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This paper will consider mobilisation from both a gendered and a comparative perspective by considering the mobilisation of women trade union leaders in the UK and the USA. The paper will draw on a Leverhulme funded international network on Women Trade Union Leadership. This is a pioneering cross national study that engages women trade union leaders (at all levels) in ethnically diverse regions in the UK (London and the south-east) and the USA (New York and New Jersey). It is the first study that seeks to systematically investigate the experiences of women in union leadership in two countries using the same research methodologies and carried out by an American/British research team. This paper asks what are the key conditions that led to the initial mobilisation of women union leaders in these regions of the UK and the USA?

In seeking to answer this question, the paper draws on the mobilisation literature and considers the importance of interests, leadership and injustice (Kelly, 1998) in the mobilisation process. Moreover we seek to understand the distinctive nature of women's mobilisation in comparative context. There are few such studies but Barry et al's (2004) study of the influence of the women's movement in Mumbai and London on city governments provides important insights. Barry et al argue that women's presence and aspirations have been influenced through the networks of their respective women's movements, operating through civil society and the local state (Barry et al., 2004). Moreover, studies have pointed to the importance of family and political background as important in the mobilising processes (Bradley and Healy, 2008, Bradley et al., 2004, Kirton, 2006, Kirton, 2005). The importance of women-only networks has emerged in a number of UK studies on women's unionisation (Kirton, 2006, Kirton, 1998, McBride, 1998, Healy and Kirton, 2000, Cobble, 2007, Kirton and Healy, 1999). This literature also recognises the different and intersectional interests of women (Bradley and Healy, 2008). Moreover it engages with the different strategies adopted by trade unions on gender and diversity (Greene et al., 2005).

Our study is about union leaders, i.e. women who in different ways contribute to the mobilisation of their unions. Our paper focuses on how these leaders came to join unions, i.e. the initial stages of their own mobilisation journeys. We take the view that attention should be paid to relationship between union and joining and mobilisation to leadership. We do not suggest that there is a deterministic reason linking reasons for union joining with mobilising to leadership nevertheless, it is of value to consider why union leaders became involved in unions.

Why compare the UK and USA?

It might be pertinent to ask why we seek to make comparisons across national boundaries. Hyman (1994) offers a number of reasons supporting comparative research in industrial relations as well as the Increasing internationalisation of labour and capital. For him the underlying rationale is that it forces the observer to address critically what is normally accepted as unproblematic within national context and what is taken for granted may be shown to be contingent and perhaps exceptional. Moreover comparison forces us to relativise our assumptions about the nature and meaning of key institutions of employment relations and offers a more rigorous test of causal explanations developed in individual countries (Hyman and Ferner, 1994) What we choose to compare, when and where are also relevant to the outcome of research. O'Reilly reminds us that in comparative research we should give more attention to understanding societal specificities and how key concepts and indicators are interpreted in different environments (O'Reilly, 2006).

Why compare the UK and USA? Clearly the UK and USA are two major liberal industrialized countries, whose social and economic profiles bear many similarities (as well as significant differences). Both countries have experienced industrial and occupational restructuring which is not unrelated to women's increased employment participation. From an industrial relations point of view, both countries may be characterised as 'in crisis' with union decline taking a seemingly resilient and relentless shape; in the case of the USA for some 50 years and in the UK, for some 30 years, leading Towers (1997) to talk about a representation gap in both countries.

 In 1983, American union membership was 17.7 million, a density of 20 per cent (from a high of 30 per cent in 1955). By 2009 there was a density of 12.4 per cent. There is a huge difference between private sector density (7.2 per cent) and public sector (37.4); Union Review attributes this difference to stronger labour laws in the public sector and a combination of unemployment and anti-union retaliation by corporations (http://unionreview.com/bureau-labor-statistics-union-density-and-statement-american-rights-work - accessed 29th April 2010). In the US, women comprise just under half (44%), but a growing proportion of union members (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, Kaminski and Yakura, 2008), as compared to about 30 per cent in the 1980s.

Whereas in the UK, in 1979 there were 12 million trade union members, an all time high of 55 per cent. By 2008, this had nearly halved to 6.5 million members and a density of 28 per cent. Like the US, there is sharp distinction between public sector density (57.1 per cent) with that of the private sector (15.5 per cent) in the UK. Union density among female employees in the UK was 29.2 per cent in 2008, not dissimilar to what it was in the 1980s, while for male employees it is now 25.6 per cent. For the seventh consecutive year female union density has been higher than males and the gap between men and women is widening (Barrett, 2009).

It is evident that women now make up a highly significant proportion of union membership in both countries. This compares with a figure of around 30 per cent in the early 1980s in both countries. More women than men are now joining unions in both countries so the female share of membership looks set to increase. Despite this, women are not fore-grounded in the revitalisation debate.

The growth in women's proportional membership is important and underpins the pertinence of a study investigating an unrepresentative group of women leaders. It is true to say that women have made gains in both countries within union leadership and decision-making structures, yet they generally remain underrepresented in union leadership. Why? The argument that women are naturally more passive than men and that they are happy to leave men to represent their interests was refuted decades ago (Purcell, 1979). We have seen a change in that these 'essentialist' explanations that basically put the blame on women have less currency now. Even though women have made huge advances in the workplace and unions, research shows that climbing the ladder to leadership positions remains far from a smooth process and women face multiple gendered barriers ((Kirton and Healy, 1999, Kirton, 2006, Healy and Kirton, 2000, Cobble, 2007). We also need to note that black and minority ethnic women or women of colour are a significant constituency for American and British unions, but these women are even less well represented in leadership and decision-making positions and research shows that the barriers for them are multiplied and often of a different order (Cobble, 2007, Bradley and Healy, 2008, Bradley et al., 2004)). It is against the above context that our study took place.

Union Joining and Mobilisation

Our concern is with the dynamic relationship between union joining, union participation and union leadership. It is well documented that people join trade unions for a variety of reasons. Reasons for union joining have been well explored in both a generic way and national contexts (for example, Klandermans, 1984, Waddington and Whitson, 1997) and specifically with respect to women (Healy et al., 2004, Kirton, 2005). Klandermans discussed three reasons for union joining: frustration-aggression; rational choice and interactionist theories. Frustration-aggression approaches see union participation as a reaction to frustration, dissatisfaction, or alienation in the work situation. People and organizations are defined as systems striving for equilibrium. Rational choice theories account for participation from consideration of the individual costs and benefits of participation. Such an approach is particularly used in macrosociological analyses of union growth and decline. Interactionist theories relate participation to the networks and groups inside and/or outside the company in which employees work. Participation is bound to group culture, and the individual decision to participate is influenced by the group to which an individual belongs. It is concluded that frustration-aggression at best provides incomplete explanations of union participation and that the other two approaches are more promising. It is suggested that frustration, deprivation, or grievances are filtered through cost–benefit considerations and/or social organization in and

outside the workplace (Klandermans 1984:139). More recently Klandermans argued that we can distinguish between three fundamental reasons why movement participation is appealing to people: people may want to change their circumstances (*instrumental),* they may want to act as members of their group (*identity)* or they may want to give meaning to their world and express their views and feeling *ideology* (Klandermans, 2009:361). Waddington and Whitson consider individual versus collectivist reasons and conclude that the main reason that people join unions is to 'protect me if I have a problem at work', in other words an instrumental collective reason.

Our earlier work has also engaged with union joining but with respect to why women join unions in the UK (Healy et al., 2004, Kirton, 2005) and in these studies, the social organisation in and outside the organisation were shown to be pertinent. Healy et al in their study of black women union activists discuss routes to unionism as a result of family influences, political and feminist influences; diversity experience and the experience of the workplace – a combination of all three of Klandermans' reasons. They consider the debate on individualism and collectivism by engaging with Fox's analysis of atomistic individualism, instrumental collectivism and solidaristic collectivism (Fox, 1985). The latter forms of collectivism are broadly related to rational choice and interactionist theories. Moreover both union members and women are often treated as homogenous groups. Intersectional perspectives alert us to the different views and experiences of trade unionists between part-time and full-time women (Tomlinson, 2005); of black women trade unionists (Healy et al. 2004), of women participating in male dominated unions (Kirton 2005) of union members in professions (Healy, 1997, Healy and Kirton, 2002). Thus differences by category, union, job contract are key, as of course are differences by country.

Kelly's (1998) approach, drawing on mobilisation theory, is to direct attention to the role of ideologies in framing issues around which people can be mobilised for action 'since workers' willingness to act is one the key power resources for unions, then the way in which employees think about workplace and employment issues is a vital component of the mobilisation process'. While mobilisation theory identifies interests, organisation, mobilisation and forms of action as key, Kelly argues that changes in these four aspects of collectivism do not necessarily coincide (Kelly 1998:64). Nevertheless for Kelly injustice is central to the theory; the ways in which people (particularly members of subordinate groups) come to define them. The concept of organisation refers to the structure of a group and in particular those aspects which affect its capacity for collective action. Mobilisation refers to 'the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action' (Tilly 1978:7 quoted in Kelly 1998:25). The concept of opportunity is divided into three components: balance of power between the parties, the costs of repression by the ruling group and the opportunities available for subordinate groups to pursue their claims (ibid: 55). Importantly, Kelly states that ruling groups may be said to engage in counter-mobilisation in order to change subordinate definitions of interests, thwart the creation of effective collective organisation and to repress attempts at mobilisation and collective action (Kelly 1998:26). The above components are relevant to our

study which it should be remembered reflects on union leaders' early collective careers. Moreover, leaders are important in framing issues in particular ways, intensifying or moderating employees' sense of injustice. They play four major roles in the overall process of mobilisation: they imbue workers with a sense of grievance, create a sense of social identify, urge collective action and legitimate such action in the face of hostile criticisms (ibid: 49). Kelly's work has been influential but is not without its critiques (Atzeni, 2009, Cox et al., 2007).

Kelly also argues that activist' notions of workers' rights are often derived from general ideologies which implicate unions in political campaigns that go beyond the workplace (ibid:65). For a study of leadership then, the origins of collective identity is important.

Research Methods

This paper is part of a wider study international network programme on Women and Trade Union Leadership funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Our aim for this international network was to:

a) Stimulate a cross-national exchange of ideas and experiences on women's union leadership development
b) Run a cross-national exchange program for women union leaders
c) Contribute to global research on women and unions by providing a cross-national UK/US comparison carried out and analyzed by a cross-national research team
d) Establish an international e-network of women union activists and leaders
e) Disseminate findings to the UK and US union movements and scholarly community via a project report and academic workshops and publications

The research employed multiple research methods including

a) An innovative exchange program involving American and British women union leaders
b) One-to-one interviews with American and British women union leaders at all levels
c) Focus groups or roundtable discussions with American and British women union leaders
d) Case studies of a selection of the most senior union women in the UK and USA – these women are not named in this report for confidentiality reasons
e) A survey of the 2008 New Jersey WILD (Women in Leadership Development) Conference

20 women were involved in the exchange program, 119 women were interviewed (58 in the UK and 61 in the US). The women held various unions roles at all levels (both paid and unpaid) and we also included women who were prominent union leaders in both countries.

Our study has involved a complex multi-method approach and was indeed innovative in its character seeking to provide an in-depth comparative study. This took place during 2009-10. This has included an international exchange of women trade unionists from the UK to the US and these same women from the US to the UK and in each case to experience a common learning experience. In addition, 10 prominent trade unions were interviewed in the UK and the US and an interview programme involving some 80 women took place on both sides of the Atlantic. Crucially, in all cases, the same research instruments were used (adapted only to ensure that language was appropriate to the context). The study has had the support of the SERTUC (South East Region of the Trades Union Congress) and the New Jersey AFL-CIO, plus the Cornell Labour Education Department (New York City) and Rutgers Women at Work Centre plus cooperation from the different trade union movements from both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, the method includes two academic exchanges between academics from Queen Mary, University of London and those involved from Rutgers and Cornell University.

This paper will report on the findings of this relevant to the mobilisation conditions of women leaders at the early stage of their union careers operating in both countries. It will cast light on whether, despite the apparent international convergence in trade union density, there is divergence in women's experiences of participation in trade unions.

Research findings

We present our research findings by considering reasons for union joining. We do this by drawing on insights from the literature and therefore organise the findings by discussion of a) the traditional route to unionism through family b) ideological influences through feminism and social and political movements; c) experience of the workplace – injustice; d) instrumental collectivism and e) individualism.

Traditional route – family, communities and socialisation

Family influences were important on both sides of the Atlantic. Our interviewees were knowledgeable that being a union member was likely to benefit them; however, the nature of the benefit differed both between and within countries. Thus the interrelationship between familial union commitment and rational choice was evident.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the traditional route of family and communities was important. This should be no surprise and has been chronicled by many scholars (Ledwith et al., 1990, Bradley, 1999, Bradley et al., 2004, Kirton, 2005). Nevertheless, this is not sufficient, while this may identify a propensity to join a union and to get involved, there is no deterministic relationship. In other words, other conditions must also be in place for the traditional route to lead to activism. Union values however, may well come from family as illustrated in the following quotations.

I do have a family, very pro union, my grandmother was an organiser in Pittsburgh may years ago with the Combs steel workers out there and my father was a machinist in Philly and I heard union stories, and my mother, my mother's father was a union painter and he felt very strongly about the union so that was definitely part of my background, my family is very progressive. NJ10

My parents were active in the union when I was growing up so it wasn't a particularly big jump for me, so when I got my first job after leaving university, I joined straight away, I found out what the appropriate union was. UK12

My mother was a union representative, . . . and she became president, she was very active, she had me on my first picket line when I was six, I will never forget, I thought it was a block party. NYC2

The above examples are illustrative of the importance of union values across trade, profession and educational levels. For the above women, the role of leaders in their decision to join a union was less important that their collectivist values. Moreover, the intergenerational transfer of collective values is important to a differentiated workforce (Healy et al 2004).

The following story is apposite for its link between family and the paternalistic approach to trade unions experienced. Increasingly the link between management taking union roles has been questioned.

My parents were both trade union members, they met while there were working on the railway in Leeds, both members of TSSA and the my mum qualified as a teacher and joined the NUT and led a strike at my secondary school, so there was an industrial background, a family history, we were always in manual skilled trades, engineers, electricians, and they were always union member, it was part of life, there was no question, you started to work and joined the union, so when I started to work at the bank, pretty strange actually the local rep was the branch manager, quite paternalistic in those days so I went to work the next morning, by that time we had moved to North Devon and he said welcome to Barclays and he was trade union and he signed me up on the first day and I have been a trade union member ever since, UK20

It is salutary to relate this story from a contemporary perspective, it would seem an inconceivable unitary world.

Feminism and social and political activism

Our group of activist women reported feminist, anti-racist and political values in their interviews. The importance of the link between social movements (whether women's, anti-racist or left wing political parties) and collectivist values and their influence on trade unions has been documented in single country studies.

Strong female role models. Activists commonly reported commitment to feminist values. These ranged from their experience of strong women in their families to their 'learning' feminism from feminist tracts. The impact of home cannot be disconnected from feminist values of some women. The importance of strong women as role models was a recurring theme, for example:

> I think my life, not necessarily my experience with unions, my grandmother was very independent and proactive, so was my mom, I have always been surrounded by very strong, outspoken, independent women and it was natural order for m. NYC19

Role models in organisations are frequently cited as important to encourage women to aspire to leadership both in unions and organisations more generally. The connection between women's personal experience of strong women role models in their homes is less often made in organisational studies. Thus the interaction order of the home helps shapes the individual efficacy of women, despite the gendered nature of organisations.

Social and political movements. Historical influences recurred on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of the women grew up in the 1960s and their ideas about unions were a reflection of the political values of those days:

> I could and I was always drawn to collective, I guess being a child of the 60s and a hippie and wanting to be part of something collective and also anti establishment and I am not sure that my motives were completely pure as far as the labour movement goes, but it just seems like the thing to do at the time but when I went to work I was in unionised places and I didn't' give it much thought, I wasn't very involved, I joined but not as first, I started taking it for granted and I had some prejudices that people here tend to have about unions because I saw them as trade unions as opposed to why do white collar professional need a union, I would make those class distinctions in my own head. NJ2

Despite what might appear to be a collectivist orientation to unions, the above interviewee also found she had to overcome deep seated prejudices against trade unions. We noted that the omission of the word 'trade' was still important in the discussion on American unions. This reflected long standing discussion in the British trade union movement about white collar unions predilection for the use of the word 'association' rather than trade union. With the growth of super-unions, these conflicts are more likely to be intra-union rather than inter-union.

Probably stronger in the UK than in the US, was the growth of left political parties. The following woman stated that rather than feminism her influences were Marxist and again she came from a trade union background.

> Well I guess I was influenced more politically, as a socialist and Marxist, I always took the view, although obviously we do live in a patriarchal society but that has been encouraged by the system, so rather than blame men for that, it is the system, I never took the hard-line feminist view that all men were the problem and we had to fight the men because

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I think in the trade union, you can't do that, we have to work together UK13

UK13 pointed to the different approaches to feminism and how for her, a socialist perspective did not allow for the rupturing of class unity. Joining and activism coincided for the following woman who also attributed her activism to socialist politics:

> the reason I joined was because when I got into the first day at work, people were putting on coats and going out on strike and I have never been one to cross the picket line and it wasn't because everyone was doing it, I was pretty young at the time and I was getting involved in socialist parties and socialists politics so I walked out with them UK51

The following woman's politics and union political groupings were one and from a 'broad left' perspective. This case is interesting because at the time, the National Graphical Association (NGA) had a pre-entry closed shop, which was outlawed by the 1979 Conservative Government.

> I was actively involved in the Communist Party and it was in the National Graphical Association, there was a strong left grouping which was broad left. UK19

Nevertheless, the above case also points to the importance of political 'slates' in British unions and one which on the whole would override feminist platforms. This pattern was not something we detected in our interviews with American women. We undertook some of our research during the election campaign and were in New Jersey the night that Obama was elected to the Presidency. The women leaders we knew united around the Democratic Party and for Obama and were active in getting the vote out. While in Britain, unions tend to support the Labour Party (with some exceptions), union leaders are more likely have a variety of political affiliations and not all could be counted on 'to get the vote out'.

A union background does not inevitably lead to left politics. For the following woman, the exposure to intellectual ideas of Marxism and key historical events were the source of radicalisation.

> My dad was a shop steward so I was aware of unions growing up but he was not really political about it I mean he is a member of the Liberal democrats party, which traditionally is not really union but I was always aware of the union and growing up I was real political growing up because I came from a working class family, in my school it was like really middle class and I always felt out of place, when I started learning about the Russian revolution and Marxists and stuff and when I got to Uni, I got really radical like most students tend to do and my first job was a real crappy temp job and it just seemed like the natural thing to do was join a union, it as something I believed in and the kind of job I was in, you were able to get messed around by management, I had seen other people get messed around so I joined to have that support in case anything happened to me. UK47

Thus her political ideologies superseded her family union background, which she rather downplayed because of her father's liberal politics. Moreover, she was sensitised to be alert for problems at work and wanted to ensure that they she had protection at work (see Waddington and Whitston (1996) for a discussion on this point).

While women openly reported socialist and left wing commitments in the UK unions, this was rare in the US. Rather, they were more likely to report that they had been accused of being a communist, because of their organising activities.

> after I got a bad evaluation, my supervisor told me she knew I was a communist because of my organising activities and so I thought discretion was a better part of the battle so I found another job since we lost a campaign and the State nurse's association offered me a job as a labour representative NJ11

Accusations of 'communist' as a form of abuse are more common in the US; the ideology of self sufficiency and freedom from the state is deeply embedded in American psyche. But this was not always the case. Fantasia and Stepan-Norris chart the purging of the Communist Party and left winger activists in the CIO changing it from a social movement to a business union with a practical accommodation to American capitalism (Fantasia and Stepan-Norris, 2009). Nevertheless, in the UK, where an acceptance of the role of the state for the collective good is more acceptable, derogatory accusations of left-wing agitators are not an uncommon form of counter-mobilisation. We now follow through the importance of injustice element of the above quotation.

Experience in the workplace: injustice

The importance of injustice in the mobilisation literature was established earlier in the paper. Moreover Klandermans raised the importance of frustration-aggression in encouraging union joining. In different ways and in different forms injustice was a recurring theme as to why people joined, organised or became active in both countries, in other words, injustice was a spur for 'preparedness to become active' (Kelly 1998).

The following quotation encompassed a woman who knew little about unions, but experienced injustice and frustration when her attempts to resolve the problem through management failed:

> I didn't' know anything about unions, I was a staff nurse in a hospital and I was very, very dissatisfied with my working conditions, . . . so it was a dangerous and very frustrating job environment and I had tried through the normal way, committees, even I even wrote a letter to the board of nursing because I was so concerned about putting my license and people's lives at risk and I needed some direction, they never answered my letter by the way, so I was put through to the State nurses association. NJ11

This contact led to her organising the union in the hospital, which was not at that time organised:

> they (the association) said you need to organise and I said how do I do that and they said come to the office and they gave me a bunch of authorisation cards and said I had to get them signed. There was very little information available but I was so frustrated, I started an organising campaign which was unsuccessful, it was a bargaining unit of about three hundred nurses and we lost by eighteen votes and my only bad evaluation as a practicing nurse was done during that campaign. NJ11

The original feeling of injustice was a trigger to starting an organising campaign. In this case there was no organisation (a component of mobilisation theory), rather the woman was prepared to start an organising campaign in order to create the necessary organisation to challenge injustice. Thus while organisation might be a necessary part of mobilisation, it is not a precondition.

NJ11's increasing alienation from management led to further injustice, and this time directly targeted at her because of her acts of resistance. Moreover, her career in that hospital was potentially damaged as a result of a negative evaluation and she felt obliged to change jobs.

Attribution of blame to management was part of picture of injustice; but as in Calveley and Healy's (2003) study, so also was frustration with and attribution of blame to the union in the following case.

> I went to the union and the rep told me to be glad I had a job and that was probably was kind of changed the way I looked at things and at that point, I realised I wasn't going to get help from him, I would have to do it myself and that's what I did, I fought for my seniority and the right to bid on a job based on seniority and once I got that it just seemed like it drew a lot of attention from other people at the plant and they kind of pushed me into becoming a shop steward and once I got into it, I liked it, I liked being in a position that helped. NJ9.

NJ9 explained that it wasn't just her own injustice that led to her personal union journey. it was also the gendered culture of the union that undervalued individual grievances:

> It depended on what it was, the union was kind of like an old boys' network, if it was an issue that affected a lot of people yes but because it was a singular issue, it was about me and my seniority which wasn't that important to them, no and that's why I kind of stepped out on my own. NJ9

For other women, it was the injustice they saw that was targeted at specific groups, in this case, women and minorities.

> Yes, it was one of the things happening in the office, it was more the local management at the time which is now different, but women and also minorities were not being treated the same in terms of division of

labour, the arraignment schedule and assignments and also in the way we were being evaluated, to me that was the biggest distinction. NY17

Thus the attribution of blame rather than being individual had a collective base with women and minorities being the group affected. Injustice and the subsequent attribution of blame were often highly specific. In the following case management were blamed for its neglect to insure its staff.

and some workers got injured and we discovered much to our chagrin, she did not have workman's comp insurance for us and we were saddled with the bills based on the injuries, They then organised. NYC 19

Whereas others came to collectivism by recognition of injustice despite their negative evaluation of unions, they gradually saw their value, for example.

I used to be in the air force, we had no unions, there was no need and I thought union people were troublemakers, so that was my background, since then, I have changed my mind quite a bit. I joined the union because I saw there were problems that could not be sorted out by an individual, you needed the backing of a body and it took me quite a few years to come around to that way of thinking.UK21

This quotation is important because it shows how injustice can mobilise. But also how it may be a gradual process, rather than what Watson (1988) calls 'significant events' or 'significant others'. In the above case, we see a gradual realisation of the importance of collectivism and the corresponding weakness of the individual.

There is little doubt that unions have the potential to mobilise workers from minority groups; moreover in the UK and the US black and minority union members are seeking active roles in the unions (see Cobble, 2007, Healy et al., 2004). Nevertheless unions may fail to take account of other than white and often white men's concerns.

When I got promoted to being a technician, I went into an all white male environment, when I went, there was an influx of black women coming into that position, it was like an affirmative action program, so listening to people telling me their problems, I would say why don't you grieve, they said, they won't take it on, they only sit in for whites, they won't do it for blacks and I said, okay elections are coming up, I will put my name on the board, and I will make sure your grievances are heard and that is how I got in. I didn't go in just to represent the blacks but it was everybody, NYC 27

The above example is important as we know that where unions alienate migrant workers or where there are no unions to represent them they will turn to their own communities and still organise as has been evident from the growth of community organising and worker centres (Fine, 2006), The community context was also important to many of the women

> Especially in New York where we have so much diversity, there are so many things to get involved, not just union, I am in the Latino American Democratic Board and in our community, teaching about health care reform, but I don't see the trade union in those communities.

Similar patterns occur in the UK although they take a different form. In the following example, we cite a Caribbean woman influenced by her Christian background and how she interacted with another outsider to learn how to organise for black workers.

> Most Caribbean have this Christian framework, I have been trained in fair play so if I see it and I am around, I won't have it, I will do something about so it's this Christian ethos and then in addition to that, when I went to [organisation], she was in the Lesbian and gay group, I am not a Lesbian but she got me in on this race things, she was fighting her corner and I needed to fight my own, so she gave me some paper work from Unison and she gave me the course and . . . , they introduced me to [the union]. UK18

Instrumental collectivism

It has always been the case that workers have joined unions for instrumental reasons. Our sample of union leaders demonstrated different reasons for union joining, and instrumental collectivism was important. However what is interesting form a comparative perspective, is the way that instrumental collectivist reasons differed according to the structural contexts of the different countries.

In the following case of New York teachers, there was an expectation that teachers would join the union. Not joining would place you outside the collective body of the teachers, therefore the expectation of joining tended, although not always, to be met.

> With teachers, we are all represented by the union whether we choose to join or not and we have to pay to be represented whether we sign up or not so the third day in teacher orientation was the last thing on the schedule, they had to provide union time so the current president and labour specialist came in and spoke to us and told us all about the union and passed out our forms and we all signed them, it was expected and we just did, we have had 100% membership in my local for a number of years, no one objects, every now and then you have someone who has a moral issue with unions and will choose to just be an agency. NY16

'to protect me if I have a problem at work' is the most common instrumental collectivist reason that people join unions in the UK (Waddington and Whitston 1996). This reason is well spelt out in the following quotation and related to the vulnerability of the woman's own situation:

> I think not just because you are an individual but so many things, I am a woman, I am an ethnic minority and I am disabled and it makes you a vulnerable category so it seemed to me that was an added protection to

have union backup, it was vital to be in the union and that support was there UK44

The UK literature reveals that one of the reasons that people do not join unions is because they have not been asked (Waddington and Whitston 1996). So far we have indicated the importance of family and political socialisation, the following quotation makes clear that such politicisation can be local:

> one of the girls joined the union, either joined or came to AGM, someone invited her and she came back and said it's really interesting and then she went to the (union) one and said you should come to next year's so that's what I did and we continued to have problems as trainees and there was a trainee rep on the committee but she was rubbish and she got promoted so the post was vacant and I thought I can do that job, so there was no election, I put myself forward and got it. UK1

Some of the women were committed to trade unions by their background, but were not prepared to take them at any price. The multi-union context in Britain allowed them to move between unions which did not appear to be working for them. The following woman had a union family background, but was also prepared to critically appraise her experience of unions and move unions if necessary:

> my father was a miner, my mom worked in the hospital as an auxiliary nurse and they were members so unions were not strange to me, but I signed up with [public sector union] and had an issue at work while I worked in school meals and they were not very good and someone said you should join the [general union] and I went to see the rep, they signed me on, they took on my problem UK11

A union cannot count on unquestioning loyalty because of an ideological commitment to trade unionism. In a multi-union context such as the above, movement between unions remains an option. Because of the nature of labour contracts in the US, this situation is unlikely to arise. As Fantasia and Voss state (2004:24) 'Trade union membership is a status that is attained (and maintained) workplace by workplace and firm by firm'.

Individualism

Fox considered 'atomistic individualism' to be where individuals pursue their own enlightened self interest acting as an atomistic, independent and self responsible unit. This is not to say that an atomistic incentive to join unions is fixed in time; on the contrary, the experience of unionism can mobilise and lead to solidaristic collectivism. It should be remembered when reading this section, that all the women in our study were activists at different levels in their unions.

From a comparative perspective, it is this aspect where differences between the countries are quite stark. The differences tend to be structurally based. Until Obama's recent health reforms, some 40 million Americans had no health benefits, where all their British counterparts have access to universal

healthcare though the National Health Service. Thus this underpinned the motivation to join a union that offered health benefits:

> I got in because I need the money and in America we don't' have health benefits and I got in because I have a small son, he's seven now but when I got in, he was three, that is originally why I joined the union. NJ15

The craft union organisation in New York and New Jersey gave real benefits over and above their non-union counterparts. In some union locals, they are effectively demonstrated 'closed' union characteristics that have nearly disappeared from the British industrial relations landscape. Nevertheless, it influenced some of the older women in our sample:

> I did a four year apprenticeship at school with the [government department], the firs two years you were at the training school and the last two years, you were down in the yard working on the jobs and to go and work in the yard you had to join the union because it was a closed shop, they don't have them anymore, it's been outlawed, but I joined because you had to, I didn't think about it, you had to join to carry on. So I joined because it was a closed shop. UK43

In the American context, the importance of the craft union remains. In some crafts, the union offered training, better pay and benefits.

> I guess you could be an electrician in this state and not be in trade union member but my union is all electricians and if you join that union, they train you to become an electrician in five years so automatically you are a union member and they'll split shop, so as far as how I became one, my grandfather, my father, my brother, my uncle, my two sons, all electricians and my brother is ten years younger than me and he started to apply and I thought if he's smart enough to do it and make that kind of money, I'd be damned if I am not going to do it. I applied and I passed the test the first year, although I waited seven years to get in because they didn't accept me for seven years in a row, they only interviewed once a year. NJ1

Despite the key pull factors to enter the electricians' world, it is evident to this woman that it was unusual for a woman to follow her male family members into the trade. In other words, this is a male dominated occupation and an associated dominant male culture. What was also noteworthy to the British researchers was the pride with which craft union members wore their union shirts. Moreover, the union mobilised their members not only by benefits, but by bringing members together through various family and community activities.

There may be an assumption that in some cities and in some sectors jobs are union jobs. This belief may encourage members to join the union. In the

following case, the combination of 'union jobs' plus a union family background was reported in the following case:

> I became a member because most New York City jobs are union jobs and i was told by my father who is a union member, a retired member of local 237, he always told my brother and myself, we needed to get a union job. NYC 26

In other American cases, references were made to the agency shop. In such cases, the worker who chooses not to join the union, will still pay the union subscription. The rationale for this is determined to reduce the impact of the 'freerider'.

> When I got to the turnpike, there was a trade union there and in New Jersey, you pay an agency shop no matter what but obviously growing up in my house, it was automatic. NJ7

We were advised by labour educators, that despite the above context, unions could not take for granted union joining of all potential members. Indeed a key concern was to organise those in agency shops, and this challenge shaped the content of union leadership education.

Thus the reason for union joining may be characterised as individual, the reality is that the reason is circumvented with a set of social reasons that shape the experience of unionism.

Conclusions

Our findings indicate that the political and legislative conditions that operate in the UK and the US provide divergent conditions in which mobilisation takes place. Nevertheless, this comparative study confirmed the importance of family networks in influencing a propensity to unionise and to get involved in unions. This was passed on by parents with a solidaristic background and by parents who saw unions as an instrumental vehicle. Moreover, many of the women expressed ideologically committed views with respect to feminism and socialism. The influence of strong women in the lives of our women leaders was a recurring theme; the importance of role models, watching women navigate difficult male dominated contexts all influenced their personal union efficacy.

In the UK, a number of women also reported the influence of socialist politics as being central to their involvement in unions. Kelly pointed out the notions of workers' rights are often derived from general ideologies which implicate unions in political campaigns that go beyond the workplace (1998:65). From our study it was the case that politics did influence the belief in worker rights and how these may be fought for solely within the workplace context. However it was also the case that political campaigns created a predisposition to unionism and that that involvement in unions led to wider political engagement. The moment in history when the women leaders in our study joined unions was important. This was particularly the case for older women with respect to involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the feminist

movements. However, our research also revealed that political engagement emerged from the intellectual study of socialism, politics and key political events in history. Thus it was evident that the origins of a collectivist orientation often lay outside the workplace and reflected the importance of ideology.

Nevertheless, this does not discount the workplace as a site of mobilisation. For Kelly (1998) injustice is central to mobilisation theory. A collective orientation may mean that there is a greater likelihood of identifying the nature of injustice and attributing blame to management. This was evident in our studies. However, there was no deterministic relationship between a prior orientation to collectivism and recognition of injustice. On the contrary, we noted women who could be characterised as anti-union being mobilised by the experience of injustice. Moreover, attribution of blame was not confined to management; it was also evident that injustice was amplified by the union's lack of representation, perhaps for a range of reasons including gender and race. Thus analytically it is crucial to recognise the complexity of the mobilisation process and the role of injustice, including the attribution of blame.

From a comparative perspective, it was evident that many of the experiences with respect to external factors influencing mobilisation (whether from family and social movements were common in the two countries. However a key difference was the influence of left wing political movements having less significance in the US. The purging in the post world war II era has left a clear legacy. However our observations and engagement in union events, particularly in New York City, suggests that immigrant involvement in unions and the importance of women to unions, may indeed lead to some resurgence in union activity and a form of union transformation in pockets of organisation ((see also Fine, 2006).

It was also the case the different legal contexts in the two countries resulted in a more fragmented union movement in the US and as is well documented (Logan, 2008), the counter mobilising lobby of employers is much more intense than in the UK. Moreover there is a very different bargaining context in the two countries with considerably greater fragmentation in the US. Nevertheless, where labour contracts exist, there is an incentive for workers to join unions, notwithstanding the free-riding nature of agency shops.

What does our study mean for union joining? In both countries, the opportunity to join is a key variable. There were clear examples of mobilisation, where opportunities were created as a result of collective orientations. The women in our study are all leaders at different levels in the two union movements. It was evident from their stories of union joining and participation that collective orientations are not fixed, that while social and political background is important, so is the experience of injustice in the workplace as an important element in the mobilisation process.

Thus we must conclude that the reasons for union joining are multidimensional and overlapping. Moreover, in neither country is there a deterministic trend. However, the instrumental imperative to join is far greater

in the US than in the UK. Nevertheless, instrumentalism may lead to a mobilising journey and lead to union leadership as was the case with the women in our study.

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