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INTRODUCTION

For most trade unions in New Zealand, economic restructuring was historically something that happened around them, and with which they coped as best they could. The most important change in New Zealand trade unionism in the last decade is the articulation of an alternative model of economic restructuring, combined with supporting industrial and political activity. Union success in promoting this model has been mixed; what stands out is the contrast with what went before and the suggestion that this pro-active stance might bear fruit in the future.

However, this move towards strategic unionism, whilst clearly driven by fundamental shifts in the economy, is also prompted by political and legislative changes which threaten to undermine the very basis of trade union organisation in New Zealand, at least as conventionally and historically understood. The model of strategic unionism is a conscious effort to respond to those wider developments.

UNIONS AND ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING BEFORE 1984

For most of this century, statutory, organisational and attitudinal constraints combined to limit the capacity of New Zealand unions to play a pro-active role in shaping economic policy outcomes. Most unions in the private sector were creatures of the system established by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894. This system offered a glittering array of benefits to participating unions: for registered unions the state guaranteed their coverage rights against potential rivals, obliged employers to negotiate with them, gave easy access to compulsory arbitration by state tribunals, ensured the application of resulting awards to all workers in the occupation or industry concerned and accepted a responsibility to enforce the award upon all employers. From 1936 the state also guaranteed membership and thus revenues for registered unions.

In exchange for these benefits, unions were required to accept an extensive range of statutory restrictions upon their structure and activities. They were prohibited from extending their coverage beyond the occupation or industry originally designated, without the approval of the Court of Arbitration, which was rarely forthcoming; national unions were prohibited until 1936; unions were subject to legislative limitations upon the membership fees they could charge; they were confined to representing their members on 'industrial matters', which were themselves defined narrowly by the Court; and, until 1964 unions were prohibited from undertaking any educational or welfare activities for their members.

The result was a distinctive and polarised union structure (Brosnan, Smith and Walsh, 1990). Unions were numerous in number, typically small in size and regional and occupational in their jurisdiction, limited in resources, and restricted in the scope of their activities. For the most part, they were arbitrationist in character, created by the system and dependent for their existence upon the protections it offered. These unions tended to be highly centralised, with very limited opportunities for membership participation and weakly organised at lower levels with almost no effective workplace presence. They were dependent upon the rules and procedures of the arbitration system as the means of securing acceptable employment conditions for their members. In contrast stood unions opposed to arbitration, for whom the alleged benefits of the
system were of little or no account. These were typically but not exclusively industrial unions who were confident of their capacity to survive by relying upon their own resources of membership solidarity and strategic market power (for the vividly written example of the seafarers, see Bollinger, 1968). These unions chafed at the constraints of the system - 'labour's leg-iron' they dubbed it - and on occasions they vainly challenged its very basis (Bassett, 1972; Olssen, 1988). They were never supported in these challenges by the system's compliant union supporters.

The dominant concern of all unions was to extract an award from the conciliation and arbitration process (Holt, 1986). This was not a task which taxed even the limited resources of New Zealand unions, for it proceeded according to widely understood ritual. From time to time, the Court of Arbitration would issue a Standard Wage Pronouncement in which it would indicate the level of wages it considered appropriate for different skill categories. This led to the development of a hierarchy of occupational wage relativities which became the principal consideration in wage fixing, although not to the degree sometimes claimed. The importance of this relativity hierarchy ensured that the influence of these Standard Wage Pronouncements continued long after the last one was issued in 1952. For their part, public sector unions, although free from statutory controls on their structure and organisation, were tied to the private sector wage fixing system by the application of the principle of fair relativity between the two sectors. From the 1940s they too were able to make use of compulsory arbitration and this consideration decisively shaped their strategic approach (Powell, 1989; Walsh, 1991a).

The lack of institutional capacity on the part of most unions, the seductive appeal of the conciliation and arbitration process and - as a consequence - the modest ambitions of most union officials severely limited the potential for unions to articulate alternative models of economic development or to exercise significant influence on key economic decisions at either national, industry or workplace level. Their capacity to influence national economic policy was limited by continuing central divisions. Private sector and public sector unions maintained separate central organisations, and it was not until the very end of this period that the two began to work together. Within the private sector, divisions between the craft/occupational unions on the one hand and industrial unions on the other, which were grounded in differing attitudes to arbitration, were not overcome until the formation of the Federation of Labour (FOL) in 1937. Even then unity was more apparent than real, and the deep divisions between the two factions continued to bedevil efforts to establish a strong and politically influential central organisation.

Inadequate resources - even by the 1980s the FOL employed only three research or policy staff - and a strongly industrial orientation, which saw the FOL preoccupied with resolving disputes, compounded the effect of these divisions. Moreover, from the perspective of any government, the FOL's inability to bind its constituents to centrally negotiated incomes policies made it an unattractive candidate for corporatism (Boston, 1986). This did not prevent periodic efforts during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s to strike some corporatist deal, but any successes were short-lived. The central organisation of public sector unions, the Combined State Services Organisations (after 1976 renamed the Combined State Unions) pursued the specific employment interests of its members energetically enough, but lacked any ambition in this period to shape wider economic policy.
However, the FOL was not entirely without influence. It was formed at the behest of the recently elected Labour Government which was seeking a united industrial wing to deal with in government. Labour drew the FOL into the processes of policy-making during its 14 years in office from 1935-49, never more so than during and immediately after the second world war when the FOL exercised a major influence over all aspects of economic policy. But this was soon seen to have rested partly on the exigencies of war and partly on strong personal ties between key union officials and politicians. The FOL's influence on wider economic policy waned considerably in the following decades, even in the two brief periods of a Labour Government from 1957-60 and 1972-75. The relationship between the Labour Party and the union movement as a whole was at best a loose one, which varied with circumstance. The FOL's main impact on economic outcomes came not by direct influence upon government policy, but through the presentation of successful General Wage Order cases to the Court of Arbitration. Such influence as it could exert on government policy was by and large limited to strictly industrial matters, over which it was always consulted, most notably in the drafting of the Industrial Relations Act 1973 which was done by the FOL working jointly with the Employers Federation.

Unions were not much better placed to influence economic decision-making at the industry level or at the workplace. The occupational basis of most union and bargaining structures deprived them of easy institutional access to industry level forums. Even for industry unions, award bargaining, which was their primary preoccupation, did not extend to consideration of broad industry or sectoral issues. This was due partly to the 'industrial matters' restriction, partly to custom and practice, but principally to lack of resources. Occupational unions, with their resources and commitments spread across a range of industries, found it even more difficult to focus on the development of alternative models of industry development. In any case, union resources and ambitions were not so grand that this was felt as deprivation. Very few unions in the private sector employed any research or policy staff. Most would have given little thought to any strategic planning, whilst in those few that did, any such activity would have fallen to already over-worked organisers or secretaries.

In the public sector, relatively better resourced unions, which organised a much higher proportion of the potential membership, and faced a more accommodating employer, did exercise significant influence over industry-level decision-making, although it was not always thought of in this sense. But, whether it was decisions in the public service about the machinery of government or the appointment system for senior officials, or in the education sector about teacher qualifications, school zoning or the curriculum, or professional training in the health sector, the relevant unions or 'professional associations' were consulted and were influential. Similarly at the workplace level, the thick jointly negotiated manuals which governed the details of workplace relations were testimony to the relatively greater influence of public sector unions. Clearly this reflected the professional orientation of those unions and different managerial approaches in the public sector compared with the private sector.

At the workplace level, this strong tradition of managerial prerogative in the private sector greatly limited the ability of unions there to shape key economic decisions. New Zealand managers did not accept that there was a legitimate role for unions in influencing their decisions. This was partly a matter of ideology, but also a consequence of the fact that most managers had only fleeting contact with unions. For much of this period, few unions had a well developed delegate structure at the
workplace. An equally small number were able to service an elected workplace structure with an effective field officer or organiser structure. Those unions that did have a workplace presence - the watersiders, the miners, the seamen, the drivers, the freezing workers, the rail unions and, less certainly and less uniformly, some craft unions like the engineers, the electricians and the boilermakers - did secure influence, in some cases significant, over workplace decision-making. To what extent this went beyond a veto power over certain developments is unclear, and an answer would require more specific workplace studies.

UNIONS AND ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AFTER 1984

Where strategic unionism had been largely non-existent before the 1980s, by the end of the decade it was being strongly advocated by the newly formed Council of Trade Unions and by some, albeit certainly not all, major unions. The key to this change lay in an unbroken series of political and industrial reversals for unions under the fourth Labour Government.

National economic issues

In policy terms, the years between 1984 and 1990 were bleak for unions. They opposed Labour's programme of economic restructuring in almost every important respect. However, with the notable exception of the provisions of the Labour Relations Act 1987, unions were largely unable to exercise significant influence over national economic policy for most of Labour's six years. In some respects, this was surprising. Despite the coolness between the Labour Party and the FOL in the early 1980s, relations had improved greatly by 1984. Unions worked hard for a Labour victory and expected to enjoy policy rewards in return. Moreover, it was no longer the case that unions had nothing to offer to debates about economic restructuring. For the first time, unions had begun to articulate a coherent alternative economic model. A number of factors contributed to this, particularly the continued intervention by successive governments in the wage-fixing system and the growing appreciation by union officials of the country's economic vulnerability. The new approach also reflected the entry into union ranks of more economically literate officials who provided a more sophisticated analysis than had been customary in the past.

The first expression of this new approach in the private sector lay in the adoption of An Alternative Economic Policy as FOL policy. This was written by Alf Kirk who had recently joined the FOL staff. It was followed in 1983 by After the Freeze in which Kirk was joined by Rob Campbell of the Distribution Workers Union, which set out a programme of union support for and participation in a centralised wage fixing system following the lifting of the National Government's wage and price freeze. The most consistent articulation of this new approach came from the economic commentaries by Peter Harris of the Public Service Association (PSA). A number of other unions, such as the Engineers were beginning to make contributions to this approach. Together, these analyses set out an alternative, chiefly social democratic model of macro-economic management, which challenged the ad hoc interventionist approach of the ruling National Government, and the free market model increasingly being advocated behind closed doors within the Labour Party.
To some degree influenced by the Australian accord, unions also began to explore ways of implementing this alternative model through the negotiation of a corporatist accord with the Labour Party. The FOL/CSU's discussions with Labour were given added urgency by the growing strength of the free market faction within the Labour Party. These discussions during 1983 and 1984 were, however, unsuccessful. Their failure was in large part due to the legacy of past patterns of union organisation and political activity. A key reason lay in the belief by leading Labour MPs that the central union organisations would be unable to deliver their side of an accord. The latter view was not confined to the free market faction; significantly its strongest exponent was Stan Rodger, a former PSA president, who would be Minister of Labour in the Labour Government (Oliver, 1989). The historical legacy of weak central union organisation continued to frustrate any hopes of significant union influence over national economic policy-making. Secondly, the inability of unions to overcome the free market faction within the party reflected their historical neglect of the union/party relationship and the degree to which union energies had been focussed on the world of conciliation and arbitration. Equally, this traditional orientation set limits to the capacity of unions to commit themselves to an accord. Many union officials were looking forward eagerly to the end of the two year wage and price freeze and the resumption of free wage bargaining under a Labour Government. Labour's awareness of this encouraged its belief that any centralised incomes policy would be broken by the unions (Harvey, 1991).

The failure to establish an accord set the pattern for Labour's first four years. Labour excluded unions from significant involvement in the policy-making process. Its programme of economic restructuring, outlined in chapter One, brought widespread unemployment and high levels of social and economic distress. The collapse of manufacturing and the progressive withdrawal of the state from its historically active role in the society and economy threatened the jobs, the well-being and the future of union members and their children, and jeopardised the traditional bases of union organisation. The unions' one major success in the restructuring process came in the Labour Relations Act 1987 when they managed to avert the radical programme of labour market deregulation promoted by the Business Roundtable, the Treasury, and somewhat less certainly at that stage, the Employers' Federation (Walsh, 1989). Nonetheless, it was clear that such success, which had depended upon a distinctive pattern of coalitions among politicians and union and government officials, could not be guaranteed in the future.

Industrially, outcomes were scarcely any better for unions under Labour. Unemployment shifted the balance of bargaining power decisively against unions (Shirley et al., 1990). Real wages, which had fallen under the wage freeze, continued to decline, interrupted only by the relatively large wage round of 1985-86. Employers began to apply pressure to claw back conditions won in the past. Hours of work and penal payments became major battlefields. The legislative prohibition upon the negotiation of unqualified preference clauses or any other closed shop arrangement, which had been introduced by National in 1984, was not repealed by Labour for 18 months, time enough to reveal graphically the vulnerability of particular unions to voluntary membership and the continued inability of some unions to organise their membership without major legislative supports (Harbridge and Webber, 1987).
It was in this context that the model of strategic unionism began to emerge. It comprised a series of initiatives, some only loosely related and others not connected at all, united by the common goal of securing a foothold for unions in the process of economic restructuring, and with the intention of ensuring that the interests of union members and other vulnerable groups were taken account of in the decision-making process.

One of the first efforts to stake out a New Zealand model of strategic unionism was in a paper by Owen Harvey (1988), an official with the Northern Distribution Union. It is difficult to judge how influential Harvey's analysis was, although his paper was widely circulated and discussed. The paper is noteworthy, however, because it identified most of the components of what became the New Zealand version of strategic unionism.

Harvey argued that the degree to which the radical New Right agenda had excluded unions from significant influence over restructuring, combined with other union inadequacies, had fostered a picture of unions "as antiquated, unresponsive to change and membership concerns and therefore decreasingly relevant" (p.4). Political irrelevance was being accompanied by increasing industrial marginalisation. The correct response, argued Harvey, lay in the reorganisation of union and bargaining structures along industry lines, allowing unions to take initiatives relevant to the circumstances applying to their own industries. Without this, already visible trends toward the polarisation of the workforce into the protected organised sector and the unorganised exploited sector would become entrenched. Drawing on the United Kingdom experience, Harvey was scathing about the future of trade unionism in this scenario:

As in the UK, the trade union centre, disconnected from workers with no real role to play, is likely to wither into a toothless arbiter between powerful union blocks competing for members and work sites, like corporations seeking an increasing market share in order to survive. As our ability to influence the course of events further diminishes, attention will be focussed on internal political wrangles within the Labour Movement with decreasingly significant minorities arguing over their theoretical purity while capital runs rampant. The prospects for those workers falling outside a few union protected zones, and for society as a whole, will be grim (p.14).

The answer, argued Harvey, lay in strategic unionism, which, following the Swedish model, as set out in *Australia Reconstructed*, he defined as

- union concerns going wider than wages and conditions
- the pursuit of centrally coordinated economic strategies - for full employment, labour market programmes, trade and industry policy, productivity, industrial democracy, and social welfare and taxation policies which promote equity and social cohesion
- participation in tripartite bodies
- a commitment to growth and wealth creation and equitable distribution
- an emphasis upon strong local and workplace organisation
- the extensive delivery of education and research services
Harvey was pessimistic about the prospects of such a model gaining influence within the union movement in New Zealand. If any significant progress was to be made, he observed, it would require a substantial commitment and development of a programme of action along these lines by the newly formed Council of Trade Unions (CTU).

The formation of the CTU was a major event in the development of strategic unionism. The CTU was more than a merger of the FOL and CSU. Those organisations were dissolved and a new organisation formed so as to encourage affiliation by unions which had not joined either the FOL or the CSU. The two organisations had begun to work cooperatively from the late 1970s, at least in part due to the attitudes of new leaders on both sides. The original impetus for the formation of the CTU came in 1981-82 from the PSA, whose officials saw the opportunity for forging a unified central organisation for the first time. The formation of the CTU would also help to remedy the institutional deficiencies which had always hobbled the trade union movement, especially where establishing an accord with the government was concerned. Understandably, the birth of the CTU was protracted, taking more than six years, and difficult, with major disputes over its structure and its rules. In the event, it was not as representative as had been hoped, with several of the important manual unions refusing to join, in protest against the dissolution of the FOL and the 'dilution' of its principles by the inclusion of public sector unions in the new organisation.

Nonetheless, the formation of the CTU in 1988 changed the institutional configuration of trade unionism and industrial relations in New Zealand, and, by shedding historical baggage which constrained its predecessors, created opportunities which had not been available before. The CTU leadership triumvirate, deliberately drawn from the leadership of the FOL, the CSU and those unions previously not affiliated to either, was able to sketch out a different approach to economic management, to industrial strategy and to union organisation. A second institutional change was also significant in this regard. In 1986, the Labour Government established the Trade Union Education Authority (TUEA) and granted a statutory right to paid educational leave for union representatives. TUEA played a major role in providing forums where unions could assess the merits of possible union strategies. In addition, its officials worked with different unions in promoting bargaining and union reorganisation.

The CTU called its approach 'the third way', the middle ground between the right wing policies of the Labour Government and the ad hoc interventionism and excessive regulation of the previous National Government. The CTU's approach combined traditional Keynesianism with post-Fordism (Harvey, 1991). It argued that Labour's fixation with monetary policy and the reduction of government expenditure as the key to lowering inflation was permanently depriving New Zealand of its productive base, as firms and almost whole industries collapsed under the weight of record interest and exchange rates. Nothing was being put in place, said the CTU, to stimulate economic growth, a situation compounded by the dismantling of the state, and the cessation of its traditional role in supporting economic development. The CTU's view was that the precondition for growth was a centrally negotiated incomes policy, which would prevent inflation, allow a slide in interest rates, an increase in investment, ensure a managed increase in demand and stimulate economic and employment growth. It argued that the future for New Zealand lay not in competing with the low wage/low skill Taylorist production systems of developing countries, whose example was often cited in the New Zealand debate, but in promoting the development of a highly skilled workforce, at home with advanced technology, producing high quality goods for specialised markets.
(Harvey, 1991). The CTU did not claim any particular originality for this programme, but was convinced it would pay more dividends than Labour's approach.

However, the Labour Government's commitment to its radical programme of restructuring and deregulation meant that the CTU was quite unable to make any progress in advancing its economic programme between 1984 and 1988. In 1988, however, the political balance began to shift, and the possibility of a negotiated accord between the Government and the CTU moved again onto the political agenda. This suited the CTU's strategic unionism approach, but the change did not reflect any new found political or industrial strength on its part. Rather it grew out of divisions in Cabinet between the Prime Minister, David Lange and the radical free market group, led by Finance Minister Roger Douglas and Richard Prebble, the Minister of State-Owned Enterprises - a key position in the programme of state restructuring. Lange and his supporters had become increasingly disenchanted with the more extreme aspects of the free market approach. Although they remained in the majority in the parliamentary caucus, they were a minority in Cabinet and this fact shaped the new approach to the unions. In plain terms, Lange needed allies, and the trade union movement loomed as a likely source of support (Harvey, 1991). Such a re-ordering of coalitions would also please the Labour Party outside Parliament whose support for Rogernomics had never been whole-hearted, and who would welcome a Lange/union rapprochement in the interests of blunting the Douglas sword. But this itself underlined the political weakness of the union movement; their support was helpful when hitched to other battles but was not sought on its own terms.

The offer of a compact between the Government and the CTU was made formally at the Labour Party conference in Dunedin in September 1988. The compact was not presented as an agreement on specific issues, but rather a commitment to consult unions and give them the opportunity to influence policy outcomes. The conference speech by Ken Douglas (Douglas, 1988), the president of the CTU, was important in this process, for it set out the CTU rationale for entering into a compact or accord even with a government that had seemingly betrayed the basic principles of the labour movement. Douglas was naturally aware that the compact would be controversial among unions, and he was at some pains to set out the CTU's position in terms of a strategic unionism agenda.

Douglas revived the idea of a labour movement, with political and industrial wings, and tried to establish common cause between the two. He reminded the delegates of their 'shared tradition of struggle' for the rights to organise and to act collectively and presented a 'shared social vision' of a society that values cooperation and mutual help above the antagonism and selfishness of competitive and acquisitive societies. He offered them cooperation from unions in this task, but in so doing, acknowledged the limited resources that unions would bring to it.

The hard fact of life is that unions have very little economic power.....no matter how well those workers are organised, there are basic things that they cannot do. They cannot decide what sort of product or service is to be produced, where and for what price it is to be sold, what machines are going to be used to make it, who the working capital needed is to borrowed from, and so on. In short, they do not design or control the process of production, distribution and exchange. Equally, those workers cannot set the rates of tax on labour and capital, or determine what sort of broader protection their industry should have, or adjust the money supply to influence interest rates. They do not design or control the economic environment within which the process of production takes place.
- We do not shape the macro-economy.

- We do not shape our industries.

- We do not shape our enterprises.

Other forces control the levers of government and the levers of management. They are the real brokers of economic power.

However, Douglas observed that unions have three things they can contribute to the process of production: knowledge of the production process, commitment to the community and the country in contrast to the international mobility of capital, and cooperation in introducing new technology and developing the new skills required. But, he pointed out, unions are unable to insert themselves into the process of change. The Government controls entry into that process, and it is up to them whether unions are allowed to contribute to it, or remain excluded. He noted the 'two class' approach, Labour had taken to unions, on the one hand supporting the development of a strong union organisation by establishing the Trade Union Education Authority, providing paid education leave, union membership legislation and protection of bargaining rights, whilst on the other hand, excluding unions from the process of economic restructuring. A compact would help remedy this deficiency.

A month after the Labour Party conference in October 1988, the CTU published *Towards a Compact* (NZCTU, 1988a), which aimed to reassure those unions who were suspicious of the proposal. It set out the CTU position forthrightly:

- Traditional union methods have had limited success in creating a more stable, more equal, and fully employed society. Unions must now look at bargaining over wider economic, and industrial policies.

- There are not many convincing ideas of what else unions could or should have done or should do in the future.

- One plausible option is to try and get some influence on the way in which the levers of government and the levers of management are manipulated.

- This option raises the level at which unions negotiate from the workplace or occupation to the region, the industry or even the economy as a whole. It has long been the preferred option of the union movement. It reinforces bargaining at the "micro" level with "macro-bargaining". By agreement. By "compact".

Working parties were set up to examine various aspects of the compact process. These working parties comprised union representatives, government officials and Labour MPs but no employer representatives. Douglas and the CTU Vice-President, Angela Foulkes supported the compact proposal strongly in speeches to unions around the country (Douglas, 1989a; 1989b; Foulkes, 1989) The original proposal had been for a union/government compact, but Mike Moore, the Minister in charge of the compact, had then raised the idea of participation by 'enterprise' (employers). However, employers rejected this suggestion themselves. The working parties laboured away through 1989, and in December the Government and the CTU were able to produce a joint statement on
the proposed compact. The statement proposed a tripartite Compact Council which would be an arena for facilitating input into the formation of social and economic policy, industry and enterprise restructuring. The document was cautiously worded and made it clear that the Compact Council would have no decision-making authority. Despite this, the Compact Council proposal was aborted. Employers were unwilling to participate, and the Government was not totally united on the proposal. In its place, the Minister of Labour, Helen Clark proposed to confine the compact to bipartite consultation between the CTU and the Government, with the possibility of specific working parties being set up. In the event, the compact was short-lived, if not still born, and, so far as one can judge, ineffective.

It ran too strongly counter to the thrust of economic policy-making under Labour. The unions had too little to offer in terms of wage restraint, inasmuch as real wages were falling anyway. Other areas of economic and social policy were too heavily imbued with a free market philosophy. The unions were themselves highly divided over the compact. Opinions varied considerably over how well unions had done under the Australian accord, particularly in terms of its impact upon women and what were claimed to be the non-democratic nature of the accord procedures (NZ Clerical Workers Association, 1989). There was a bitter debate over the wisdom of entering a similar agreement with a government that had consistently betrayed unions and workers in its period in office. In any event, the Government was too heavily divided to deliver on a compact. Key areas of policy were too strongly contested to allow genuine power-sharing with unions, as this would have required a victory by one of the factions. The refusal of employers to participate was fatal to the compact. Given their industrial and political predominance, it was always unrealistic to expect a compact to work without their support.

The corporatist idea would not die, however. It surfaced again in the 1990 Growth Agreement, negotiated between the CTU, the Labour Government and the Reserve Bank. The agreement was prompted by growing anxiety over continuing rises in interest rates, the absence of any significant investment and fears of a massive increase in unemployment. Another consideration was the likelihood that many unions were facing a nil pay round. The agreement involved the CTU's acceptance of a 2% wage round, with the possibility of a further increase based on productivity in return for the Reserve Bank's commitment to facilitating a drop in interest rates. The Government also agreed to negotiate economic policy with the CTU and, in particular, to involve unions in discussions about projected public expenditure cuts, with the intention of protecting lower income groups as much as possible. The agreement also included a commitment to a strategy for economic development at the industry and sectoral level.

The agreement was naturally controversial within the union movement. Many of those who had opposed the compact were again critical of the CTU. Some unions that had supported the compact, and had been strong advocates of a strategic unionism approach, such as the PSA, were sceptical of the agreement, although, in the PSA's case, it did eventually support it. But the controversy that surrounded the agreement indicated that the debate over the future strategic direction of the union movement is far from over. Some critics saw the agreement as a last ditch effort to ensure the re-election of the Labour Government. If so, it failed in this ambition, but it has been far more successful in its primary objective of bringing down interest rates which have fallen substantially since then, influenced to a considerable degree by the low level of wage increases. Needless to say, the Labour Government's promise of consultation over policy, especially spending cuts, has not been adhered to by the National Government. Since
the election in October 1990, unions have been almost completely excluded from involvement in the policy-making process.

Industry level

The CTU's Third Way linked influence over national economic policy to the restructuring of collective bargaining and of the union movement itself along industry lines. (CTU, 1988b) The call for industry bargaining was on the one hand a pro-active stance, designed to make awards and agreements relevant to the industries in which they were located. It recognised the impact of product market deregulation and the increasingly competitive nature of those markets, the greater concentration and mobility of capital and the accelerated pace of change in technology and work methods. The emphasis on industry bargaining was also designed to promote the notion of restructuring on an industry basis, involving a coordinated sector-wide approach to economic change.

At the same time, it was a defensive stance, a reaction to increasingly strident calls from the Business Roundtable and the Employers Federation for an end to national awards and their replacement by enterprise bargaining (New Zealand Business Roundtable, 1987). Unions feared enterprise bargaining for its potential impact on union organisation and conditions of employment. National awards and blanket coverage were seen as vital if collective bargaining coverage of various sectors was to continue. The CTU was aware that unions would be unable to maintain existing levels of bargaining coverage without the legislative prop of blanket coverage. (In 1989-90, fewer than 15% of firms in New Zealand were cited as parties to awards. The remainder were covered only by virtue of blanket coverage (Harbridge, 1991).

In terms of the particular issue of economic restructuring, unions believed that enterprise bargaining would fragment their resources to such an extent as to make it impossible for them to make a substantial contribution on industry wide issues like industry policy, health and safety, new technology, reskilling, training and so forth. Between 1987 and 1990 the key issue in the debate over the labour market was whether industry or enterprise bargaining would be the dominant pattern of the future. The outcome of this debate would help decide whether economic restructuring would be to some degree coordinated on an industry basis or not.

The particular character of this issue derived from the provisions of the Labour Relations Act 1987. Prior to that, it had been possible for private sector unions to negotiate enterprise or workplace agreements to cover groups of workers already covered by an award. In some cases, these agreements - second tier agreements - completely replaced the award, and in others they supplemented it by providing better conditions on some issues and referring back to the award on others. The Labour Relations Act made it impossible to continue this practice. It introduced what was called the single set of negotiations principle, by which unions were required to decide whether a particular group of workers should be covered by an award or an agreement. Where they chose the latter, unions were obliged to cite out the employer of those workers prior to the beginning of award negotiations, and then to negotiate a separate agreement for their members in that firm. Those workers could only return to award coverage in the future with the agreement of the employer.
Unions had opposed this provision, which had been urged upon the Government by employers, eager for the rationalisation of bargaining structures, despite the fact that the second tier applied to less than 10 percent of the total private sector workforce covered by collective agreements (Harbridge, 1986). Unions feared and employers hoped that the new provision would encourage enterprise bargaining, as unions responded to the pressure of strategically placed groups of members wanting to exploit their position to secure better conditions than in the national award. This would mean, it was thought, that awards would become residual documents providing only basic protections for (increasingly numerous) weak groups of workers.

This did not happen, principally because unions continued to control the process which triggered negotiations for separate agreements. Employers who wanted separate agreements - and by no means all employers did (McAndrew and Hursthouse, 1990) - but who had no ability under the legislation to initiate negotiations for an enterprise agreement, found to their frustration that unions moved to protect the integrity of their national award and to pull members back into award coverage. The outcome was that the number of private sector workers covered by single employer agreements fell by 60 percent between 1986 and 1990 (Harbridge, 1991). The response by employer groups was, predictably enough, to clamour for legislative amendment that would give employers the ability to press an enterprise agreement upon a reluctant union. Although the Labour Government did amend the Labour Relations Act in this direction in 1990, by then it was too little and too late to divert the political steam that had built up for a more radical change.

But during this period, the strategic issue facing the CTU and most major unions, was how to deflect the growing pressure for enterprise bargaining. Acceptance that occupational bargaining was incompatible with any notion of strategic unionism, tied to the conviction that strategic unionism would be organisationally impossible under enterprise bargaining, led the CTU and many unions to embrace industry bargaining. There was already a solid foundation to such a strategy. The dominance of occupational awards had been waning. Although reliable data for earlier years are not available, by 1989-90, less than 25 percent of workers covered by an award fell under an occupational document (Harbridge, 1991). Nonetheless, those awards still stood in the way of a comprehensive restructuring of bargaining along industry lines.

The union most strongly identified with the shift to industry bargaining, and with a consciously strategic unionism orientation has been the Engineers Union. Its principal award, the metal trades award, has been durably the most important document negotiated in New Zealand. It has been cast year after year in the role of lead award for a particular wage round, and its outcomes have exercised considerable influence on those of all other documents. In 1987, the Engineers Union and the Engineering Employers Association agreed to set in motion a bargaining restructuring process, the key to which was to be the gradual replacement of the metal trades award by a series of industry awards. This would necessarily draw other unions into the process, as the parties sought to replace the occupational metal trades document and a wide range of other occupational documents by composite industry documents involving all unions in the industry.

The Engineers Union tied changes in bargaining structure explicitly to the issue of wealth creation. Its national secretary, Rex Jones, described the union's objectives as being to "secure and expand job growth through improving job and workplace design, training,
utilisation of labour, advancing new technology and the overall efficiency of plants" (Jones, 1990). Central to the achievement of these objectives was to be the implementation of an integrated programme of skills development and the reclassification of skill categories, linked to coordinated pay structures and consultative management processes. These would facilitate the efficient and productive deployment of labour by employers, and offer workers a portable career path within the industry. Moreover, skills development would promote industry development and therefore the international competitiveness of New Zealand firms. To critics who argued that firms needed enterprise specific skills, the union argued that local industries would be able to choose modules that applied to them from the broad industry matrix of skills or have their own training initiatives included in the 'national skill strategy' (NZEU, 1991, Appendix 8).

Since this strategy was applied in 1987, the Engineers Union has made significant changes to its bargaining structure. The combined coverage of its two largest awards, metal trades and factory engineers, has fallen from 68 percent of its total membership to 53 percent. The union's assessment is that more than half of its current documents are new since 1987 or have undergone major change since then (NZAEU, 1991, Appendix 9). Just on half its total membership are covered by documents that have changed or are in the process of changing. The most important outcomes of this strategy in terms of specific documents have been the negotiation of a packaging industry award, drawing together 12 awards and 23 unions into one document covering 6000 workers, and industry composite awards covering freezing industry trades, hospital trades and the motor industry. The major continuing project is the development of a composite award for the plastics industry, which employs almost 8000 workers, down 3,000 in recent years, represented by 23 unions who currently negotiate 12 different awards. The process of developing the plastics award has been modelled on the process which achieved the packaging award, involving extensive reliance on joint union/management working parties and national educational programmes supporting the changes. Other industry awards are also in the process of development. These changes have also permitted the introduction of enterprise variations from the national award by the negotiation of enabling or permissive clauses. These apply particularly to hours of work clauses, a principal employer target in recent negotiations. These have been introduced as a means of demonstrating the potential flexibility in the award system and deflect some of the pressure for doing away with it.

It is hard to judge the degree of success achieved by the Engineers Union in this new approach. How much change is a lot of change? How long is a piece of string? Different observers will make different judgements. However, given that labour market change, especially the transformation of long established institutional arrangements, which encode entrenched attitudes and practices, is always a difficult process, it is hard not to be struck by the contrast with what had previously been the case.

This is certainly the case in the dairy industry, a key economic sector in New Zealand. For some years now, bargaining in that industry had proceeded along well established lines, involving regular outbreaks of industrial action and the spilling of millions of dollars of milk. Following a bitter strike in 1989, a joint union/management working party was established to examine the structure and content of the award. The settlement of the 1989 strike and the decision to set up the working party followed intervention by the CTU, which materially influenced the outcome. In May 1990 the parties concluded negotiations on a 30 month no-strike document designed to restore stability and eventually growth to the industry. Workers were granted a 4% increase for
the first 18 months and 2% for the final 12 months, with a flat rate increase of $12 per week up front for low paid workers. Following the model set by other restructured awards, the dairy award provides a career path and a programme of skills development for workers (Dairy Industry Unions and Dairy Industry Employers, 1990). The employers' advocate, perhaps slightly optimistically, described the former document as 'geared to mediocrity', with the revised version 'geared to excellence'. The structure of the industry was an important factor in the development of the new dairy award. The dominance of the Dairy Board and the degree of central planning accepted in the industry reduces the potential influence of the Business Roundtable and the Employers Federation. The union advocate claimed that Employers Federation had attempted unsuccessfully to block the negotiation of the award (National Business Review, May 2 1990, p.2). In some cases, unions have failed to secure an industry award. Newspaper industry unions were unable to achieve an industry award due to their employers' determination to achieve enterprise agreements. The stalemate means that occupational documents continue. In contrast, Finsec, representing workers in the finance sector, has been unable to get the banks to agree to move from an industry award to separate enterprise documents.

One major legacy of the Labour Government has been its radical programme of state restructuring (Boston et al. 1991). Labour privatised a wide range of state agencies, its corporatisation programme turned others into autonomous commercial organisations, it overturned the structure and operation of the health and education sectors, and of government departments themselves, and made sweeping changes to the system of local government. These were accompanied, or more precisely driven, by a determined policy of fiscal restraint, which set real limits to the budgets of all state agencies. No longer could pay increases be met by supplementary allocations; 'excessive' rises would have to be met by cuts in jobs, services or other activities. In this period, the public sector saw huge job losses, constant pressure on budgets, strong employer efforts to claw back established conditions of employment and low levels of wage increases, culminating in the 1991 round of a general trend of a nil wage increase in return for no changes (read worsening) of conditions. The magnitude of the shift in the public sector climate is indicated by the fact that public sector unions regard the 1991 settlements as a victory. It should, however also be noted that a chief objective of all unions, including those in the public sector, has been to renew their documents prior to the implementation of the Employment Contracts Act on May 15 1991.

The response of public sector unions to this massive programme of restructuring has varied according to the structure of different sectors. A shift towards industry bargaining has been most marked in the health sector and, to a lesser degree, in the education sector. In both cases, multiple unions face multiple employers, but the State Sector Act 1988 draws a distinction between the employer party for industrial relations purposes and the employer for all other purposes. Thus, Area Health Boards and school Boards of Trustees are the employers of staff for all matters except the negotiation of employment conditions. For that purpose, the State Services Commission is designated by the State Sector Act as the employer party with authority to negotiate employment conditions.

Fiscal constraint bit first and deepest in the health sector, and in 1988 the major unions there combined to negotiate together on an industry basis. This was not easily achieved, given the diversity of their membership composition, decision-making structures and industrial traditions, as well as the existence of coverage disputes
between almost all the major health unions. Again, the active intervention of the CTU was vital in nurturing and sustaining the combined negotiating stance, and after the first national strike in the health sector in 1989, a settlement broadly satisfactory to the unions was achieved (Walsh and Fougere, 1989). A key aspect of the settlement was agreement on union participation in the restructuring of the health sector through joint union/management effectiveness studies and review exercises. The combined negotiating stance did not continue during the next two rounds, but was revived again in 1991. The success of the combined approach has led to proposals for a health sector industry award, or for just two documents covering the whole of the industry. In the education sector, a smaller number of more homogeneous unions faced a similar situation. Nonetheless, no common negotiating stance emerged until 1991 when the education unions negotiated together and reached a common settlement. Indeed, during difficult negotiations between 1988 and 1990, there were significant differences in the approaches taken by the major teaching unions, and different outcomes were reached (Walsh, 1988; 1990).

The CTU did not achieve its programme for the restructuring of the union movement along industry lines, as set out in its 1989 publication Strategies for Change. There, a model of 15 industry sectors was set out, with at most two unions in each sector. It was a radical programme which would have rewritten the face of trade unionism in New Zealand, and in that sense it is not surprising that it was not implemented. Too many established structures and interests were challenged by the model. As importantly, many unionists disagreed with the principles of the argument. Its poor understanding of the character of the state as an employer and its dismissive attitude towards state sector unionism was a major impediment to its success.

The most important force for union restructuring, as ever in New Zealand, has been legislative change. The Labour Relations Act set 1000 as the minimum membership for a registered union. This was designed to promote large, well resourced and preferably industry unions. It too was bound up in the debate over industry versus enterprise bargaining, and was calculated specifically to block enterprise bargaining by making it difficult to form enterprise unions. This had a profound effect on the number and size of unions as small unions looked around for a suitable candidate for amalgamation. The number of registered unions fell from 206 in 1987 to 105 in 1990, and this latter figure is bolstered by the inclusion of public sector unions which in 1987 were not required to be a registered union. Deregulation and wider processes of economic restructuring had their own impact on union structures. As the barriers between different sectors and skills disappeared, and as privatisation and corporatisation proceeded apace, the relevance of traditional union structures was called into question.

These issues are illustrated by consideration of the implications for union coverage of the deregulation of the finance sector and the privatisation of state agencies in that sector. Previously, the Bank Officers Union represented workers in registered trading banks and the Insurance Workers Union covered insurance companies, while public sector unions covered workers in the state's financial institutions. As banks started to offer insurance services and vice-versa, it become very difficult, at least for purposes of union coverage, to distinguish between a bank and an insurance company. The formation of Finsec, the finance sector union, an amalgamation of the Bank Officers Union and the Insurance Workers Union acknowledged the elimination of the traditional demarcation between the two unions. However, in another important banking sector - the Trustbanks - the Clerical Workers unions retain coverage, despite overtures from
Finsec. The privatisation of the Rural Bank and State Insurance which traditionally were covered by the PSA raised further questions. The Labour Court ruled that Rural Bank coverage belonged to Finsec, but the legislation covering the sale of State Insurance recognised continued PSA coverage. Postbank, formerly part of the old Post Office but now sold to the ANZ Bank, remains covered by the Post Office Union which continues to maintain its old name and coverage despite the disappearance of the Post Office more than four years ago.

The workplace or enterprise level

As discussed above, New Zealand unions were historically not as well organised at the workplace level as at the national level. That began slowly to change by the 1960s and 1970s, and by the 1980s the majority of unions had a presence at their major workplaces. However, it is clearly the case that many, probably the majority of employers are still untroubled in their day-to-day management of the workplace by the intrusion of either elected or full-time union officials (McAndrew and Hursthouse, 1990). A union role in economic restructuring at the enterprise level is most likely to be visible through the negotiation of enterprise agreements that either facilitate or impede the restructuring process. It may be that unions play a role in other ways, but these are less visible and would require more workplace studies than have so far been undertaken.

It is clear, however, that private sector unions have not had a major involvement in economic restructuring through the negotiation of enterprise agreements. As discussed above, a major, albeit unintended impact of the Labour Relations Act was to greatly reduce the incidence of enterprise bargaining in the private sector. Although the number of single employer agreements did not change much, the number of workers covered by those documents dropped drastically. Many of the agreements negotiated at enterprise level were very minor, covering only a small number of workers. This drastic fall in enterprise bargaining necessarily limited the scope of the potential union involvement in restructuring at that level. The picture has, however, been quite different in the public service and in the state-owned enterprises, where the union role in state restructuring has been driven through union participation in the negotiation of enterprise agreements.

The bulk of enterprise agreements are negotiated for reasons that are largely incidental to the restructuring process. Those which are contributions to or consequences of economic restructuring fall into three categories. The first are those agreements purposely negotiated as part of a wider strategic unionism agenda, or less ambitiously, an effort to take up a pro-active stance towards change; the second are those which unions have been compelled to accept as a consequence of restructuring; the third, which comprises a distinctive category, are the enterprise agreements negotiated as a component of the process of state restructuring.

There are common themes to the first category of agreements - those negotiated as part of a union effort to influence the restructuring process. These agreements are typically grounded in market deregulation, particularly the reduction of tariffs and the general opening up of the domestic economy to international competition. The unions that have negotiated them argue that deregulation makes necessary substantial improvements in productivity and product quality if domestic industries are to survive in
their local market, still less to export successfully. The union position is that given the extraordinary rate of plant closures and other sources of job losses, the principal responsibility for unions is to negotiate agreements that reflect the particular conditions at individual enterprises, thus making the preservation of jobs more likely. Promotion of this position creates difficulties for the wider union strategy of preserving a national award system. At the same time, unions should follow a similar strategy as at the award level and seek to protect the union role at the workplace and ensure the development of integrated skills programmes and career paths for workers. Thus these agreements - including major examples at Fisher and Paykal, Comalco, Goodman Fielder Wattie, Firestone, Nissan, Mitsubishi and elsewhere - involve the acceptance of multiskilling arrangements, team work, continuous improvement and consultative practices. In some cases, they also involve restructured payment systems, with changes to the penal rates system and other 'extra' payments. The initial development of this approach, most notably at Nissan, was intensely controversial within the union movement (Jesson, 1988). Critics of this approach charged that those unions, at Nissan the Engineers Union, had yielded control of the labour process to management under the illusion of consultation, sacrificing traditional craft demarcations for dubious gains and earning instead greater rates of exploitation of a workforce now divided and competing against itself by the teamwork system.

The second category of agreements contain many similarities in content to those just described. The main difference is that they result from management initiative, and tend to be part of a managerial strategy to integrate industrial relations, and particularly pay and conditions of employment, with wider corporate strategies. Faced with a more difficult and competitive market environment, firms look to shape employment conditions to what they see as commercial imperatives. In some cases, firms with a long tradition of separate enterprise agreements have taken an uncompromising stance for the first time. The negotiation of a 30 month no strike enterprise agreement tied to the CPI at the Elders Resources New Zealand Forest Products pulp and paper mill at Kinleith (technically a composite award, but in reality a company document) grew out of the company's assessment that investment in much needed plant modernisation could not proceed without a complete restructuring of employment conditions and industrial relations procedures (McCaw and Harbridge, 1990). The unions were reluctant parties to this document, but the threat of plant closure elicited their agreement.

In other cases, companies which might previously have accepted whatever conditions of employment were thrown up by the award process have successfully put pressure on unions to accept an enterprise agreement as part of the restructuring process. The most prominent example of this was the negotiation by Hancocks, one of the country's largest liquor retailers and a subsidiary of Lion Nathan, of their enterprise agreement (also technically a composite award) in 1989. Many companies including Hancocks wanted to move away from the general hotelworkers award which covered taverns, trusts, independent operators, the large accommodation hotels, liquor retailers and wine shops and did not reflect the particular economic circumstances of those different sectors. To overcome this, Hancocks decided in 1988 to pursue a separate enterprise agreement, but due to the provisions of the Labour Relations Act, it could not initiate this itself. It achieved an enterprise agreement by communicating directly with its employees through a travelling roadshow, where it presented the arguments for a separate company agreement. The concurrent inability of the Hotelworkers union to renegotiate the award assisted the Hancocks strategy.
The third category of union involvement in enterprise-based restructuring has been in the public service and the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In both sectors, major changes to the structure and content of collective agreements have been seen by management and unions as vital to the ability of those organisations to adapt to the new fiscal, managerial and commercial pressures they face.

Structural considerations pushed the public service itself - principally government departments but also including quangos and other state agencies - down a different path from the health and education sectors. Prior to 1987 bargaining in the public service was on a service-wide occupational basis. Employees fell into one of more than 150 occupational classes, all of whom had their own separate agreement. The practical difficulties of negotiating that number of separate agreements meant that many conditions including pay were settled on a service-wide basis and applied to the different agreements. However, there was also provision for separate pay claims by any occupational class, whilst other issues could also be negotiated separately. The outcome was a highly centralised system of occupational bargaining relying heavily on historical relativities.

Since then there has been a considerable transformation, driven by the wider process of state restructuring. Fiscal constraints and the pursuit of managerial efficiency have shaped the structure and outcomes of public service bargaining (Walsh, 1991b). The most important changes were firstly the agreement in 1987 between the PSA and the State Services Commission to shift away from occupational bargaining to enterprise bargaining on a departmental basis. This, combined with the elimination by the State Sector Act of any general wage adjustment, made it necessary that pay levels be negotiated separately in each department. Centralist tendencies persist, however, with the PSA and the State Services Commission still managing to secure the widespread adoption of an informal central deal on wages. Secondly the abolition of compulsory arbitration and the Government's refusal to vote supplementary expenditure means that overall wage increases can be controlled, unlike in the past when fiscal austerity could be undone by an unfavourable arbitration decision. There have also been important changes in the content of agreements. Ranges of rates and necessarily some element of performance-based pay have replaced the stepped scales and annual increments, new and more extensive systems of performance appraisal and job evaluation have been introduced, the scope of collective bargaining coverage has been reduced, industrial democracy structures and union recognition and facilities provisions introduced. The latter provisions have been regarded as particularly important by the PSA as a lever to ensure union participation in the radical processes of reorganisation within the public sector.

Similar changes have taken place in the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) which were established by Labour's corporatisation programme. These organisations, previously government departments, had the same bargaining arrangements as other departments. When set up as commercial organisations they were required to discard occupational bargaining for enterprise agreements. Radical organisational reconstruction, aimed at making the SOEs profitable, saw bargaining structures aligned with new organisational structures and managerial philosophies (Walsh, 1988; Walsh and Wetzel, 1990). Choices ranged from single company documents to a range of agreements reflecting the new divisions within the SOE to heavy reliance on independent contracting making a separate collective agreement unnecessary - and
not achievable. Changes in content are similar to those in the public service. The chief contrast with the public sector has been the promotion in some SOEs of an aggressively anti-union approach by management.

CONCLUSION

It is not overstating the case to describe the years 1984-90 as traumatic for trade unions in New Zealand. At a national level, a Labour Government excluded them from what was undoubtedly the most comprehensive period of economic restructuring since the late 1930s. Legacies of union organisation and resource allocation combined to limit their capacity to remedy this. Unions sought to insert themselves into the policy-making process but in the absence of compelling political or industrial resources, any success was short-lived. Ironically, the development of a strategic unionism agenda by the CTU and its adoption by key unions such as the Engineers Union and the PSA meant that unions had more to offer to the national debate over restructuring than at any previous stage in their history. At the industry level, unions were somewhat better placed to take a role in restructuring, reflecting their rather greater focus on this level in the past. Some progress was made towards the development of industry bargaining as a way of assisting the process of restructuring. Less progress was made towards industry unionism. Unions emphasising skills development, consultative structures and changes in payment systems and hours of work achieved significant changes in their documents where they faced amenable employers. At the workplace level, the historical pattern of managerial dominance remains in place. Nonetheless, unions have organised in the workplace to an unprecedented degree over the last two decades, and, particularly in the public sector, have made considerable gains in securing a major role for themselves at the workplace. The vision of the future sketched by the Employment Contracts Act of enterprise bargaining is a daunting one for unions.

Overall, unions have reaped what they have sown. Their limited role in economic restructuring since 1984 reflects their historical neglect of the restructuring process and the issues central to it. Their ability to seize a role in the restructuring process has been highly variable, and where achieved, has sometimes not brought the hoped for results. The strategic unionism model continues to hold sway within the union movement, but it is not universally accepted, and even among its supporters, its advantages over a traditional wage focus must continue to be demonstrated. Nonetheless, the inadequacies of the latter approach have been sufficiently clear in recent years that it is difficult to imagine it becoming the majority view again in the foreseeable future. However, the Employment Contracts Act means that the industrial relations future in New Zealand is anything but foreseeable.
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