council<br><br>Union relationships | Ideological / identity commitment to collaboration<br><br>History of collaboration – repertoire of contention |

## **b. Choices**

Opportunities aside, the development of union practice is not simple a force of nature. As Pocock argues, social contexts and impending crisis can cause union sclerosis as well as union renewal (Pocock 1998). A union must also exercise a choice in determining whether it commits to coalition practice given the crises and general opportunity structure that surrounds it (Hyman 1994; Hyman 2001). As Kochan, Katz et al argue, unions are strategic agents, and internally they make conscious decisions that determine their fate amidst the economic and political conditions in which they act (Kochan, Katz et al. 1986). Turner adapts the ‘strategic actors’ thesis to argue that engagement or non-engagement in coalition practice is most greatly influenced by union (actor) choice (Turner forthcoming). This adaptation provides a useful framework for examining when unions are likely to choose to engage in collaboration. Furthermore, this section will explore if community collaboration looks different depending on the various union forces that may inform the ‘choice’ for collaboration.

Again, this section uses the definition of community to structure the discussion, firstly considering the question of unions as an organisation, exploring how an organisational

decision or response to crisis may cause a union to choose collaboration. Secondly I consider common interest and identity, and how the presence of a group with a common interest or identity may be a factor in unions choosing collaboration. Finally, I consider how a union's organisational scale may allow a union to more easily embrace collaborative opportunities.

### **(i) Organisational responses**

It is widely argued that union change is affected by the nature of organisational structures (Delancy, Jarley et al. 1996). Yet organisational structures should not be reified (Hyman 1975). Consequently, this section documents the range and combinations of individuals who may be involved in promoting the choice for union collaboration, and how the degree of support for collaboration conditions the type of collaboration undertaken.

Union revitalisation scholars single out union leaders the most important strategic actors. Leadership support is said to be critical for organisational change, and thus leadership support for coalition practice makes collaboration more likely (Nissen 2000; Cooper 2001; Oxenbridge 2001; Heery 2003; Frege, Heery et al. 2004; Turner forthcoming). In particular, within the context of organisational crisis, union leaders play a critical role in determining an organisation's response (Delancy, Jarley et al. 1996; Pocock 1998; Cooper 2001). Leadership is also vital, because it is through the leader that external organisational relationships are most readily cultivated and that influenced is interpreted and acted upon (Garner 1989; Heery, Simms et al. 2000; Cooper 2001). Leadership support was certainly critical in the Public Education Campaign, the President of the NSW Teachers Federation was previously an officer assigned to coordinating one of the major public arms of the campaign (called the Vinson Inquiry). Similarly, the Justice for Janitors campaign was a collaborative program implemented by union locals coordinating with the International (Voss and Sherman 2000). Voss and Sherman introduce a dynamic process to measure the likelihood that a union will embrace collaborative social movement unionism, arguing that it is the combination of new leadership, with a mandate for collaboration and the backing of internal supporters with cross-movement experience that creates a platform that makes collaboration a likely choice of strategy (Voss and Sherman 2000). Thus while leadership is broadly identified as important, it is also recognised that external and internal relationships and possibly new leadership may make a shift to collaboration even more likely.

In contrast, 'bottom up' democratising pressure is also said to be a key agent for collaboration. Moody, amongst other social movement unionism writers, cites the role of Teamsters for a Democratic Union as promoting collaborative strategies such as that used in the United Postal Workers strike in the 1990s (Moody 1997). He argues that hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations are unlikely to embrace collaboration without pressure from below, as it moves cautious leaders away from their tendency to straddle and 'manage' the relationship between capital and workers (Mills 1948; Moody 1997). These writers suggest that it is not benevolent leadership but membership pressure that are the key agents of change, including collaboration.

Between the ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ theses, Rose points to a layer of officials or union representatives who may act as bridge-builders and be key agents for collaboration. Bridge builders are individuals in a union or community organisation who have experience in both movements, and from that experience are able to facilitate collaborative relationships by translating organisational practice across cultural and class barriers (Rose 2000). Bridge builders help open up the repertoires of union strategy, adapting social movement practices to a union context (Voss and Sherman 2000; Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Individuals with cross-movement experience act as champions for collaboration, generating internal support amongst union members and leaders.

In addition to bridge builders, union revitalisation writers note the critical role that officers and active delegates can play in acting for and supporting renewal. Cooper argues that union officials play a key role in supporting the adaptation of new union strategies and countering internal resistance (Cooper 2002). Kelly emphasises the role of workplace leaders as a key agent who provides support for new strategies (Kelly 1998).

There is a tendency in the literature to seek out particular agents as primary, that somehow ‘leaders’, ‘the rank and file’ or ‘bridge-builders’ are the most important variable for shifts to collaboration. This instrumentalist tendency is partly a desire to reject Michel’s iron law thesis, that suggests that union change, particularly a shift to enhanced democracy is impossible (Michels 1958; Voss and Sherman 2000; Leach 2005). Yet while this instinct is important, Michel’s thesis does not necessarily contradict the evolution of collaborative practice. As Leach argues, Michel’s thesis is not a law of conservatism, even a bureaucratic oligarchy may embrace collaboration (Leach 2005).

Instead of seeking one agent as a primary cause, Hyman suggests that a union’s internal shift in strategy may be a product of some or all of these different forces. Hyman notes that unions contain a complex set of relations which contain and condition the power of leaders. These include the checking roles of factions, committees, the power of shop-floor organisations and the influence of junior full-time officials (Clegg 1970; Hyman 1975). Rather than abstracting specific union roles from their organisational context, Hyman argues that two contradictory forces describe the shifting balance of decision making – ‘power for’ and ‘power over’ – or a continuum between the autonomy and incorporation of members in a union structure (Hyman 1975; Hyman 1989). If power is a relation within a union then the success of a particular strategy depends on how well those strategies can be transmitted by both the rank and file and leaders. Thus whether a union is likely to ‘choose’ a collaborative strategy depends on how much support that strategy receives at all different levels of the union, from leaders, officers and members. Thus collaboration is likely to occur and flourish, for example, when leaders make a decision to collaborate using their ‘power over’ members, and that coincides with members and officials believing that the decision to collaborate gives ‘power for’ members. The extent of union support is a measure of the success of the strategy.

Hyman’s reformulation of the debate provides a series of testable research questions on how the organisational role of unions promotes collaboration. Rather than considering

the presence of enlightened leadership or movement pressure, Hyman suggests that change will occur when there is a coincidence between ‘power for’ and ‘power over.’ Thus strategic change is most likely to be accepted when it is simultaneously advocated by the rank and file and by leaders, rather than by a single organisational unit. Thus within a union, the greater the level of support for collaboration – at a leadership, officer, delegate and membership level – the more likely it is to be embraced as a strategy. In addition, the cultivation of support for collaboration is magnified when a union has individual bridge builders with strong cross-movement relationships with possible partner organisations (Rose 2000; Voss and Sherman 2000).

Following this logic, we can also predict that if support is lacking at certain levels of the union, then collaboration is less likely to be successful, and indeed is likely to look different. Leadership support for collaboration with staff/membership resistance or disengagement is likely to create a shallow commitment to collaboration. Alternatively, staff/membership support for collaboration with leadership disengagement is likely to only result in ad hoc collaboration that remains peripheral to the union’s strategy and is denied adequate resources. Thus not only is there a link between the dimensions of union support and the existence of collaboration, there is a link between the level of support for collaboration and the types of collaboration that develop.

A useful example of these complex relationships in practice is the development of community unionism in the NSW Teachers Federation. The opportunity for considering community union strategies arose from an unusually hostile salaries claim in the late 1990s that shook the union as whole, prompting internal discussions for the need to revisit union strategy. A group of organisers and delegates all based in South-Western and Western Sydney began strategising and planning concrete alternative strategies. These strategies were proposed to the 1999 Annual Conference of the union, and while initially unsupported by the leadership they were endorsed by the Conference (Author interview, union organiser, March 2005). A year later, a union election occurred, with the victorious team mandating the pursuit of a community union strategy and public education campaign. The victory of this new team cemented this initially rank and file idea as a new strategic direction for the union. The fact that the policy change had both membership and leadership support created a deep engagement in the collaborative agenda, which was evidenced through large local mobilisation, and the formation of locally-based public education lobbies.

While the issue of organisational support allows us to examine individual change agents, the ability to cultivate member or leadership support is effected by the choice of issues and capacity for multi-scaled collaboration. These issues are considered in the following two sections.

## **(ii) Common identities and interests within the union**

Engagement in collaboration is also affected by the identities of union members, and whether the issues selected for collaboration connect to union member's common interests.

Membership diversity can dialectically make shifts to collaboration more likely. Social movement union writers argue that diversity is an important element of union practice and change, because large pools of the potentially unionisable workforce are increasingly women, ethnically and racially diverse and that unions are also beginning to reflect that diversity (Moody 1997; Savage 1998; Walsh 2000; Nissen 2001; Clawson 2003). Delancey et al suggest that union diversity may encourage strategic innovation (Delancy, Jarley et al. 1996). Diversity in the workforce creates pressure to diversify the strategies of unions, and broaden their frame of reference from (male, white) pay and conditions issues to a broader set of concerns that encompass the experiences of women and/or migrants (Kelley 1997; Moody 1997; Needleman 1998; Clawson 2003). For instance, female dominated workplaces may be more likely to support campaigns that integrate work and non-work issues because work and family demands are more connected in women's lives (Needleman 1998). Unions with diverse workforces may also be more likely to engage in collaboration as identity issues such as sexism, racism, immigration status, childcare and work/family balance are also key concerns of many community based organisations. Often community organisations will be able to provide expertise and skills that unions lack, for instance with immigration issues (Needleman 1998; Frege, Heery et al. 2004). Nissen stresses it is not simply the existence of diversity, but a union's decision to include traditionally excluded identities that causes a diverse workforce to enhance community collaboration (Nissen 2001). Similarly Needleman emphasises that change develops as traditionally excluded groups are incorporated into a union's structure, or acquire knowledge and capacity to change the structure – thus generating pressure for collaboration across the union (Needleman 1998).

Secondly, the campaign context provides an important backdrop for whether coalition activity is contemplated, and the type of collaboration that is undertaken. In particular, the purpose of the campaign and the campaign's timeline are critical. Campaigns are different, and while all may involve choices to engage community partners, the types of partnerships created vary. Short-term organising drives are more likely to result in short-term, or ad hoc community relations if and when they occur (Tattersall forthcoming). In contrast, long term campaigns, built around a desire to shift the nature of work and the conditions in the industry, may be more likely to engage deeper community collaboration.

Thirdly, member engagement and support for union collaboration varies depending on the issue(s) that is being campaigned on. Not all issues engage union members equally. Issues that connect to the actual lived experience of union members are more likely to be supported than abstract or distant concerns. As EP Thompson emphasises, class relations take shape through the impact of experience, with those experiences shaping workers activity and ideas (Thompson 1963; Wills 1998). Membership support is more likely if the common interest at the heart of the campaign relates to the common experiences of union members.

There are several factors that may enhance the connection between a campaign and member interest. Firstly, the collaboration will be in the members interests if it relates to core union activities such as bargaining (Bramble 2001). Secondly, collaboration is likely to be perceived in the interests of members if it is connected to issues within the industry in which the union organises. This may provide a broad frame for collaboration; for instance for public sector unions' interest-based campaign could include improvements in funding and quality of services. Thirdly, collaboration may be interest-based if it connects to the geographic location of work, such as campaigns by manufacturing unions about the role of jobs in a local town. Thirdly, union education programs may enhance political awareness and the breadth of concern amongst union members, particularly if it engages members as political agents, cultivating union member support for a wider range of issues or training members in how to cultivate relationships with community organisations (Freire 1972; Spencer 1994; Bernard 2002). Certainly, the confluence of these factors was evident in the public education campaign in NSW. The Teachers Federation have a strong program of union education that includes education about public education funding. The public education campaign also intersected with bargaining demands around salaries as well as teachers interest in money for public education to improve the quality of education conditions, including funding for reduced class sizes.

However, the ability to cultivate common experiences across the membership of a union will vary depending on the relative homogeneity or heterogeneity of the union involved (Delancy, Jarley et al. 1996). A campaign on public education by a union who represents only workers who work in public education is more likely to cultivate common interest and union participation, than a campaign on public education in a general union that represents people from many industries. The breadth of common interest amongst union members is likely to be enhanced if there is some homogeneity amongst union members, because the broader the support for union collaboration the more likely that a union will choose collaboration (Turner forthcoming).

### **(iii) Scale**

The ability to undertake collaboration is also affected by the organisational resources and scale of the union, particularly its size, the scale of its activity and its organising and mobilising capacity of its membership.

Union collaboration can be a resource intensive exercise as collaboration with the community often requires dedicated staff, the capacity to mobilise members and large campaign budgets (Needleman 1998; Nissen 2004). It will be easier for a union to engage in collaboration with the community if a union is large and resource rich. Certainly, the NSW Teachers Federation were able to run a public education campaign because they had collected a public education levy from members that had raised over \$1 million for dedicated public education campaigns. In addition, it will be easier for a union to engage in collaboration if it is well organised, so that it is capable of mobilising members. Thus a union with effective internal communications structures and the ability

to 'turnout' members may be more likely to engage in collaboration, particularly when that collaboration has a mobilisation component. This was certainly the case in Chicago. SEIU 880s sophisticated internal mobilisation database and turnout program meant that it was able to be an anchor for some of the major demonstrations around living wage issues, providing the base for the social movement.

Labour geographers, in particular, debate at what scale is union collaboration most likely to develop. Some labour geographers argue that collaboration most readily developed by unions located in a regional setting, where there is a dense network of relationships and proximity between work and non-work identities (Taksa 2000; Markey and Nixon 2004; Patmore 2004; Ellem 2005). Others privilege the local scale in general, arguing that collaboration is most likely to form at a local scale irrespective of whether the site is within a large city or in a regional town (Jonas 1998; Walsh 2000; Wills 2002). A major argument for the likelihood of local collaboration relates to the scale of community organisations. While both unions and community organisations operate at all scales, from the international to the local, most community organisations operate at the local scale (Wills 2002). Thus it is often easier to embark on collaboration with community when unions are acting at the scale that community organisations tend to dominate. Thus a union which has a locally scaled capacity, through member associations, may be more likely and able to participate in collaboration. In addition, when collaboration is controlled at a local level, it is likely that horizontal community-union relationships can be sustained and strengthened, rather than ad hoc and instrumental. In the public education campaign, the NSW Teachers Federations 150 regionally based Teacher Associations were a driving vehicle that sustained relationships with school based Parents & Citizens Networks. Similarly, a union located in a regional area – such as the CFMEU Mining division in the mines of the Pilbra region – has a rich capacity to form horizontal relationships with the surrounding community (Ellem 2003).

However, there may be limitations to local union action from unions themselves. Terry notes that local workplace based unions are less likely to move beyond workplace issues (Terry 2000). The higher the scale of a union, such as a national union or a central labor council, the more likely they are to embrace a broad set of concerns that may facilitate connections with community organisations. Certainly, during Unions NSW's campaign against the War in Iraq, it was state and national union branches rather than workplace organisations that provided most support and coordinated mobilisations for the campaign (Tattersall 2004).

Finally, if union collaboration is to operate with any depth, it requires internal union structures to be capable of campaigning, mobilising and activating members on an issue. Kelly argues that a union's campaign capacity relies on micro-mobilisation structures (Kelly 1998). These could include individuals such as delegates or stewards, local representative structures such as regional delegates meetings or even extend to local union infrastructure such as workplace branches and offices. Kelly argues that member leaders are critical for activating, cultivating and engaging member participation. Unions who have a highly developed internal member capacity are more likely to be able to engage in deep, collaboration and have members support that collaboration. The NSW

Teachers Federation 300 person State Council, 150 Teacher Associations, and 2 200 delegates and women’s contacts, and 50 staff and organisers provided a critical resource for coordinating activities such as the Vinson Inquiry into Public Education that held events and hearings across the state.

**(iii) Framing choices for collaboration**

Thus for collaboration with the community to develop, a union must act as a strategic agent and embrace collaboration as a strategy given the available opportunity structure. There are many forces that make union collaboration a likely and predictable choice. Firstly, are organisational features that include leadership, officer/staff and membership support. The depth of support across the organisation is a key measure for likely and sustained collaboration. Furthermore, the presence of bridge builders who humanise the links between organisations, enhance the chances of organisational collaboration. Secondly the common identity of the union members and the presence of diversity increases the likelihood of collaboration. Yet also, a relative commonality of interest is also required across the membership, which can be more easily cultivated depending how the issue of the campaign affects the experiences of the members. Finally, the scale of the union matters. The likelihood of collaboration is affected by the size of the union, its organisational scale and connection to community, and its capacity to internally mobilise its members. The various choices that make collaboration more likely are summarised in *Figure 3*.

***Figure 3: Choices for Union Collaboration with Community***

| <b>Organisation</b>                           | <b>Common Interest / Identity</b>                          | <b>Place</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| Organisational decision or response to crisis | Common interest or identity within the union               | Organisational scale, and scale of relationships      |
| Leadership                                    | Purpose of campaign  | Size  |
| Bottom up, stratum of officials               | Diversity in union and presence of non-traditional members | Mobilising structures, delegates/stewards, organisers |
| Support across leadership and membership      | Issue selection and its connection to members              |   |
|   | Homogeneity or heterogeneity of union                      |   |

**4. Reflections and Conclusion**

This paper has investigated the circumstances under which union collaboration with the community is likely to develop. It analyses both the opportunities and choices available to unions, and structures these indicators using a definition of community. By using the definition of community to frame this discussion, the paper suggests that a union is most likely to embrace union collaboration with the community when it has an opportunity structure and internal features that 'align' with the community.

A union is more likely to engage in collaboration if it has a supportive opportunity structure. This firstly has contextual, place-based elements. The greater the opportunities for connection with community partners, whether due to declining relationships with political parties or because of spatial-fixes a union can exploit, the greater the likelihood of collaboration. Secondly, there are organisational relationships which also point to a supportive environment for relationships building, created with Central Labor Councils, unions or community organisations. Thirdly are identity-based opportunities, where unions with an open progressive issue frame or with a history of collaboration are most likely to pursue collaboration.

Yet, unions must also choose their own history, and the decision to collaborate and the depth of collaboration can be measured by the extent of internal support. Organisationally, the more internal union support for collaboration the more likely it is to occur. Support comes from leaders, staff and members, and can also be enhanced by bridge builders. Campaign purpose can vary organisational commitment and also organisational preparedness to embark on community collaboration, with collaboration more likely in long-term priority campaigns. Interest and identity also vary the likelihood of choosing collaboration. The presence or absence of non-traditional union members and the selection of campaign issue vary member support for collaboration and thus the likelihood of it occurring. Finally, union scale is also a variable. The size of a union, the scale of its organisation and its capacity to mobilise members vary the support for collaboration as well as the ability for a union to connect with community.

In many senses this opportunity/choice structure suggests some indicators for when a union is more likely to embrace its social movement capacity. Effective collaboration requires not simply opportunistic partnerships with outside organisations but a process of union renewal and union activation. Union collaboration is most likely to occur, and occur with depth if a union can garner the support and participation of its members.

Union collaboration occurs unevenly across and within union movements. This paper has developed a framework for understanding the varying opportunities and choices that influence when collaboration develops. Union collaboration may not be a useful strategy for all unions. This paper points to the fact that service industry unions, public sector unions, unions with diverse memberships and unions with a progressive ideological commitment may be more able and likely to embrace the strategy for collaboration. Thus this paper tries to develop a framework that makes sense of the variable strategic terrain that unions operate within, and providing some indicators of opportunities and choices that might support the development of collaboration in the future.

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