1. Introduction

Looking cross-nationally at labor movement revitalization, we observe a complex process of change that varies according to sociopolitical and economic context. Although a large variety of union strategies and outcomes are observed, different forms of structural adjustment such as mergers and acquisitions, and 'rationalizing' unions' internal structure are common elements of revitalization efforts in most countries observed in our study (Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, USA). It is also apparent that not each and every effort for structural change could be successfully implemented and many of the reforms that were implemented created the positive results labor was craving for.

Structural changes can materialize in different forms, which affect varying aspects of union organization. To deal with these different shapes of structural adjustment we conceptualize them along three different dimensions. The first dimension is 'external structure' (Clegg 1976, p. 40) or 'external shape' (Hyman 1975, p. 36) which comprises the boundaries of a union movement. As such, external shape embraces the principles that underpin the pattern of union organization, decisions on inclusion and exclusion, and border or demarcation lines between unions. The two remaining dimensions are concerned with different aspects of internal restructuring. The second dimension is union government, the analysis of which centers on union democracy, representation and participation. It is thus concerned with internal union politics and relations between different groups within a union. The third dimension is union administration, which focuses on union management and the allocation of resources. As is apparent from this conceptualization, the scope of structural change is much broader than just finding a clear-cut technical solution for structural adjustment. It also affects the heart of the union in that it defines the rules of interest representation, the rights of membership towards the leaders and much more.
Numerous failed or incomplete efforts for restructuring bear witness to the difficulties faced in restructuring. Among the most serious obstacles which keep unions from revitalizing is internal resistance. Once founded, unions, together with other organizations, are subject to strong inertial pressures, which only allow for an incremental transformation in their goals, structure and tactics. One major cause for this conservatism is the high degree of internal resistance faced by almost any kind of comprehensive restructuring. In unions, resistance may come from members, comfortable with the status quo and concerned about being disenfranchised; leaders, worried about losing their political base; or staff members, unsure where they will fit in the new organization (Fletcher and Hurd, 2001). But what does it take to overcome this resistance? We argue that there are two mutually supportive causal chains that explain incidents of successful union restructuring.

Figure 1: Organizational Change In Unions

To overcome resistance, successful restructuring requires a sufficient level of environmental pressures to start the process of change. As shown in the upper section of Figure 1, such pressures raise the level of urgency within the union. It is often necessary for union leaders and staff to educate members about the existence and impact of environmental pressures in order to win support for organizational change.

Environmental pressures are not sufficient to cause comprehensive restructuring. There are numerous examples of such pressures (e.g. employer opposition, deregulation, globalization) that caused labor to suffer initially but did not induce structural change. While environmental
pressure potentially enables unions to overcome resistance, a second element provides direction and focus. As shown in the lower part of Figure 1, unions need a clearly articulated mission (or vision) that provides a basis for strategic priorities. If restructuring is not driven by mission, initiatives will stop short of transformation, because they do not provide focus and direction. This is not to say that without a mission there would not be restructuring at all, but rather such cases would result in a limited 'structural fix' (Behrens 2002, Grabelsky/Hurd 1994). Indeed, such an outcome would remind us reminiscent of the organizational conservatism described above. Such a limited approach leads to aggressive restructuring at best, which is designed to solidify and strengthen union leadership (i.e. consolidate internal political control). Aggressive restructuring may extend the presence of the individual union but it does not translate into net membership growth for the labor movement as a whole, nor to any notable enhancement of union bargaining power or political influence. The same is true for defensive restructuring which is a reaction to declining fortunes and attempts to stabilize the union to assure survival. In the following we focus on forms of restructuring which are based on strategic priorities and which are considered to be 'transformative' restructuring efforts. Transformational restructuring is tied to substantive organizational change and promises to augment union power.

These incidents of transformative restructuring are analyzed at three different levels of union function. For our purpose, we distinguish between international confederal activity, peak-level confederations at the national level and national unions, which may be affiliates of union confederations.

2. Structural Change at the Pan European Level

The development of the ETUC (European Trade Union Congress) and the EIFs (European Industry Federations) is closely linked to the successive enlargements of the European Union and the process of European integration. From the perspective of external shape, both the ETUC and the EIFs have thus repeatedly extended their coverage to embrace successive enlargements, thus bringing over 60 million trade union members from more than 30 countries (through confederations and national unions) into the ETUC. While European enlargement created some pressure for structural reform, it also took some vision by the ETUC's leadership to initiate two far-reaching structural reforms.

The first of these concerned the assignment of wider bargaining powers to the ETUC by affiliated confederations at the ETUC Congress in 1991. The extent of the bargaining powers granted to the ETUC were not as wide-ranging as initially envisaged by those that proposed
the motion, due largely to opposition from Nordic confederations (Dolvik 1999:132-140). The granting of any authority to the ETUC to enable it to bargain independently, however, represented a fundamental transformation of its political influence. The subsequent engagement of the ETUC in negotiations on a range of issues including European works councils, parental leave, part-time workers and fixed-term contracts of employment, together with its involvement in broader matters of social dialogue, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights, illustrate the impact of the initial decision to grant bargaining rights to the ETUC. Although the direction of ETUC policy is contested (Waddington 2000), movement towards a European industrial relations area required an ETUC with the authority to bargain. The acquisition of bargaining powers by the ETUC was thus a development of transformatory potential.

A second reform of the ETUC adopted in 1991 arose from a recommendation of the Stecklenburg Report (1990). The constitution of the ETUC initially allowed only national level confederations to affiliate directly. In 1991, however, the constitution was amended to enable EIFs to affiliate directly to the ETUC and to allow representatives of the EIFs seats on the Executive of the ETUC. In practice, this decision meant that national unions were linked to the ETUC through two routes; geographically via a national confederation and sectorally via the EIFs. The adoption of this measure thus represented the abandonment of country of origin as the sole basis to organization. The amendment also has the long-term potential to be transformatory in the context of bargaining power. Throughout Europe a range of cross-border bargaining initiatives were developed after about 1995, most of which were sector-specific and fostered by unions affiliated to particular EIFs (Gollbach and Schulten 2000; Prince 1995). Furthermore, in 1999 the ETUC Congress resolved to strive for 'the paramount goal' of a co-ordinated collective bargaining policy 'developed at sectoral or cross-sectoral level' with 'primary responsibility for co-ordination in the field of collective bargaining at European level' allocated to the EIFs (ETUC 1999:67). There are many difficulties to overcome before European sectoral bargaining becomes a reality, not the least of which is the absence of employers' organizations prepared to enter into bargaining arrangements. Designating the principal role in this function to the EIFs, however, represents the potential to diminish further the influence of the national confederations and to transform the ETUC into a European confederation of EIFs, each of which conducts bargaining.

The institutional vitality of trade union organizations at the pan-European level is thus associated with the developing polity of the EU. The development of a bargaining function by the ETUC and marked shifts in the position of the EIFs represent changes of transformatory potential. Other reforms of the EIFs are more defensive in character. The reduction in the num-
ber of EIFs after 1996 as a result of mergers, for example, results primarily from membership
decline and financial weaknesses.\(^1\) Furthermore, there is little or no correspondence between
these mergers and the structural reform of national unions, thus minimizing any benefits that
might arise from economies of scale. The limited resources available to the EIFs also limit
the transformatory capacity of all of these developments. National level union organizations
are the primary source of these resources. As is apparent from what follows, membership
decline, often associated with financial difficulties, at national level effectively restricts the
allocation of additional resources to the pan-European level.

3. Peak level confederation

Historical differences in confederal function and structure, and in the authority granted to
confederations by affiliated unions, influence the trajectory of recent developments. In par-
ticular, Italian and Spanish confederations have a more wide-ranging bargaining function
than their American, British and German counterparts. To facilitate the undertaking of this
wider bargaining function, Italian and Spanish confederations have greater authority over
affiliated unions. By comparison American, British and German unions vigorously protect
their autonomy from confederal interference. Furthermore, in Italy and Spain several confed-
erations compete on the basis of different political allegiances, whereas elsewhere confed-
eral structure is unitary\(^2\). Italian and Spanish confederations collect union income and dis-
perse it to affiliated organizations, whereas the reverse is the case in Britain, Germany and
the US. This distinction further compounds the differences in the relationships between con-
fedrations and affiliated organizations.

Irrespective of these differences, a consistent theme among the confederations of the five
countries is the extension and reform of external shape. To expand the external boundaries
in Britain, Germany and the US, confederations have encouraged new affiliations, particularly

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\(^1\) Several mergers involving EIFs took place from the mid-1990s. Among these mergers were the formation of
the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation from the European Federation of Chemical
Workers' Unions and the Miners' European Federation, and the acquisition of the European Federation of Agri-
cultural Workers' Unions by the European Committee of Food, Catering and Allied Workers' Unions. In addi-
tion, the international trade secretariats of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and
Technical Employees, Communications International and the International Graphical, Media and Entertainment
Federation merged to form Union Network International. This merger was also carried through at European level
where the respective European regional organisation merged to form UNI-Europa.

\(^2\) We classify Germany as a unitary system although it should be noted, however, that there are some rather small
pockets of inter-union rivalry where the DGB's affiliates are facing competition by independent unions or union
federations. The Christian Trade Union Federation of Germany (Christlicher Gewerkschaftsbund, CGB), as the
most important of those competing federations, organizes about 300,000 employees in several industries. In
addition, some rival unions such as the pilots' union Cockpit or the Independent Association of Flight Attendants
(Unabhängige Flugbegleiter Organisation, UFO) were created in opposition to the DGB and its affiliates.
of unions that organize in the expanding sectors of the economy. Since 1995 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has accepted no fewer than 14 additional unions into affiliation, while both the United American Nurses and the California School Employees have affiliated to the AFL-CIO. Similarly, the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) encouraged the involvement of the Deutsche Angestellten Gewerkschaft (DAG) in the Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (ver.di) merger in 2001, thereby bringing the DAG within the scope of the DGB for the first time since 1945. In Italy and Spain the relative strength of the confederations allows them to have greater influence on the pattern of expansion. Since 1998, the three major confederations have each established unions specifically to organize and represent ‘parasubordinates’ or labor only sub-contractors (Baccaro et al. 2003:45; Fullin 2002).

The promotion of mergers is at the core of policy initiatives to reform external shape. Again, however, differences in the political position of the confederations influence the character of these initiatives. While AFL-CIO, DGB and TUC have no direct authority over the merger process, in Spain and Italy the confederations have been able to influence mergers between affiliated organizations. Particularly in Spain, this influence has been brought to bear to promote sectoral organization at the expense of regional structures (Hamann and Martínez Lucio 2003). This difference between the authority of peak confederations is even more striking when it comes to policies supporting the unity of the labor movement at the confederate level. Clearly, this is an issue specific to Italy and Spain, where attempts to overcome considerable barriers have created mixed results so far.

Throughout the 1970s and until the mid-1980s the Italian confederations maintained a formal alliance administered through the Federazione Unitaria on which sat representatives of the three confederations. During this period the prospect of a confederal merger was raised, although the primacy of politics and the different political affiliations of the confederations constituted an insurmountable barrier (Kreile 1988; Locke and Baccaro 1996). The dissolution of many of the traditional party-confederation affiliations following the corruption scandals in 1992 facilitated the development of the unity of action between confederations and a formal proposal to merge in 2000. Political differences re-emerged after 1998, once again putting the merger proposal on hold. Similarly, in Spain the unidad de acciór (unity of action) between Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) and Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) represented a weakening of traditional political animosities.

While most of the confederations in the five countries have introduced limited changes to their respective systems of government, the case of Italy is striking in that it comes close to true transformatory change. As predicted in our model, restructuring was first initiated by the
impact of adverse environmental change. Three developments promoted the shift in the system of Italian confederal government. First, after the mid-1970s many skilled workers left unions affiliated to the confederations after the reforms to the *scala mobile*, which narrowed wage differentials based on skill. Second, a large number of *sindicati autononi* (autonomous unions) were established to represent the interest of white-collar workers, who regarded the confederations as focusing too strongly on the interests of manual workers. Third, *Comitati di Base* (COBAS, rank-and-file committees) were established, primarily in the public and service sectors, in opposition to the policies and practices of the three confederations. In combination, these developments constituted a crisis for confederal union organization in Italy (Bordogna 1989; Kreile 1988). In response, the confederations instigated a series of reforms central to which was submitting all major collective agreements to a binding vote of the membership. Coupled to legal reforms on plant-level representation structures (*rappresentanze sindicati unitarie*), this reform 're-legitimized' confederal organization and was associated with increases in membership, particularly in the service sector (Ponzellini and Provenzano 2001).

The range of administrative reforms undertaken by confederations in the five countries also follows some similar trajectories. Increased use of the web and sophisticated electronic hardware and software is widespread, as are efforts to improve the quality of service offered by confederations. The latter point is of particular significance in Italy and Spain, as it represents a formal acknowledgement that union activity must engage and involve members as well as embracing political engagement. More specifically, the TUC has jettisoned much of its formal, standing committee structure and introduced a series of task groups, which are dedicated to particular campaigns and are dissolved when the campaign objectives have been achieved. Consistent with this accentuation of the TUC’s role in campaigning, a Communications Department was established to publicize campaigns initiated by the TUC. In this context the TUC has successfully launched high-profile campaigns on organizing and partnership and has been able to cascade the objectives of these campaigns to affiliated unions, many of which have adopted these initiatives in one form or another. Similarly, the election of John Sweeney to the presidency of the AFL-CIO in 1995 led to wide-ranging internal reorganization of staff department and field operations. Efforts to encourage the adoption of the organizing model have also intensified. More recently, the AFL-CIO has downgraded the position of the ‘unwieldy’ 54-member Executive Council and established a 17-member Executive Committee in order to streamline confederal policy-making and to sharpen the focus of the AFL-CIO on political and organizing objectives (*New York Times* March 9th, 2003). There is no doubt that these and similar initiatives have contributed to an impression of institutional vitality and may have enhanced administrative efficiency. Resistance to these initia-
atives, however, remains entrenched in both Britain and the US. Furthermore, union density in the two countries continues to decline. Efforts to lead revitalization from the center thus remain problematic in the absence of direct confederal authority over affiliated unions. In Spain, where confederal authority is more wide-ranging, campaigning teams have been deployed by the confederations to raise membership levels particularly, during works council elections (Hamann and Martinez Lucio 2003). It remains in question whether such an approach leads to long-term membership gains. Furthermore, when coupled to the professionalization of service delivery, this approach is also associated with increased centralization and the lowering of members’ commitment to, and expectations of, union activity (Rigby et al. 1999).

4. Revitalization and National Union Structures

In each of the five countries under discussion, mergers and other forms of closer working are commonplace as a means to reform external shape among national unions. The driving force for most mergers is membership decline. The contraction of employment in specific industries is particularly effective in promoting mergers when it occurs in the context of industrial unionism. Trade unions in the agriculture, mining, textile and timber industries, for example, have been acquired by larger unions in many countries, with the result that independent union organization in these industries no longer exists. Thus, most mergers are examples of defensive restructuring. Some mergers completed by larger unions, however, have the stated intention of extending organization to sectors of the economy where they had no initial presence. To be successful such policies require considerable post-merger investment in recruitment and organizing.

In Britain, Germany and the US, confederations exert no direct influence on the merger process. Decisions on mergers rest almost exclusively within the unions involved. Given the wide range of views on union organization present within these unions, it is not surprising that no single principal of union organization informs these national merger processes. In consequence, the external shape of the union movements in these countries exhibits no uniform pattern of development. In Britain and the US larger unions are tending to extend their recruitment bases by both mergers and recruitment, and memberships are thus becoming more heterogeneous. As such extensions to recruitment bases are vertical and horizontal, a larger number of organizations are adopting the characteristics of general unions. Although there are exceptions, in Germany, Italy and Spain multi-industry unions tend to result from mergers as industrial unions merge.
Increasing membership heterogeneity is also associated with new forms of union government. Similar to confederal restructuring, many unions have supplemented regional and industrial forms of representation with structures for women, white-collar, young and ethnic minority workers. Such measures reflect changes in membership composition and are intended to raise participation levels among such groups, to encourage denser horizontal interlinkages between different vertically organized groups of members, and to facilitate the development of union policies to incorporate items of direct concern to these groups. In short, as membership becomes more heterogeneous, systems of union government become more sophisticated. Arguably, union government also becomes more expensive in such circumstances, thus mitigating the impact of any economies of scale that might arise from merger involvement. It is also far from clear-cut that these measures have achieved their intended results. Take the case of women, for example. A variety of reserved seats systems, women's sections and the appointment of Women's Officers have raised the profile of women trade unionists, although they tend to operate at the senior levels within the union hierarchy, rather than at local or regional levels. These systems have yet to result in the proportional representation of women in the decision making structure of most unions at national level (Braithwaite and Byrne n.d.; Garcia et al. n.d.).

Two developments, however, have greater potential for change: the systems of union government adopted by UNISON in Britain and ver.di in Germany. Both of these unions were founded by merger, and representatives of the participating unions set out to establish 'new' unions. The introduction of these two systems of union government was facilitated by this approach, as, implicit in it, was the rejection of the systems of union government employed in the participating unions. Underpinning the approach adopted by UNISON and ver.di is the principal of proportionality, whereby the composition of each committee within the union must reflect the composition of the membership from which its members are drawn. In other words, if 60 per cent of a group of members are women, then 60 per cent of the committee that represents the group should also be women. Allied to the adoption of the principal of proportionality in UNISON are novel approaches to fair representation and self-organization. While the situation in ver.di is less developed, because the merger was more recent, the point is that these approaches constitute a significant development beyond traditional approaches to equality. They also present opportunities to mainstream issues of concern to these groups, rather than treat such issues as those of 'special interest' groups.

UNISON was formed in 1993 by the merger of the Confederation of Health Service Employees, National and Local Government Officers' Association and the National Union of Public Employees. Both unions, UNISON and ver.di, organize service workers: UNISON in just the public services, whereas ver.di organizes across all
There have also been marked shifts in the approaches of national unions to administration, with an increased emphasis placed on efficiency, new management techniques and budgetary control. German and Spanish unions have paid particular attention to the provision of increasingly sophisticated legal services, reflecting the juridified industrial relations systems of the two countries. Increased use of opinion polls and market research to obtain the views of members and non-members, coupled to the targeting of specific groups of potential members, are now widespread. Furthermore, devolved budgetary control, often introduced in conjunction with the centralized setting of targets and monitoring of individual performance, has facilitated the retention of centralized control within an overall tendency of shifting more resources to the local level. This tendency is most marked where bargaining is decentralized.

There are very few examples where the introduction of administrative change has transformed union organization. Even where organizing budgets have been markedly increased, the absence of a coherent membership strategy has often undermined the impact of additional funds. Two notable exceptions to this general framework are the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) in the USA. About half of the budget of these two national unions is now allocated to organizing and pressure is being exerted on locals to adopt a similar approach. Furthermore, wide-ranging measures have been introduced to ensure that national and local levels of these unions are articulated and initiatives taken at either level are co-ordinated with those taken elsewhere. Membership of the SEIU and the UBC has increased steadily since the mid-1990s as a consequence of these measures, whereas aggregate membership in the US declined over the same period.

5. Conclusion

It often takes unions many years to adjust their structures, but organized labor is capable of overcoming organizational conservatism and of implementing initiatives of transformatory restructuring. Although the success in terms of a true revitalization of the labor movement is to date limited, structural change can make an important contribution to labor’s revival in several respects. Changes in the external structure, as well as different forms of internal restructuring, can increase the power of organized labor by limiting inter- and intra-union competition, and by freeing resources for the purpose of improved efforts for recruitment and organizing. Transformative change also benefits unions’ economic power by limiting union competition at the bargaining table and by helping them to adjust bargaining structures to the services. Furthermore, the two unions are the largest unions in their respective countries (see Waddington et al., 2003 for details).
changing shape of labor markets. In a similar vein, structural change has the potential to infuse labor with more power and unity in the political sphere. This is not just a case for union mergers, but for the transformation of bureaucratic forms of union government. A union movement which is open, participative and democratic and which is perceived as such will find it easier to have its voice heard in public debates and to be recognized as a partner in political alliances.

**Literature**


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