Trade Unions and Industrial Regeneration in North West Tasmania: Moving Beyond Lock-In?

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Abstract

As the North West coast of Tasmania, Australia, has deindustrialised, the region's unions have lost membership, power and relevance. This process of deindustrialisation opens up possibilities for the unions to become involved in regeneration as regional development actors and, by moving outside the workplace and engaging with the community, renew and revitalise themselves. But many unions have found it difficult to move beyond their traditional forms of action and relationships. This article uses the concept of lock-in, and draws on semi-structured interviews, two forums and a workshop, to detail the way the North West coast unions attempted to break from the confines of the workplace and out into the community. Their attempts to do this were uneven and contested. They were, to varying degrees, locked-in and constrained by their traditional relationships with politicians and their own members. At another level they were locked-out from participating in regeneration decisions by long standing relationships between governments and business and their antagonism towards the unions. Although the unions attempted to reimagine themselves, there remained a pattern of regional lock-in where long-standing relationships continued and limited and hindered the unions' ability to participate in regeneration debates and activities.

Keywords

Trade unions, deindustrialisation, lock-in, labour agency, labour geography.

Introduction

Many traditional industrialised countries have experienced some degree of deindustrialisation as the production of manufactured goods shifts away from traditional industrialised countries to newly industrialised countries. This has affected countries in

uneven and complex ways. Some regions and cities have been able to reorient their economies towards knowledge intensive service jobs whilst others, especially those dependent on a small number of industries, have struggled with the profound and ongoing impacts of deindustrialisation and its effect on the number and quality of jobs (Hudson, 2005; High, 2015; Christopherson et al., 2014; Tyler et al, 2017; Strangleman, 2016). The unions in these economies have experienced a period of sustained membership decline and loss of power. As they search for a way to halt or reverse this process, most unions have experimented with a variety of initiatives to revitalise or renew themselves. They have democratised their structures, shifted their focus from the workplace and engaged with the community through community unionism, experimented with new organisational strategies and broadened their range of action and engagement with 'outsider' organisations as they attempt to renew or revitalise themselves. Whilst there have been sporadic union successes, it has been insufficient to reverse their fortunes and this has led to some questioning of unions' ability to change (Murray, 2017; Fairbrother, 2015; Heery, 2015; Ibsen and Tapia, 2017; Tattersall, 2018).

Within deindustrialised regions unions have been in retreat with large groups of workers left unrepresented. Those unions that remain are often weakened by membership losses and their members affected by job losses and downward pressure on their wages and conditions. As a union's membership shrink, its focus may turn towards organisational survival and become inward looking, defensive and marginalised (Ellem, 2003; Pike, O'Brien and Tomaney, 2007; High and Lewis 2007). Within this context unions have faced difficult questions about their own identity, traditions, membership and their relationship to the region and its people. Many unions have found it difficult to engage with these questions and challenges and, in this context, unions can become a source of inertia rather than change in communities (Sadler and Thompson 2001). Similarly deindustrialisation can devastate a community's volunteer groups and cohesion and, although union power may have waned, the unions' membership and solidaristic traditions can still make them a significant and powerful force (Harvey and Ozich, 2015; Wray and Stephenson, 2012; Barton, 2018). In these communities, many unions have recognised the need to develop new spatial practices (Anderson et al, 2010; Harvey and Ozich, 2015) and "geographical imaginations" by adopting both globally scaled and local campaigns (Anderson et al, 2010: 386).

Although unions' power and influence has contracted, there is an argument that

deindustrialised regions' ability to regenerate requires the involvement of labour organisations. It has been proposed that public policy is best able to meet local and regional concerns if it is shaped by local and regional actors, including trade unions and community groups. It is often through regional trades and labour councils that unions become involved in these processes. These actors can broaden the range of issues considered and influence public policy in a direction that is more sympathetic to particular local concerns and lead to a process of renewal and revitalisation (Pike, O'Brien and Tomaney, 2002; Connelly et al., 2004; Rittau, 2005; Pike, O'Brien and Tomaney, 2007; Ibsen and Tapia, 2017). The challenge for trade unions is how to insert themselves in this process. Although union members live in communities and act as both producers, consumers and citizens (Hyman, 1999), the workplace remains central to union power (Anderson et al, 2010) and many unions find it difficult to change and reach outside the workplace and into the community. While the potential for a new form of unionism exists, its coming into being depends upon the unions' ability to exert agency and overcome both internal and external barriers.

This paper seeks examine unions' ability to become actors in regional development and, more specifically, the factors that enhance and hinder that potential. There have been attempts to explain how and why unions can participate in economic development (Fairbrother, Walker and Phillips, 2017) but few explanation as to why they do not and it is here that the concept of "lock-in" (Grabher, 1993) is useful to explore the unions' difficulty in inserting themselves into economic regeneration. Deindustrialisation opens up the potential for unions to shift their purpose and orient themselves away from a narrow economistic focus on terms and conditions of employment and towards organisations and people outside the workplace (Holgate, 2018) and assist those affected by economic restructuring (Hyman, 2007). While many unions have experimented with different ways of working and new political alliances (Milkman, 2013), other have remained wedded to their historic practices. This has led Cumbers et al (2016: 106) to suggest unions are "stuck in outmoded and nationally oriented institutional cultures and practices, 'locked-in' to defensive and inward-looking perspectives that are inappropriate to admittedly complex and difficult to negotiate multi-scalar realities". In the theoretical debates about lock-in, little attention has been paid to the agency of actors such as trade unions with the focus firmly on the macro-level and in specific regions such as the Ruhr (cf. Galgóczi, 2014). The agency of actors such as trade unions to influence change in

regenerating regional economies is a neglected area of research, with the focus generally on labour market outcomes or policy responses (Thomas et al, 2008). This has important implications for unions as they struggle to retain their relevance in deindustrialised communities and for labour's voice in these regions.

The research is located in the North West Coast of Tasmania, Australia, one such place that has experienced deindustrialisation and the accompanying negative social and economic issues (Neville, 2014; Strangleman, 2016). In this isolated old industrial region in Australia's smallest and most southern island state, deindustrialisation and punitive industrial legislation has caused some unions to disappear from the region while others have suffered significant membership decline. Although the unions are strongly integrated into the community and have used this as the basis for community campaigns aimed at preserving jobs (Barton, 2018), there has been an ambivalence about taking this a step further and attempting to influence the shape and types of future jobs in the region. While many union leaders were enthusiastic about the possibilities engendered by moving outside the workplace, this was not universally held by the membership. Union decline and powerlessness (Ellem et al, 2019) and continued deindustrialisation made some memberships sceptical of their unions ability to protect them and caused them to turn inwards towards the workplace. In spite of general agreement about the merits and necessity of moving outside the workplace and engaging with the community, the unions were unable to do so at any deep level and therefore seemingly unable to influence the direction any regeneration activities took. This begs the question as to whether the unions were unable to participate in these activities because there was a form of lock-in (Grabher, 1993) operating that prevented them from participating in regeneration activities. Had the relationships and organisational structures that sustained the unions during industrialisation come to act as a constraint to their own and the region's regeneration or could the unions break free from the bonds of the past.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section deals with the North West coast and trade unions. The third section examines the concept of lock-in and its relationship to industrial regeneration and the absence of labour and agency from these debates. The fourth section comprises a methods section and this is followed by an analysis of the unions and their approach to industrial regeneration whilst the last section presents a conclusion.

Tasmania's North West Coast and Trade Unions

The North West coast of Tasmania, Australia, is home to around 19 per cent of the State's population of about 521,000 people. The two main population centres, Devonport (25,000) and Burnie (19,000), are complemented by a number of smaller towns that often serve as dormitories for the two larger towns (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2018). In the mid-1930s government initiated hydro-industrialisation saw the region move away from its mainly agricultural roots and a range of industries in vegetable processing, chemical, textiles, carpet manufacturing and pulp and paper manufacturing open. The largest factory, Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM), opened in 1938 in Burnie and at its peak employed 2,500 people. Since the 1990s a number of these industries, including APPM, have closed with significant job losses leading to population decline (Barton and Fairbrother, 2014; Barton, 2015; Department of Treasury and Finance, 2018). The region is profoundly disadvantaged with high unemployment rates and levels of long term unemployed, low levels of educational attainment and labour market participation (Neville, 2014).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Whilst there had been unions on the North West coast, hydro-industrialisation and APPM's opening saw the emergence of a number of new unions and the formation of trades and labour councils. The Burnie Trades and Labor Council was formed in 1940 and the Devonport Trades and Labor Council in 1945. Both were strongly involved with local community and Labor politics at the municipal and state level and took an active role coordinating regional industrial campaigns (The Advocate, 1940a; The Advocate, 1940b; The Advocate, 1940c; The Advocate, 1954; The Advocate, 1945a; The Advocate, 1945b). By the early 1990s both the Burnie and Devonport Trades and Labor Councils had disappeared (Parliament@Work, 2008; Jamieson, 1994) leaving the Hobart based Unions Tasmania, with one paid official, as the peak union body in Tasmania (Unions Tasmania, 2017).

Since the 1950s trade union density in Australia has fallen from over 50% to 15% in 2018 (Stanford, 2018). Although in Tasmania 21% of workers are trade union members, the highest density in Australia (ABS, 2017), this disguises the uneven nature of union membership. Whilst some service sector unions such as education and nursing unions have seen their membership increase the main Tasmanian manufacturing union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), has seen its membership decline from 3,784

members in 2003 to 1,639 in 2018 (Registered Organisations Commission, 2018). As industries have closed and the unions finished negotiating redundancy packages and retraining for their members, unions such as the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) Pulp and Paper Division and the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union Australia have withdrawn from the region. The unions that remain on the North West coast have, with one exception, a single official. All the unions have offices in Devonport with a number of unions sharing offices as a cost saving measure. Other unions either use their cars as mobile offices or can drop in and use another union's office facilities. With the exception of the National Union of Workers (NUW) and CFMMEU (MUA), the North West coast unions are sub-branches and either report to state offices in Hobart or interstate. Deindustrialisation and legislative constraints on the right to strike, collectively bargain and protect vulnerable workers (Ellem, Goods and Todd, 2019) have weakened the unions organisationally and practically and reduced their presence and influence in the region.

The unions recognised the North West coast had been overly reliant on a small number of large industries and their closure had a profound impact on the region. As one union official stated, "Burnie fell in a big hole when you're a one company [town]. You can't survive being a one company town forever". This had led to a lack of jobs, declining house prices and an exodus of young people, particularly the well-educated. In the words of one unionist, "what happens is the community starts to find no work in the area, the community starts to fold down, people are moving away" (Union Forum, February 2015). There was a common belief amongst the unions that in this environment they needed to change their approach and this had led to a number of them engaging with the community, albeit in a rather ad hoc and sporadic way.

In the lead up to the 2007 federal election the ACTU and its peak body representative in Tasmania, Unions Tasmania, ran the *Your Rights at Work* campaign aimed at ousting the conservative Liberal/National Party government and the unpopular *Work Choices* legislation. This campaign developed local union leaders who were strongly locally integrated into the local community (Former union official, 2014) and established a network of community activists but once the election was won, the unions turned inwards and the community network fell away. In hindsight the unions saw this as a lost opportunity and learnt from this, and after the 2016 election they maintained their activist groups and initiated measures to ensure that interaction between the unions, community and activists continued (Unions Tasmania, 2016). Individual unions have successfully initiated campaigns and gained and

used community support to retain jobs such as in the Australian Workers Union's campaign to prevent the National Heritage listing of the Tarkine. In this campaign the union, faced with the prospect of an environmental ban on mining in the Tarkine region in Tasmania's West coast, initiated a community campaign on the West and North West coasts that used images of work, place and identity to mobilise the local community. The union organised well attended rallies in local towns and, supported by local businesses and local government, caused the proposed National Heritage listing to be overturned and allow mining to continue into the foreseeable future (Barton, 2018). There have been other campaigns on retaining Australian crewed coastal shipping vessels (Unions Tasmania interview, 2016), the AMWU and CFMEU's retraining of retrenched forestry and pulp and paper workers, government service quality provision or the protection of jobs related to a union's particular, sectional interests (United Voice (A) 2014; Unions Forum, 2014; Interview CPSU SPSF, 2014, Interview AEU, 2014; Interview former Unions Tasmania official, 2011; Interview AWU, 2012; Interview AWU, 2015; Interview AMWU and CFMEU, 2011; Unions Tasmania, 2016). Thus in the North West coast there has, largely because of deindustrialisation, been a decrease in both the number of unions and union membership numbers. The unions have adopted some new community centred approaches but these tended to be sporadic and short lived and this raises the question as to whether they are able to take a more systematic and sustained approach with the community on industrial regeneration.

Industrial Regeneration, Lock-in and the Unions

With many countries experiencing some level of deindustrialisation, there has been renewed interest in explaining how regions regenerate. Economic geography's focus has been on those aspects of geographical clustering that enable regions to regenerate, with the realisation that not all regions regenerate. Hassink and Shin (2005) have drawn attention to the factors that hinder regional ability to regenerate. One explanation focuses on the evolutionary concepts of path dependence and regional lock-in where factors that were strengths in the past turn into obstacles to innovation, locking the region into a trajectory of decline. Lock-in can take a number of forms: functional - where long term enterprise stability, inter-dependence and cooperation stifle innovation; cognitive - where personal ties, tacit knowledge, trust and a common mind set stifle regional innovation and reorganisation; and political - where cooperative and symbiotic relationships

between networks of organisations such as trade unions, business and government and patterns of behaviour obstruct industrial reorganisation and political innovation (Grabher, 1993; Hudson, 2005).

Regional lock-in can form through a combination of these three forms of lock-in (Hassink, 2010) and even after industries have left, lock-in can remain as the local leadership becomes locked into "outdated forms of collective response" (Bailey et al, 2010: 462). The strength of such lock-in influences the prospects of industrial regeneration (Hassink, 2010) and affects adaptability, that is the ability to pose radically different questions and utilise different responses. Regions that lack adaptability are likely to be left behind, a process labelled "institutional blockage" whereby institutional structures have evolved to become rigid and wedded to familiar patterns of policy and corporate strategy (Sadler and Thompson 2001). They often have long established and deep seated social and economic, interpersonal and inter-organisational networks that make it difficult for alternative visions and strategies to develop while these actors still dominate local decision making bodies and structures of influence (Grabher, 1993; Galgóczi, 2014). Policy forums often continue to be dominated by the same bodies, and arguments about regional development occur in a narrow conceptual space (Hudson, 2005).

There have been criticisms of the concepts of lock-in and path dependence for being ahistoric and placing insufficient emphasis on a regions' ability to free itself from lock-in. These criticisms suggest greater emphasis needs to be placed on geographic and place-based foundations and human agency as well as structural factors (Hassink and Shin, 2005; Hassink, 2010; Fornahl et al., 2012; Martin and Sunley, 2006). Hassink (2010) suggests that regional lock-in is both multi-scalar and has a high degree of place dependence and argues that institutional context at all levels needs to be taken into account. Where there has been successful, albeit lengthy, regeneration following deindustrialisation, such as in the Ruhr Valley, there has often been a bottom up approach characterised by active federal and regional government involvement and assistance, a cooperative industrial relations culture based on trade union and worker involvement and a comprehensive policy framework that takes into account the region's key competencies (Galgóczi, 2014). While the concept of lock in can illuminate the way that regions adapt, it is blind when it comes to labour which is either ignored or seen in human capital terms (eg. Trippl and Otto, 2009; Underthun et al., 2014). Labour is

accounted for in terms of job losses, skills possessed and skill transferability and versatility or as suffering from a form of cognitive lock-in where workers are tied to the region and hold outdated expectations of wage labour and working in 'traditional' industries (Hudson, 2005). In this way the possibility is removed of labour being able to redirect or influence regeneration activities and it is seen as an object to be acted upon rather than exerting agency in its own right.

More recently economic geographers have moved beyond evolutionary concepts such as lock-in and path dependence to Global Production Networks (GPNs) with their emphasis on bodies other than business, such as trade unions In this context regional development is a product of strategic coupling between GPNs and other regional assets and in this context two aspects of strategic coupling are important. This first is that it is strategic insofar as it requires deliberative action by participants and the second is that it is time and space contingent in that it involves the formation of a temporary coalition between groups who would not usually work together, such as employers and unions, towards a common goal such as regional development (Coe and Hess, 2010; MacKinnon, 2012). Whilst the GPN perspective promised a deliberative pluralism that was non-hierarchical and based on an equitable, trust-based consensus and assumes a harmony of interests, this may not be the case. The 'dark side' of strategic coupling can result in the replication of the traditional power hierarchies the networks were meant to replace. One outcome being that in the process of attracting new development some bodies, such as unions, may be excluded from the process with a significant impact on the type and distribution of development and employment in the region (Coe and Hess, 2010; Davies, 2011). In this way, traditional patterns of union exclusion from regional governance are continued. It may not be the case that unions are locked in to familiar patterns of interaction with actors such as employers and government but that employers and governments have continued with their usual patterns of behaviour and, in effect, locked out the unions

When a region deindustrialises, labour's power is weakened. Unions' ability to exercise the associative power that emerges from collective organisation and the structural power that comes from low unemployment and high union membership (Wright, 2000) recedes. Under these circumstances unions' ability to take action is diminished and they lack capabilities to mobilise their resources and engage with this changed environment. In this environment there are two resources Lévesque and Murray

(2010) propose as relevant for unions attempting to insert themselves into the networks and dialogue on regional development in deindustrialised regions. The first is network embeddedness which is the vertical and horizontal links that unions are able to forge with community groups and social movements. The second is narrative resources which are the union stories that frame understandings and actions and lend legitimacy to their actions. But these resources alone are insufficient and unions must be able to activate them. They can do this by using capabilities such as intermediating which is the union's ability mediate between contending interests particularly when working in new coalitions; framing which is the ability to put forward an inclusive agenda that can be part of a broader social project and articulation which involves remaking the geography of unionism (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). Whilst the marriage of resources and capabilities can enable unions to exert agency and therefore power, as Lévesque and Murray (2013) argue, they do this in a context where other actors exert capability and power and can use this to prevent unions taking their power outside the workplace and into the sphere of politics where they can influence the formation and implementation of state policies (Wright, 2000), such as regional development policies. Thus, although unions may possess the resources and capacity to take action and exert agency in terms of regional development, the greater power of other actors, such as employers and government, may prevent this

Although structural constraints influence the actions of key social actors (Hudson, 2005) such as unions, agency can still be exerted (Cumbers and MacKinnon, 2010). Unions have the potential to overcome lock-in by developing collective understanding and strategies to overcome the constraints that are limiting their ability to adapt (Pike, Dawley and Tomaney, 2010). It is here that labour geography, with its emphasis on agency, can provide a means of overcoming lock-in's ahistoric tendency towards inertia. Workers have, as Castree (2007) argues, the capacity to exert agency and when realised can play a role in shaping the broader economic landscape outside the workplace with important consequences for them and other actors, such as their communities (Herod, 2010). In some instances, unions have done this by looking outside the workplace. They have recognised the importance for them and their members of participating in and influencing community conditions by becoming community unionists and seeking to influence public policy on regeneration (Pike, O'Brien and Tomaney, 2007; Symon and Crawshaw, 2009; Stephenson and Wray, 2009).

Australian unions have taken limited steps towards community involvement but have often been constrained by their continued focus on representing working people and using the local community to advance their claims (Barnes and Balnave, 2015: 578), rather than representing the broader community. Although deindustrialised regions should provide unions with ample opportunities to become involved with and in the community, union engagement in community unionism has been 'patchy and distant' (Symon and Crawshaw, 2009: 151). As Hastings (2016: 314) argues, workers "actions are … driven by what seems practically possible and prudent, based on assessments of what is desirable on an individual and collective basis" and that labour's ability to influence events is circumscribed (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2004).

With unions facing such difficult circumstances, there has often been an emphasis in labour geography on union victories at a time when most unions are in decline, and this has tended to lead to an overoptimistic affirmation of labour's agency (Siemiatycki, 2012: Peck, 2018; Tattersall, 2018). There has been a belated recognition of the structural constraints facing labour (Peck, 2018) and the need to recognise the diverse uses of space to sustain agency and produce political activity and labour organising (Featherstone and Griffin, 2016). While unions have attempted new and different strategies with only sporadic success (Ellem et al., 2019), unions' multi-scalar organisation and ability to re-scale their activities mean they can adapt or even shape economic sectors with innovative and new strategies. It is therefore important to consider that although unions and workers may have the potential to enter into debates on industrial regeneration, their ability to exert agency may be constrained by both other actors and their own sense of what is both possible and probable.

Methods

The research forms part of a project that examined unions on Tasmania's North West coast and their capacity to be involved in regional regeneration. As part of this project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 regional union officials or organisers with members on the North West coast. They respondents were interviewed about their union's activities and campaigns, the regional economy and its future, the main challenges unions and their union faced and to possible action they could take to become involved in regional

regeneration. The interviews were held between March 2011 and October 2016 and involved 12 unions namely the National Union of Workers (NUW), Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), Community and Public Sector Union SPSF (CPSU SPSF), Community and Public Sector Union PSU (CPSU PSU), United Voice (UV), Australian Services Union (ASU), Australian Workers Union (AWU), Australian Education Union (AEU), Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Constructions Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union Forestry and Furnishing Division (CFMMEU) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the peak body Unions Tasmania. As well a seminar with Hobart based union officials was held at Unions Tasmania in June 2014 to that introduced the project to the unions. This was followed by two union forums attended by North West coast based secretaries, organisers and activists from the AEU, ASU, NUW, AMWU, ANMF, CFMEU and HACSU were held at Devonport in February and June 2015. The forums aimed to map the questions facing the region, identify strategies that could assist the unions to address the challenges over regional development and regeneration and potentially arrive at a consensus about the form that could take. The interviews and forums were transcribed, analysed and interpreted.

Setting a New Direction?

While deindustrialisation leads to a decline in union visibility and strength in the region (Barton and Fairbrother, 2014), it need not herald the demise of union action. Reynolds (2009) argues a new model of reimagined unionism can emerge to take advantage of scalar changes and preserve working class agency. Key unions and community organisations can use regional economic development as the focus to rebuild unions by forming deep coalitions with diverse groups and taking ongoing political activity focused on working families and economic justice. Amongst the North West unions there was general agreement that they needed to focus on employment and good jobs (Union Forum, June 2015) "I think what we as a union group should be doing, is standing up for jobs and saying we want jobs, and we'll support any organisation who's going to come and set up here, following the rules …. What we've got to be is about good jobs … sustainable jobs … responsible jobs" (AMWU, Union Forum, February 2015). If the unions were to become involved in regeneration activities, they needed to be active at the local level. In the words of one union "You've got to start local first …. you've got to drive it from the bottom up"

(CFMEU, Union Forum, June 2015). The unions wrestled with the issues of how to engage with workers and the community at a deeper rather than transactional level (Union Forum, June 2015) and for this to occur the unions needed to work together and speak to their members and community values. In the words of one union:

> I think union membership and community is the same thing … it probably comes to your question, how do you engage them? …. while we're talking about building industries and driving the economy here in Tasmania, it comes in so many different avenues which falls back to unions working together, because we need to talk to what is relevant to them or their values at the time (AMWU, Union Forum, June 2015).

This was echoed by Unions Tasmania "…as a union movement in this state, we're moving to and trying to position ourselves as something more than just a workplace… it's a question of how we move to be seen as … having a legitimate role in that area" (Interview Unions Tasmania, 2016).

Some unionists used their embeddedness in the community to try and engage with people on the issues that impacted on people's domestic and social as well as working lives. As one unionist proposed, the unions needed to:

> Have that conversation, connect it to what their values are, what their story of self may be, what they believe in, so that we do become relevant. … Not just for EBAs [collective workplace agreements] but … because they are part of the community, to go to their local councils, to go to their local sporting group and drive it from a different direction. This is important. I don't have time anymore to participate in local sport activities because I have to work every weekend because I need to support my family … work is affecting the local sporting communities because no-one's got time to do it anymore (AMWU, Union Forum, June 2015).

In this there is a recognition that the union needed to have conversations with people about the issues that are important to them, such as work's encroachment on people's social lives, and in this way assert their relevance as agents of change in the broader community. There was a need for the unions to "start getting things together and coordinating what we do" (CFMEU, Union Forum, 2 June 2015) with the impetus in some unions coming from

members who wanted their union to move away from coverage disputes to focusing on common community interests (Interview ASU, 2014; AMWU, Union Forum, June 2015) "I've got a lot of feedback from members saying … look there's problems in forestry, there's problems with water … Why don't we all get in and help out, because we've got that huge rent-a-crowd …" (AEU, Union Forum, 2 June 2015). This shift away from the workplace provided an opportunity to escape the strictures of the workplace, with its legal constraints on industrial action, by moving out into the community and in the process reinvigorating the union.

> … it's a really exciting time to be in the unions because it's like the phoenix rising from the ashes. Thirty years it's the same attacks … Let's regroup, redefine, re-engage, it's a perfect time, it's brilliant (IEU, Union Seminar, June 2014).

While the union leaders were enthusiastic about the possibilities of reaching out into the community, this was not shared by all members. Many union members took a defensive position, sceptical of their unions' ability to protect them or to chart any type of alternative future other than continued deindustrialisation and powerlessness (Former Unions Tasmania official, 2015). While some union members wanted their union to move outside the workplace and become more engaged in community issues, other unions have experienced criticism from members for moving into areas outside their usual domain and engaging in broader social and economic policy (Interview United Voice, 2016). Some unions persisted with community engagement in the face of opposition from some portion of the membership on the basis they need to represent members in both their working life and their home life. Unions such as the AWU and the CFMEU knew they and their members were strongly integrated into the community and community organisations such as football clubs (Interview AWU, 2012; CFMEU, Union Forum, 2 June 2015) and had used this in their local campaigns. They had faith their structures, the good sense of their members and their history would enable them to influence the regional agenda. 'I actually think that the local union members, who are in fact the union …. They are the people that if we give them the direction, they'll drive it. We proved it before with the Burnie Trades and Labor Council' (AEU, Union Forum, 2 June 2015).

The challenges posed by deindustrialisation, declining membership and punitive industrial legislation had served to make some unions more receptive to alternative models and ways of thinking and adept at talking 'strategically to their members and take people through a bit of a

journey' (Interview former UV official, 2014; Interview Unions Tasmania, 2016). In a high unemployment region, there was a tension between the need for jobs and advocating for quality jobs and the danger of being 'painted as being that anti-progress, anti-development or not wanting these jobs, and that's not the case' (Interview CPSU (A), 2014). The ASU and CPSU officials believed they and their members had the knowledge to contribute to debates over regional jobs but to do so needed access to the political parties in power (Interview CPSU (A), 2014; Interview ASU, 2014) and were hampered by their inability to create the space to do this (Interview NUW, 2014). The unions' ability to influence policy was coloured by long term relationships that excluded unions from political processes and there needed to be a realignment and rebuilding of their relationship with large industry and local government from one that was combative to one where there was greater trust and focused on satisfied workers and increased production (CFMEU, Union Forum, June 2015; Interview ASU, 2014). The unions perceived that, in the eyes of government and local business, they lacked legitimacy to participate in discussions about the industrial regeneration and community and generating greater understanding and acceptance of unions was central to overcoming this (CFMEU, Union Forum, 2015; Interview SDA, 2016).

Some unions lobbied politicians about jobs but this was on an individual basis and about jobs in their areas of coverage rather than at a broader regional level whilst others found it difficult because, in the face of membership decline, the union turned inwards and focused on servicing their members. (Interview UV (A), 2014; Interview ASU, 2014). Unions such as the MUA and AWU had run campaigns to defend jobs and from this had formed strong and enduring linkages with the community and politicians at all levels (Interview AWU (B), 2014). On the other hand, unions such as United Voice found it difficult to become involved in regional development because the union's focus was at the state or national or industry level rather than the regional level (Interview UV (A), 2014). For some time the unions had been excluded from regional decision making structures which tended to be dominated by small business and local government. As one official argued:

> I think it's important that unions are part of the process of developing that vision for the future, but … we have tended to be out of that space. In an area like the North West coast, decisions seem to be made by councils and Chambers of Commerce and it's all about small groups of people, Rotary Clubs and … and all the rest of it, how conversations are had and how decisions are made. It's fairly typically Tasmania (Interview CPSU, 2014).

The unions were not just locked-in by their long-standing lack of participation in regional decision making processes but locked out by continuing forms of leadership that centred on local councils and small business.

This exclusion was exacerbated by the rise of strong anti-union sentiment amongst some North West coast businesses which discouraged union participation in joint forums (Interview former UV official, 2014; Interview MUA, 2014). The unions believed they were excluded from policy processes at a political level:

> The Liberal government that's currently in place does not place as much importance on the role of trade unions, as would a Labor government and it would be fair to say that the current [Liberal] government does not believe there's a particular need to ensure that trade unions get any preference (Interview SDA, 2016).

Some of this exclusion was self-imposed with unions wary of being seen to cooperate with a Liberal government (Interview Unions Tasmania (B), 2016). Even under Labor governments the unions lamented they were not given privileged access to policy making or consultative bodies and, like any other organisation, had to apply to sit on these bodies (Interview MUA, 2014). There was an instance when the Labor state government, under its economic development plan, had attempted to engage with the unions on regional economic transition by established regional reference groups that each had a union representative. The union participation was uneven. Some unions did not attend the meetings or engage with the process whilst others understood and grasped the significance. Thus the unions had sporadic involvement in political decision making, some of it because of their being excluded but in other circumstances they excluded themselves.

Conclusion

The problems faced by the North West coast unions are similar to that faced by those deindustrialised regions. Here they have experienced varying degrees of membership loss, have been confined to a shrinking number of workplaces as industries have closed, suffered a loss of workplace power and relevance and seen a decline in job quality and numbers. Many have experimented with the renewal strategies enumerated by Fairbrother (2015) and Heery

(2015) and in differing ways with community unionism (Tattersall, 2018) but this has led to little substantive change.

In the past many of the North West coast unions' campaigns were defensive and focused on matters such as the retraining or retrenched pulp and paper workers, retraining Australian crewed coastal vessels or allowing the continuation of mining in the Tarkine rather than attempting to direct local policy, as had been done in differing ways until the 1990s through the regional Trades and Labour Councils. The success of many of these campaigns depended on community involvement and support. With these campaigns the unions had sought to move outside the workplace and into the community and engage with the community at the local level. A number of unions wanted to take this further and become involved in regeneration activities where they could influence the type and amount of employment in the region. However, there was uneven engagement by the membership with some wanting their union to become actively involved in the community whilst others sensed the limits of their union's power and retreated to the workplace.

This article has sought to examine unions' ability to become actors in regional development and the factors that enhance and hinder that potential. This brings into focus Grabher's (1993) concept of lock-in. In some senses there was a form of regional cognitive and political lock-in where, as in the industrial past, local business and government leadership continued to participate in decision making forums on regeneration to the exclusion of the unions. Some unions were cognitively locked-in to past patterns of behaviour and thinking where historic relationships with their members and other unions limited their ability to participate in debates about industrial regeneration. Their past exclusion from these regional decision-making networks dominated by local business and government fed into their current exclusion. It led them to believe they were incapable of breaking into any of these networks and even when offered the opportunity to participate in regional development initiatives, their take up was uneven. The unions suffered from forms of political lock-in where they continued to engage in long standing individual political relationships with ALP politicians to the exclusion of other political avenues. In this sense there was regional lock-in where traditional sectional interests prevailed over community and regional interests. There was a pattern where the unions continued to focus on traditional patterns of individual linkages with politicians or political parties whilst the regional decision-making processes continued in their usual manner and marginalised the unions.

The concept of lock-in is important for brining into focus how both the patterns of trade union behaviour in terms of both membership expectations and political relationships hindered their ability to become active in regional development. This inability was exacerbated by long standing regional power structures that acted to exclude the unions. A short coming of lock-in is its focus on the way that harmonious relationships within regions act to stifle a region's ability to adapt and innovate (Grabher, 1993). One problem with this framing is that it ignores the existence of antagonistic and unequal power relationships trade unions, employers and the state (Wright, 2000). On the North West coast, as in the past, the antagonistic or indifferent relationships between unions, employers and government continued and the unions were excluded from the regeneration debates and process. These employers and the state used their power to, in effect, lock-out and exclude the unions from regional decision-making bodies and confine them to the workplace. That labour is limited by these structural constraints (Peck, 2018) provides recognition a region can be locked-in by not only cooperative but antagonistic relationships and opens the way for labour to be inserted into the regeneration process. The structural constraints imposed on labour in the workplace opened up the possibility for the unions to exert agency and reimagine their relationships within the region. The unions used their embeddedness in place to break from the confines of the workplace and their geographic imaginations (Anderson et al, 2010) and multi-scalar organisation to initiate community campaigns. This process was uneven and both contested and supported by union members and leaders.

Funding

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