The tail that wags the dog: lessons from London's independent trade unions for class struggle trade unionism

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Abstract

This article examines in what way strategies of new independent trade unions in London - that achieved many pioneering, high-profile victories to end outsourcing - offer learning opportunities for more established trade unions. It proposes to (re-)encourage a culture of class struggle trade unionism. The article builds on existing research that outlined the organising practices of these independent trade unions but breaks down the binary analysis of independent versus established trade unions. I use the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) as an analytical framework for exploring class struggle trade unionism, and examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the example of independent trade unions. *In doing so, this article contributes to a much wider debate on trade union renewal.*

Design/methodology/approach: *This article offers an insider perspective of an 'academic activist' (Chatterton et al.,2007). The article draws on my own experiences and reflection as the co-founder of the trade union United Voices of the World (UVW) created in 2014, and previously involvement in the establishment of the Independent Trade Union of Great Britain (IWGB) in 2012. Findings are based on my own ethnographic engagement as well as a selection of 29 interviews from a much larger data set on independent trade unions comprised of focus groups and interviews.*

Findings:

This article demonstrates that class struggle trade unionism has in some ways been remembered and hence pioneered by the new independent trade unions, yet they are possible in established trade unions alike.

Originality: *This is the first time an article systematically explores the strategies that established trade unions can learn – and indeed are learning - from independent trade unions.*

Key Words: *Trade Unions, migrant workers, low wages, industrial action, trade union renewal UK, class struggle trade unionism*

1. Introduction

The winter of 2022/2023 was a new winter of discontent. Workers in transport, postal services, universities, schools, hospitals (nurses and ambulance drivers), and the civil service have been on strike. The strikes resulted in around 1 million lost working days in December 2022, the worst single-month industrial disruption since 1989.[i] On the 1st of February 2023 almost half a million workers walked out on their jobs, with further action following. Many disputes are in the public sector and in industries that have been subject to privatisations, including outsourcing. This might evoke hope for regained union power.

At the same time, union membership is (still) low. Only 23.1% of the UK employees were in a trade union in 2021 - a slight decline from 2020 after four years of small but consecutive membership growth, and after decades of steady membership decline. Within this overall trend, there are considerable demographic variations. Many of the most vulnerable groups of workers are not part of a trade union. Young people are much less likely to be a union member, as are migrant workers (18.6% of non-UK born employees were trade union members in 2021, compared with 24.1% of UK-born employees) as well as poorer workers (12.0% of those earning less than £250p/w are members of a trade union by contrast to 30.4% of those earning between £500 and £999p/w). Furthermore, the rise of (bogus) self-employment, particularly in the growing gig economy, means that many workers are

not captured by those statistics. This article focuses on two overlapping groups, migrant workers and low paid workers in outsourced services, and thereby contributes to the literature on trade union renewal that looked at the capacity for established trade unions to integrate precarious workers, including migrant workers (Lucio and Perrett 2009; Tapia 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2017; Murray 2017).

Most unions have attempted to address the precarisation of work by developing a more integrative approach that aims to include precariously employed migrant workers within its membership (Tapia 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2017). Yet, this has often been done in a patronising manner which frames migrant workers organising as 'organising the unorganisable,' assuming a lack of organising capacity of BAME and migrant workers and demands the integration of migrant workers into the overall political strategies of trade unions (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009). Workers are usually portrayed as 'passive subjects of top-down organizing strategies' within established unions (Rizzo and Atzeni 2020). Such approaches neither pay attention to the specific needs and support required by migrant communities and adjusting political strategies in response to these needs (Lucio and Perrett 2009), nor actually seeing or supporting the struggles led by migrant workers that *already* exist outside of established trade unions (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009).

Petrinia and Wettergren (2022) argue that 'two new grassroots unions, Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) and United Voices of the World (UVW), formed by precarious and migrant workers, are now leading the movement against outsourcing'. Such unions offer learning opportunities for established trade unions. Following Hardy's research call, that if we want to understand why some industrial disputes lead to victory and others do not, we need to look at the microcosms of struggle (Hardy 2021), I discuss these learnings on two sets comparable campaigns. First, the successful insourcing campaigns in hospitals, namely the pioneering in-house victory of the cleaners in St Mary's Hospital (St Mary's) and then Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in 2020 with UVW and Unite's in-house campaign of facility workers in St Barts hospital trust in 2022. Second, the parallel campaigns of facility workers at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) with the UVW and at the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) with the PCS in 2019.

This article proceeds as follows: after the literature review offers a brief overview on the emerging literature on independent trade unions, I outline the theoretical underpinnings of intersectional class struggle unionism as well as the methodology applied in this research. It discusses the political economy of facility outsourcing in the UK in its historical context before elaborating on the historical dynamics of independent unions' struggle against outsourcing. The paper then analyses the ways in which strategies of independent trade unions in the struggle against outsourcing have been adopted by established trade unions by looking at the UVW's campaign at GOSH and St Mary's hospital, Unite's campaign at St. Barts hospital, and UVW's MoJ and PCS's BEIS dispute. The article concludes with a discussion on class struggle trade unionism and what independent trade unions offer to the debate on trade union renewal.

An emerging literature on independent trade unions.

The new independent unions have been praised for their 'significant high profile wins' of 'David and Goliath' battles (Hardy 2021; Pero 2020). They have focused on organising low-paid, precarious and mostly migrant and BAME workers in separate organisations of class struggle independent from, and outside of, established trade unions. Starting with mostly migrant outsourced facility workers and then the gig economy (IWGB) they now represent a range of precarious workers – migrant workers as well as UK-born workers in areas such as hospitality, legal sector workers, sex workers, cultural workers, yoga teachers, foster carers, charity workers, etc.

The rise of these new, independent trade unions has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Several studies examining at the successful organising of low-paid migrant workers within independent unions in the UK have started to address a gap in the literature that has hitherto overlooked the grassroots workers initiatives outside of established trade unions (see Kirkpatrick 2014; Moyer-Lee and Lopez 2017; Shenker 2019; Pero 2020; Hardy 2021; Gall 2020; Cant and Woodcook 2020; Pannini 2021; Weghmann 2022; Smith 2022, Petrini and Wettergren 2022). Understanding workers' experiences in these new trade unions have global significance in terms of understanding the emerging phenomenon of organising outside of the traditional structures of established trade unions (Ness 2014; Rizzo and Atzeni 2020; Webster 2021). Yet there are disagreements on the relevancy of these new unions in the organising of low-paid and migrant workers and their impact on the UK's trade union movement. By some they were celebrated as a beginning of the 'effective representation of the precariat' (Pero 2020: 901). Others dismissed them as radical breakaway unions that are in a "red bubble" and 'avoid the necessity of persuading and winning over the majority of the workers' (Hardy 2021). Much research to date remains trapped in binary thinking that contrasts 'old' versus 'new' unions (Gall 2020; Pero 2020; Cant and Woodcook 2020). While Cant and Woodcook (2020: 519) raise the important question of how the struggles of independent trade unions could be generalised for the rest of the workers movement, they conclude that as 'many of these unions – including IWGB and the United Voices of the World (UVW) – are splits from mainstream unions, the connection can be limited'. Ultimately, as Pero points out, that 'the overall relationship between mainstream and indie unionism has not been very collaborative' (2020: 906).

This article calls for a break from the binary thinking that either argues for low waged migrant workers to be integrated into established trade unions, or emphasises the need to organise separately. Instead, we need to look at the lessons that can be learnt from independent trade unions for the wider trade union movement ([redacted]). Smith (2022: 1384) argues:

> *'indie unions have played an important influential role in the UK labour movement in the form of producing new knowledge, which in addition to providing a practical strategic template for mobilisation against outsourced work, has also driven incentives for other unions to act.'*

Complementing Smith's work, which looked at the learning mechanisms inside independent and established trade unions, this article builds on my previous analysis of the political strategies of independent trade unions ([redacted]). This work argues that some strategies of independent trade unions in the struggle against outsourcing have been adopted by established trade unions. Through the analysis of the learning and collaboration between established and new trade unions I proposed that the main lesson from the independent trade unions is that we need to re-encourage a culture of confrontation, worker-led organising, and solidarity in unions – rather than putting too much emphasis on trade union recognition and partnership models. This work sought to contribute to a much wider debate on the necessity of class struggle unionism (Ness 2014; Burns 2022). It is important to acknowledge that not all established trade unions are the same and that the organising strategies vastly differ between them. Similarly, there are also important differences between the independent trade unions (see [redacted]). A more detailed discussion on the inter-union differences goes beyond this article.

An intersectional approach to class struggle unionism: Theoretical insights for empirical analysis

Ness (2014) challenges the historic focus of European trade unions on trade union recognition and partnership models. He argues that across the world 'new forms of workers organization' and 'independent and democratic unions are emerging [that are] fundamentally opposed to bureaucratic domination, class compromise and concessions with employers' (Ness, 2014: 2–6). They are revitalising class struggle unionism by rejecting the corporatist model, instead favouring strikes and direct action (Ibid.). Like Ness, Burns (2022:2) remembers the syndicalist strategies in the US and argues that 'one of the key weaknesses of the labor movement since the early 1990s is the absence of broad-based explicit class struggle union trend'. According to Burns the basis of class struggle

unionism is the understanding that society is divided into two groups – 'the workers who produce things and the billionaires who take the product of labour' classes' (Burns 2022: 13). In that sense 'workplace struggles are part of a larger fight in society over the distribution of the social surplus' (Ibid: 14). Burns also highlights the dichotomy between class struggle unionism and business unionism with the latter having a much narrower view, seeing the role of the union to represent individual workers that face "bad" employers that have too much power (Burns 2022: 17).

It is, however, important to include the intersecting forms of oppression in society into a class struggle unionism framework. Lee and Tapia (2021: 639) have challenged Industrial Relations (IR) scholars to include intersectionality – based on the pioneering theoretical endeavours of Crenshaw – and to 'rejected singular, predominantly class-based theoretical frames in favour of contextualized socio-structural analyses'. Specifically, they stress the need for IR scholars to 'acknowledge that racism is an ever-present system of oppression' and to avoid ''whitewashing'' knowledge [by] oversimplifying racial and other identity constructs, and undertheorizing identity-based systems of oppression (Ibid: 638).

For this article it is especially important to remember that economic, social, and racial justice elements are often linked to one another and that groups of workers will be affected by precariousness in different ways and thus react and resist it in different ways (Atzeni 2016). Likewise, also not all migrant workers are the same and hence attention needs to be paid to differences within the groups of workers (Lee and Tapia 2021). The analysis in this article will take the existing and historical class-based power structures into consideration and specifically emphasise the pervasiveness of institutional racism within outsourcing arrangements as well as the intersecting systems of identity-based oppression.

Methodology

The analysis is rooted in my practice, as someone who was involved in the IWGB from its start in 2012 and then co-founded the UVW in 2014. I draw on Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which goes back to Marx's exhortation that 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it' (Marx 2000: 173). PAR seeks to create reflective knowledge that is normative and action orientated (Bradbury and Reason 2008). Knowledge creation took place over many years through participant observations, various informal discussions with workers and union organisers, and my own reflections and actions. As such I hold a 'shifting research positionality', as in addition to my 'insider' position I also hold an 'outsider' perspective (Wiederhold 2005). I have gradually withdrawn from holding a central role in these trade unions to concentrate on my full-time academic job while I still am part of the wider community of those two mentioned trade unions. I thereby occupy a subject position that Chatterton et al. (2007) call the 'academic activists' – a person that has capacity and distance for the necessary reflection and the ability to address my potential bias but at the same time is actively engaged in the researched struggles.

Regarding the analysed disputes, I was a participant observer but not part of organising any of those. The data is gained through interviews and my own participant observation stimulated the interview and provided the necessary trust for participants to feel free to develop their own narratives. The findings of this article are based on a selection of 29 interviews from a much larger and still expanding data-set on independent trade unions comprised of focus groups and interviews. Specifically, I selected 10 worker interviews with leaders in the three aforementioned campaigns; namely GOSH, St Mary's and St Barts, BEIS and MoJ (all of them with a migrant background; four identifying as men and six as women); 8 interviews with independent unions staff that were leaders and organisers in the selected campaigns (four having a (partial) migrant background; four identifying as men and four as women); and interviews with 11 influential organisers in established trade unions, namely Unison, Unite, PCS (four with migrant background; eight identifying as men and three women). The latter ones

were selected based on the following criteria a) organisers that have been involved in in-house campaigns, b) that have an understanding of independent trade unions, organising migrant workers against outsourcing, and an ability to analyse the actions of independent trade unions within the wider contexts of the trade union movement in the UK. By and large, these organisers in established trade unions hold a sympathetic view towards independent trade unions. While this might be a potential bias it simultaneously adds to the knowledge creation as this article is about reflecting on the possible lessons that can be learnt from independent trade unions in order to revitalise trade union militancy within the wider trade union movement.

The focus on this article is on UVW as I discuss two disputes by this union, which are however located in a serious of campaigns against outsourcing by the IWGB, UVW as well as their newer sister the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU). When suitable, I speak for the independent trade unions as a whole as learning did not take part from just one dispute to another but as part of a bigger picture of independent trade unions arriving in the UK's trade union landscape.

The socio-political context of facility outsourcing in the UK

Putting facility services (as well as other services) out to tender and contracting private companies to deliver the services became the norm in the UK in the mid-1980s. New Public Management, the idea that the state should become more business-like, pushed these types of privatisation in the public sector. It was, however, the abolishment of the Fair Wages Resolution (FWR) in 1983 that made outsourcing profitable. The FWR, introduced in 1891 required companies working on government contracts to observe terms and conditions of employment not less favourable than those in relevant collective agreements. It was due to trade union campaigns, driven principally by the printing unions, that the FWR was introduced (Hall n.d.). When the FWR was abolished outsourcing became a mechanism to lower labour costs, with high competition between different providers pushing down the wages and conditions of outsourced workers – often with zero-hour contracts and no rights to sick pay, holiday, and pensions (Grimshaw et al., 2019). Facility contracts change frequently with a duration of three to five years. Often different facility workers (eg cleaners, porters and security guards) are employed by different companies.

Outsourcing arrangements reproduce material and power differences. Subcontracting disguises the true extent of institutional income inequality and allows employers (who then become the clients for the subcontractors) to avoid their responsibility for low wages. This facilitates a racialised segregated workforce with facility subcontractors in London employing predominately BME workers, mostly with a migrant background, while the majority of the inhouse staff especially at universities' and government departments are white (Wills et al., 2009). In the words of a security guard at GOSH:

> *'We [the workers] strongly belief that it [outsourcing] is racial discrimination. Because if you see the whole hospital, you see that this department [security] is the only one that has only immigrants. Just Black and Asian immigrants, it's just one white person. So, we ask ourselves if we were all white, we would be outsourced? I don't think so.' (Interview 55)*

The UVW has repeatedly argued that outsourcing 'BAME and migrant workers on worse pay and T&Cs [terms and conditions] than they would get if they weren't outsourced discriminates against them on grounds of their race'.[1] As a UVW organiser, with migrant background, explains in more detail:

> *It's back to this…people of colour provide service, we are slaves. We provide a service. We nurture, and we cook, and we clean, we provide a service. There's no space for us to think, and do, and make, we provide a service. That's for me when I think in very base, simple terms that's what outsourcing is.* (Interview 13)

[1] https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2020/07/legal-challenge-st-georges-institutional-racism/

UVW also challenges the racial discrimination of outsourcing through employment tribunals. A recent judgment, UVW vs Royal Parks, found that differential access to employment rights and benefits can constitute indirect race discrimination, breaching the Equality Act 2010 ([redacted]) As such, through the intersectional framework outlined above as suggested by Lee and Tapia (2021) it becomes clear that outsourcing is facilitated by intersecting systems of identity-based oppression.

Independent trade unions in London challenge outsourcing – a brief history

Independent trade unions were created in London in the mid 2010s due to the neglect of the established trade union regarding low paid migrant workers organising and started through the organising of outsourced cleaners. The struggles of the independent trade unions were informed by and rooted in a long history of sporadic cleaners struggles in London since the late 1970s, and also learned for the Justice for Janitors campaign in the US (for a brief history see [redacted]). The established trade unions in the UK did not systematically engage with the struggles of outsourced migrant workers. The independent trade unions emerged in a void. In the words of a Unison organiser involved in facility workers struggles: 'They have shown existing trade unions that not only is it possible [to organise outsourced workers] but it's essential that we [established trade unions] follow suit' *(Interview 22)*.

Similarly, a PCS organiser reflects on how the independent trade unions alerted the established trade unions to move back into the struggles of low paid, outsourced workers.

> *'It was more actually the realisation "look, all of these smaller unions are going round and organising these types of [outsourced] workers, but actually we've got a duty and responsibility to these workers". They are in our workplaces and so they should be part of our own marches and we should be looking after them and supporting them and recruiting them. So definitely it focussed our minds on "actually, we need to approach this in a more strategic way"' (Interview 24).*

The independent trade unions started to make demands that went beyond the common demand for the London Living Wage (LLW) that was the norm at the time. They demanded sick pay, parity of conditions, and an end to outsourcing. Their pioneering victories had ripple effects on the wider trade union movement. Just after joining the IWGB the University of London Branch that previously organised with Unison (for a historic overview see Moyer-Lee and Lopez 2017) launched their *3 Cosas Campaign* in 2012 that demanded sick pay, holiday pay and pension, effectively demanding parity for outsourced workers. Cleaners' campaigns had been going on at SOAS (Unison) and Senate House (IWGB) for years. Eventually, a campaign by the cleaners at the LSE with UVW in 2017 became the historic dispute through which for the first time outsourcing of a facility contract at a London university was reversed through an industrial dispute. This had repercussions for the wider trade union movement, as one victory led to another. Independent and established trade unions alike won battles for the inhouse provision of facility services in London's higher education sector, such as SOAS in 2018 (Unison), Kings College in 2018 (Unison), Goldsmith in 2019 (IWGB), Birkbeck in 2019 (Unison) Senate House of the University of London in 2020 (IWGB), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2021 (Unison).

In 2019 UVW and PSC took parallel strike actions in the government departments: Ministry of Justice (UVW) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (PCS). The strikes informed each other. While neither PCS nor UVW won an end to outsourcing. The MoJ cleaners managed to secure pay increases and sick pay[2] and the facility workers at BEIS PCS won the London Living Wage

[2] https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/campaigns/ministry-of-justice/

of £10.55 per hour, along with better terms and conditions including sick pay and increased annual leave.[ii]

In January 2020 UVW achieved another ground-breaking victory. The cleaners of St Mary's won their campaign for in-house and parity on terms and conditions with NHS staff. This was the first time the UK's history that workers had successfully forced an NHS Trust to make outsourced workers direct employees of the NHS. The victory resulted in 1,200 cleaners across five hospitals being made direct employees of the NHS with a significant pay rise of around £10,000 annually and vastly improved terms and conditions of employment. Again, this historic victory that showed that in-house campaigns in hospitals are possible had wider repercussions. In December 2020 the cleaners at the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) that also organised within UVW won their campaign to overcome outsourcing and bring hundreds of cleaners into direct employment and with full parity from in October 2021 onwards. In November 2021 the security guards at GOSH also organised with UVW and launched strike actions to campaign for inhouse. In early 2022 the facility workers at St Barts Trust (which includes five hospitals with 1800 facility workers) organised with Unite, launched strike action and subsequently won in March 2022 with the hospitals insourcing the workers in April 2023 when the contract with SERCO expires.

These victories show that winning big battles by outsourced migrant workers is not a monopoly of the independent trade unions. Yet what all those struggles had in common was that they were won by strikes and protests (or at least the real threat of them).

CARE – a relational and confrontational approach of class struggle trade unionism

Agreeing with the conceptualisations of Ness and Burns, organisers in established trade unions that I interviewed for this article explain that one of the main differences of the independent trade unions was their readiness to fight, and specifically strike, and that this offers lessons for the established trade unions. As explained by organisers of Unite and Unison in more detail:

> *'These two unions they want to have the fight and its not about respectability politics, of entering into some kind of agreement with employers based on serving the union structure. Its about winning…the changes that workers need around living wage, about being brought in-house, about concrete changes to terms and conditions (Interview 21)*

> *'I believe every day is an injustice in this country really, wages are too low, rent is too high, all of these things. That will take a fight… And that's all UVW, the culture …. Now my union Unite has definitely shifted much more on to that, like that is the essence of our union at the moment, and that's fantastic. But at the time it wasn't. At the time sometimes to have a fight with the employers you would have to first fight some people in the union itself' (Interview 23)*

> *'That conservatism just kills activism, it kills enthusiasm, it kills the anger that can be build up sometimes, that ought to be the potential for action. Again, I think what we can learn from the likes of UVW is … we ought to be becoming more in the face of management and employers' (Interview 22)*

Building on previous writings by others that analysed the organising and campaign strategies of independent trade unions (Pero 2021, Pannini 2021, [redacted]; Petrini and Wettergren 2022) I use the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) as an analytical framework for exploring class struggle trade unionism, and examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the

example of independent trade unions. The CARE organising approach is not a step-by-step guide but offers a tool to frame the debate on class struggle trade unionism.

***C**ollectivising individual grievances*

The independent trade unions committed themselves to a bottom-up, workers-led approach, which shapes the disputes before they even begin. Disputes usually don't start with recruitment and organising drives of the union (which identified a particular industry or workplace as key to their overall political strategy), as is often the case in established trade unions (Panini 2021; [redacted]). Word of mouth leads workers to the union, who usually come because they have some problem at work (eg unpaid wages, discrimination, suspension or redundancies etc.). Within established trade unions case work is often considered as too resource intensive and delegated to lay representatives. In contrast, within the independent trade unions individual representation became part of the organising strategy, and they used their limited resources to build up staff case worker teams (Panini 2021). Individual grievances are collectivised – and not just by turning them into collective grievances but through collective action for bold demands from which every worker would benefit.

Rather than scaling up demands and just demanding union recognition, for example, the independent trade unions would demand parity of conditions and an end to outsourcing. This, in turn, has strategic implications. Rather than targeting the immediate employer, in other words the outsourced company, target is the client. Put differently, they cut across the triangle of employment relations where the client is abnegated from any responsibility for the pay and working conditions of the outsourced staff ([redacted]). To illustrate this model of trade unionism drawing on the St Mary's dispute: The cleaners demanded not just trade union recognition, higher wages, or slightly improved terms and conditions but full parity with directly employed NHS staff and end to outsourcing altogether. This has never been done in a UK hospital before. The campaign target was the client, the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust (Imperial Trust), and in particular their flagship hospital, St Mary's, and not the direct employer, the subcontractor, Sodexo.

In contrast, due to the partnership model/business unionism has been common practice in established trade unions to do the opposite – to launch a dispute with the employer. This can be illustrated in the St Barts dispute. In 2015 the facility workers at Whip Cross Hospital – one of the five hospitals part of Barts Trust – started to organise, went on strike with Unite, and won the London Living Wage . In 2017 a cleaners strike across the five hospitals followed. While they did win an end of zero-hour contracts and a small wage increase, they did not win parity and an end to outsourcing. A Unite organiser involved in the St Barts campaign reflects:

> *'when people ask me what have I personally learned, from the UVW - go for the fucking client. Go for the client. Who has the money? Who is the service benefitting? Who has contracted out the service? Who is the service servicing. That's the person you go for. We picked the fight with Serco. We picked the fight with the middle man.*' (Interview 23)

When the facility workers re-launched the dispute at St Barts in early 2022 they demanded an end to outsourcing and directed their demands straight to the client. The militancy of the dispute was facilitated by a change in leadership at Unite with the new General Secretary, Sharon Graham (from October 2021 onwards) developing a greater focus on dispute.

At the MoJ (with UVW) and BEIS (with PCS) both campaigns addressed the client from the start. While PCS already started to represent the facility workers at the Department for Energy and Climate Change, which was then merged into BEIS into 2016 it was only in 2019 when PCS – inspired by the independent trade unions - launched strike action with the demand for parity/in-house. As a PCS organiser explains:

> 'Obviously, when putting in the legal trade dispute you can't put in "end outsourcing" but what we were putting in were terms and conditions comparable to civil servants, which obviously kicks the

> foundation of outsourcing. So, I think having those sorts of demands were really inspired by UVW and others doing that kind of thing.' (Interview 25)

***A**ction – and that fast*

In the established trade unions much attention is paid to recruitment in order to gain trade union recognition in order to negotiate with the employer. Action is usually seen as a measure of last resort after failed negotiations. The independent trade unions' strategy is exactly the other way around. Recruitment follows action and action (not trade union recognition) is the key to negotiation. Many (outsourced) workers have never been part of a trade union before, so action is a way to demonstrate the power of trade unionism. In the words of a PCS organiser at BEIS:

> *"I think we got caught up in 'oh we must have X amount of members before you do something' but it's a vicious circle because no one wants to join because they are like 'who are you?' So, you have to do something to show 'this is who I am [the union]'. I think UVW and IWGB really demonstrated that, really kind of do something and people will start rallying behind it, and with it, alongside it. So that was a really inspirational thing".* (Interview 25)

They explain further that the first PCS strike at BEIS started with 10 people on strike (out of around 124 facility workers), by the second round of strike action they had near to 100% density not only with the facility workers but also catering (Ibid.). This is in line with research that has shown that membership numbers usually go up during strike actions – suggesting that action is an important recruitment strategy (Hodder et al, 2017).

It is important to say that the independent trade unions aim for membership density before they ballot for strike action and the IWGB even has a policy on 50% membership density before launching strike action. Yet, in the words of a UVW organiser, they also 'have successfully won important disputes without those densities' (Interview 12). For example, the security guards dispute at the MoJ had a 90% membership density with a 100% turnout in their strike ballot in the head-quarter building (Interview 11) – but a low membership density when you consider all MoJ departments across the country. Elsewhere I distinguished between strategic membership density – among workers that have disruptive potential by withdrawing their labour – and majority membership density ([redacted]). While majority membership density is always desirable the legal threshold of the Trade Union Act of 2016 of 50% turnout for ballots to be valid means that a lower but committed union density makes it easier to have successful ballots. Workers can still become members and join the strike after the ballot. So, balloting before mass recruitment can be a fast track to strike actions.

The point is, however, that recruitment follows the prospect of action. The St. Mary's cleaners dispute for inhouse illustrates this: the UVW was first approached by one cleaner, who was suspended from work (an individual grievance). Trust in the union was build when the representation was successful and the suspension overturned. Soon, another worker came to the union with a pay query which was then collectivised and led to a meeting of 20 – sceptical – cleaners, that were also divided along ethnicity lines, to discuss the possibilities of a campaign to end outsourcing. Various meetings followed and by the time of the ballot 85 workers were part of the UVW. When the ballot closed, this number had increased to 105 members and that increased to over 200 members during the months of the dispute (the majority of the cleaners in St Mary's). During the strike recruitment too place in the other four hospitals that were run by the Imperial Trust.

In St Mary's there were two unions with recognition deals: Unite and Unison. They were used as shields by the Imperial Trust to hide behind. The recognition deals (an exclusive agreement between an employer and a union to negotiate) were used to tell workers and other stakeholders that they

were in negotiation with the recognised trade unions, and that therefore the dispute was unnecessary. In other words, the process of negotiation via recognition was used as a discouraging and delaying tactic to break the worker's power. Unison was actively discouraging workers from taking action, telling workers that they would never win what they are asking for (Interview 52, 51, 11, 12).This demonstrates the contradictions within the trade union movement where unions can be so caught in trade union territorialism that they side with the employers rather than the workers. It also shows that partnership trade unionism can undermine class struggle trade unionism.

A similar dynamic played out in facility workers organising with Unite at St Barts. Some of the cleaners organised with Unison, but they were so frustrated with their trade union's discouragement of action that they left Unison and joined Unite, and organised a strike in one of the five hospitals (Whips Cross). This won them the London Living Wage in 2015. Unite started to organise in the other hospitals. When a new sub-contractor (Serco) took over and tried to cut away the workers' tea break Unite organised a spontaneous half hour walk off, and occupied the canteen two days in a row. Serco conceded, and the tea break was restored. It was the prospect of action that led the facility workers join on-mass. As a Unite organiser recalls:

> *'because the union had shown that we were challenging these people [management], and we were prepared to organise a fight back if workers would stand up and lead it themselves. We had so many membership forms we couldn't even carry them' (Interview 23)*

***R**elations of trust and care*

McAlevy's (2016) writings on organising have become influential and her 'organizing for power' workshops trained union organisers across the world. Yet, this approach to organising can become top-down and instrumental, that by predicting and classifying workers' readiness to action fails to see the workers as people. By identifying 'organic leaders', workers who can persuade others to take action, and by stipulating a specific percentage of workers that needs to be won over for an action to be successful. It bears the danger that the actual care for the worker gets lost, as they become a cog in the strike-winning machinery. While organising tools, such as workplace mapping, lists on workers readiness for action and the identification of leaders, are a crucial part of organising, an overly controlled way of organising bears the danger of underestimating the spontaneity of struggle, the momentum of disputes, and the way they are shaped by emotions. Courage and anger are contagious. These emotions cannot be planned or foreseen by external organisers. They emerge in the moment and can spontaneously make unexpected workers rise up to become strike leaders. In short, while trade union organisers need to use organising tools it is important that this does not come at the expense of a relational, empathetic, people-focus and workers-led approach to organising that creates trust, safety and belonging and thus allows room for spontaneity and the infectiousness of emotions.

This approach to organising can best be explained through the words of a worker at GOSH

"we felt like these people [the union organisers] … they are ready to strike with us, they are ready to come with us and be here with us in the cold. It was really cold, rainy and horrible. We need to trust them, there was a trust relation growing with time…. Sometimes you are not motivated but when you start talking with them, even if something looks impossible when they speak it looks possible" (Interview 55).

Similarly, at St Mary's hospital, a worker who became a strike leader started to trust the union as they saw that the union organisers 'really cared', understood the workers situation and 'would really have our back' (Interview 52). So, they rose from what would be seen as a union-sceptical person to a strike leader (Interview 11). As UVW organiser explains further:

> *"It [taking action] is the biggest trust, they [the members] have to trust you, and you have to prove that trust, earn that trust and maintain that trust … when it comes to strike you have got to prove that the union will be there no matter what. They have to trust and believe it. They have got to believe that they can win*" (Interview 12).

These personal relationships of trust and care are facilitated by the smaller size of the independent unions that allows for more intimacy. Also the ingrained worker-led principle is a major difference to most of the organising initiatives in established trade unions, where the strategies are decided further up in the organisational hierarchy and not by the workers themselves (Interview 20, 21,23,29). For example, the number of strike days and the direct action taken are voted upon by the members themselves. Also, the same members of staff that are building relationships with the workers are overseeing the whole process. As explained by an Unite organiser:

> *'what I think UVW and IWGB do differently is that with the big union you lose a lot of the intimacy, personal touch, care, community, focus and presence. … That is the difference, a big difference as well, that you don't have this mediated bureaucracy where you have this Fordism of the different roles. Yes these small unions have organisers, and case-workers, but the organiser is also the officer, the organiser also calls to ballot, the organiser is responsible for the process of workers coming through into the union. ….So, the emotional work stays relational, stays accountable and stays local, I think that's much healthier for everybody psychologically. It means that you don't get stopped at any point. The process doesn't get held up, it stays intimate'* (Interview 21)

Yet, these relationships of trust and care are also possible in bigger unions. Both at Unite's St Barts Hospital strike , as well as the PCS BEIS strike union organisers reflected on the importance of personal trust building and the emotional processes involved in organising (Interview 22, 23, 25, 27).

Another aspect of the strategies of independent trade unions that has already been discussed in detail elsewhere is the forming of communities of resistance and the power of solidarity (Pero 2020, [redacted]; Petrinia and Wettergren 2022*).* Going on strike is scary for many workers and especially first-timers. People are more likely to stand up for their personal and collective rights when they feel that they have the power to do that. Community can offer emotional supportive connections, and a sense of belonging and provides the foundation for action and for building power ([redacted]).

***E**scalating confrontation*

Building on the work of Ness and Burns I have outlined above that independent trade unions follow a class struggle approach to trade unionism that favours direct action and strikes to achieve concessions from the employers, rather than emphasising corporatist models (Ness 2014). As, such strikes are crucial as, in the words of a UVW organiser, they are 'the ultimate way for workers to express their anger, their defiance, their power' and to organise worker-led actions of disruption (Interview 3). Strike is the only time workers can come together during working hours, sometimes – due to the nature of shift work – the first time that outsourced workers meet each other (Ibid). A protest or direct action alone is difficult to be workers-led, and often heavily relies on solidarity. While the focus is on worker-led actions at times these might be accompanied with solidarity actions, such as activists disrupting bord meetings, when asked to do so on behalf of the workers, as it was the case at the St Mary's dispute; or in-house workers that are not part of the dispute putting pressure on their employer – this was the case with doctors and nurses at GOSH and PCS also mobilised civil servants at BEIS.

Strikes alone are not enough. Repressive trade union laws and the legality of scab labour bears possibilities for employers to undermine the disruptive nature of strikes. So, attention must be paid *on the way* workers strike. There is a need for building energies, escalating the confrontation through direct action, and naming and shaming strategies, and targeting the organisations (employer/their clients) where it hurts them the most, as well as creativity, fun and community. The independent trade unions escalate their disputes mostly through worker-led actions. For example, at St. Mary's before the strike, workers went in their break on mass to their managers. The managers responded by slamming the door in the workers faces, so the workers kept knocking on the door and then posted the letter underneath. This was a symbolic act of defiance. During the strike pickets were noisy. Eventually, as the workers felt their demands were not heard even after having been out on strike for weeks, they escalated the confrontation and the workers occupied the hospital refusing to go until the decision makers would meet with them. The sit-in was a peaceful and quiet but symbolically powerful action.

Similarly, the facility workers at BEIS won victories not only as they were bold enough to take indefinite strike actions but also through noisy, creative and lively pickets that included dancing, road blocks, cook-outs and also through creative direct actions. For example, on one strike day the workers and the organisers took the train to Kent in the constituency of Greg Clarke, who was then the Secretary of State for BEIS, to protest and leaflet at his local pub. Then Andrea Leadsom took over as Secretary of State for BEIS, who soon had enough from the noises of the vuvuzelas while outside where she had her meetings. As such the actions targeted the vulnerable spots of the decision makers. The workers quickly won almost all of their demands (Interview 26). At St Barts hospital stood out not only for its sheer numbers – it is the largest facility strike to date – but also for its noisy pickets. The timing of the strike was also good as it was shortly before the contract would be re-negotiated. Strategically in-house victories can be easier if they coincide with contract re-negotiation periods and when the contracts are about to end in the foreseeable future ([redacted]), as such the St Barts Trust dispute did not need to escalate that much before their demands were won.

Class struggle invokes fight backs

A focus on class struggle trade union is particularly relevant as the Trade Union Act of 2016 aimed to deter unions from taking industrial action. Tapia and Turner (2013) have argued that in institutional context hostile to industrial action, social movement tactics become a way to re-invigorate trade unions. With the cost of living crisis in the UK we see waves of strikes across the UK in 2022/2023. This has awaken attention that 'conflict is an integral part of the day-to-day nature of work' that is usually downplayed by policy makers and management (Martínez Lucio 2022).

However, a class struggle approach to trade unionism, such as the CARE approach can also lead to aggressive responses from employers. A detailed analysis goes beyond the scope of this article and further research on this subject is recommended. This can be illustrated through the GOSH security guards strike, where GOSH issued an injunction to prevent the striking security guards that organised with UVW from picketing outside the hospital. The injunction forbid the striking outsourced security guards at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) and their supporters from "waving banners", "vigorous dancing" or even "making rapid dramatic movements" within 200 metres of the hospital. This unprecedented ruling and showed how far employers would go to prevent strike action. In the words of one of the striking workers:

> *Then the injunction came. This was like a stab in the stomach, because we were like, ok, these guys didn't give us what we are asking for, instead they prefer to pay to stop us. They prefer*

to spend thousands of pounds to stop us instead of giving us what we are asking for (Interview 5)

The UK already has the most restrictive trade union laws in western Europe and the UK government is set to undermine the right to strike even further through the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill 2023, a labour law designed to force trade union workers in the UK to provide a minimum service during a strike in several sectors.[iii]

Conclusion

This article examined in what ways strategies of new independent trade unions in London - that achieved many pioneering victories of ending outsourcing by low paid migrant workers - have offered learning opportunities for established trade unions for (outsourced) low paid and migrant workers organising. This article demonstrated that class struggle trade unionism has in some ways been remembered and hence pioneered by the new independent trade unions, yet they are possible in established trade unions alike.

The article proposes that in order to revitalise the trade union movement we need re-encourage a culture of fighting unions – rather than putting too much emphasis on trade union recognition and negotiations. This builds on previous writings that analysed the organising and campaign strategies of independent trade unions (Pero 2021, Pannini 2021, [redacted]; Petrini and Wettergren 2022). In this paper, I developed the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) to analytically frame this approach to class struggle trade unionism and to examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the inspirations of independent trade unions. The relations of trust and care are at the heart of this approach of class struggle trade unionism as they provide the security, the feeling of safety and belonging that make bold and escalating actions possible. This is probably true for every worker, especially when first time strikers, but it is particularly significant for low paid, precarious migrant workers that subject to intersecting systems of oppression. The CARE organising approach is not a step by step guide but offers a tool to frame the debate and encourage further class struggle trade unionism – in independent and established trade unions alike.

As a UVW organiser has it:

'We are the tail that wags the dogs. What we do sets precedence for other unions to follow' (Interview 11)

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The tail that wags the dog: lessons from London's independent trade unions for class struggle trade unionism

Abstract

This article examines in what way strategies of new independent trade unions in London - that achieved many pioneering, high-profile victories to end outsourcing - offer learning opportunities for more established trade unions. It proposes to (re-)encourage a culture of class struggle trade unionism. The article builds on existing research that outlined the organising practices of these independent trade unions but breaks down the binary analysis of independent versus established trade unions. I use the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) as an analytical framework for exploring class struggle trade unionism, and examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the example of independent trade unions. *In doing so, this article contributes to a much wider debate on trade union renewal.*

Design/methodology/approach: *This article offers an insider perspective of an 'academic activist' (Chatterton et al.,2007). The article draws on my own experiences and reflection as the co-founder of the trade union United Voices of the World (UVW) created in 2014, and previously involvement in the establishment of the Independent Trade Union of Great Britain (IWGB) in 2012. Findings are based on my own ethnographic engagement as well as a selection of 29 interviews from a much larger data set on independent trade unions comprised of focus groups and interviews.*

Findings:

This article demonstrates that class struggle trade unionism has in some ways been remembered and hence pioneered by the new independent trade unions, yet they are possible in established trade unions alike.

Originality: *This is the first time an article systematically explores the strategies that established trade unions can learn – and indeed are learning - from independent trade unions.*

Key Words: *Trade Unions, migrant workers, low wages, industrial action, trade union renewal UK, class struggle trade unionism*

1. Introduction

The winter of 2022/2023 was a new winter of discontent. Workers in transport, postal services, universities, schools, hospitals (nurses and ambulance drivers), and the civil service have been on strike. The strikes resulted in around 1 million lost working days in December 2022, the worst single-month industrial disruption since 1989.[i] On the 1st of February 2023 almost half a million workers walked out on their jobs, with further action following. Many disputes are in the public sector and in industries that have been subject to privatisations, including outsourcing. This might evoke hope for regained union power.

At the same time, union membership is (still) low. Only 23.1% of the UK employees were in a trade union in 2021 - a slight decline from 2020 after four years of small but consecutive membership growth, and after decades of steady membership decline. Within this overall trend, there are considerable demographic variations. Many of the most vulnerable groups of workers are not part of a trade union. Young people are much less likely to be a union member, as are migrant workers (18.6% of non-UK born employees were trade union members in 2021, compared with 24.1% of UK-born employees) as well as poorer workers (12.0% of those earning less than £250p/w are members of a trade union by contrast to 30.4% of those earning between £500 and £999p/w). Furthermore, the rise of (bogus) self-employment, particularly in the growing gig economy, means that many workers are

not captured by those statistics. This article focuses on two overlapping groups, migrant workers and low paid workers in outsourced services, and thereby contributes to the literature on trade union renewal that looked at the capacity for established trade unions to integrate precarious workers, including migrant workers (Lucio and Perrett 2009; Tapia 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2017; Murray 2017).

Most unions have attempted to address the precarisation of work by developing a more integrative approach that aims to include precariously employed migrant workers within its membership (Tapia 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2017). Yet, this has often been done in a patronising manner which frames migrant workers organising as 'organising the unorganisable,' assuming a lack of organising capacity of BAME and migrant workers and demands the integration of migrant workers into the overall political strategies of trade unions (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009). Workers are usually portrayed as 'passive subjects of top-down organizing strategies' within established unions (Rizzo and Atzeni 2020). Such approaches neither pay attention to the specific needs and support required by migrant communities and adjusting political strategies in response to these needs (Lucio and Perrett 2009), nor actually seeing or supporting the struggles led by migrant workers that *already* exist outside of established trade unions (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009).

Petrinia and Wettergren (2022) argue that 'two new grassroots unions, Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) and United Voices of the World (UVW), formed by precarious and migrant workers, are now leading the movement against outsourcing'. Such unions offer learning opportunities for established trade unions. Following Hardy's research call, that if we want to understand why some industrial disputes lead to victory and others do not, we need to look at the microcosms of struggle (Hardy 2021), I discuss these learnings on two sets comparable campaigns. First, the successful insourcing campaigns in hospitals, namely the pioneering in-house victory of the cleaners in St Mary's Hospital (St Mary's) and then Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in 2020 with UVW and Unite's in-house campaign of facility workers in St Barts hospital trust in 2022. Second, the parallel campaigns of facility workers at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) with the UVW and at the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) with the PCS in 2019.

This article proceeds as follows: after the literature review offers a brief overview on the emerging literature on independent trade unions, I outline the theoretical underpinnings of intersectional class struggle unionism as well as the methodology applied in this research. It discusses the political economy of facility outsourcing in the UK in its historical context before elaborating on the historical dynamics of independent unions' struggle against outsourcing. The paper then analyses the ways in which strategies of independent trade unions in the struggle against outsourcing have been adopted by established trade unions by looking at the UVW's campaign at GOSH and St Mary's hospital, Unite's campaign at St. Barts hospital, and UVW's MoJ and PCS's BEIS dispute. The article concludes with a discussion on class struggle trade unionism and what independent trade unions offer to the debate on trade union renewal.

An emerging literature on independent trade unions.

The new independent unions have been praised for their 'significant high profile wins' of 'David and Goliath' battles (Hardy 2021; Pero 2020). They have focused on organising low-paid, precarious and mostly migrant and BAME workers in separate organisations of class struggle independent from, and outside of, established trade unions. Starting with mostly migrant outsourced facility workers and then the gig economy (IWGB) they now represent a range of precarious workers – migrant workers as well as UK-born workers in areas such as hospitality, legal sector workers, sex workers, cultural workers, yoga teachers, foster carers, charity workers, etc.

The rise of these new, independent trade unions has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Several studies examining at the successful organising of low-paid migrant workers within independent unions in the UK have started to address a gap in the literature that has hitherto overlooked the grassroots workers initiatives outside of established trade unions (see Kirkpatrick 2014; Moyer-Lee and Lopez 2017; Shenker 2019; Pero 2020; Hardy 2021; Gall 2020; Cant and Woodcook 2020; Pannini 2021; Weghmann 2022; Smith 2022, Petrini and Wettergren 2022). Understanding workers' experiences in these new trade unions have global significance in terms of understanding the emerging phenomenon of organising outside of the traditional structures of established trade unions (Ness 2014; Rizzo and Atzeni 2020; Webster 2021). Yet there are disagreements on the relevancy of these new unions in the organising of low-paid and migrant workers and their impact on the UK's trade union movement. By some they were celebrated as a beginning of the 'effective representation of the precariat' (Pero 2020: 901). Others dismissed them as radical breakaway unions that are in a "red bubble" and 'avoid the necessity of persuading and winning over the majority of the workers' (Hardy 2021). Much research to date remains trapped in binary thinking that contrasts 'old' versus 'new' unions (Gall 2020; Pero 2020; Cant and Woodcook 2020). While Cant and Woodcook (2020: 519) raise the important question of how the struggles of independent trade unions could be generalised for the rest of the workers movement, they conclude that as 'many of these unions – including IWGB and the United Voices of the World (UVW) – are splits from mainstream unions, the connection can be limited'. Ultimately, as Pero points out, that 'the overall relationship between mainstream and indie unionism has not been very collaborative' (2020: 906).

This article calls for a break from the binary thinking that either argues for low waged migrant workers to be integrated into established trade unions, or emphasises the need to organise separately. Instead, we need to look at the lessons that can be learnt from independent trade unions for the wider trade union movement ([redacted]). Smith (2022: 1384) argues:

> *'indie unions have played an important influential role in the UK labour movement in the form of producing new knowledge, which in addition to providing a practical strategic template for mobilisation against outsourced work, has also driven incentives for other unions to act.'*

Complementing Smith's work, which looked at the learning mechanisms inside independent and established trade unions, this article builds on my previous analysis of the political strategies of independent trade unions ([redacted]). This work argues that some strategies of independent trade unions in the struggle against outsourcing have been adopted by established trade unions. Through the analysis of the learning and collaboration between established and new trade unions I proposed that the main lesson from the independent trade unions is that we need to re-encourage a culture of confrontation, worker-led organising, and solidarity in unions – rather than putting too much emphasis on trade union recognition and partnership models. This work sought to contribute to a much wider debate on the necessity of class struggle unionism (Ness 2014; Burns 2022). It is important to acknowledge that not all established trade unions are the same and that the organising strategies vastly differ between them. Similarly, there are also important differences between the independent trade unions (see [redacted]). A more detailed discussion on the inter-union differences goes beyond this article.

An intersectional approach to class struggle unionism: Theoretical insights for empirical analysis

Ness (2014) challenges the historic focus of European trade unions on trade union recognition and partnership models. He argues that across the world 'new forms of workers organization' and 'independent and democratic unions are emerging [that are] fundamentally opposed to bureaucratic domination, class compromise and concessions with employers' (Ness, 2014: 2–6). They are revitalising class struggle unionism by rejecting the corporatist model, instead favouring strikes and direct action (Ibid.). Like Ness, Burns (2022:2) remembers the syndicalist strategies in the US and argues that 'one of the key weaknesses of the labor movement since the early 1990s is the absence of broad-based explicit class struggle union trend'. According to Burns the basis of class struggle

unionism is the understanding that society is divided into two groups – 'the workers who produce things and the billionaires who take the product of labour' classes' (Burns 2022: 13). In that sense 'workplace struggles are part of a larger fight in society over the distribution of the social surplus' (Ibid: 14). Burns also highlights the dichotomy between class struggle unionism and business unionism with the latter having a much narrower view, seeing the role of the union to represent individual workers that face "bad" employers that have too much power (Burns 2022: 17).

It is, however, important to include the intersecting forms of oppression in society into a class struggle unionism framework. Lee and Tapia (2021: 639) have challenged Industrial Relations (IR) scholars to include intersectionality – based on the pioneering theoretical endeavours of Crenshaw – and to 'rejected singular, predominantly class-based theoretical frames in favour of contextualized socio-structural analyses'. Specifically, they stress the need for IR scholars to 'acknowledge that racism is an ever-present system of oppression' and to avoid ''whitewashing'' knowledge [by] oversimplifying racial and other identity constructs, and undertheorizing identity-based systems of oppression (Ibid: 638).

For this article it is especially important to remember that economic, social, and racial justice elements are often linked to one another and that groups of workers will be affected by precariousness in different ways and thus react and resist it in different ways (Atzeni 2016). Likewise, also not all migrant workers are the same and hence attention needs to be paid to differences within the groups of workers (Lee and Tapia 2021). The analysis in this article will take the existing and historical class-based power structures into consideration and specifically emphasise the pervasiveness of institutional racism within outsourcing arrangements as well as the intersecting systems of identity-based oppression.

Methodology

The analysis is rooted in my practice, as someone who was involved in the IWGB from its start in 2012 and then co-founded the UVW in 2014. I draw on Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which goes back to Marx's exhortation that 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it' (Marx 2000: 173). PAR seeks to create reflective knowledge that is normative and action orientated (Bradbury and Reason 2008). Knowledge creation took place over many years through participant observations, various informal discussions with workers and union organisers, and my own reflections and actions. As such I hold a 'shifting research positionality', as in addition to my 'insider' position I also hold an 'outsider' perspective (Wiederhold 2005). I have gradually withdrawn from holding a central role in these trade unions to concentrate on my full-time academic job while I still am part of the wider community of those two mentioned trade unions. I thereby occupy a subject position that Chatterton et al. (2007) call the 'academic activists' – a person that has capacity and distance for the necessary reflection and the ability to address my potential bias but at the same time is actively engaged in the researched struggles.

Regarding the analysed disputes, I was a participant observer but not part of organising any of those. The data is gained through interviews and my own participant observation stimulated the interview and provided the necessary trust for participants to feel free to develop their own narratives. The findings of this article are based on a selection of 29 interviews from a much larger and still expanding data-set on independent trade unions comprised of focus groups and interviews. Specifically, I selected 10 worker interviews with leaders in the three aforementioned campaigns; namely GOSH, St Mary's and St Barts, BEIS and MoJ (all of them with a migrant background; four identifying as men and six as women); 8 interviews with independent unions staff that were leaders and organisers in the selected campaigns (four having a (partial) migrant background; four identifying as men and four as women); and interviews with 11 influential organisers in established trade unions, namely Unison, Unite, PCS (four with migrant background; eight identifying as men and three women). The latter ones

were selected based on the following criteria a) organisers that have been involved in in-house campaigns, b) that have an understanding of independent trade unions, organising migrant workers against outsourcing, and an ability to analyse the actions of independent trade unions within the wider contexts of the trade union movement in the UK. By and large, these organisers in established trade unions hold a sympathetic view towards independent trade unions. While this might be a potential bias it simultaneously adds to the knowledge creation as this article is about reflecting on the possible lessons that can be learnt from independent trade unions in order to revitalise trade union militancy within the wider trade union movement.

The focus on this article is on UVW as I discuss two disputes by this union, which are however located in a serious of campaigns against outsourcing by the IWGB, UVW as well as their newer sister the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU). When suitable, I speak for the independent trade unions as a whole as learning did not take part from just one dispute to another but as part of a bigger picture of independent trade unions arriving in the UK's trade union landscape.

The socio-political context of facility outsourcing in the UK

Putting facility services (as well as other services) out to tender and contracting private companies to deliver the services became the norm in the UK in the mid-1980s. New Public Management, the idea that the state should become more business-like, pushed these types of privatisation in the public sector. It was, however, the abolishment of the Fair Wages Resolution (FWR) in 1983 that made outsourcing profitable. The FWR, introduced in 1891 required companies working on government contracts to observe terms and conditions of employment not less favourable than those in relevant collective agreements. It was due to trade union campaigns, driven principally by the printing unions, that the FWR was introduced (Hall n.d.). When the FWR was abolished outsourcing became a mechanism to lower labour costs, with high competition between different providers pushing down the wages and conditions of outsourced workers – often with zero-hour contracts and no rights to sick pay, holiday, and pensions (Grimshaw et al., 2019). Facility contracts change frequently with a duration of three to five years. Often different facility workers (eg cleaners, porters and security guards) are employed by different companies.

Outsourcing arrangements reproduce material and power differences. Subcontracting disguises the true extent of institutional income inequality and allows employers (who then become the clients for the subcontractors) to avoid their responsibility for low wages. This facilitates a racialised segregated workforce with facility subcontractors in London employing predominately BME workers, mostly with a migrant background, while the majority of the inhouse staff especially at universities' and government departments are white (Wills et al., 2009). In the words of a security guard at GOSH:

> *'We [the workers] strongly belief that it [outsourcing] is racial discrimination. Because if you see the whole hospital, you see that this department [security] is the only one that has only immigrants. Just Black and Asian immigrants, it's just one white person. So, we ask ourselves if we were all white, we would be outsourced? I don't think so.' (Interview 55)*

The UVW has repeatedly argued that outsourcing 'BAME and migrant workers on worse pay and T&Cs [terms and conditions] than they would get if they weren't outsourced discriminates against them on grounds of their race'.[1] As a UVW organiser, with migrant background, explains in more detail:

> *It's back to this…people of colour provide service, we are slaves. We provide a service. We nurture, and we cook, and we clean, we provide a service. There's no space for us to think, and do, and make, we provide a service. That's for me when I think in very base, simple terms that's what outsourcing is.* (Interview 13)

[1] https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2020/07/legal-challenge-st-georges-institutional-racism/

UVW also challenges the racial discrimination of outsourcing through employment tribunals. A recent judgment, UVW vs Royal Parks, found that differential access to employment rights and benefits can constitute indirect race discrimination, breaching the Equality Act 2010 ([redacted]) As such, through the intersectional framework outlined above as suggested by Lee and Tapia (2021) it becomes clear that outsourcing is facilitated by intersecting systems of identity-based oppression.

Independent trade unions in London challenge outsourcing – a brief history

Independent trade unions were created in London in the mid 2010s due to the neglect of the established trade union regarding low paid migrant workers organising and started through the organising of outsourced cleaners. The struggles of the independent trade unions were informed by and rooted in a long history of sporadic cleaners struggles in London since the late 1970s, and also learned for the Justice for Janitors campaign in the US (for a brief history see [redacted]). The established trade unions in the UK did not systematically engage with the struggles of outsourced migrant workers. The independent trade unions emerged in a void. In the words of a Unison organiser involved in facility workers struggles: 'They have shown existing trade unions that not only is it possible [to organise outsourced workers] but it's essential that we [established trade unions] follow suit' *(Interview 22)*.

Similarly, a PCS organiser reflects on how the independent trade unions alerted the established trade unions to move back into the struggles of low paid, outsourced workers.

> *'It was more actually the realisation "look, all of these smaller unions are going round and organising these types of [outsourced] workers, but actually we've got a duty and responsibility to these workers". They are in our workplaces and so they should be part of our own marches and we should be looking after them and supporting them and recruiting them. So definitely it focussed our minds on "actually, we need to approach this in a more strategic way"' (Interview 24).*

The independent trade unions started to make demands that went beyond the common demand for the London Living Wage (LLW) that was the norm at the time. They demanded sick pay, parity of conditions, and an end to outsourcing. Their pioneering victories had ripple effects on the wider trade union movement. Just after joining the IWGB the University of London Branch that previously organised with Unison (for a historic overview see Moyer-Lee and Lopez 2017) launched their *3 Cosas Campaign* in 2012 that demanded sick pay, holiday pay and pension, effectively demanding parity for outsourced workers. Cleaners' campaigns had been going on at SOAS (Unison) and Senate House (IWGB) for years. Eventually, a campaign by the cleaners at the LSE with UVW in 2017 became the historic dispute through which for the first time outsourcing of a facility contract at a London university was reversed through an industrial dispute. This had repercussions for the wider trade union movement, as one victory led to another. Independent and established trade unions alike won battles for the inhouse provision of facility services in London's higher education sector, such as SOAS in 2018 (Unison), Kings College in 2018 (Unison), Goldsmith in 2019 (IWGB), Birkbeck in 2019 (Unison) Senate House of the University of London in 2020 (IWGB), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2021 (Unison).

In 2019 UVW and PSC took parallel strike actions in the government departments: Ministry of Justice (UVW) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (PCS). The strikes informed each other. While neither PCS nor UVW won an end to outsourcing. The MoJ cleaners managed to secure pay increases and sick pay[2] and the facility workers at BEIS PCS won the London Living Wage

[2] https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/campaigns/ministry-of-justice/

of £10.55 per hour, along with better terms and conditions including sick pay and increased annual leave.[ii]

In January 2020 UVW achieved another ground-breaking victory. The cleaners of St Mary's won their campaign for in-house and parity on terms and conditions with NHS staff. This was the first time the UK's history that workers had successfully forced an NHS Trust to make outsourced workers direct employees of the NHS. The victory resulted in 1,200 cleaners across five hospitals being made direct employees of the NHS with a significant pay rise of around £10,000 annually and vastly improved terms and conditions of employment. Again, this historic victory that showed that in-house campaigns in hospitals are possible had wider repercussions. In December 2020 the cleaners at the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) that also organised within UVW won their campaign to overcome outsourcing and bring hundreds of cleaners into direct employment and with full parity from in October 2021 onwards. In November 2021 the security guards at GOSH also organised with UVW and launched strike actions to campaign for inhouse. In early 2022 the facility workers at St Barts Trust (which includes five hospitals with 1800 facility workers) organised with Unite, launched strike action and subsequently won in March 2022 with the hospitals insourcing the workers in April 2023 when the contract with SERCO expires.

These victories show that winning big battles by outsourced migrant workers is not a monopoly of the independent trade unions. Yet what all those struggles had in common was that they were won by strikes and protests (or at least the real threat of them).

CARE – a relational and confrontational approach of class struggle trade unionism

Agreeing with the conceptualisations of Ness and Burns, organisers in established trade unions that I interviewed for this article explain that one of the main differences of the independent trade unions was their readiness to fight, and specifically strike, and that this offers lessons for the established trade unions. As explained by organisers of Unite and Unison in more detail:

> *'These two unions they want to have the fight and its not about respectability politics, of entering into some kind of agreement with employers based on serving the union structure. Its about winning…the changes that workers need around living wage, about being brought in-house, about concrete changes to terms and conditions (Interview 21)*

> *'I believe every day is an injustice in this country really, wages are too low, rent is too high, all of these things. That will take a fight… And that's all UVW, the culture …. Now my union Unite has definitely shifted much more on to that, like that is the essence of our union at the moment, and that's fantastic. But at the time it wasn't. At the time sometimes to have a fight with the employers you would have to first fight some people in the union itself' (Interview 23)*

> *'That conservatism just kills activism, it kills enthusiasm, it kills the anger that can be build up sometimes, that ought to be the potential for action. Again, I think what we can learn from the likes of UVW is … we ought to be becoming more in the face of management and employers' (Interview 22)*

Building on previous writings by others that analysed the organising and campaign strategies of independent trade unions (Pero 2021, Pannini 2021, [redacted]; Petrini and Wettergren 2022) I use the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) as an analytical framework for exploring class struggle trade unionism, and examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the

example of independent trade unions. The CARE organising approach is not a step-by-step guide but offers a tool to frame the debate on class struggle trade unionism.

***C**ollectivising individual grievances*

The independent trade unions committed themselves to a bottom-up, workers-led approach, which shapes the disputes before they even begin. Disputes usually don't start with recruitment and organising drives of the union (which identified a particular industry or workplace as key to their overall political strategy), as is often the case in established trade unions (Panini 2021; [redacted]). Word of mouth leads workers to the union, who usually come because they have some problem at work (eg unpaid wages, discrimination, suspension or redundancies etc.). Within established trade unions case work is often considered as too resource intensive and delegated to lay representatives. In contrast, within the independent trade unions individual representation became part of the organising strategy, and they used their limited resources to build up staff case worker teams (Panini 2021). Individual grievances are collectivised – and not just by turning them into collective grievances but through collective action for bold demands from which every worker would benefit.

Rather than scaling up demands and just demanding union recognition, for example, the independent trade unions would demand parity of conditions and an end to outsourcing. This, in turn, has strategic implications. Rather than targeting the immediate employer, in other words the outsourced company, target is the client. Put differently, they cut across the triangle of employment relations where the client is abnegated from any responsibility for the pay and working conditions of the outsourced staff ([redacted]). To illustrate this model of trade unionism drawing on the St Mary's dispute: The cleaners demanded not just trade union recognition, higher wages, or slightly improved terms and conditions but full parity with directly employed NHS staff and end to outsourcing altogether. This has never been done in a UK hospital before. The campaign target was the client, the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust (Imperial Trust), and in particular their flagship hospital, St Mary's, and not the direct employer, the subcontractor, Sodexo.

In contrast, due to the partnership model/business unionism has been common practice in established trade unions to do the opposite – to launch a dispute with the employer. This can be illustrated in the St Barts dispute. In 2015 the facility workers at Whip Cross Hospital – one of the five hospitals part of Barts Trust – started to organise, went on strike with Unite, and won the London Living Wage . In 2017 a cleaners strike across the five hospitals followed. While they did win an end of zero-hour contracts and a small wage increase, they did not win parity and an end to outsourcing. A Unite organiser involved in the St Barts campaign reflects:

> *'when people ask me what have I personally learned, from the UVW - go for the fucking client. Go for the client. Who has the money? Who is the service benefitting? Who has contracted out the service? Who is the service servicing. That's the person you go for. We picked the fight with Serco. We picked the fight with the middle man.'* (Interview 23)

When the facility workers re-launched the dispute at St Barts in early 2022 they demanded an end to outsourcing and directed their demands straight to the client. The militancy of the dispute was facilitated by a change in leadership at Unite with the new General Secretary, Sharon Graham (from October 2021 onwards) developing a greater focus on dispute.

At the MoJ (with UVW) and BEIS (with PCS) both campaigns addressed the client from the start. While PCS already started to represent the facility workers at the Department for Energy and Climate Change, which was then merged into BEIS into 2016 it was only in 2019 when PCS – inspired by the independent trade unions - launched strike action with the demand for parity/in-house. As a PCS organiser explains:

> 'Obviously, when putting in the legal trade dispute you can't put in "end outsourcing" but what we were putting in were terms and conditions comparable to civil servants, which obviously kicks the

> foundation of outsourcing. So, I think having those sorts of demands were really inspired by UVW and others doing that kind of thing.' (Interview 25)

***A**ction – and that fast*

In the established trade unions much attention is paid to recruitment in order to gain trade union recognition in order to negotiate with the employer. Action is usually seen as a measure of last resort after failed negotiations. The independent trade unions' strategy is exactly the other way around. Recruitment follows action and action (not trade union recognition) is the key to negotiation. Many (outsourced) workers have never been part of a trade union before, so action is a way to demonstrate the power of trade unionism. In the words of a PCS organiser at BEIS:

> *"I think we got caught up in 'oh we must have X amount of members before you do something' but it's a vicious circle because no one wants to join because they are like 'who are you?' So, you have to do something to show 'this is who I am [the union]'. I think UVW and IWGB really demonstrated that, really kind of do something and people will start rallying behind it, and with it, alongside it. So that was a really inspirational thing".* (Interview 25)

They explain further that the first PCS strike at BEIS started with 10 people on strike (out of around 124 facility workers), by the second round of strike action they had near to 100% density not only with the facility workers but also catering (Ibid.). This is in line with research that has shown that membership numbers usually go up during strike actions – suggesting that action is an important recruitment strategy (Hodder et al, 2017).

It is important to say that the independent trade unions aim for membership density before they ballot for strike action and the IWGB even has a policy on 50% membership density before launching strike action. Yet, in the words of a UVW organiser, they also 'have successfully won important disputes without those densities' (Interview 12). For example, the security guards dispute at the MoJ had a 90% membership density with a 100% turnout in their strike ballot in the head-quarter building (Interview 11) – but a low membership density when you consider all MoJ departments across the country. Elsewhere I distinguished between strategic membership density – among workers that have disruptive potential by withdrawing their labour – and majority membership density ([redacted]). While majority membership density is always desirable the legal threshold of the Trade Union Act of 2016 of 50% turnout for ballots to be valid means that a lower but committed union density makes it easier to have successful ballots. Workers can still become members and join the strike after the ballot. So, balloting before mass recruitment can be a fast track to strike actions.

The point is, however, that recruitment follows the prospect of action. The St. Mary's cleaners dispute for inhouse illustrates this: the UVW was first approached by one cleaner, who was suspended from work (an individual grievance). Trust in the union was build when the representation was successful and the suspension overturned. Soon, another worker came to the union with a pay query which was then collectivised and led to a meeting of 20 – sceptical – cleaners, that were also divided along ethnicity lines, to discuss the possibilities of a campaign to end outsourcing. Various meetings followed and by the time of the ballot 85 workers were part of the UVW. When the ballot closed, this number had increased to 105 members and that increased to over 200 members during the months of the dispute (the majority of the cleaners in St Mary's). During the strike recruitment too place in the other four hospitals that were run by the Imperial Trust.

In St Mary's there were two unions with recognition deals: Unite and Unison. They were used as shields by the Imperial Trust to hide behind. The recognition deals (an exclusive agreement between an employer and a union to negotiate) were used to tell workers and other stakeholders that they

were in negotiation with the recognised trade unions, and that therefore the dispute was unnecessary. In other words, the process of negotiation via recognition was used as a discouraging and delaying tactic to break the worker's power. Unison was actively discouraging workers from taking action, telling workers that they would never win what they are asking for (Interview 52, 51, 11, 12).This demonstrates the contradictions within the trade union movement where unions can be so caught in trade union territorialism that they side with the employers rather than the workers. It also shows that partnership trade unionism can undermine class struggle trade unionism.

A similar dynamic played out in facility workers organising with Unite at St Barts. Some of the cleaners organised with Unison, but they were so frustrated with their trade union's discouragement of action that they left Unison and joined Unite, and organised a strike in one of the five hospitals (Whips Cross). This won them the London Living Wage in 2015. Unite started to organise in the other hospitals. When a new sub-contractor (Serco) took over and tried to cut away the workers' tea break Unite organised a spontaneous half hour walk off, and occupied the canteen two days in a row. Serco conceded, and the tea break was restored. It was the prospect of action that led the facility workers join on-mass. As a Unite organiser recalls:

> *'because the union had shown that we were challenging these people [management], and we were prepared to organise a fight back if workers would stand up and lead it themselves. We had so many membership forms we couldn't even carry them' (Interview 23)*

***R**elations of trust and care*

McAlevy's (2016) writings on organising have become influential and her 'organizing for power' workshops trained union organisers across the world. Yet, this approach to organising can become top-down and instrumental, that by predicting and classifying workers' readiness to action fails to see the workers as people. By identifying 'organic leaders', workers who can persuade others to take action, and by stipulating a specific percentage of workers that needs to be won over for an action to be successful. It bears the danger that the actual care for the worker gets lost, as they become a cog in the strike-winning machinery. While organising tools, such as workplace mapping, lists on workers readiness for action and the identification of leaders, are a crucial part of organising, an overly controlled way of organising bears the danger of underestimating the spontaneity of struggle, the momentum of disputes, and the way they are shaped by emotions. Courage and anger are contagious. These emotions cannot be planned or foreseen by external organisers. They emerge in the moment and can spontaneously make unexpected workers rise up to become strike leaders. In short, while trade union organisers need to use organising tools it is important that this does not come at the expense of a relational, empathetic, people-focus and workers-led approach to organising that creates trust, safety and belonging and thus allows room for spontaneity and the infectiousness of emotions.

This approach to organising can best be explained through the words of a worker at GOSH

"we felt like these people [the union organisers] … they are ready to strike with us, they are ready to come with us and be here with us in the cold. It was really cold, rainy and horrible. We need to trust them, there was a trust relation growing with time…. Sometimes you are not motivated but when you start talking with them, even if something looks impossible when they speak it looks possible" (Interview 55).

Similarly, at St Mary's hospital, a worker who became a strike leader started to trust the union as they saw that the union organisers 'really cared', understood the workers situation and 'would really have our back' (Interview 52). So, they rose from what would be seen as a union-sceptical person to a strike leader (Interview 11). As UVW organiser explains further:

> *"It [taking action] is the biggest trust, they [the members] have to trust you, and you have to prove that trust, earn that trust and maintain that trust … when it comes to strike you have got to prove that the union will be there no matter what. They have to trust and believe it. They have got to believe that they can win*" (Interview 12).

These personal relationships of trust and care are facilitated by the smaller size of the independent unions that allows for more intimacy. Also the ingrained worker-led principle is a major difference to most of the organising initiatives in established trade unions, where the strategies are decided further up in the organisational hierarchy and not by the workers themselves (Interview 20, 21,23,29). For example, the number of strike days and the direct action taken are voted upon by the members themselves. Also, the same members of staff that are building relationships with the workers are overseeing the whole process. As explained by an Unite organiser:

> *'what I think UVW and IWGB do differently is that with the big union you lose a lot of the intimacy, personal touch, care, community, focus and presence. … That is the difference, a big difference as well, that you don't have this mediated bureaucracy where you have this Fordism of the different roles. Yes these small unions have organisers, and case-workers, but the organiser is also the officer, the organiser also calls to ballot, the organiser is responsible for the process of workers coming through into the union. ….So, the emotional work stays relational, stays accountable and stays local, I think that's much healthier for everybody psychologically. It means that you don't get stopped at any point. The process doesn't get held up, it stays intimate'* (Interview 21)

Yet, these relationships of trust and care are also possible in bigger unions. Both at Unite's St Barts Hospital strike , as well as the PCS BEIS strike union organisers reflected on the importance of personal trust building and the emotional processes involved in organising (Interview 22, 23, 25, 27).

Another aspect of the strategies of independent trade unions that has already been discussed in detail elsewhere is the forming of communities of resistance and the power of solidarity (Pero 2020, [redacted]; Petrinia and Wettergren 2022*).* Going on strike is scary for many workers and especially first-timers. People are more likely to stand up for their personal and collective rights when they feel that they have the power to do that. Community can offer emotional supportive connections, and a sense of belonging and provides the foundation for action and for building power ([redacted]).

***E**scalating confrontation*

Building on the work of Ness and Burns I have outlined above that independent trade unions follow a class struggle approach to trade unionism that favours direct action and strikes to achieve concessions from the employers, rather than emphasising corporatist models (Ness 2014). As, such strikes are crucial as, in the words of a UVW organiser, they are 'the ultimate way for workers to express their anger, their defiance, their power' and to organise worker-led actions of disruption (Interview 3). Strike is the only time workers can come together during working hours, sometimes – due to the nature of shift work – the first time that outsourced workers meet each other (Ibid). A protest or direct action alone is difficult to be workers-led, and often heavily relies on solidarity. While the focus is on worker-led actions at times these might be accompanied with solidarity actions, such as activists disrupting bord meetings, when asked to do so on behalf of the workers, as it was the case at the St Mary's dispute; or in-house workers that are not part of the dispute putting pressure on their employer – this was the case with doctors and nurses at GOSH and PCS also mobilised civil servants at BEIS.

Strikes alone are not enough. Repressive trade union laws and the legality of scab labour bears possibilities for employers to undermine the disruptive nature of strikes. So, attention must be paid *on the way* workers strike. There is a need for building energies, escalating the confrontation through direct action, and naming and shaming strategies, and targeting the organisations (employer/their clients) where it hurts them the most, as well as creativity, fun and community. The independent trade unions escalate their disputes mostly through worker-led actions. For example, at St. Mary's before the strike, workers went in their break on mass to their managers. The managers responded by slamming the door in the workers faces, so the workers kept knocking on the door and then posted the letter underneath. This was a symbolic act of defiance. During the strike pickets were noisy. Eventually, as the workers felt their demands were not heard even after having been out on strike for weeks, they escalated the confrontation and the workers occupied the hospital refusing to go until the decision makers would meet with them. The sit-in was a peaceful and quiet but symbolically powerful action.

Similarly, the facility workers at BEIS won victories not only as they were bold enough to take indefinite strike actions but also through noisy, creative and lively pickets that included dancing, road blocks, cook-outs and also through creative direct actions. For example, on one strike day the workers and the organisers took the train to Kent in the constituency of Greg Clarke, who was then the Secretary of State for BEIS, to protest and leaflet at his local pub. Then Andrea Leadsom took over as Secretary of State for BEIS, who soon had enough from the noises of the vuvuzelas while outside where she had her meetings. As such the actions targeted the vulnerable spots of the decision makers. The workers quickly won almost all of their demands (Interview 26). At St Barts hospital stood out not only for its sheer numbers – it is the largest facility strike to date – but also for its noisy pickets. The timing of the strike was also good as it was shortly before the contract would be re-negotiated. Strategically in-house victories can be easier if they coincide with contract re-negotiation periods and when the contracts are about to end in the foreseeable future ([redacted]), as such the St Barts Trust dispute did not need to escalate that much before their demands were won.

Class struggle invokes fight backs

A focus on class struggle trade union is particularly relevant as the Trade Union Act of 2016 aimed to deter unions from taking industrial action. Tapia and Turner (2013) have argued that in institutional context hostile to industrial action, social movement tactics become a way to re-invigorate trade unions. With the cost of living crisis in the UK we see waves of strikes across the UK in 2022/2023. This has awaken attention that 'conflict is an integral part of the day-to-day nature of work' that is usually downplayed by policy makers and management (Martínez Lucio 2022).

However, a class struggle approach to trade unionism, such as the CARE approach can also lead to aggressive responses from employers. A detailed analysis goes beyond the scope of this article and further research on this subject is recommended. This can be illustrated through the GOSH security guards strike, where GOSH issued an injunction to prevent the striking security guards that organised with UVW from picketing outside the hospital. The injunction forbid the striking outsourced security guards at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) and their supporters from "waving banners", "vigorous dancing" or even "making rapid dramatic movements" within 200 metres of the hospital. This unprecedented ruling and showed how far employers would go to prevent strike action. In the words of one of the striking workers:

> *Then the injunction came. This was like a stab in the stomach, because we were like, ok, these guys didn't give us what we are asking for, instead they prefer to pay to stop us. They prefer*

to spend thousands of pounds to stop us instead of giving us what we are asking for (Interview 5)

The UK already has the most restrictive trade union laws in western Europe and the UK government is set to undermine the right to strike even further through the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill 2023, a labour law designed to force trade union workers in the UK to provide a minimum service during a strike in several sectors.[iii]

Conclusion

This article examined in what ways strategies of new independent trade unions in London - that achieved many pioneering victories of ending outsourcing by low paid migrant workers - have offered learning opportunities for established trade unions for (outsourced) low paid and migrant workers organising. This article demonstrated that class struggle trade unionism has in some ways been remembered and hence pioneered by the new independent trade unions, yet they are possible in established trade unions alike.

The article proposes that in order to revitalise the trade union movement we need re-encourage a culture of fighting unions – rather than putting too much emphasis on trade union recognition and negotiations. This builds on previous writings that analysed the organising and campaign strategies of independent trade unions (Pero 2021, Pannini 2021, [redacted]; Petrini and Wettergren 2022). In this paper, I developed the acronym CARE (Collectivising individual grievances, Action, Relations of trust and care, Escalating confrontations) to analytically frame this approach to class struggle trade unionism and to examine in what ways these strategies have been (re)-learnt by established trade unions through the inspirations of independent trade unions. The relations of trust and care are at the heart of this approach of class struggle trade unionism as they provide the security, the feeling of safety and belonging that make bold and escalating actions possible. This is probably true for every worker, especially when first time strikers, but it is particularly significant for low paid, precarious migrant workers that subject to intersecting systems of oppression. The CARE organising approach is not a step by step guide but offers a tool to frame the debate and encourage further class struggle trade unionism – in independent and established trade unions alike.

As a UVW organiser has it:

'We are the tail that wags the dogs. What we do sets precedence for other unions to follow' (Interview 11)

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