A little help from our friends

A framework for understanding when labor unions are likely to join long-term union-community coalitions

By Amanda Tattersall

School of Business, University of Sydney

Faculty of Economics and Business

Economics & Business Building H69

The University of Sydney

Sydney, NSW, 2006

amandatattersall@gmail.com

Phone (US): +1-607-342-1512

Phone (Aus): +61-409-321-133

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Abstract

Union renewal and coalition unionism are widely considered necessary, however the different factors that provoke union engagement in coalitions is an under-theorized area of scholarship. This article develops a framework using the term community and the dialectic of opportunity and choice to explore likely factors for long-term union coalitions with community organisations. It then explores this framework by comparing two case studies of union engagement in long-term coalitions in Australia and Canada. The article finds that the dialectic of opportunities and choices is critical, and in particular emphasizes the role of pre-existing union identities, and common interest and decentralized union structures for generating deep union engagement. It highlights that unions are likely to engage in coalition unionism when there is a coincidence of crisis and perceived opportunity for coalition practice, while noting that the depth of union engagement is greatly affected by the type of union actors that initiates coalition participation (whether officials, factions, organizers or delegates). The article finds that different passages for coalition unionism are possible, and they can originate inside unions or be provoked externally by coalitions. It stresses that union leadership support for coalition unionism may be necessary for coalition practice, but it is not sufficient for generating deep union engagement in coalitions.

There is a hope that union renewal is possible. Yet indicators of when a shift to renewal is likely to occur are uncertain, and often a secondary focus of scholarship. Some suggest that union-community coalitions (labor-community coalitions) are one example of renewal (Frege, Heery et al. 2004; Reynolds 2004; Turner forthcoming). Long-term coalitions between unions and community organisations, or coalition unionism, is said to be an important source of power and renewal for unions who are suffering from a crisis of density, lack of political influence or needing to build a broader social agenda (Tattersall 2005).

This article focuses on the question of coalitions, often called labor-community coalitions, beginning with the meaning of the term community. It then presents a framework of the opportunities and choices that make an individual union more likely to engage in coalitional unionism. This framework is then explored in two comparative case studies – the NSW Teachers Federation's collaboration with the Public Education Alliance in Sydney Australia and the Canadian Union of Public Employees collaboration with the Ontario Health Coalition in Canada.

1. What is Community?

Terms such as labor-community coalitions, coalition unionism and community unionism have a contested and uncertain meaning, in part due to the ambiguity of the term 'community.' However, while the term community is loosely deployed across union renewal literature, there are some consistent themes (Tattersall 2006a). Most commonly, the term community is used as a surrogate for the phrase community organisation, for example in the term labor-community coalition (Brecher and Costello 1990a; Tufts 1998). Secondly community is used to describe a group of people who have 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 neighborhood community (Ellem 2003). These three discrete definitions are complementary and supplementary, defining the attributes of community and providing a concrete anchor for exploring terms such as labor-

community coalitions, coalition unionism and community unionism (Tattersall 2006a). See figure 1.

Figure 1: The threefold dimensions of community (included at end)

Thus, union collaboration with the community, or what I term community unionism, can include one of three different practices (Tattersall 2006a). It can include working in coalition with community organisations (Banks 1992; Tufts 1998). It can include unions or community organisations acting with a broad common 'community' or class interest or acting with people with a specific identity (Cranford and Ladd 2003; Fine 2005). Or, community unionism 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 and power (Ellem 2005). This article explores one of these practices in detail – coalition unionism – when unions collaborate with community organisations, asking when long term collaboration likely to develop.

Not only can the definition of community define community unionism, but it also defines the different elements of coalition unionism (Tattersall 2006a). Coalitions have organizational features, operating with different types of organizational relations; they have common interest or identity features, operating with different degrees of common concern between organisations, and coalitions have place based features as they engage with the external world, operating with scalar dimensions (Tattersall 2006a; Tattersall

2006c). Thus the term community can also be a guide for understanding the operation and variations of coalition unionism.

2. When are unions likely to collaborate with 'the community'?

Union strategies rarely develop evenly across national or international union movements; rather many internal union and environmental factors affect when particular strategies unfold. Yet this variation has received only limited attention, making it difficult to explain why for instance, coalition unionism appears more prevalent in the United States compared to the United Kingdom, or more successful in the service industry rather than traditional blue-collar industries.

This article develops a framework for examining when long term coalition unionism is likely to develop in an individual union, by adapting two analytical devises. Firstly, I borrow from a recent approach by Turner that categorizes the pressures that generate union change as arising from both the opportunities that surround unions and the choices internal to unions (Turner forthcoming). Secondly, I structure this approach using the three-fold 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.

2.1 Opportunities

A union's environmental and organizational context shapes the kind of strategies that it is likely to develop. The term opportunity structure, adapted from social movement theory, stresses the importance of structural and environmental factors in social movement emergence (McAdam, Tarrow et al. 2001; Turner forthcoming). In the union renewal literature, three important 'opportunities' are identified that correspond to the three definitions of community. Firstly there are place-based opportunities in the political, economic and social environment, secondly a union's relational opportunities, and thirdly opportunities arising from a union's pre-existing identity.

Shifts in the external political and economic environment spurs opportunities for changes in union strategy, including coalition unionism (Hyman 2001). Causes include the decline in legal regulatory support for unions, such as in the United States where comprehensive campaigning has sought to replace traditional National Labor Relations Board routes for unionisation (Savage 1998). The demise of traditional political routes can also cause shifts towards collaboration, particularly with the rise of 'new labor' policies that distance social democratic parties from unions in countries such as Australia or the United Kingdom (Wills 2002; Fine 2003; Wills 2003; Upchurch, Taylor et al. 2006). The demise of these traditional relational sources of union power may encourage unions to experimentation with coalitions as an alternative source of power.

The economic context, including collapsing union density or industrial location may influence the likelihood of coalition practice. Crises such as contracting out, attacks on

the public sector, privatization or plant closures, have provoked coalitions because of the common opposition by workers and surrounding communities (Craypo and Nissen 1993; Johnston 1994; Nissen 1995; Reynolds 2002; Tattersall 2006a; Greer, Byrd et al. forthcoming). The crisis of declining union density may also influence coalition practice, seen particularly in the US (Banks 1992; Bronfenbrenner, Freidman et al. 1998). Labor geographers have argued that industries with a spatial-fix, such as some primary industries such as mining or certain human service work such as cleaning, may provide distinct opportunities for coalitions because this work is embedded in fixed local communities (Savage 1998; Walsh 2000; Ellem 2003; Ellem 2005).

A union's organizational relationships, both within the union movement and within civil society may also create opportunities for coalitions. Peak councils or other unions may support collaboration by creating a culture of alliances that supports individual unions engagement (Ellem and Shields 2004; Tattersall forthcoming a). Central labor councils in the US can be agents for change, with programs such as Union Cities that support coalition practice (Ness and Eimer 2001; Byrd and Rhee 2004; Luce and Nelson 2004; Reynolds 2004). Similarly, community collaboration requires available community allies (Tarrow 1994). Johnson argues that allies are prevalent in the public sector, where consumer groups share common interests with workers (Johnston 1994; Carpenter 2000). The type of coalition partner may also affect whether it can change union practice and deeply sustain and engage union participation. Union coalitions with separate, independent coordinators may be more capable of affecting union practice as they can act above vested organizational interest and assist in the creation of compromise and a

sustained campaign agenda (Lipsig-Mumme 2003; Reynolds 2004; Tattersall 2005). The relative independence and separation of a coalition from a union may enable it to in turn influence the union, possibly generating change and a depth of engagement.

Finally, pre-existing union identities may also create opportunities for coalitions. Unions with a history of militancy, ideological radicalism or broad interest representation beyond wages and conditions may be more likely to engage in future collaboration (Hyman 1994; Robinson 2000). Ideologically progressive unions may find it easier to cultivate a common interest with community organisations if they are committed to campaigning on issues beyond wages or conditions (Waterman 1998; Bramble 2001; von Holdt 2002). Similarly, if union collaboration is a familiar tactic – part of a union's 'repertoire of contention' – then it is more likely to be used as a strategy in the future (Tarrow 1994; Frege, Heery et al. 2004).

2.2 Choices

However the development of union practice is not simply a force of nature; a union must choose to commit to coalition unionism given the surrounding opportunities (Kochan, Katz et al. 1986; Pocock 1998; Hyman 2001; Turner forthcoming). Union strategy literature highlights the diversity of actors that can shift union strategies. These are explored in this section then examined in the comparative case studies.

Specific union actors are held out as key for causing coalition unionism. Leadership support is most often suggested to be critical for organizational change, and leadership

support for collaboration practice is said to make it more likely to occur (Nissen 2000; Voss and Sherman 2000; Cooper 2001; Frege, Heery et al. 2004; Crosby 2005). Alternatively, some argue that 'bottom up' pressures are primary, presenting an idealistic picture of rank and file democratic pressure as key for promoting sustained coalitions (Moody 1997). In addition, Rose identifies an important layer of 'bridging building' officials that support coalitions (Rose 2000). Bridge builders have experience in the union movement and social movements which they use to facilitate coalitions by translating cultural and class barriers (Rose 2000; Voss and Sherman 2000).

A common criticism of this literature is that it identifies a particular agent as primary; that somehow leaders, the rank and file or bridge builders are the most important for achieving shifts to collaboration. Yet as Hyman emphasizes, unions contain a complex set of relations, decision making bodies and political forces that all influence the development of strategy (Hyman 1975; Hyman 1989). In the case studies I explore this question of agency, considering how the alignment of particular types of actors affects and shapes the quality, and in particular the depth of coalitions (Tattersall 2005).

There are three additional factors that shape whether a union is likely to choose coalition unionism: the common interests and or identity of the existing and potential union workforce, the type of coalition the union is working with and the organizational scale of the union.

The identity or common interest elements of community affect the likelihood and depth of coalition unionism, and the ability of the union to develop a broader class consciousness from collaborative experiences. Member engagement is affected by the type of issue selected for collaboration. The connection between issue and direct interest is relevant; a teacher is likely to connect to a campaign on public education because there is a direct connection between working conditions and education funding (Johnston 1994; Tattersall 2005; Tattersall 2006a). Union education may enhance political awareness and breadth of concern, cultivating a political concern beyond issues of wages and conditions, creating a basis of solidarity beyond individual concern where personal interests are more broadly connected to industry, region or class (Freire 1972; Spencer 1994).

The organizational scale and decentralization of decision making and leadership within a union may also vary the depth of member engagement in a coalition. At the scale of a union office, effective collaboration requires resources and dedicated staff, which may mean that large resource rich unions can more easily practice coalitions (Tattersall 2006a). The decentralization of organizational scale and workplace leadership are also critical for depth of member engagement (Tattersall forthcoming a). Political consciousness are developed not only through vision, but through personal relationships, making makes local union participation, decision making and leadership critical for deep coalition unionism (Thompson 1963; Wills 1998; Tattersall 2006a). The extent to which unions have rank and file decision making structures and space for delegates or stewards to make decisions will affect the depth of coalition engagement.

3. Case Studies

These six indicators for likely coalition unionism are explored through a comparison of two public sector unions that shift towards coalition unionism in Australia and Canada respectively.

3.1 NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) and the Public Education Alliance, Australia

The NSWTF is the largest public sector union in NSW, representing teachers in the public education school system (O'Brien 1987). The union has strong density, with over 90% of full time teachers in the union (White 2004).

The union's identity and a decentralized internal structure created opportunities for coalition unionism. It has a history of advocating for issues such as peace and feminism, and campaigning in coalition with parents on issues of public education (O'Brien 1987). Indeed, the NSWTF, the Federation of Parents and Citizens (P&C) and the Federation of Community Organisations (FOSCO) have, since WWII, met as the Three Federations, to report on issues of concern and priority to each other as an ad hoc coalition. Internally, the structure of the union is decentralized and the union runs a comprehensive training program. The union has a 300 person rank and file council that meets eight times per year and over 2000 union delegates and 2000 women's contacts, one in each school across the state (Federation 2005). The union has a regional structure, with over 150 regionally-based teacher associations that meet monthly.

Despite these strengths, the union found itself in an escalating crisis in the mid-1990s as public education funding was cut and the union was increasingly unable to affect that agenda. In the 1990s ideological and financial attacks on public education occurred at a federal and state level.[1] Federally, there was a privileging of private education and a shifting of funds to private schools (Watson 2004). At a state level, the pressure to reduce budget deficits prompted school restructures and a need to reduce recurrent expenditure – the greatest item being teacher wages (interview, former Minister for Education, 2005). 'Tense and aggressive' salary battles developed over the 1990s, 'with condition stripping becoming the basis for award negotiation' (interview, O'Halloran NSWTF President, 2004). The conflict escalated in the 1999 salaries campaign which was aggressively fought in the media. For example, the popular Sydney tabloid, *The Daily Telegraph* ran a front page campaign attacking the NSWTF's wage claim, culminating in a front-page article featuring a cartoon of the NSWTF President drawn wearing a dunce's cap with the slogan 'if the cap fits!' (Daily Telegraph 1999).

This salaries campaign generated significant disquiet amongst teachers' there was a sense teachers 'were being denigrated by talk-back radio' (interview, NSWTF Organizer 4, 2005). Organizers recalled members contacting them 'worried and angry' about the 'berating' of teachers on talk-back radio (interview NSWTF Organizer 4, 6, 7 2005). This despair sometimes resulted in anger at the union, particularly that the NSWTF did not have a sufficient media presence, with motions moved at union state council meetings

[1] In Australia, State and Federal Governments are responsible for education funding, with the State Government primarily responsible for running the public school system.

calling for it to investigate a more effective media strategy (interview, NSWTF Official 2, 2005; O'Halloran, 2004).

A group of organizers and delegates, all located in South-Western and Western Sydney, and all in a similar loose faction within the union began strategizing about how to shift the union's capacity. At the same time, an organizer, Zadkovich, wrote a paper calling for a series of internal reforms that would support 'social movement unionism', inspired by a study trip overseas (Zadkovich 1999). This group became an agent of change within the union. Working off the widespread anger around media messaging and strategy, delegates from South-West Sydney moved a motion at the 1999 Annual NSWTF Conference calling for the formation of a Public Education Fund – a membership fee that would create a dedicated union resource for public education campaigns.

The South-West Sydney group also argued for the formation of formal education coalitions – called public education lobbies – between teachers, parents and school principals (Zadkovich 1999). This supported by the leadership, but gained momentum after a series of local forums, first in Campbelltown and Liverpool in 1999 that together attracted 600 people, then in Mount Prichard in 2000 that attracted 750 people (interview, NSWTF Organizer 5, Principal representative, 2005). Establishing public education lobbies in south-west Sydney was made easier by the Public School Principals Forum. This was a 'radical' grouping of principals, who broke away from the Primary Principals Association in the mid-1990s (interview, Principal representative, 2005). This group was internally well organized, had a public media presence and offered the local teachers a

ready ally in their desire to organize across the education community (interview, NSWTF Organiser, 2005).

The greatest achievement of the NSWTF's coalition unionism was the 'Vinson Inquiry' – an independent inquiry into public education run by the NSWTF and parent groups, a deep form coalition that extended from the rank and file to the leadership of the union (Tattersall 2006a). Local union support for the Inquiry was widespread given the preceding debates about coalition unionism, sharing a sense of 'ownership over the public education campaign' (interview, NSWTF Organizer, 2005). Organizational support for the Inquiry was key, as the 1999 Fund had amassed over $1 million which funded the Independent Inquiry. The union leadership was actively committed to the campaign. Deputy President O'Halloran who was responsible for the day-to-day affairs of the Inquiry, was later elected President in late 2002 (interview, NSWFT Organizer 4, 6). The issue of public education deeply connected to teacher's concerns as professional educators, and engaged them about how to repair the system (interview, NSWTF Official, 5, 2005). As O'Halloran describes, the Inquiry 'touched the middle teacher who normally doesn't get involved in their union' (interview, O'Halloran, 2004). The campaign was connected to members through the union's decentralized structure. It was regionally-based organizers, regional teachers associations and local school delegates who coordinated school visits, public meetings and media interviews as the Inquiry's head, Tony Vinson, toured the State promoting and investigating the issue of public education (interview, Irving, NSWTF Official, 2005).

However, the coalition unionism was not sustained at this pace or depth. Two years after the Inquiry, the coalition with the parent groups declined. At this time the union moved into a campaign on salaries and while it continued to use the frame of public education, the issue was limited to wage claims. The leadership of the parent group also shifted, and a new leader who prioritized a relationship with Government rather than the union took away a traditional ally (interview, parent representative 2, 2005). Furthermore, during the salaries campaign the union moved out of a 'community-focused' mode and into an 'industrial mode' – organizing itself around the Industrial Relations Commission hearings with rallies that sought to influence the IRC and the Government (Tattersall 2006a). It did not sustain the regular parent-principle meetings that had occurred during the Inquiry, and these coalitions fell away. More recently coalition work has rekindled, but not yet to the magnitude, depth or policy success that was achieved during the Vinson Inquiry.

3.2 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC)

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is the largest union in Canada. Its members are the general staff of the public sector, including non-clinical hospital workers. It is one of seven unions in health care.[2]

Similar to the NSWTF, CUPE's internal decentralized structure and union identity has created opportunities for coalition unionism. CUPE has two central Ontario-wide

[2] Other unions in health care include traditional health care unions such as the Ontario Nurses Association, Ontario Public Sector Employees Union and the Service Employees International Union, as well as less traditional private sector unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers, who have come to represent health care workers in a context of union competition.

leadership units: a central office led by President Sid Ryan and the Ontario Council of Hospitals (OCHU), a bargaining unit for hospitals led by President Michael Hurley. Underneath are CUPE's locals; separate union branches, often based around workplaces or regional areas (interview, CUPE Official 3, 2006). CUPE's identity also predisposes it to coalition unionism. It is a 'left, nationalist, social union,' regularly campaigning beyond wages and conditions in alliance with the labor party (the New Democratic Party) and social movements.

Despite these pre-existing features, it was not until the Ontario Health Coalition reformed in response to expanding attacks on public health care that CUPE began engaging in long-term health care coalition work. The Ontario Health Coalition was first formed in the early 1980s, but was rekindled in December 1995 by the Ontario Federation of Labor to respond to pressures for privatization and hospital closures (Tetley 1995). At first, CUPE's participation was relatively limited to membership and meetings with the OHC Administrative Committee, financial donations and ad hoc participation in campaign events (interview, CUPE Official 4, 2005).

In 2002, CUPE's coalition engagement deepened in response to a major political crisis and opportunity for the OHC. In early 2002, a public campaign for privatization of health care intensified, with statements that Medicare was unsustainable (Mackie 2000; Fraser 2001; Kirby and Le Breton 2002). Then, an opportunity arose for the OHC when the Liberal Federal Government announced a Royal Commission into Health Care, charged with investigating the viability of universal health care.

In April 2002 the OHC, led by CUPE, embraced a radical strategy to support public Medicare by ‘canvassing the Province’, going door to door (Mehra 2005). The idea came from Ross Sutherland, a member of the Kingston Health Coalition and a CUPE activist. As a bridge builder between this local community group and the union, he took his community focused idea to Sid Ryan, the leader of CUPE. Ryan’s supported the idea both because Sutherland was a trusted and influential union activist, and the idea was consistent with Ryan’s beliefs about social union strategy (interview, Ryan CUPE, 2006). The canvassing idea was supported internally by CUPE’s health care council, and then taken by CUPE to the Administrative Committee of the OHC where it received broad support (interview, Harris, coalition participant 2, 2006).

CUPE participated in the canvas which was a dramatic OHC success, courtesy of local health coalition volunteers and union institutional support. Through over 55 local coalitions, the OHC collected over 300 000 signatures on petitions (Mehra 2005). Yet the campaign was driven by local coalition volunteers, with union participation remaining centralized. CUPE ‘booked-off’ many activists, who helped prepare the canvas, and provided financial support; but the union did not engage many members in the campaign (interview, local coalition participant 1, 2, 6, 7, 2005). One local group recalled trying to get a CUPE book-off to call around CUPE members, but was blocked from getting a list of union members from the local union leadership (interview, local coalition participant 2, 3, 2005). Where there was significant union participation, it occurred in places with a

history of union campaigning where the volunteer activist base was rooted in the unions (interview, local coalition participant 4, 5, 2005 and 2006).

It was not until the OHC's next campaign – against the privatization of hospitals – that CUPE's leadership within the coalition translated into local union support. In December 2002, Ontario's Conservative Government announced that it would build two hospitals as public-private-partnerships (P3s) (OHC 2003a). P3 hospitals are privately built, privately administered hospitals with contracted out non-clinical services. P3s were 'core' for CUPE because they directly threatened the employment standards of CUPE hospital workers (interview, Allen CUPE, 2005). The issue of privatization was actively opposed by the union leaders, particularly Michael Hurley. According to a CUPE researcher, leadership commitment was the key ingredient in intensifying union commitment to the OHC (interview, Allen CUPE 2005). The direct engagement of the leadership in the campaign had a direct flow on effect to local union engagement. This occurred in two key ways – through the role of coalition tactics, and through direct union leadership intervention into the campaign.

Firstly, tactical events held by the OHC created opportunities for CUPE's Provincial leadership to encourage its locals participate. For instance, in 2002 in Brampton a large 3000 person rally was dominated by unionists. Secondly, Hurley's direct engagement had a ripple affect on union participation. In 2003-4, the OHC organized a series of Province-wide tours to educate coalition supporters about P3s (interview, Mehra, 2005). Hurley believed CUPE's relatively large union member participation 'was partly a

function of the union structure' (interview, Hurley, 2006). In contrast to other unions 'which have one provincial local and centralized resources we have a local structure where locals retain half the money', which allowed CUPE to bring a local tour to local unions, and directly engage local participation at the same scale (interview, Hurley, 2006).

However, local engagement across the province was still uneven. Explanations for this include whether the locals had full-time or part-time officials, the attitude of those officials to coalition work, the degree of union participation in coalition meetings, and how well-organized the local was (whether they had a strong steward network, had been through training) (interview, local coalition participant 6, Ryan, Hurley, union participant 2). In addition, variation was also explained by the scale of the city in which this organisation was occurring: union and coalition engagement was easier and deeper in smaller cities (interview, Hurley, 2006; Levis, 2006; Ryan, 2006).

This pattern changed during 2005, where the OHC developed an intense local plebiscite campaign that further deepened union participation. Community run referendums were run in cities where P3 hospitals were planned (interview, Mehra, OHC, 2005). Between May 2005 and May 2006, six plebiscites were held with over 80 000 people voting against closures. The locally-scaled nature of the plebiscite campaign shifted coalition resources to a local scale and directly engaged union members as volunteers. Engagement varied, with union participation greatest in smaller cities, and where union locals faced a direct crisis prompting participation. For instance, in St Catherines the

plebiscite occurred just after a jurisdictional battle involving CUPE. This context propelled CUPE 'to be visible' and created 'a motivation for part of the local union' in that area' (interview, union 3, 2006). The St Catherine success was also enhanced because the main local health coalition coordinator was a unionist, and could bridge between union conflicts and the coalitions (interview, local coalition participant, 8).

3.3 Evaluation

Many of the similarities between these cases were opportunity-based, highlighting the important role of structure and the external environment for coalition unionism. Similarities included the importance of crisis for promoting initial coalition engagement; that unions were in the public sector undertaking spatially-tied service work; that the unions had a broad social identity and had pre-existing community organisation relationships. These unions also had decentralized union structures, either through regional teachers associations and organizers or union locals, which created the possibility for deep union engagement.

A key common feature was choice based, in that each campaign was staged on an issue where there was a deep common interest connection to the union members. For the NSWTF, the issue of quality public education was directly in the interests of their members. The issue of class-sizes created a broad mutual common interest between parents and teachers. For CUPE, the connection to health care was important; however it was on the issue of privatization that enhanced union participation, where there was a direct connection between the coalition and employment standards. Additionally, each of

these unions had strong union education programs, which may have assisted union engagement.

The two coalitions had different levels of independent resources, with the greater independent resources of the OHC allowing it to cause change in CUPE. For the NSWTF, the coalition was union-initiated and union resourced by union organizers and officials. The coalition unionism was primarily a product of internal union change. Yet for the CUPE case study, it was the coalition itself that was the primary agent for engaging the union, and then deepening the union's engagement. The OHC had significantly more independent resources than in the public education alliance, with a separate coalition office, a larger number of contributing unions and a paid independent coordinator. It also had a growing number of locally based 'broker' health coalitions which were resourced with local volunteers. These independent resources drew in union participation, and then when an issue arose that was in the mutual self-interest of CUPE, the union engagement intensified. Later, it was the local broker organisations and the local plebiscite campaign that further deepened union participation by taking campaigning to a scale closer to the membership.

The deeper form of coalition unionism found in the NSWTF case study was a product of multiple union actors acting as agents, in contrast to the CUPE case study which was primarily supported by the union leadership. In the NSWTF, the coalition unionism developed first as a movement inside the union which became institutionalized through leadership support, resulting in a deep and 'whole of union' commitment to coalition

unionism. In contrast, for CUPE, the union was brought into the OHC by its leadership. Leadership support intensified over time, particularly as the issue agenda of the coalition – privatization – aligned with the union's own strategic interests. Eventually, a deeper form of union engagement developed as the OHC shifted its strategy to a local scale – engaging in plebiscites of local towns. At this local scale CUPE's union locals intensified their commitment beyond individual events, committing to the strategic development of the local plebiscite campaign.

The variation between these case studies demonstrates that while leadership is necessary for coalition unionism, it is not sufficient to create deep union engagement. This finding significantly contrasts with much of the common wisdom in the 'shift to organizing' literature, which argues that leadership change is often singularly the most important factor for creating change. In each case it was leadership combined with either pre-existing member agency or an independently resourced, multi-scalar coalition that created the capacity for deep union engagement.

4. Conclusion

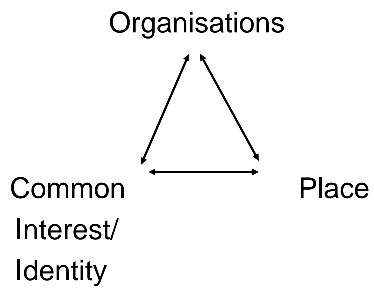
The dialectic of opportunity and choice provides an important mechanism for understanding how coalition unionism develops in a union. In these case studies, it was the conjuncture of both structure and agency that figured prominently. Opportunities union identity and crisis were vital, as were decentralized union structure and common interest campaigns. However the types of union actors who agitated for coalition unionism varied the depth of coalition engagement.

The coalition unionism framework combined the dialectic of structure and agency with a definition of community. It highlights that community collaboration is more likely when a union has opportunities for horizontal community engagement, for instance because of 'place based' issues such as economic or political context, 'common interest or identity based issues' such as union identity or 'organizational' based issues depending on the availability of community partners.

The article explored coalition unionism, by focusing on the passage of organizational change in unions that promoted coalition unionism. Too often, the specific process of change is assumed to be a function of crisis or creative leadership. In contrast, this article has identified a series of concepts to assist further research into how this process of change develops in order to generate a greater understanding of union renewal and possible routes for deeply engaging unions in coalitions.

Figures

Figure 1: The threefold dimensions of community


Organisations
Common
Interest/
Identity
Place

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