

Amnesty and the Unions: A Study of Cross-Movement Collaboration

Edmund Heery

**Professor of Employment Relations
Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University
Wales
United Kingdom**

Heery@Cardiff.ac.uk

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Introduction

For more than thirty years British trade unions have been affiliated to Amnesty International UK (AIUK) and have formed a distinct Trade Union Network within Amnesty. This relationship was further cemented in 2009 when AIUK signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) that committed both organizations to joint working. The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of AIUK's relationship with trade unions in the light of recent interest in cross-movement coalition. In the literature on union revitalization, coalition with community organizations has emerged as a cardinal theme (Frege et al. 2005; Tattersall 2010), while social movement theorists have become interested in the conditions that encourage cross-movement collaboration to emerge, thrive and dissolve (Van Dyke 2003). In the paper, the arguments developed in these bodies of theoretical literature are tested against a case study of Amnesty's Trade Union Network (TUN), a singular and enduring link between trade unionism and the movement for human rights.

The paper makes use of archive, interview and observation material to tell the story of AIUK's collaboration with unions. The research was carried out between the summer of 2007 and spring of 2009 and assumed two main forms. The main source was archival records of the trade union network. These were provided by AIUK and a number of present or past members of the network. In addition, use was made of the material on trade unions and human rights kept at the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University. These archival sources were supplemented by interviews carried out with past and present members of the network committee and staff of AIUK. In addition to interviews a number of meetings of the network committee and the 2008 trade union conference on human rights were attended and observed.

The research project focused on the following issues:

1. *Origins*: the circumstances that generated Amnesty's trade union network, including consideration of the factors external to the organization and the motives and characteristics of the internal originators of the network in both Amnesty and the unions themselves.
2. *Form*: the specific feature of the relationship between AIUK and trade unions is that it is based on the principle of affiliation – trade unions are collective members of Amnesty in the UK with rights to participate in its governance and decision-making. This is a distinctive institution which has been neglected in the literature on unions but which has helped sustain collaboration with the human rights movement for more than 30 years.
3. *Substance*: the activities in which the trade union network has been engaged, including campaigning on behalf of victims of human rights abuse, what can be thought of as individual trade union human rights campaigning. Unions affiliated

to Amnesty have also engaged in collective human rights work acting as campaigners and lobbyists for legal change at UK, European and global levels.

4. *Conflict*: the existing literature on union-community coalitions points repeatedly to conflict and tension in the relationship. The project examined conflict and identified its sources and modes of expression. Although the relationship between Amnesty and the unions has undergone a series of crises, its critical feature has been that it has endured and the paper explains how and why conflicts have been resolved.
5. *Evaluation*: in the literature on coalitions and cross-movement collaboration there is an emphasis on the nature of the exchange at the heart of these relationships and the factors that promote or inhibit effective cooperation. The paper concludes with an evaluation of the AIUK-union relationship. This identifies the benefits and costs of joint working to both sides and the conditions that have allowed cooperation to take place.

Each of these issues is considered, in turn, in the sections that follow.

Origins

The inaugural conference that established AIUK's trade union network took place at the University of Warwick in September 1979. In the following year there was the inaugural meeting of the Liaison Committee for Labour Organisations (LCLO), which later became the Trade Union Liaison Committee (TULC) and then the Trade Union Network Committee (TUNC), the body that has overseen the activities of AIUK's network ever since.

Context

What was the context that had allowed these developments to take place? One component derived from developments within Amnesty UK. There was a feeling amongst some within the organisation that Amnesty had stalled and that there was a need to kick on and create a 'mass Amnesty', an organisation comprising more than just 'lawyers and intellectuals'. The creation of the trade union network, and associated approaches to religious and student organisations, in the same year was an expression of this desire. At this point, Amnesty's membership stood at 13,000 and, while the previous decade had been one of expansion and great achievement, there was a belief that further growth was necessary if the organisation was to add to its activities and influence. In this context, trade unions were seen as a potent source of membership, activism, campaigning capacity and finance. Unlike in the current period, when union-community coalitions have been formed to supplement waning union power, AIUK's network was founded in a period of union strength, when British unions were at their maximum level of membership and regarded widely as a 'fifth estate' within British public life.

Trade unions were also becoming more predisposed to working with Amnesty at this time. In 1973, the Chile Solidarity Campaign had been created with trade union involvement and there was an upsurge of union campaigning against human rights abuse in that country, including abuse of the rights of trade unionists. The Chile campaign operated alongside the established, active union involvement in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which had mass support from across the political spectrum.

Against this background, the NGA submitted a resolution to the annual TUC conference in 1977 drawing the attention of affiliated unions to human rights violations and urging them to become involved in Amnesty's Urgent Action programme. The resolution was carried and pointed towards continuous involvement of trade unions and the TUC in Amnesty.

A final point on the context in which the network was formed is that parallel developments were taking place in other national sections of Amnesty. In the USA in 1978 Amnesty began publishing *Labor News*, which sought 'to engage not just the sympathies but the resolute action of labor leaders, labor lawyers and union members on behalf of imprisoned or disappeared trade unionists around the world'. The magazine reported in its first issue that other Amnesty Sections, including Australia, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden, were already publishing details of imprisoned trade unionists and developing union-backed campaigns on their behalf. The cultivation of Amnesty-trade union links in Britain therefore was part of an international trend. It was only in Britain, however, that the link took the form of collective union affiliation to Amnesty with union representation on the Section's governing body, a development that was to prove highly controversial.

Reasons for affiliation

Beyond the context, why have unions chosen to affiliate to Amnesty? There is no single answer to this question and the reasons for joining the network have varied over time and across unions. Larger unions have tended to join, possibly because they have resources to invest and are more likely to have been targeted for recruitment by Amnesty itself. In some cases affiliation has flown from prior involvement in human rights activism and some of the earliest and most active members of the network have been unions with international departments, like NALGO/UNISON and the TGWU, or unions which have long campaigned against human rights violations of the occupational group they represent. Examples of the latter include unions of performers, writers, musicians and journalists and the education unions. Another example is the NUM whose involvement in Amnesty arose from its inquiries into human rights violations in Latin America and the Soviet Union in the 1970s.

It should also be noted that all of the affiliated unions are members of the TUC, with the exception of NIPSA, which is a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. This suggests that affiliation to Amnesty is an aspect of a wider identification with the labour movement and, indeed, this was supported strongly by accounts of the decision to join reported by individual unions. In several cases affiliation to Amnesty flowed from 'regime change' within unions, the election or appointment of new leaders who pushed for affiliation as part of a wider programme of reform. In some cases this involved joining the TUC for the first time, becoming more active in the international activities of the TUC, affiliating to other social justice organisations or seeking to represent a broader set of members' interests. In BIFU, the banking union, for example, it was explained that affiliating to Amnesty was part of complex of changes that included developing a stronger policy on gender and race equality and establishing a gay and lesbian network. Here and in other cases affiliation was a statement about the purpose of trade unionism: 'We're not just focused on internal issues...We see human rights and Amnesty fitting in with us a trade union organisation' (Union interview).

The decision to join was also influenced by some of the attributes of Amnesty itself. When the network was first founded relatively few social justice or human rights organisations sought membership from trade unions and Amnesty gained an early mover's advantage. It also gained from two other features. First of all, Amnesty was explicitly non-political and this was an important consideration for white-collar or public service unions that were themselves not affiliated to a political party. Joining Amnesty for these unions was a way of expressing a broader conception of union purpose in a way that was acceptable to their members. Opposition was still encountered but it could be overcome: 'Amnesty was seen as a "safe" affiliation. It got the union involved in international issues but was not controversial – You could hardly fall out about it really. Evil was evil' (Union interview).

Second, Amnesty was an organisation that could be trusted and which enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy. It is a 'credible organisation', one union representative stated, 'We are pleased and very proud to be associated with it' (Union interview). The reliability of Amnesty's research on human rights was particularly mentioned as was its sheer authority, which added weight to unions' own human rights activism. As one union official explained, Amnesty has a multiplier effect with regard to our members'; they are more likely to support a call for action if it is endorsed by Amnesty than if it is just issued by unions themselves.

Another important factor that contributed to union affiliation was that Amnesty actively recruited unions to membership. Through a mixture of personal contacts and formal approaches to union general secretaries, Amnesty staff charged with setting up the network attracted unions to join. In this they were aided by Jack Jones of the TGWU, who spoke for Amnesty among his union peers. In the intervening years, recruitment of unions has been less systematic but has continued via the Amnesty presence at TUC and union conferences. Tom Hedley, current chair of both the AIUK Board and the network committee, has played an important role in persuading unions such as Accord to take out Amnesty membership.

Form

The central governing principle of AIUK's trade union network is affiliation. It is a network of trade union organisations. The use of an 'affiliation system' was decided early on at a meeting between representatives of the AIUK, the TUC and several union general secretaries (Amnesty interview). The practice of unions affiliating to human rights organisations had been established in Anti-Apartheid and the Chile Solidarity Campaign and it was explained by the union side at this meeting that if they were to support Amnesty then it would have to be on the basis of their 'having a say' (Amnesty interview). In other words, they would not just donate to the organisation but would participate in its governance.

Once this decision was taken then other issues had to be resolved. It had to be established how the network govern itself and decided who would lead it, how it would take decisions and what systems of accountability would be put in place to link the network back to its member unions.

The central body within the network from its inception has been the, variously

titled, network committee. Originally meeting six times per year, the committee has overseen the work of the network. Throughout, it has been composed of representatives nominated by affiliated unions who, in the main, have been members of national union executives though in some cases have been paid union officers. A key function of the committee members has been to report back to their unions but also to enlist the union's support of and promote involvement in Amnesty's activities.

If the committee has been one key node in the network then another, for many years, was the Annual Trade Union Conference on Human Rights. For more than two decades the conference was the pivotal event in the network's calendar. Scheduled in the autumn, the conference, especially in its early years, was a substantial event. It featured major figures from politics, public life, human rights organisations and the trade union movement. It was also addressed regularly by human rights campaigners from overseas, several of whom had been the subject of Amnesty action backed by the network. More than a hundred delegates attended the conference through the 1980s though this number declined in later years. They included representatives of national unions, local union organisations and Amnesty branches. Invariably there was also strong attendance by Amnesty staff, who helped run sessions and briefed delegates on human rights issues and Amnesty policy.

The third key point in the network's system of governance is occupied by the trade union officer. This post (currently titled Trade Union Campaigns Manager) has been held by a series of incumbents since the initial appointment in the late 1970s. The trade union officer acts as secretary to the network committee and is responsible for implementing its decisions. The job involves maintaining the network through recruitment and servicing of affiliates, ensuring scheduled meetings and events are organised and producing and distributing the network journal, *Trade Union Alert*, and other communications. The job is not purely secretarial, however. Trade union officers have played an important part in initiating network activity and developing strategy. At the inception of the network the trade union officer established the principles that would guide its subsequent development, while in the current period the trade union officer has pushed for the concept of an activist network. This has led to a series of initiatives, including individual affiliation, programmes to recruit union branches and involve them in activism, the development of closer ties between union affiliates and local Amnesty groups, increasing the volume of communication directed to affiliates, pressing the international secretariat to adopt persecuted trade unionists as prisoners of conscience, and developing stronger ties with both the TUC and international trade union organisations.

The central feature of this pattern of union involvement in AIUK is that it has been based on affiliation, it has been continuous. There has been fluctuation in the level of activity of the network and, for example, the annual conference no longer takes place in the form it once did. But collective membership of AIUK through trade unions has provide the basis for a permanent relationship between the UK labour movement and the movement for human rights.

Human Rights Activism

Action on behalf of persecuted workers, trade unionists, their allies and defenders has been pivotal to the work of the Trade Union Network. Since its inception, the network has publicised, campaigned for and supported those who have suffered persecution. This work has assumed two main forms: campaigning on behalf of individual victims of human rights abuse and campaigning on human rights issues.

Individual Cases

Not surprisingly, activism in support of individual cases within the trade union network has typically focused on persecuted trade unionists. This is demonstrated repeatedly in the network's archive. In 1982, for example, CPSA stated in its annual report to the trade union conference that it had sent appeals on behalf of jailed trade unionists in Brazil, COHSE reported that it had raised the question of human rights violations against members of the medical workers' union in the USSR, and NATFHE reported that 'appeals were sent on behalf of trades unionists in Turkey, Colombia, and Guatemala'. Ten years later, NIPSA declared that it had protested against 'executions, abductions and threats directed at trade unionists in Guatemala' and issued similar appeals for the Philippines. In 2002 prominent concerns for the network were trade unionists in Colombia and members of the incipient independent workers' movement in China.

However, the network's activism has not been confined to trade unionists. It has embraced workers, peasants and indigenous people affected by economic development, social movements of the poor, individuals with an occupational link to the union taking the action and human rights campaigners as well as those persecuted on the basis of gender or identity. There has been an understandable desire to express solidarity with the labour movement but the latter has been defined broadly, not simply in terms of trade unionism, and activism has encompassed a wide set of cases. As we have seen, affiliating to Amnesty is itself an expression of a broad conception of union purpose and this, in turn, has affected the scope of campaigning. Charter 77 activists in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s, Chinese intellectuals calling for democracy in the 1990s and community activists and human rights defenders in Colombia and other countries have all fallen within the span of the network's activism.

Individuals who have been the subject of network action have been drawn from a broad set of countries. However, there is a cluster of countries that have been targeted repeatedly. These include Colombia, Guatemala, Iran, Peru, and China: all countries that at various points in time have been identified by Amnesty as suffering from chronic human rights abuse. The repression of the labour movement, it is clear, forms part of a wider pattern of violation, underlining the centrality of labour rights to the cause of human rights generally.

The other main finding in the tables is that the vast majority of countries targeted are located in the Global South; that is in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. There is one western country included, Spain, and countries from the old Soviet bloc, which were targeted in the 1980s. The remainder though are developing countries with weak or non-existent traditions of liberal democracy. To compensate for this pattern, and allay suspicion of implicit 'colonialism', Amnesty International,

but also the trade union network, has targeted countries in the Global North in its thematic campaigning, not concerned directly with individual prisoners. The trade union network has campaigned actively against use of the death penalty in the USA, on the export of technologies of repression from Britain, on Britain's treatment of asylum seekers, and against police racism and brutality in Europe.

Within Amnesty, individual cases are selected for campaigning by the International Secretariat (IS) based in London. The vast majority of individuals for whom the trade union network has campaigned therefore have been referred to them by the IS. While the IS proposes cases to the network, individual trade unions (as indeed any other Amnesty activists) have discretion as to their response. Critics of union involvement in Amnesty have suggested that case selection would be on the basis of ideological affiliation; that unions would select prisoners as a means to advance pre-determined ideological positions. In fact, the network's campaigning shows little evidence of this. In the 1980s, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia featured in union appeals alongside Chile, the Philippines, and South Korea. The declaration of martial law and the attempt to crush Solidarity in Poland in 1981, for instance, led to protests by union conventionally seen as on both the right and left of the UK trade union movement.

While ideological affiliation has not been a major factor underpinning the adoption of cases, occupational affinity most assuredly has. At the very first meeting of the network committee the NUT declared that its work within Amnesty emphasised 'adoption of prisoners of the same profession', while SPOE reported that an attempt to disaffiliate had been headed off through the adoption of a telecommunications engineer, Mohammod Ezzedine, as a prisoner of conscience. An attempt to find 'something in common' (Union Interview) with prisoners as a way of generating member support for Amnesty campaigns has been a feature of certain types of union. Occupational unions, especially those from occupations that are likely to be targeted by oppressive regimes, have tended to adopt cases from the same occupational group. This is characteristic of the activism of educational unions, the journalists, printing, musicians and performers' unions.

Over the course of their history unions have developed an extensive repertoire of labour protest, including strikes and other forms of industrial action and, in the political sphere, demonstrations and other forms of public protest. What is striking about union activism within Amnesty is the absence of this repertoire. In its stead, unions have largely made use of letters sent by mail, telex and latterly email to protest against human rights violations. Within Amnesty, unions have primarily used Amnesty's own methods.

Written protest by the network has assumed a number of forms and been directed at a range of targets. The most common form has been to send either a standard or tailored letter to public authorities overseas calling for the cessation of human rights violations against named individuals. It has also been common for letters to be sent to the UK embassies of repressive regimes. Recently, letters have tended to be despatched by email with, in some cases, many thousands of emails being sent to protest against the persecution of particular trade unionists. This was the case, for example, with recent appeals issued on behalf of, jailed Iranian trade unionist, Mansour Osanlu.

A refinement of the method of written protest has been the use of delegations to embassies to deliver letters by hand and reinforce their message in person. Direct appeal to the responsible public authorities has often been supplemented by attempts to exert indirect pressure. The network has lobbied the UK government, European and international agencies on behalf of persecuted trade unionists. For example, in 1985 affiliates were asked to raise cases of torture in Turkey with 'MPs and MEPs at a time when the issue of Turkey's membership of the EEC was being debated in various international forums'.

Human Rights Issues

The second main focus of the trade union network's activism has been substantive campaigns. From the outset the network has lent its weight to Amnesty campaigns designed to highlight patterns of human rights abuse and promote the strengthening of international human rights law and domestic public policy. Four areas in which the network has been particularly active are torture and the export of technologies of repression, the death penalty, treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and the human rights of women. As these issues demonstrate, there has not been a narrow concern with labour rights or with the rights of workers or trade unionists.

The subject matter on which unions have campaigned has tended to evolve over time, reflecting the broadening of Amnesty's mandate. The campaigns in the first decade or so of the network's life were typically focused on violations of basic rights to life and liberty: they dealt with disappearance, state murder, torture and the death penalty. Civil and political rights were at the heart of activism. From the late 1980s, however, newer threads emerged dealing with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race. The human rights of women have been particularly prominent. The other thing to note about campaign themes is that they have typically been recurrent. Campaigns that emerged in the early years of the network's life have re-emerged later, reflecting both the enduring quality of human rights abuse but also the continuing development of law and public policy relating to rights, as well as the tenacity of campaigners. Campaigns have been updated and re-launched as new legislative threats or opportunities have come to the fore.

In certain respects the authorities targeted in thematic campaigns are the same as those targeted in individual appeals. Campaigns have been directed at states abroad with a history of repression. This is seen particularly in the death penalty and Stop Violence Against Women campaigns. The primary target of thematic campaigns in which the network has been involved, however, has been the British Government. Campaigns have been developed to secure Britain's adoption of international conventions, to oppose domestic legislation, to ensure legislation is introduced or amended and to shape non-legislative aspects of public policy. Campaigns have also been directed at international agencies, seeking to reform international law, but for the trade union network it has typically been the British state that is the focus of campaigns. Indeed, this feature has become accentuated over time, again as Amnesty's mandate has changed and there has been increased tolerance of 'own-country' work.

The final point to make about the pattern of campaign activism relates to

methods. The central distinction here is between campaigning that seeks to win the support of trade unions for Amnesty policy, and that which seeks to use the resources of trade unions to promote policy more generally. The first, 'internal' set of methods include promoting campaigns to unions through circulars, leaflets, articles and web-pages and seeking formal backing through conference debate and resolutions. The network has used methods of this kind to win the support for Amnesty campaigns of individual trade unionists, branches, national unions and the TUC. On occasion, it has also extended its influence to the international trade union movement, promoting international union support for international human rights campaigns.

The second, 'external' set of methods is equally diverse. It has embraced the issuing of appeals by trade unions and the adoption of individual cases that exemplify broad campaign themes. Greater emphasis though has been placed on political lobbying and a feature of the network's campaign work is that much of it has been directed at government, Parliament and the Labour Party. It is the unions' links with the latter, particularly over the twelve of years of Labour Government from 1997 to 2009 that have been enlisted by Amnesty in its campaign activity.

Conflict

Research on the relationship between unions and their coalition partners often reports tension and conflict. The experience of AIUK and British trade unions provided further evidence. The affiliation of trade unions to Amnesty proved controversial and excited considerable opposition, not just within the UK Section but in the wider international movement. This opposition culminated in attempts to end the practice of affiliation and effectively expel British trade unions from membership at Amnesty international council meetings in the 1980s. These attempts were unsuccessful, partly as a result of very effective counter-action by the network committee. The purpose of this section is to tell the story of this conflict and of its resolution. It deals, in turn, with the domestic opposition to union affiliation within the UK Section, the system of governance that was established to regulate union participation in the Section and which was intended to allay fears of 'excessive' union influence, and the moves at international level to put an end to union affiliation.

Domestic opposition

A common feature of 'coalitions across the class divide', involving unions and social justice organisations, is a clash of cultures, of ethos and personal style. This should not be exaggerated in Amnesty's case but several members of the network reported some suspicion of unions amongst ordinary members of Amnesty, 'middle class liberals' who had had little prior contact with the labour movement (Union interview). 'They never did approve of us, you see', was how one union interviewee described the response to the network. For their part, network members admitted to their own suspicion of the liberal intelligentsia they encountered in Amnesty: 'anyone with corduroy trousers and a posh accent' (Union interview). Particularly in the early days, union delegates were rather bemused by the highly participative but also rather chaotic nature of Amnesty gatherings, which contrasted sharply with the more disciplined form of representative democracy found within the labour movement.

While cultural difference was an underlying factor there were also more

concrete political and ideological motives that led to opposition to union affiliation. Perhaps surprisingly, these were articulated most strongly at the time of the network's birth by voices from within the trade union movement itself. In 1980 a member of the electricians' union, Bill Blair, submitted a resolution to the Section's AGM to disband the network.

The substantive point at the heart of this opposition was a belief that creating the network 'would upset AI's non-partisan balance'. In other words, there was a feeling that union affiliation would compromise the principle of political neutrality upon which Amnesty had been founded. Behind this objection, however, it seemed clear that union factional politics were also at play. Those arguing against the creation of the network were on the political right within the trade union movement and clearly perceived the hand of the left in developments at Amnesty.

The opposition of some in the trade union movement to the creation of the network fused with a more general disquiet within Amnesty. This was motivated largely by a concern that unions would use their voting power to control the organisation. The unions were at the peak of their influence in British society when the network was created and there was a fear that affiliation would allow them to dominate Amnesty, itself quite a small organisation at the time. The response to this concern was the formulation of a set of constitutional rules to limit trade union influence over Amnesty policy-making, which is described below.

The regulation of union involvement in AIUK policy was achieved through two principal means. First, the network and its governing institutions, the network committee and trade union conference, were allotted only advisory status. The decision-making prerogative within AIUK would remain the preserve of the AGM and Section's Council (later the Board), while at international level it would be the preserve of the International Council Meeting and International Executive Committee. The union network could request and advise these bodies to take action but it could not compel or bind them in any way. Second, the voting strength of trade unions at the AGM was strictly limited to prevent any dominance by the 'block vote'. In both these areas there has been change over time, as Amnesty has undergone successive episodes of constitutional reform, but the basic principles set down at the network's inception have endured. Their purpose is to shield Amnesty from 'excessive' union influence.

The international affiliation dispute

In the 1980s an attack was mounted on the principle of affiliated membership, and particularly affiliated membership by trade union and labour organisations, which ran across a number of International Council Meetings (ICM). Its origins lay in the ICM of 1978, which deleted the provisions for affiliated membership of Amnesty at international level. Once this had been done, a question was inevitably posed about the future of affiliated membership in national sections and this was duly raised at the 1981 ICM in Rimini. It was at the 1983 Paris ICM, however, that the attack was fully developed and there was a sharp division between those wishing to retain and those wishing to abolish affiliation. No resolution was reached and it was agreed that there should be the creation of an International Working Group on Affiliated Membership by the International Executive Committee, in order to examine the question in detail and report to the Helsinki ICM of 1985. At this meeting, the defenders of affiliation

won the day and the UK Section was allowed to continue with its trade union network.

The attack on affiliation originated in the Swedish section and its strongest exponent rather paradoxically was a union official in one of the smaller Swedish union confederations. The key issue for opponents of affiliation was one of political neutrality. It was argued that if trade unions and, even more, local branches of political parties affiliated to Amnesty then its political independence would be compromised. In time, it would come to be viewed as an expression of a particular political force rather than an organisation campaigning on behalf of universal human rights. This argument resonated particularly in Amnesty Sections, such as France, where trade unions were themselves the creation and direct expression of competing political traditions: socialist, communist and Catholic.

The essential points made in the defence were that affiliation was beneficial to Amnesty in increasing its resources and drawing 'target groups' into its programme of activism. It was also denied that there were marked disadvantages or that unions had sought to use Amnesty for political ends. The central argument, however, was the procedural one that Sections should be allowed to develop their own systems of membership and governance provided they complied with basic conditions and safeguards. Following an investigation by an International Working Group in 1985, these points were accepted and the AIUK's network was permitted to continue in existence.

What is notable about this dispute, and indeed the domestic opposition to union participation in AIUK, is that it focused on procedural and constitutional questions. The wider literature on conflict between unions and social movement organizations has tended to identify its origins in contrasting cultures and differences of substantive policy. The latter emphatically was not a major source of dispute within the network. Unions affiliated to AIUK endorsed its goals, adopted its methods and acted as loyal supporters of Amnesty. Conflict arose because of a suspicion that this might not always be the case and focused on the very principle of union affiliation.

Evaluation

The trade union network has provided the basis for a unique partnership between AIUK and the labour movement. Over 30 years, it has brought together trade union and Amnesty activists to work together for human rights. The journey has not always run smoothly and on occasion, as we have seen, the position of trade unions within Amnesty has been challenged. But the relationship has been sustained, and trade unions continue to provide a fund of activism on which Amnesty can draw.

The fact that AIUK's trade union network has endured for three decades raises two general questions, both of which are considered below by way of conclusion. The first concerns the value of the network to Amnesty and to the unions that have participated in its work. What is the nature of the exchange between Amnesty and its affiliated unions and what does each side draw from the collaborative relationship? The second concerns the factors internal and external to the network that have sustained it and allowed it to thrive.

Mutual gains

As we have seen joint-working between trade unions and other social justice organisations is currently in vogue and has attracted research and comment in Britain and other countries in recent years. The trade union network is a peculiarly long-lived instance of joint-working of this type, so what have the two parties taken from it? What mutual gains have been accrued?

The gains for Amnesty have been more tangible. The affiliation of trade unions has given Amnesty access to a broad range of resources that have helped sustain its human rights campaigning. The most tangible of these resources is cash. Union subscriptions to Amnesty have been a minor but significant source of income and have been supplemented in times of particular need by additional donations. Unions have also subsidised Amnesty by providing meeting rooms, free stalls at conferences, and picking up the bill for *Trade Union Alert* and other means of communication. The work of union officers has often supplemented that of Amnesty's own staff.

Establishing a trade union network has also provided Amnesty with a gateway to the component elements of the labour movement. Most obviously, it has provided a link to union members and although numbers have declined there are still more than six million trade unionists in Britain. The network through its own communications media and that of its affiliates enables 'outreach' to this constituency, allowing Amnesty to take the argument for human rights to an important element within British society.

The network has also allowed a link to unions as organisations and to the TUC. Amnesty has been able to feed details of appeals and campaigns to unions and offer briefings on human rights in particular countries and on particular issues. In return, unions have gathered intelligence, channelling information on human rights violations back to Amnesty. Critically, this link into the union world encompasses international trade union organisations. They have also provided an avenue through which Amnesty can influence the International Labour Organisation.

Finally, trade unions are actors on the political stage and although currently rather frayed, have an enduring relationship with the Labour Party. While Amnesty is politically neutral it is important for it to shape the political process, whether by bolstering Parliamentary opposition or lobbying the government of the day. In the period of Labour Government between 1997 and 2009, the link to Labour and the ability of the TUC to reinforce Amnesty's own lobbying activity, was regarded as particularly significant.

However, the main resource that unions offer to Amnesty is activism. Over the 30 years of its history, unions, union branches and individuals who are members of the trade union network have written letters of appeal, adopted prisoners of conscience, sent greeting cards and emails, visited and played host to human rights defenders, lobbied MPs and publicised Amnesty campaigns. The unions have provided a fund of activist, not just passive supporters of Amnesty. As one Amnesty officer put it, 'You can tap into this massive, extended family of people who are interested in rights issues' (Amnesty interview). There are limits to this activism and

it rises and falls, but the active participation of trade unionists in Amnesty's on-going fight for human rights is surely the primary benefit the network has brought.

There are also benefits in the relationship for trade unions. Trade union campaigning for human rights is as old as the labour movement and pre-dates any formal involvement in Amnesty. It remains the case that, human rights activism within trade unions is not confined to and often proceeds independently of joint work with Amnesty or other 'human rights majors'. Nevertheless, to the extent that trade unions become engaged in human rights campaigning then there are real benefits in working closely with an organisation of Amnesty's stamp. These stem largely from the sheer credibility and authority of Amnesty as a campaigning body. It is politically neutral, independent, principled and enjoys very high legitimacy amongst union members and the wider public. Much of this rests on a strong research base and resultant expertise that Amnesty has built over the years. Unions can trust Amnesty and in working with it on human rights issues, share in its authority and legitimacy. The level of expertise and campaigning know-how that Amnesty has now accumulated would be impossible for unions, particularly smaller unions, to accumulate and through the network member unions can draw upon these resources.

Unlike Amnesty, however, unions are not focused purely on human rights or even questions of social justice. They are much more variegated institutions that encompass a range of functions, including acting as an economic interest group on behalf of their members. It is this quality, combining economic instrumentality with the fight for social justice that has fed some of the suspicion of unions within the more patently 'altruistic' Amnesty. The general consensus of those trade unionists who were interviewed was that work for Amnesty had little connection to their more routine activities within their unions: representing members and dealing with employers. One person placed Amnesty in the category of 'good works', something additional not integral to working as a trade union representative.

In the main therefore the value of Amnesty to unions becomes apparent when they step outside their workaday selves and become involved in human rights campaigning, for unions an essential but rather specialised activity. This may not always be the case, however, and in future Amnesty's work may have a stronger connection to core trade unionism. The basis for this belief is the broadening of Amnesty's mandate to encompass the full spectrum of economic and social rights. In this regard, the SVAW campaign is emblematic in its call for concerted action, including action at the workplace, to combat violence against women. A call of this kind obviously can have a direct connection to core trade union activity in Britain and embrace the representation of members and bargaining and consultation with employers. Amnesty, potentially, can support these activities, encourage unions to develop good practice and in so doing foment innovation in the 'workaday' activity of British unions. The significance of this kind of development remains to be seen but at least potentially it offers the promise of a new value in Amnesty for the trade union movement.

Supporting success

Over its 30 years, the trade union network has gone through good times and bad. Its first decade was highly productive, achieving record levels of union participation and

active campaigning on behalf of individuals and human rights themes. In the 1990s, membership and vitality ebbed away somewhat before being rekindled at the end of the decade. In the last few years there have been further problems but also a new beginning, seen in the relaunch of the network since 2007.

What explains this pattern and what lessons can be extracted for the future? Some of the causes are external to the network itself. Unions have declined in British society over the 30 years of the network's life and this, inevitably, has had an effect, not just in reducing the number of affiliates but in encouraging Amnesty to turn to other social groups and movements in its outreach work.

Union decline began in the early 1980s however and this was still a successful decade for the network. Possibly this was because it was a highly polarised period in British politics, in which unions were subject to attack by Government and when other high profile causes, such as anti-Apartheid attracted unions and their activists to the network. The 1980s was, in certain respects, a decade of protest that has been followed by a more quiescent phase in British public life – itself now seemingly coming to a close following the financial crisis of 2008

Union decline coincided with a long-period of Conservative ascendancy and in these years the political resource that unions could offer Amnesty was necessarily depleted. It is no surprise that the revival of the network since the late 1990s coincided with a period of Labour Government, when the lobbying strength of unions has been more significant. The last decade has also seen increasing concern about globalisation and its effects. This in turn has heightened interest in global labour standards and the need to bolster rights of free association and collective bargaining across the globe. In this context, Amnesty appears as a potent ally for unions and there is a strong and growing reason for the two institutions to collaborate as questions of global governance come to the fore.

While external developments may push Amnesty and the unions together or weaken their attachment, internal factors are also important. On Amnesty's part, it is important that the network committee provides a strong link back into the trade union movement and that its members have influence within their unions. It is also important that strong bilateral connections exist, especially with the TUC and international trade union organisations. It is notable that building these bilateral links is an important feature of the relaunch currently underway. On the union's part, it is important that work with trade unions is properly resourced by Amnesty and that there is a strong, committed trade union officer. Coalitions between unions and other institutions need effective bridge builders and the network has operated most effectively when both parties, Amnesty and the unions, have put forward people of this type.

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