TRADE UNION AMALGAMATIONS
THE LOCAL CONTEXT

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Completing this research has been a long road but also the fulfilment of a personal ambition. I have been a trade unionist all my working life and the opportunity to reflect on that experience and engage with a particular facet of union activity through academic research has been a great privilege.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout their history individual trade unions have amalgamated together to form new unions. The catalyst for amalgamation has come from a combination of sources; industrial change, government policy and legislation and internal motivations related to membership size and resources. At the same time local union organisation has remained integral to the structure of unions including their internal government, bargaining ability and engagement with members. This thesis relates these two features of trade union practice to each other by considering the effects of amalgamation on local union organisation, both in terms of the local level itself and the local level as part of the whole organisation of the union.

The thesis does this through a case study approach to the research. The case studies are of three major UK trade unions which have experienced amalgamation over a ten year timeframe and a local union organisation within each of these. The unions reflect a spread of industry, different forms of organisation and types of membership. The research examines the tensions and synergies between the different levels of organisation in a union and their leaders; in themselves and as they influence a process and outcome of amalgamation.

As a study of trade union organisation and behaviour the thesis engages with and complements the wider body of research into union mergers and that on local union organisation in unions. Its individual contribution is to the research on trade union mergers where the position of the local level of union organisation has been a neglected area of investigation. Beyond that it also provides further insights into the role and activity of paid officials and lay representatives as union leaders, the role and activity of organised factions within unions, the influence of unions' industrial and ideological orientation on forms of local union organisation and the tension between different concepts of trade union structure and behaviour.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTU	Australian Congress of Trade Unions
APEX	Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff
ASSET	Association of Supervisory Staff, Executives and Technicians
ASTMS	Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs
AScW	Association of Scientific Workers
AEEU	Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
BIFU	Banking Insurance and Finance Union
CFDU	Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
CP	Communist Party
CWU	Communication Workers Union
DATA	Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association
GMB	General Municipal and Boilermakers Union
GMBATU	General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union
GPMU	Graphical Paper and Media Union
MSF	Manufacturing Science and Finance
NAG	NALGO Action Group
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers Association
NEC	National Executive Committee or Council
NHS	National Health Service
NUBE	National Union of Bank Employees
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NWSA	NatWest Staff Association
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PTC	Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union
RCN	Royal College of Nursing
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
TASS	Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Staffs
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress

UK	United Kingdom
UNiFI	Union for the Finance Industry
UNIFI	Union for the Finance Industry
WEA	Workers' Educational Association

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

During the preparation of this thesis, ballot papers dropped through the letterboxes of over two million trade union members across the United Kingdom and Ireland, including my own. I was asked to approve the amalgamation of Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union to form the largest trade union in the UK and one of the largest worldwide. It was the third time I had participated in a ballot to approve the amalgamation of my trade union with one or more other unions. Members of the amalgamated union would be employed in virtually every industrial sector. They would have many skills and occupations and have incomes ranging from the National Minimum Wage to that of a highly paid professional. Not only would it be the largest union it would also be the most heterogeneous. It would also take five years before it achieved its definitive shape. However, it is only the latest of an ongoing trajectory of mergers between UK trade unions. This thesis is about such amalgamations: why they happen, how they are achieved, the problems that have to be overcome. However and most importantly, it is about the local context of amalgamation, the environment where union members have their most direct engagement with trade union activity.

As a union member, I was employed for nearly thirty years by a County Council as a Chartered Accountant working successively on most of the services delivered by the council. From the outset of that period, I was a member of the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) and the County Council branch of the union. Within the union, I was successively the Treasurer, the President and finally the Secretary of my branch. Beyond the branch, I was elected onto various District (regional) Council committees of NALGO and then, for two years, as the Chair of the District Council. Finally, I was elected onto the National Executive Council of NALGO for two years and was a member of various national committees. For a period of about thirteen years, I had paid release from 50 per cent of my council work in recognition of my trade union activities. In 1993, NALGO amalgamated with the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) and the National Union of

Public Employees (NUPE) to form UNISON. The amalgamation coincided with my heavy involvement in trade union activity within NALGO at branch, regional and national levels. Subsequent to the amalgamation, I continued all this union activity in UNISON until my retirement from County Council employment in 1995.

In the final period of my activity, I also undertook study for a Certificate in Trade Union Studies at The University of Nottingham. On my retirement, I continued these studies with a Diploma in Labour Studies at Ruskin College and then a MA in Comparative Labour Studies at the University of Warwick. My involvement in the UNISON amalgamation as a union activist had developed into a research interest and I was able to pursue my interest through these studies. Since then and alongside the research for the thesis I found part-time employment with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) as a course tutor on training programmes for trade union representatives. Later I again became involved in union activity in Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF) and, following its subsequent amalgamations, in Amicus and now Unite the Union.

The present research grew out of my personal experience. I developed an interest in amalgamations and was able to follow my interest with academic research. My concomitant activity as an active trade unionist in the workplace underpinned this interest. The experience of amalgamation in NALGO followed by the amalgamations of MSF and Amicus and the environment of the workplace, brought that interest and experience together and generated the research.

This chapter introduces the research subject, outlines its parameters, indicates the context in which it is set, and starts to develop the argument that will underpin it. First, the personal context from which the research emerged will be outlined. Then the research will be set in the context of wider debates on trade union mergers and trade union activity in general. These contexts will be seen to generate an overarching research question for the thesis. How the research set out in later chapters seeks to answer the research question and support the argument will then be indicated. The chapter will conclude with an outline of the whole thesis.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Research can be generated from a variety of sources but for me it was the direct result of personal experience. My experience developed from straightforward involvement in the amalgamation process through tentative questioning of the processes and outcomes of that involvement. Early research generated more fully formed questions and culminated in this thesis. It is thus important and relevant to set out some personal history.

To reiterate, the research is concerned with amalgamations of trade unions but it was my own experience of and participation in an amalgamation involving my own trade union, NALGO, which was the catalyst for it. This amalgamation created UNISON. A large and significant element of my involvement and interest was located at a local level of trade union organisation and this activity generated the other and related concern for the research, the local context in a process of amalgamation.

As an active trade union member holding representative positions in my union I observed and participated in the amalgamation from inception through to approval and implementation. In retrospect, my participation was largely from a position of extolling the virtues of my previous union's practice. More than this, as the amalgamation developed I became increasingly conscious of the process being played out to reach agreement with individuals in two other unions.

The amalgamated union was promoted as being 'new' (that is different to any of its predecessors) in its values, ways of working and organisational form. However, for me it quickly came to bear a remarkable resemblance to my previous union. This observation became increasingly prevalent as the amalgamated union went through a process of merging its organisation at local as well as regional and national levels.

A large part of my participation in NALGO had been located at local level and I saw organisation at that level as central to the functioning of the union. A further observation was that in many places the process of merger at local level had been a painful one, particularly for those from COHSE and NUPE who saw major changes in their roles and forms of organisation. In the context of the creation of a 'new' amalgamated union the continuation of practice from one of its predecessor unions

seemed surprising or at least prompted questions over the process of amalgamation itself.

The amalgamation had a long gestation, there had been intense negotiations between the three unions to reach agreement and these had been accompanied by proclamations of 'newness' for the amalgamated union. I was prompted to ask, how could a situation of continuity from one participant union be the outcome? It was possible that one union had the better negotiators but since all three were skilled in such activity, such a conclusion could be set aside. Maybe the other two unions were simply content to adopt the forms and values of my previous union but the intensity of the negotiation period argued against that proposition. A superficial observation was that a higher level of debate and amendment to details of the amalgamation took place in my previous union than in the others but if that had produced the observed outcome what particular characteristics had that union which were apparently not present in the others. Clearly, there were important questions to be considered, not just in the context of a single amalgamation but on a wider basis. A research journey began.

DEBATES

Studies of trade unions are not new. Starting from the Webb's (1897) seminal work on their purpose and organisation and the writing of Marx and Engels (1848) and Lenin (1970) on their revolutionary potential, their activity and formation have been variously examined and debated. More recently writing from such as van de Vall (1970) and Tannenbaum (1968a) on leadership in unions and, in a more populist format, Lane's (1974) advocacy of their socio-economic role, have developed these debates for the later twentieth century. Writing based on case studies of union activity in real workplaces has complemented and enhanced these debates, notable examples being work by Beynon (1973), Batstone and colleagues (1977) and Nicholson and colleagues (1981). Writing that is more recent has seen the development of debates on trade union typologies. This writing contains deeper concerns over the form and practice of democracy in unions, the presence and influence of bureaucratic tendencies and the role of leadership. Analyses sometimes typified individual unions as being 'centralist or leader-led' or 'workplace or member-led' (Drake *et al* 1980, Fairbrother 2000a, Heery and Kelly 1990, Undy *et al* 1981).

These studies have been underpinned by analyses concerned with the presence of bureaucratic tendencies and the tension between national and workplace practice (Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001). Debates have also developed on change and development in unions, particularly in the context of rapid and continuing political, industrial and technological change. Prominent amongst these debates are the advocates of theories concerned with union renewal (Fairbrother 2000a) and union mobilisation (Kelly 1998).

However, hardly any of this considerable body of work carries any account of trade union mergers, despite its prominence in the organisational development of unions. Its value for the research is in providing the research basis for understanding the role and incidence of the various influences that contribute to the local context in a process of amalgamation. Prominent among these influences will be the role of leaders at national, regional and local levels of organisation (Tannenbaum 1968, van de Vall 1970) and the tension between these organisational levels partly generated through bureaucratic tendencies and leadership practice (Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001). The work on union typologies will enable these influences to be distinguished between individual unions involved in the amalgamation process (Drake *et al* 1980, Fairbrother 2000a, Heery and Kelly 1990, Undy *et al* 1981). The work concerned with the local context will provide a basis for appreciating its centrality and role within unions (Batstone *et al* 1977; Beynon 1973; Nicholson *et* al 1981).

Merger has been a feature of British trade unions throughout their history but has been particularly prevalent since the mid-1960s. Partly, merger activity has been facilitated by the Trade Union (Amalgamations etc) Act 1964 (Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995), but more important have been the influences and motivations which have been the catalyst for drawing individual unions into a process of merger. Debates here have been located around two contrasting analyses. First, that merger is largely the result of instrumental action by individual unions, mostly by their national leaders and, in particular, their General Secretaries (Undy 1999a, Undy *et al* 1981). Second, that external events and influences are also important motivators for merger (Waddington 1995). However, the context for both factors has been the global environment of rapid and ongoing political, industrial and economic change. For trade unions, the environment has seen challenges to their presence and relevance in many of the new and radically changed workplaces coupled with a

marked deterioration of membership and resources in older, traditionally organised ones. The result has been a debilitating process of declining membership, resources and presence when those were needed to support recruitment and organising effort in the new environment. Merger has often been seen, amongst other developments, as an appropriate response to this challenge.

However, merger should also be located in the much wider analyses of union activity including the relationships between different levels of trade union organisation and those of leaders and paid officials at all levels of union organisation. Once merger is more widely considered, the parts played in the process by the national leadership, full-time officials and lay leaders at regional and local level become embedded in relationships peculiar to each individual union involved in the merger. Thus, the merger process is played out against the ongoing organisational life of the unions involved in it.

The debates on merger will be explored later where it will also be argued that their scope is limited in two ways. First, merger is frequently seen as an event marked at specific points in time, such as the formal completion of the merger (for example Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995) and only latterly as a long-term ongoing process, before and after the formal merger (Keller 2005; Waddington 2005a, Waddington *et al* 2005). Second, merger is seen as an event that is orchestrated at national level rather than a process with the potential of impacting on and being influenced by all levels of trade union organisation, including that at local level (Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995).

The aim of the thesis is to address these limitations by exposing them to examination in the context of amalgamation, as it influences and is influenced by the local context, and from this examination gain a fuller understanding of amalgamation as an important and continuing manifestation of trade union activity. The rationale is that without a fuller understanding, consideration of amalgamation is itself incomplete. It is incomplete because for many commentators (for example Fairbrother 2000a) workplace unionism is the fundamental unit of trade union organisation, the unit which gives form, content and expression to union members' experience of their trade unionism. It follows that without consideration of local trade union organisation and activity within a

process of amalgamation a full understanding of amalgamation itself will not be available.

It will also be contended that amalgamation is a process, which goes through periods of gestation, implementation and consolidation, and not just a single event in the history of unions. As such, it potentially involves all levels of the union and its membership, resulting in a considerably more complex picture. This complexity requires consideration of the role and influence of other forms of union activity in the amalgamation process alongside the consideration of trends, rationale, forms and mechanisms of amalgamation, and the instrumental role of national leaders (*cf.* Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The tentative question and concern coming from my early personal experience and these debates can be formulated as follows:

- What are the effects of trade union amalgamation on local trade union organisation?

This is a complex question involving a range of influences on all levels of organisation and practice within a union. Alongside the variety and incidence of these influences and adding to the complexity of the research question are the variations of organisational form within and between unions. Within this complexity, it is important to distinguish between the union branch as part of a union's constitution and a workplace group or committee established for bargaining or organisation purposes. These arrangements may be coterminous and/or complementary with each other. The relationship these forms of workplace and/or local organisation have with the wider union at regional and national levels and the relationship between full-time and lay leaders at the same levels provides another essential but complicating issue. In the thesis, it will be necessary to unpick these aspects in ways that enable identification of commonalities and comparisons between the experiences of the local level in different union amalgamations.

One key to answering this question is my experience and knowledge of the local level of trade union organisation and trade union amalgamations. My background comes from three sources:

- As a trade union activist with a strong commitment to and long experience of local activity and direct personal experience of three major union amalgamations;
- As a course tutor working with union representatives from a variety of workplaces and unions on TUC and individual union training programmes for union representatives; and
- As an academic researcher who has engaged in a series of research studies into trade union mergers and the position of local union organisation in relation to mergers.

In outline, three case studies, supported by the body of other research into trade union activity, provide the basis for the research. The case studies were selected to reflect a spread of industry, forms of union organisation and make-up of membership. They took into account such factors as the presence of previously merged unions, progress toward merged local union organisations and bargaining arrangements, and the legislative form of amalgamation they used. They also exemplified different stages of the amalgamation process, from initial proposals to post-completion.

Based on these criteria, the three amalgamations chosen as case studies were (in chronological order of amalgamation) Manufacturing Science and Finance (MSF) (1988), UNISON (1993) and UNIFI (1999). Crucially, they were all amalgamations and could be expected to have had similar experiences of agreeing and implementing a new structure for the amalgamated union through a process of negotiation and agreement.

The case studies will be used to explore the role of local union organisation within these particular processes of amalgamation. The primary source of data comprised structured interviews using a standard set of questions with a range of respondents, complemented by documentary analysis of amalgamation papers and related materials.

In developing the analysis, it will be necessary to establish an analytical framework that will take account of the debates around amalgamation, local union organisation and distinguishes between individual unions. Such a framework will enable the empirical research from the case studies to be assessed against these debates and against each other. In this way, an overall analysis of amalgamation from the perspective of local union organisation will be presented and a more complete assessment of amalgamation as a continuing feature of trade union organisation and activity will be made.

PLAN OF THESIS

Nine further chapters follow this introduction.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the existing research into union mergers and amalgamations, relating it to the local context in a process of merger and locating this research as a development of it. This survey of the debates is concerned with the procedures by which union mergers and amalgamations take place, the debates over developing analytical frameworks for understanding such mergers and the motives for and barriers to mergers. The chapter is concerned to identify the attention paid to the local context in a process of merger. It also concentrates on research into the outcomes of mergers, particularly in terms of seeing the merged union as a reflection of its predecessor unions and considering the local level of union organisation in the merged union.

Chapter 3 fulfils a similar function in focusing on research into local union organisation and shows how this research expands the analysis to include the role of union amalgamations in its development. The chapter explores the various debates on local union activity and those concerned with the relationships union members in the workplace have with employers and with their union. The debates concerned with the geographical identity of the workplace for union members and the nature of their collective identity supplement this analysis. One focus of the research has been on the importance of local union activity and, in particular, the relationship between leaders and members within unions. This work is concerned with the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism within which the relationship plays out and the tension between democratic and bureaucratic tendencies that characterises it.

Chapter 4 sets out the various methods utilised in the research. These include data emanating from my experience of union activity, my employment as a tutor and my earlier academic research. The chapter goes on to describe my selection and use of key informants as a research method including the formulation of questions for and location of interviews with these individuals. A description of the various documents I accessed for the research and their use in confirming and illuminating the responses of my informants follows this section. The chapter concludes with a description of the method used for analysing the interview data.

Chapter 5 provides an initial account of the three case study amalgamations. First, it sets out the history of the unions involved in each of the amalgamations, their structural organisation, the characteristics of their memberships and their forms of unionism. Second, the amalgamations themselves are described. These accounts include the procedures for amalgamation, the context for the amalgamation, the process of negotiation and agreement between the unions involved in each amalgamation and the outcome of each amalgamation in terms of the organisation and operation of the amalgamated union. Third, there are descriptions of the local union organisations that were studied within each case study and their experience of the amalgamation process.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide detailed analyses of the three case studies. These analyses follow the progress of each amalgamation from the pre-amalgamation situation of the participant unions, through the process of negotiation and agreement for amalgamation and finishing with the post-amalgamation implementation of the amalgamation agreement. Within each analysis particular attention is given to the local context at each stage of the amalgamation process and how that was influenced by the forms of unionism of the participant unions, the roles of leaders and factions, the provisions of the amalgamation agreement and the transition of the local union organisation into the amalgamated union.

Chapter 9 provides an assessment of the research. It considers the environment of the case study amalgamations and then concentrates on the local context in each of them. The union within the workplace is examined in the context of their organisation and their relationship with the wider union, their transition into the amalgamated

unions and the influences on them within the amalgamation process. The assessment then seeks to identify the outcomes of the three amalgamations and the influences that produced them. The chapter concludes with an overall argument for explaining the local union context in a process of amalgamation.

Chapter 10 is the conclusion. This completes the research through a series of interrelated themes. These are the process of trade union amalgamation, the practice and ethos of workplace unionism and the role of leaders and factions within divergent forms of unionism. The conclusion ends by setting out the implications of the research for unions engaged in the amalgamation process and the agenda for future research on amalgamated unions.

Chapter 2

TRADE UNION AMALGAMATIONS

Merger is a prevalent and ongoing phenomenon of trade union development. In many parts of the industrialised world, it is portrayed as the appropriate structural response to many of the challenges faced by unions (Waddington 2006: 631). Whether emanating from economic globalisation, rapid changes to forms of work, a volatile and flexible workforce or the individualisation of the employee/employer relationship, merger into larger organisations will provide the opportunity to respond to the challenges and secure the long-term viability and continued relevance of trade unions. Understanding the nature of this phenomenon is, therefore, a vital area of investigation for researchers interested in the organisation and activity of unions.

For union members their most imminent and relevant relationship with their union is at their place of work, with the local organisation of their union and the local union representatives. With the decentralisation of bargaining it is here that their interests are defended and advanced, that their individual employment relationship is played out and that they are most likely to personally engage with union activity. As such, the relevance and influence of this level of the union is essential to an understanding of trade unions.

My experience and knowledge of the UNISON merger of three trade unions into a new union raised questions over the inter-relationship between these two manifestations of trade union activity. For me merger was an episode in the life of a trade union but workplace activity was a constant feature before, during and after the process was completed. Since both forms of activity were being engaged in simultaneously, it seemed inevitable that each would have some influence and/or

effect on the other. Undoubtedly, the merger had raised contentious issues both within and between the unions involved despite an overall commitment to its success. This continued after the formal merger and permeated all levels of the new organisation. It was also apparent that members of the new union were differentially affected, possibly in line with the experiences and practices of the previous unions.

Within the literature on merger, there was much debate over the motivations for and forms of merger. For UK mergers this included the distinction between two legal forms of merger, amalgamations and transfers of engagement (Waddington *et al* 2005: 24-25). The UNISON merger and those of the other case studies in this study had been amalgamations. Consequently, the principal focus of this study is on amalgamations as a distinct legal form of merger in the UK. However, little of the literature directly addressed the position of local workplace and branch union organisation in the process of transfers of engagement. This is understandable as the local representatives and membership played little role in this type of merger. However, where merger came to involve the amalgamation of two or more large unions this was not the case. Oddly perhaps, the neglect of the workplace continued, with a concentration on the national leadership dominating discussion. Latterly issues concerning articulation and co-ordination in post-amalgamation unions have started to be identified (Waddington *et al* 2005: 16, Waddington 2005b) and this literature has focused more attention on the workplace as one structural component of these problems. It has also encouraged consideration of amalgamation as involving a series of linked phases with the actual act of amalgamation being only one of these phases (Waddington 2006; Waddington *et al* 2005: 3-4). An outcome of these enquiries is that the problems of articulation and co-ordination within amalgamated unions have become a focus of study. However, despite this development and the centrality of the workplace in trade union action, amalgamation remained a nationally orchestrated event for most writers. It will be argued that a full appreciation of amalgamation can only be achieved when it is seen

as a process of change from the perspective and role of the local workplace organisation and branch as well as the national leadership.

Finally, there was an absence of discussion into forms of unionism as an influence on the progress and outcome of amalgamations. The term 'forms of unionism' implies that unions are constituted in different ways, organisationally and in their operation. Such features may have an impact on both the amalgamation process and outcome. Research suggested that each of the participating unions to an amalgamation would exhibit a particular form of unionism as would their successor (for example Carter 1991; Morris *et al* 2001; Terry 1996). Where these forms were apparent they might have a crucial influence over the role of local union organisation in the process.

The chapter is organised in the following way. First, a definition of trade union merger and its different forms as amalgamations and transfers of engagement is provided. This section is followed by a consideration of the various analytical frameworks used in the literature on merger. Then the themes identified in the literature will be described along with discussion of commonalities and differing emphases between the various approaches to the subject. This consideration leads to a discussion of the difficulties that result from a lack of attention to the local context of union organisation and forms of unionism as influences within the process. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of the literature in the context of amalgamation as a long-term process within which the role and influence of local union organisation becomes vital to a full understanding of union amalgamations.

FORMS OF TRADE UNION MERGER: AMALGAMATIONS AND TRANSFERS OF ENGAGEMENT

Mergers are not a new manifestation of union organisation and activity. Waddington (1995) set out to place them in an historical perspective starting in 1892. However, all writers identified their increased prevalence from the 1970s onwards.

Defining the essential features of all mergers is a prerequisite for an examination of them. Michelson (2000) attempted to arrive at a definition as follows:

- A combination of two or more separate unions,
- A legal combination,
- A resultant loss of autonomy and control for at least one of unions involved (even if this loss is only minor), and
- A reduced autonomy and control that occurs either at point of combination or at some agreed stage thereafter (Michelson 2000: 111).

Most writers used merger as the generic term for studies of the process. Nonetheless, they also differentiated between the form of merger entered into by small and large unions. The former were more likely to be the subject of a 'take-over' (Undy 1993) or 'absorption' (Chaison 1986) by a larger, whereas the larger unions may also be engaged in some form of 'amalgamation' (Undy 1993; Chaison 1986) with unions of an equivalent size. In the United Kingdom (UK), different legislative requirements apply to these forms of merger. The relevant legislation is the Trade Union (Amalgamation) Act 1964 which stipulates that for an amalgamation a simple majority of the members voting in a ballot in each amalgamating union is required whereas for a transfer of engagements (or 'take-over') only a simple majority of the members of the transferor union is necessary (Waddington *et al* 2005: 24-25).

The legislation, and the relative size of the merging unions, often determined the form of merger adopted. However, the form did have a crucial influence over the post-merger structure of the merged union. As Undy remarked, a merger may be:

> On a continuum between, at one extreme, a new rulebook and system of organisation and the other a [take-over] type arrangement where the smaller of the unions accepts the existing rules of the dominant organisation (Undy 1993: 4-5).

Chaison (1986), Undy (1993) and Waddington (1995) also claimed that either a 'transfer of engagements' or an 'amalgamation' could result in the total loss of previous identity of any or all of the merging unions or the retention of substantial autonomy as a distinct section of a larger union in a transfer of engagements. Thus, the organisational structure of a post-merger union could exhibit a myriad of different forms (Waddington 2000b, 2005c, 2006; Waddington *et al* 2005: 4). Along with Chitayat (1979), these structural variations when put alongside differences in motivation, environmental circumstances, negotiations over merger and post-merger outcomes lead some to suggest that:

> Evaluation of union mergers is likely to require a case-by-case assessment (Campling and Michelson 1997: 239).

Undy and colleagues (1981: 167-171) and Waddington and colleagues (2005: 227-231) both showed that amalgamations were generally predicated on an acceptance of equality between the partners to the amalgamation during the process of negotiation and agreement. Amalgamations were also the province of major unions in terms of membership size, resources and industrial strength. Minor unions and those suffering relatively high reductions in membership and resources were more likely to be the subject of transfers of engagement to major unions seeking to maintain their membership size or consolidate their position in particular industries (Undy *et al* 1981: 167-171; Waddington *et al* 2005: 24-25).

Transfers of engagements invariably resulted in little change for the acquiring union's structures, whereas an amalgamation was likely to result in structural change for all the participant unions. For the local union organisation in workplaces and branches, a transfer of engagements mainly affected those within the transferor union. There, they were either absorbed into the acquiring union's existing structures at local level or retained an unchanged local autonomy. In contrast, a process of amalgamation implied the possibility of structural change on a wide basis including change for local organisation. The UNISON merger and the recent merger that produced Unite the Union were amalgamations, implying the possibility of change for union organisation in workplaces and branches.

The problem with many studies was that conflating 'amalgamation' and 'transfers of engagement' within the generic term of 'merger' resulted in difficulties in isolating consideration of the role and place of the local union organisation in a process of amalgamation. Concentration on merger as an event in the organisational history of merging unions rather than distinguishing between amalgamations and transfers of engagement frustrated an appreciation of the potential long-term effects on local levels of union organisation in these two forms of merger. The result was that the previous research largely ignored the presence of union workplace organisation in the context of merger activity.

Waddington and colleagues (2005) went on to suggest that there were two strands to the merger process:

> First, it is a process in relation to its historical role in the development of trade union structure ... [and second], a process in relation to changes in union governing structures and policies (Waddington *et al* 2005: 3).

The latter strand involved three stages in the process of merger; pre-merger debates, agreement on terms for the merger and post-merger implementation. The first strand may have provided opportunities or promote disruption that lead to further re-structuring. Examination of the case studies in this research will exemplify

these facets of merger as they relate to amalgamations.

DEBATES ON MERGER

Both Undy and Waddington have developed and devised an analytical framework for the merger process that allows for these variations. Undy (1993, 1999a, 1999b) and Undy and colleagues (1981: 167-168) saw unions having distinctive policies toward merger. Thus, in territorial terms, mergers involved changing the job territory or membership base of unions. Unions may have a policy which is 'aggressive' (active search for merger not necessarily in existing territory), 'consolidatory' (strengthening an existing industrial or job position) or 'defensive' (protecting a weakened position). Absolute changes in size, usually in terms of decline in membership, produced a defensive approach as affected unions sought to protect their weakened position (financial problems and difficulty in maintaining services) through merger with a major union. Relative changes resulted in consolidatory and/or aggressive mergers. These mergers could be to consolidate a union's position in a particular industry as competitors made inroads into its traditional territory. Unions may also have sought to attract unions searching for defensive mergers or looked to extend their territory into new areas of representation through merger.

Waddington (1995) also provided an analytical framework for the study of trade union mergers arguing that two aspects of merger activity needed to be understood and related to each other, its rate ('the urge to merge') and its character in terms of changes in union purpose. In seeking to recognise the distinction, the argument was that there were three sets of relationships in the bargaining process that must be considered. He noted that:

> The bargaining position of unions relative to employers and the state; the bargaining position of a union relative to that of competitor unions; and

> factional bargaining within unions. ... The interaction between these relationships is termed the politics of bargaining (Waddington 1995: 4-5).

Waddington's conclusion was that all three relationships influenced the character of structural change whilst that relative to employers and the state was the main influence on the rate of merger activity.

Waddington's explanation of mergers was set against postulated waves of merger activity that could be identified with particular periods of economic change and other environmental factors. In contrast, Undy and colleagues (1981) and Undy (1993) developed a framework that focused more on internal relationships within trade unions. Thus, a debate over the relative influence of exogenous and endogenous factors has been generated (Undy 1996; Waddington 1997; for summaries see Michelson 2000, Undy 1999a). Campling and Michelson (1998) have set out an interesting approach to integrating endogenous and exogenous factors along with the influence of internal and external agency using strategic choice-resource dependence theory. Their argument stressed the importance of internal and external agency in reaching strategic choices in the context of internal and external environments and the dependence for survival of the union on adequate resources:

> Deliberate and emergent strategic decisions are made through initiatives taken within a given environmental landscape that essentially aim to command control of critical resources. Strategic choice is therefore an integral part of the process of managing organisational resource dependencies which, through choice, can shift over time (Campling & Michelson 1998: 596).

However, while opening up debate, there was still no clear resolution to the different assessments.

MOTIVES FOR AND BARRIERS TO MERGER

In the literature on trade union mergers, there was an overwhelming tendency to see trade unions as single, homogenous entities whose organisation and activity were focused at a national level of management and leadership for both amalgamations and transfers of engagement. The emergent themes were largely related to the concerns and aspirations of the national level of the participating unions to the merger. Thus, the factors that might frustrate a proposed merger were those experienced at a national level.

Most writers cited membership decline and financial difficulty as the main motivations for merger (Chaison 1986; Chitayat 1979; Michelson 2000; Undy 1993; Waddington 1995; Waddington et al 2005: 5-8). They produced a vicious circle of decline where membership loss resulted in financial problems and an increased inability to provide an adequate service for members that led to further membership losses. Many smaller unions in the harsh climate of the 1980s found themselves in such a position and actively sought merger as a means of extricating themselves from the situation, invariably through a transfer of engagements to a larger union (Undy 1999a; Willman 1996). As Carter (1991), Undy (1993) and Waddington (1995) pointed out in the British context, most unions experienced membership decline during the 1980s. Undy noting that:

> Many of the major unions faced similar ... problems and were highly receptive to such mergers [in the form of transfers of engagements] as they sought compensatory membership increases [for] the decline in their own membership (Undy 1993: 13).

However, there were also examples of mergers where participants were not in any immediate financial difficulty and others where membership had actually increased prior to the merger (Michelson 2000). It was probable that, as Chaison noted:

> Membership decline and financial hardship are symptoms of motivating factors, and relate more to absorbed and amalgamating unions than to absorbing ones (Chaison 1986: 58).

In practice the decline of old craft distinctions through technological change and the consequent impact on craft-based unions had been a significant factor in the decline of mainly smaller unions (Chaison 1986). Similarly, in many cases the inability of smaller unions to maximise economies of scale in the face of decline compounded by increasing membership expectations for individual as against collective representation and the growing complexity of labour legislation, encouraged a search for merger through a transfer of engagements to a major union (Chaison 1986; Chitayat 1979; Undy 1993; Waddington 1995).

Implicit in the merger process, there was an assumption that increased size benefited efficiency and effectiveness. However, as Gill and Griffin argued, these two objects were fundamentally different:

> Efficiency concerns the use of resources to obtain given ends and can be assessed according to economic and administrative rationality. In contrast, effectiveness can only be assessed in terms of the achievement of the particular social, political and industrial objectives, which a union has set for itself (Gill and Griffin 1981: 369).

The members set these objectives of effectiveness and only they could judge their achievement. In practice Carter (1991), Chaison (1986), Waddington and colleagues (2005: 12-13) and Undy (1993) found difficulty in establishing whether there had been increases in efficiency arising from merger. Often, employment and administrative practices continued through transitional periods, making the achievement of economies of scale only a long-term objective. This difficulty was compounded by the increased diversity of membership and bargaining patterns in the merged union.

Chaison maintained that:

> [Increasing bargaining power] has almost become traditional for union officers to state [as] the principal reason for mergers (Chaison 1986: 51).

Such claims came from an ability to coordinate negotiations with the same employer or provide greater resources to support negotiations. Where potential partner unions dealt with the same employers or with the same industry, bargaining power might be a primary motive for merger but it was also widely promulgated elsewhere. Thus, the impact of the decentralisation of bargaining (Waddington 1995) and the growing complexity of employment legislation (Undy 1993) also argued for merger to maintain and increase the resources needed for effective bargaining capability (see also Waddington *et al* 2005: 14-15).

Both institutional and bargaining concerns could also be assisted by the elimination of inter-union competition and rivalry (Chaison 1986; Chitayat 1979; Terry 1996; Undy 1993; Waddington 1995). Amalgamation could be an effective way of combating the debilitating impact of larger unions in particular competing with each other for members. It might also strengthen negotiating positions in the face of hostile employer strategies, economic movements and state policies.

Studies of mergers have questioned whether the merged union was more effective at bargaining or organising. Chaison (1986), in particular, was sceptical that increased bargaining power resulted from anything other than a small number of mergers. He recognised the many other influential forces on the merger decision such as, the fragmentation of bargaining that might encourage union coordination without any need for merger, employer resistance to a unified union approach, economic factors and prospective union density. Still, it must be acknowledged that none of these factors is necessarily affected by union merger. Undy (1993) was more sanguine over the prospective benefits of merger suggesting that, in many cases, merged unions were waiting for a less hostile period for their realisation and access to increased resources for members of small unions might reap some immediate benefits. For some large unions an immediate objective of merger had been to compensate for their membership decline and merger provided little incentive for further growth. As Waddington (1995) concluded, merger was often a

response to a position of vulnerability whether as amalgamation or transfer of engagements:

> The urge to merge will remain in the form of pressures arising from increasing administrative costs, membership decline and bargaining weaknesses relative to employers (Waddington 1995: 213).

As such, its promotion as a route to greater efficiency and effectiveness was founded more on the imperative of convincing a voting membership of the benefits of merger than any sustainable calculation.

Writers on the British scene (Carter 1991; Terry 1996; Undy 1993; Waddington 1995) and in Australia (Gardner 1988; Hose and Rimmer 2002; Tomkins 1999) have also been concerned to identify the influence of external bodies such as the TUC/ACTU and the Labour Party as motivations for merger. In national environments where these external bodies could wield influence over governmental economic and employment policies such influences were most likely to be evident.

Undy (1993) and other commentators (Chaison 1986; Terry 1996; Streek and Visser 1997; Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995 and 2005a) saw merger as a vehicle for national leaders to achieve sought-after reform of internal structures and government. Often manifesting itself in increased central control of union policy and resources and the establishment of semi-autonomous trade groups as an attraction for prospective merger partners through transfers of engagements:

> Merger ... could be but part of a much wider strategy intended to reform the union's system of government and redirect its energies into new territories (Undy 1993: 17).

There was a consensus between most writers that merger tended to create in unions more powerful centralised government. This outcome was most obviously the case where there was a high level of integration (Carter 1991; Chaison 1986; Gardner 1988; Streek and Visser 1997; Undy 1993) but even structures modelled around trade groups often had a strong central body exercising control over resources and

overall union policy. The actual form of these structures varied greatly. As Undy remarked with regard to amalgamations of large unions:

> There was a general tendency to greater centralisation of control over issues determined in the non-bargaining channel of decision-making, following some mergers. Union leaders with long-running concerns over the problems of regionalisation and decentralised control over subscription income, have used, or sought to use, mergers to reduce the role of regions and other lower levels of organisation (Undy 1993: 20).

Many writers recognised the role played by national leaders in the merger process (Chitayat 1979; Michelson 2000; Tomkins 1999; Undy *et al* 1981; Undy 1993). A close association between the senior officers of prospective merger partners often generated the initial proposal (Undy *et al* 1981) and they usually had the main responsibility for conducting the negotiations (Chitayat 1979). As a result, it was to be expected that such leaders would play a major role in these activities.

However, many proposed mergers did not reach a successful conclusion (Chaison 1986; Willman 1996). Most writers identified internal concerns as being the main source of barriers to merger proposals. Undy and colleagues found that:

> All the unions examined, regardless of their systems of government, were led into merger by their national full-time officials (Undy *et al* 1981: 214).

In such circumstances, it was not surprising that without the support of national leaders virtually no merger would succeed. Chaison crystallised the conclusion of many writers by commenting that:

> The primary reason for officer opposition is the pursuit of their economic and political self-interest (Chaison 1986: 71).

Any threat to status, power, prestige or pay could arouse opposition. Accordingly, political affinity between the leaders of unions could assume an importance in merger negotiations beyond questions of industrial or bargaining logic. Successful opposition generated from a membership base was rarely found although that did

not preclude them from an important degree of influence over the final shape of individual amalgamations (Carter 1991; Terry 1996).

Internal institutional differences could also prove to be barriers to merger. All writers recognised the extent to which structures required change and the difficulty that could pose in terms of levels of autonomy, forms of democracy and administration (for example Waddington *et al* 2005: 9). This was particularly prevalent in amalgamations where all parties to the amalgamation could expect changes to their existing practices but much less in transfers of engagements where the transferor union usually accepted those of a larger union. As Chaison wrote:

> The resolution of institutional differences has to be within the boundaries of what is acceptable and capable of winning approval ... The joining of union structures may often be more of a political than a technical problem (Chaison 1986: 85).

Having considered questions of motivation and barriers to merger Chaison concluded that:

> Whether or not there is a merger, is determined by the balance between the motivating factors and the barriers rather than just their individual importance (Chaison 1986: 86).

While the emphasis here has been on national (and regional) leaderships, it is also necessary to consider the way that the local context has been considered in the amalgamation process.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF TRADE UNION AMALGAMATION

As Waddington and colleagues suggested:

> A wide range of substantive issues is negotiated during a merger (Waddington *et al* 2005: 5).

Waddington and colleagues went on to suggest that the negotiations would encompass union form and union character (Waddington *et al* 2005: 5) (see Fryer

2000: 29-33 for a full exposition of these concepts). 'Form' represented those formal aspects of rules, procedures and structures within a union whilst 'character' referred to the more intangible concepts of ethos, ideology and relationships, formulations that characterise the local context along with the wider union. Chapter 3 will consider the incidence of 'form and character' within this research.

There was within much of the literature an absence of consideration of the workplace level of union organisation and the branch, and their relevance to the amalgamation process. This neglect resulted in two complementary problems in developing a full understanding of the amalgamation process. First, the presence of the local workplace and branch as integral elements of union organisation that would be an influence on or be influenced by an amalgamation was ignored. Second, the lack of an analytical framework that encompassed all aspects of trade union organisation and activity inevitably limited the perspective of the research to that prescribed by the national level of organisation and activity.

This aspect confirmed the problem that I identified from my previous experience and knowledge. Although some writers cited issues of contention as barriers to amalgamation (Chaison 1986; Waddington *et al* 2005: 9-11; Willman 1996; Undy *et al* 1981), these barriers mostly related to issues of structure and self-interest, or personal animosity amongst national full-time officials. These issues did little to explain the experiences at a local level within or between unions going through amalgamation. Equally, the absence of the local context in the literature meant that the overarching question of the influence on and by union organisation at the workplace and branch in an amalgamation was not addressed. The paradox here is that the organisation and activity of the union at the local level is often seen as a defining feature of trade unions. Thus, its relative absence from literature concerned with unions was surprising and was likely to result in partial assessments of union amalgamation.

Exceptionally Chaison (1983) did address the particular issue of the merger of union workplace organisations within an amalgamation, the key point being the considerable variation between merging unions. Chaison found that it was a rarity to find a requirement for local mergers even where there was duplication of organisation. The influencing factors were the perceived need for local mergers, the degree of local resistance, the level of national pressure to merge, and the number of local bodies involved. However, little attempt was made to extend consideration to the wider question of workplace influence on the whole process.

Issues relevant to the workplace and branch were raised indirectly in some of the literature on merger. Thus, recent studies on merger identified concerns around articulation and co-ordination within trade unions resulting from amalgamations (Due and Keller 2005; Waddington and Hoffman 2000; Waddington 2000a, 2000b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Waddington *et al* 2005: 16). Articulation was defined as:

> The density of inter-linkages between vertical levels of the union (Waddington 2005a: 27).

Co-ordination, in contrast, was defined as:

> The horizontal linkages [between different groups of members] within a union (Waddington 2005a: 27).

These issues became increasingly significant as amalgamations resulted in a growing heterogeneity in the membership of unions (Ebbinghaus 2003; Keller 2005; Waddington 2000b, 2001; Waddington *et al* 2005: 15-16).

This literature relates closely to the extent of member participation in the local activity of the union. Those commentating specifically on the workplace level of union activity and on occasion in the literature on merger (Waddington 2000b) strongly identified that it was in the workplace that most members identified with the union. As earlier commented by Crouch (1993):

> [An articulated union is] one in which strong relations of interdependence bind different vertical levels, such that the actions of the centre are

> frequently predicated on securing the consent of lower levels and the autonomous action of lower levels is bounded by the rules of delegation (Crouch 1993: 54-55).

Later, Waddington commented on co-ordination that:

> [A co-ordinated union is one where] dense horizontal linkages facilitate cohesion between different groups of members and thus mitigate the adverse effects of increasing membership heterogeneity on interest aggregation (Waddington 2005a: 27).

Without the workplace and the branch level being appropriately integrated into the structure and organisation of the amalgamated union, the adverse effects associated with a reduced level of articulation and co-ordination were likely to become more apparent and member participation aggravated.

Some attention has been given to attempts by individual newly amalgamated unions to introduce innovative organisational and structural forms to counter these problems (Keller 2005; Terry 1996, 2000a; Waddington 2006: 648) but there is little evidence of any coherent approach to investigating the problem from the standpoint of local union organisation. Given the importance of the issue of member participation in trade union activity identified in the literature on the workplace and now, that on the Organising Model with much of its focus also on the workplace (Heery and Kelly 1994; Heery 2002; Heery *et al* 2003), this failure seemed a surprising gap in the literature on amalgamation. However, the need for attention at the local level has been identified, with Waddington commenting that:

> Given the current pattern of development of the merger process, it would be particularly beneficial to understand the impact [of mergers] on membership participation (Waddington 2005c: 390).

By implication, Waddington was referring to workplace and branch levels of union activity and involvement.

A partial explanation of this gap is the attention paid by many writers to motivation and implementation in all forms of union merger rather than distinguishing (in the UK context) between amalgamations and transfers of engagement (Campling & Michelson 1997; Michelson 2000; Undy 1993, 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Undy *et al* 1981; Waddington 1995, 1997, 2005c). Within that prism, they concentrated on national leaders as prime motivators of mergers and those with the main responsibility for negotiating the terms of the merger and its implementation. A process of amalgamation requires a simple majority in ballots of the membership in all of the unions participating in the amalgamation, rather than just in the membership of the transferor union within a transfer of arrangements. It follows that the campaign for a YES vote in an amalgamation has to be co-ordinated across all the participating unions and vigorously prosecuted amongst all the separate memberships to ensure a positive result. It is only through the national leadership that such a campaign can be successfully put together. Inevitably, this puts them at the forefront of the campaign to mobilise members in favour of the amalgamation. However, they failed to acknowledge the widespread change, including for the local level, that could emanate from an amalgamation as opposed to the complete take-over or retention of autonomy that were the usual outcome of a transfer of engagements. The role of and impact on the workplace level of organisation was a consequence of amalgamation rather than an integral part of the process itself.

Yet my experience of amalgamation from the perspective of a local union officer contradicted this assessment. Prospective amalgamation was debated at all levels in the union, contentious issues were raised and hotly debated and the campaign to secure agreement in the final ballot was largely prosecuted in the workplace. After the formal amalgamation, the full impact of the agreements reached with the other unions started to impinge on union organisation at the workplace and branch. A further period of contention, negotiation and implementation ensued. Numbers of longstanding local representatives in all three previous unions either lost positions or

were not prepared to adapt to the changed situation and left active involvement. The notion that union members and local officers were virtual bystanders whilst national leaders orchestrated a major change such as amalgamation was not one that I experienced. However, despite some belated recognition in the literature that issues of member participation, articulation and co-ordination can be studied as a consequence of amalgamation, there has been little attempt to examine how they influence the whole process (for example see Waddington *et al* 2005: 225-231).

OUTCOME OF AMALGAMATION

Much attention has been paid to procedures for amalgamation and there were attempts to provide frameworks for the examination of amalgamations but there was little effort to explain the appearance of the emergent amalgamated union in terms of its predecessors. The conclusion some commentators reached was that the leaders of certain unions saw an opportunity for change through amalgamation from an existing constitution toward greater central control of finances and policy (for example Waddington 2005a). Others have seen this aspiration as circumscribed by a need to satisfy the interests of dominant groups and factions in partner unions in order to reach an agreement for amalgamation (Campling and Michelson 1998; Undy 1999b). The straightforward result provided by a number of researchers was that unions were individual organisations. They had different amalgamation policies, and experienced different environmental circumstances, amalgamation negotiations and post-amalgamation outcomes. As a result there was no consistency in the consideration of the outcomes for amalgamated union structures (Hose and Rimmer 2002; Morris *et al* 2001; Waddington 2005c, 2005b).

Once merger, in the form of an amalgamation, is seen more as a process than an event in the development of trade unions, the relevance of the workplace and local forms of union organisation to a full understanding of union amalgamation becomes much more apparent. As Waddington questions:

> Does the merger process allow the development of articulated and co-ordinated post-merger union organisation and activity through which an agenda appropriate to current circumstances may be generated and delivered (Waddington 2005a: 28)?

This question begins to open up the way in which local branches and the workplace organisation fit into the amalgamation process. However, subsequent discussion of it has tended to concentrate on the post-amalgamation implementation of agreements and policies coming from the amalgamation rather than the experience of union members in their place of work within this period (Waddington *et al* 2005: 205-216). The inconclusive assessment was that:

> The process of post-merger adjustment is long-term, contested, and is unlikely to be predetermined by the terms of the merger agreement (Waddington *et al* 2005: 216).

The result was an inadequate response to the position of the union within the workplace in an amalgamation process.

Others also recognised that the post-amalgamation period may result in a long period of introspection as new structures were put in place (Keller 2005; Waddington 2000b, 2001, 2005c, 2006: 647-648; Waddington and Hoffmann 2000). However, despite the growing recognition of the post-amalgamation period as vital to the overall success and eventual outcome of the amalgamation it was only belatedly that attention was being paid to this aspect. As Keller remarked:

> The post-merger period's significance is great for the 'sustainability' and overall success of the project, but it is mostly underestimated in theory and practice. ... The empirical evidence demonstrates that it generally takes longer to implement a merger than to agree to it in the first place (Keller 2005: 212).

The concerns over articulation, co-ordination and member participation that were closely associated with the workplace level of organisation were not sufficiently

addressed and this failure was compounded by a similar lack of attention to the local level in the post-amalgamation period. These omissions were largely attributable to a failure in associating these issues with the two legal forms of merger prevalent in the UK, amalgamations and transfers of engagement, and acknowledging their widely different presence within them. Without consideration of amalgamation as a long-term process involving initial proposal, negotiation, decision and post-amalgamation implementation, it is not possible to gain a full understanding of it. The process also involves all levels of union organisation and that at the workplace and branch is an essential component of that consideration.

CONCLUSION

The focus of the thesis is an examination of amalgamation as a process involving all levels of trade union organisation and activity. Latterly there has been some acknowledgement that amalgamation can produce a more heterogeneous membership in amalgamated unions. This result leads to issues of articulation, co-ordination and member participation in the post-amalgamation situation. Three points should be noted. First, these issues have to be understood in the context of the whole union with the workplace and local branch organisation as the foundation for member participation. Second, seeing amalgamation as a long-term process enables them to be examined in the context of amalgamation. Third, there is a need to provide a framework within which all aspects of amalgamation can be seen.

Based on this literature review, the research question becomes:

- What is the place of the local branch and workplace organisation within the amalgamation process?

This survey of the available literature on merger has shown an overwhelming concentration on the national level. Given the centrality of the workplace and

branch to trade union practice, failure to examine local experience in any detail may seem surprising. The explanation is rooted in the predilection of much of the literature to see merger, first as a singular event rather than a lengthy process, second the national leadership as the prime arbiters of that event and, third as a generic form rather than contrasting between amalgamations and transfers of engagement. Within this framework, there is little space for consideration of the workplace since its influence and role only becomes apparent over time and in the context of two distinct legal forms of merger.

Chapter 3

TRADE UNION AMALGAMATIONS: THE WORKPLACE AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Many writers have attested that the basic unit of trade union organisation is at the workplace (for example Fairbrother 2000a: 3; McIlroy 1995: 162-163). It is in the workplace and the local branch where members have their immediate contact and interaction with their union. It is here that the immediate aspects of their employment relationship are played out. Consequently, members' interest and activity in the operation of their union is expressed most forcefully in the day-to-day circumstances of the workplace and the discussions that ensue in shop steward meetings and at the branch.

The employment relationship may also be played out at regional and national locations and levels of organisation. The individual workplace may also be subject to employer and management directive from a regional, national and even multi-national level. State legislation may also impinge on employee pay and conditions; it may also shape the employer's policies and management discretion. The union requires an organisational form to co-ordinate its activity and resources at these levels alongside providing the resources to support effective organisation in the workplace. Nevertheless, for the 'ordinary' trade union member this activity is mostly one-step removed from their daily experience and infrequently encountered, in contrast to the ongoing life of the workplace. For the union member the local level remains the basis of the employment relationship and the basis of trade union organisation through which that relationship is mediated.

With the decentralisation of bargaining, most workplaces now constitute bargaining units. Willman (2001) argues that it is the viability of these workplace/bargaining

units, which collectively determine the viability of the whole union. Maintaining workplace/bargaining units and countering the weakening effects of reduced membership on levels of activism and resources has led unions to consider new or revitalised initiatives to ensure their survival and reverse the debilitating trends of the 1980s and 1990s (Fairbrother 2000a, 2000b), for example the Organising Model (Heery 2002: 26-31). Amalgamations can be seen as one union response to a changed environment. A further two contrasting theories on how employees can respond to external change have also been advanced which stress "Renewal" (Fairbrother 1996, 2000a) and "Mobilisation" (Kelly 1998). However, in order to evaluate the potential of either of these approaches we need to understand the internal representational and organisational structure of the union, how this relates to the local level and how this in turn relates to the wider structures of the trade union.

DEBATES ON THE WORKPLACE

Change is part of the fabric of union activity in the workplace. Governments enact legislation aimed at employment and health and safety conditions; employers reorganise working practices, declare redundancies and seek to introduce new pay systems; unions launch recruitment campaigns; new union leaders want to change longstanding practices; union members become dissatisfied with union polices and action; and, of course, unions amalgamate. Some change agents are external and some are internal, but any or all can influence union activity and organisation in the workplace. Responding to change takes many subtle but also overt forms. Here we are particularly concerned with amalgamation as an agent of change in the workplace and local organisation of the trade union. To develop insights into that process requires a wider examination of how change manifests itself and the response of unions.

There has been much debate about sources of organisational and operational change in unions. Heery (2005) considers the results of a survey of full-time officials on the influences that encourage change. Change could be generated within the union by members demanding a response to change in the workplace (Fairbrother 1996: 133-140), managerially from national union leaders concerned with the long

term viability of the union (Willman 2001), or new policy initiatives such as the Organising model (Heery 2002: 26-31). Influences for change may also be generated externally from collective bargaining activity, public policy, legislation, and external agencies such as the TUC. Heery's conclusion is that there are no overriding sources of internal pressure for change but that the current approach by the UK and the EU on employment legislation provides opportunities for change to which union officials responded.

However, change should also be seen in the context of two contrasting theses on the conditions that encourage change in trade unions and re-affirm the importance of the local context in that process. Renewal theory suggests that the fragmentation of bargaining and managerial control has provided the conditions for a reorientation of union activity to the workplace. This focus is the result of members' dissatisfaction with the response of a centralised and hierarchical leadership to the changed employment relationship and the need for member engagement and activity in the workplace as the appropriate response. Much of the empirical research on Renewal is concentrated in the public sector (for example Fairbrother 1996, 2000a), where unions are already recognised (Gall 2003b: 232). Mobilisation theory emphasises the role of leaders in objectifying members' dissatisfaction with the union and grievance against the employer and then organising a collective response to them (Kelly 1998, Darlington 2002, Gall 2006). In contrast to Renewal theory, Mobilisation theory has been shown to have a particular salience for empirical research in the private sector where campaigns to build trade unionism have revolved around the issue of trade union recognition (Gall 2003a: 16-18; Gall 2003b:234-235). Thus, there is a contrast between the research and application of these theories between the two sectors. In the public sector where union recognition is generally unproblematic, issues concerned with the role of an established union leadership come to the fore. Whereas in the private sector where recognition is a prevalent problem, especially in new and expanding workplaces and industries, union leadership becomes a wider issue concerned with the generation of union activity and building union membership in unrecognised workplaces alongside their role where unions are already established.

Both theories have been subject to criticism. The Renewal theory has been criticised for being a desirable objective in itself rather than contributing to the achievement of real goals for workplace trade unionism. Further, the theory has been questioned because it fails to take account of wider political and economic influences on union activity in the workplace or acknowledge the role of political activism (Gall 1998). Mobilisation theory has been criticised for denying the place of members' self-activity and participation in the generation of collective action rather than this being the result of vanguardist action by a small cadre of individuals (Fairbrother 2005,). Empirical study of these theories has resulted in a mixed bag of evidence (for the public sector see Carter 2004; Danford *et al* 2002; Johnson and Jarley 2004 and for the private sector see Bacon and Blyton 2004; Darlington 2009;McBride 2004; Simms 2007; Taylor and Bain 2003 ;). What is important, however, is the recognition of the centrality of union organisation in the workplace and the branch, the presence of leaders and members, and the processes of union change including amalgamation.

THE UNION AND THE WORKPLACE

The straightforward descriptions of 'the workplace' emanate from two distinct relationships both located at a local level, that of union members with their employer and that with their union. For observers like Coates and Topham (1988), the first will usually comprise an organisation of union members and stewards or representatives, and represent individual work areas or a collection of work areas associated with the same employer. In practice, 'organisation' here can be envisaged as a continuum of increasing formality of structure and rules accompanied by a range of informal dialogue and action at the workplace (Coates & Topham 1988: 161-163). It comprises a group of members and their leaders acting collectively in their relationship with the employer. However, as noted by Coates and Topham:

> The relationship between workplace democracy and the formal organs of trade union authority from the branch upwards are seldom defined in rules (Coates & Topham 1988: 154).

Instead, accountability and recognition in the union is regulated through the presence of elected workplace leaders, stewards or representatives whose status,

functions and responsibilities are recognised in the union's constitution and rules (Coates & Topham 1988: 153-154).

The relationship of union members with their union is conducted through their local branch as the lowest level of organisation recognised by the union's constitution and rules. All members belong to a branch and are entitled to attend its meetings, elect its officers, and vote on issues under debate. In some unions, branches may also be the principal focus for union members' relationship with the employer and fulfil both relationships (Coates & Topham 1988: 74-80). Distilling these two relationships in terms of union organisation, the branch is the formal means of representation within the union that integrates the workplace within the union. In the thesis, it may be necessary to distinguish the branch as the formal unit of union structure within the wider relationship of workplace members with their union to illustrate these characteristics of individual unions.

The problem with this description is that it tends to homogenise these relationships into somewhat simplistic organisational terms, when the reality may be considerably more complicated. Coates and Topham (1988) were concerned with multi-employer unions (Coates & Topham 1988: 41-50) and this constraint excludes consideration of unions or staff associations associated with single employers, a feature of union organisation in the finance industry (for example see Gall 1997). Here the relationship of union members with their employer and that of their union with the same employer may be synonymous; as a corollary members' relationship with their union may be contained within the same intimate relationship. These union members are locally employed. Their lay representatives are locally based. There are industrial relations issues to be resolved locally. 'Local' extends to a single national employer who has a one-to-one national bargaining relationship with the union and to that of members with their union, which identifies solely with their work situation.

The model also fails to take account of the many variations in the actual practice of the two relationships within multi-employer unions. The members' relationship with their employer will take many forms dependent on the location of the employer as a single locally-based entity, a highly decentralised national or multi-national

company, or a centralised one. Union branches can be based on single local employers or locations of national ones, local industries, or local geographical areas. In some unions, branches will also be the focus for the bargaining relationship alongside the relationship with the wider union. A multi-employer union may be structured around one or a variety of these arrangements (Coates & Topham 1988: 74-80). However, it should also be noted that in single-employer unions and staff associations the tight-knit relationship between members, union and employer might result in unions eschewing altogether the need for branches (Blackburn 1967: 103).

To appreciate the centrality of the 'workplace' for union members' relationship with their employer and their union it is necessary to elaborate on the organisational arrangements described by Coates and Topham. Conceptualising the meaning of 'workplace' and 'local' for those who work, live and engage in union activity within them is an essential stage in this process. Here the work of economic geographers such as Ward (2007) and Wills (1996) becomes important.

Wills remarked, before going on to contrast union activity in retail banking between two UK regions, that:

> As institutions forged through the relationships of employment, trade unions are one of the most important mechanisms by which labour markets are differentiated across space. Shaping the communities in which workers live, as well as the workplaces in which they are employed, the extent and complexion of local trade union organisation can make a profound and significant difference to working experiences, expectations and behaviour. (Wills 1996: 360)

Ward goes on to discuss the geographical dimension of social relations in terms of three concepts that are the foundation for incorporating this dimension into such research – place, space and scale. 'Places' are not simply locations on a map but 'socially constructed, the product of a host of human practices' (Ward 2007: 269). It follows that to understand what is actually going on within an identifiable place (or 'workplace') it is necessary to take account of external activity which is bound up with local activity or as Ward puts it, recognising that 'the non-local is increasingly *in* the local' (Ward 2007: 270). This concept also recognises that other places are subject to other sets of external activity but may still be connected by those that are

common to all of them. Union activity beyond the workplace is not separate from activity in the workplace or even simply connected to it as an intrinsic element of that activity. The concept of 'space' encapsulates the position that places are not islands but connected to other places, either through competitive or co-operative influences (Ward 2007: 271, Wills 1996: 360). 'Space' underpins the value of trade union organisation to employees where co-operation between workers in different workplaces seeks to establish common levels of pay and conditions. 'Scale' captures the situation where workers live and work in specific locations but are able to influence their conditions in that location by acting on a wider canvas. Union activity on a wider scale mediates and enhances union activity in the workplace.

Maintaining a position of the importance of the workplace within trade union activity rests on the immediate relationship between union members and their union at that level. However, accepting that premise inevitably raises the question of the evidence for the level of engagement members have with their union in the workplace. A widely acknowledged view is that member attendance at branch meetings is very low, Coates and Topham (for example) remarking that:

> Branches are commonly sparsely attended, and never more than when they are organised on a geographical rather than an industrial basis. A very large number of studies document the poor attendances and low participation ratios that commonly characterise branch meetings. (Coates & Topham 1988: 78)

Against that, other studies (for example McBride 2004: 139) have found high levels of engagement when issues concerning the employment relationship are the principal concern at workplace meetings. Such a dichotomy potentially strikes at the heart of the collective concept that characterises trade unions.

However, as Stephenson and Stewart (2001) and subsequently McBride (2006) point out, seeing worker collectivism as solely related to positions of antagonism with employers denies other types of collectivism in the workplace. Together these comprise 'trade union collectivism', 'workplace collectivism' and 'the collectivism of everyday life' (Stephenson & Stewart 2001: 12-18). 'Trade union collectivism' captures that of union members and their leaders acting together in pursuit of common objectives against their employer, 'workplace collectivism' the support given by workers to each other in the workplace over work and non-work related issues

and 'collectivism of everyday life' the support and friendship provided by workers to their colleagues beyond the workplace. This wider view of worker collectivism, and its three dimensions, provides a more rounded picture of the many threads that bind workers together in the workplace. It also shows how members engage with their union in ways other than attendance at union meetings. Casual discussions with other workers and union leaders in and out of the workplace and informal support networks can readily result in more formalised union activity but also remain at a lower level of mutual support. What is relevant for union activity in the workplace is the presence of the union as a catalyst and focus for these various forms of collectivism.

Putting these concepts alongside the straightforward description of the workplace in Coates and Topham (1988) facilitates an appreciation of union activity that takes account of the many variations of organisational form and collectivism in the workplace. These variations also reinforce the centrality of the workplace for union members and the importance of understanding its position in a process of union amalgamation.

Certain organisational features can be identified within these parameters, despite the considerable variation between individual workplaces and within individual unions. Of prime importance to this variation is the relationship between leaders (stewards, representatives etc) and members. However, this relationship still portrays a somewhat one-sided picture of the complexities experienced in the employment relationship at the workplace. It is the contrast between individual and collective action, which distinguishes the non-presence or presence of union organisation. Collective action is the touchstone of union activity in the union organised workplace. The assumption is that workers can only effectively counter the corporate power of the employer if they act together (Hyman 1975). This straightforward understanding of collective action underpins much case study evidence on workplace union organisation and action (for example Batstone *et al* 1977; Nichols and Armstrong 1976; Nicholson *et* al 1981; Darlington 1994; Fairbrother 2000a; Mc Bride 2004). It is the formulation of collective action, which brings together the understanding of members and the need for an organisational form to focus it in relation to the employer.

How members and leaders come together to create and maintain the collective organisation and action which is the substance of the union presence in the workplace has been the subject of much debate (for a summary see Upchurch *et al* 2002). The exposition of Mobilisation theory (Kelly 1998) has encouraged a revival of these debates focused on the extent to which leaders are the essential catalyst for generating collectivity. Thus, a question arises of how far the relationships that workplace and other leaders have with those in the wider union and with members in the workplace, have a crucial influence on the process of amalgamation and the extent to which the collective principle is a fundamental element of that process.

LEADERS AND MEMBERS

The central relationship in all these debates is that between leaders and with members. It is expressed in different forms and reflected from different perspectives in the change process as it relates to local union organisation. It is through leaders that the aspirations and grievances of members are negotiated with the employer, through them that their membership of the wider union is given reality and presence, through them that their individuality becomes subsumed in a collective consciousness. As such, it is the essential relationship for local trade union activity.

Tannenbaum suggests that:

> Organisation implies control. A social organisation is an ordered arrangement of individual human interactions. ... It is the function of control to bring about conformance to organisational requirements and achievement of the ultimate purposes of the organisation (Tannenbaum 1968b: 3).

Trade unions are social organisations and it is the establishment and exercise of control within them that establishes the importance of the role of leaders. For, as Tannenbaum maintains:

> The responsibility for creating and sustaining order tends to be distributed unevenly within organisations. Often it is the few who decide on the kind of order to which many must conform. But regardless of how order is created, it requires the conformity of all or nearly all to organisational norms (Tannenbaum 1968b: 4).

Tannenbaum goes on to suggest that there are two variables to be considered in the presence and exercise of control: First, where in the organisation's hierarchy control is exercised and second, the total amount of control that is available (Tannenbaum 1968b: 12-14). Thus, in a trade union, the hierarchy extends from the membership to the General Secretary and the amount of control varies through the hierarchy, the higher the amount of control of the membership relative to the General Secretary the greater the level of 'democratic control'. However, the total amount of control within the union can only be known by aggregating the amount of control at each level. Thus, even though the amount of control exercised by the membership in a union may be lower relative to that of the General Secretary than in another union, if the aggregate amount is greater the membership in the first union may still be in a more powerful position (Tannenbaum 1968c). This aspect becomes particularly relevant in the context of relative levels of autonomy and resources between local, regional and national levels in different unions. Therefore, the position of leaders at all levels within unions and their relationship with members is relative to the presence and exercise of control at the different levels of organisation within unions. These ideas inform the following debates on leadership within trade unions.

Fairbrother (2000a) distinguishes two forms of unionism that describe the relationship between leaders and members, 'centralised and layered (organised according to the principle of leadership predominance) or devolved and participative (organised according to the principle of membership participation) (Fairbrother 2000a: 27-28)'. More specifically, a union organised around leadership predominance (or 'leader-led') will exhibit a downward flow of information to the membership, leaders who have position through expertise rather than close association with the membership and centralised forms of accountability throughout the union. Members have no shared responsibility with leaders for the development of policy, their involvement being orientated toward YES or NO referendums (or their equivalents) on leadership proposals rather than any influence over the actions of those leaders. The union resembles more an insurance company, where members pay a subscription for the provision of a service rather than an organisation where collective action achieves gains.

In contrast, a union organised around member participation (or 'member-led') sees members actively involved in the affairs of the union. Bargaining, policy and the activity of full-time officials and leaders are all potentially open to influence and control by members. Leaders will be keen to encourage member involvement through open and regular forms of communication and a 'continuous dialogue between members, representatives and officials throughout the union' (Fairbrother 2000a: 29). This feature of trade unionism is enabled through a participative democracy based on the principle of collective activity. The union is not another service provider but an organisation that enables workers to use their collective strength to protect and enhance their individual and collective interests.

Heery and Kelly's (1994) analysis of the role of trade union leaders set out a range of approaches that approximate to these models. Professional Unionism ('professional negotiators to service a largely passive membership' (Heery & Kelly 1994:1)) is the 'leader-led' form or Servicing/Partnership model (for Servicing see Heery & Kelly 1994: 2-10, for Partnership see Heery 2002: 21-26). Participative Unionism ('activist conception of union membership and a facilitating role for union officialdom' (Heery & Kelly 1994:1)) is the 'member-led' form or Organising model (Heery 2002: 26-31). They extended the descriptions to Managerial Unionism ('union members as reactive consumers whose needs must be continually tracked and responded to by unions drawing on the techniques of strategic management' (Heery & Kelly 1994:1)). This characterisation has similar features to the 'leader-led' form or Servicing/Partnership model.

Batstone and colleagues (1977) also identified two leadership styles to characterise the relationship between leaders and members, 'delegate' and 'representative'. The 'delegate' relationship is one where the steward merely acts on the instruction of members whereas the 'representative' also leads members by taking personal initiatives alongside expressing their wishes. However, for leaders to retain the support of members whilst exercising leadership of them entails a participatory style and a collectivist outlook (Darlington 1994 & 2002; Fosh and Cohen 1990; Greene *et al* 2000; McBride 2004). Members need to be encouraged and facilitated to participate in the activity of the union and stewards need to promote issues as potentially affecting all members rather than individuals.

Whilst not denying the importance of individuals, particularly in the role of leaders, the centrality of the local union organisation for union members has to be reaffirmed (Fairbrother and Waddington 1990; Fairbrother 2000a). Whatever the contradictions in the role of stewards and the different personal qualities and perceptions they bring to it, their position as local leaders and the workplace focus of union activity is vital to the engagement of members with the union.

Clearly, the relationship shop stewards have with full-time officials says much about the particular form of trade unionism involved. For members, both may be seen as leaders dependent on circumstances and the issue at stake. Not every bargaining issue is negotiated at the local level and political and industrial campaigns organised and promoted at the national level are an important part of union activity. For these and other major policy changes such as amalgamation the prerogative, at least initially, lies with full-time officials (in particular the General Secretary) and national lay leaders. Accompanying the increased sophistication of workplace union organisation, senior stewards and convenors often acquire similar skills, knowledge and status as local full-time officials (Darlington 1994; Batstone *et al* 1977).

Yet, as Heery and Kelly (1990) maintain:

> [It is] claimed by a large number of writers that the line between FTOs and lay activists constitutes a fundamental cleavage within unions and that the interests of those on either side systematically and consistently diverge' (Heery and Kelly 1990: 76).

In Heery and Kelly's analysis (1990: 76-81) this division can be seen in competition between full-time officials and stewards with each seeking to expand their area of leadership at the expense of the other or following the Marxist analysis:

> The [steward] an exponent of class struggle, the [full-time official] a manager of discontent (Heery and Kelly 1990: 77); (see also Hyman 1979 and Darlington 1994).

Many will also claim that full-time officials and stewards have different relative objectives. Full-time officials are more concerned with maintaining the security of the union and a continuing place at the bargaining table whereas stewards are more

interested in the outcome of bargaining. Looking to the institutional interests of the union, full-time officials will also make lower and narrower demands on employers than stewards. To ease the bargaining process and maintain the bargaining relationship, they will also favour use of procedures over mobilisation of members to achieve results (Hyman 1979, Darlington 1994).

On the distribution of power between full-time officials and stewards, Heery and Kelly's (1990) survey of the available literature sees some writers arguing from Michels' (1962) influential analysis that full-time officials use their greater expertise and control of the union machine to dominate stewards and ensure their preferences take priority. Against this analysis, others argue that strong workplace union organisation enables stewards to challenge the power of full-time officials (Beynon 1973). Empirical research into the relationship (Batstone *et al* 1977; Darlington 1994; Heery and Kelly 1990) suggests a much more confused and fluctuating picture. There is a reciprocal relationship, with full-time officials often reliant on and supportive of stewards fulfilling a bargaining role in the workplace whilst stewards are dependent on full-time officials for advice, resources and support in those negotiations. The relationship at local level will often be more comfortable and mutually supportive than the relationship with higher levels in the union hierarchy.

Fairbrother (2000a) and others (Batstone *et al* 1977; Heery & Kelly 1994; Terry 1986) have commented that the 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism are a continuum and unions will have exhibited them in various combinations or in very distinct ways. Thus, labelling individual unions in this way or as adherents to Organising, Servicing or Partnership models, can be problematic. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion the distinctions provide a sufficiently robust nomenclature to characterise and differentiate the role of the local workplace and branch in the amalgamation process. First, the local level in individual unions will fit more easily into one form than the other at particular moments in their history, as during a process of amalgamation. Second, the tensions inherent in these forms have a universal aspect to them: decentralised or centralised organisational forms, egalitarian or hierarchical structures and participative or remote forms of membership involvement. The debates around these tensions prompt questions as to why, in an amalgamation process, unions exhibiting different forms of unionism

and practising different responses to the need for change result in local union organisation in workplaces and branches having a differential influence over the amalgamation process.

DEMOCRACY AND BUREAUCRACY

Leadership in the context of a trade union raises important analytic questions of a more abstract nature. Relating back to the earlier discussion on change in unions and different organising models in both 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism the same groups of potential leaders are present; members, stewards and officials (elected and employed at national and regional levels). As organisations espousing democratic principles, the leadership relationship in the context of trade unions is mediated through participative processes. As organisations, trade unions will also exhibit bureaucratic features, which may also impinge on this central relationship at the local workplace and branch (Hyman 1978).

Latterly the debates on union democracy have been revisited (Morris and Fosh 2000; Fairbrother 2006) with the issue of democracy seen as a complex of practices and relationships. The earlier concentration on elections and decision-making (Lipset *et al* 1956; Martin 1968; Edelstein and Warner 1975) has given way to more subtle ways in which influence and involvement can manifest themselves in trade unions. The emphasis on the role of local leaders (Fosh and Cohen 1990) failed to account sufficiently for the many nuances in that role when the relationship with members is considered. The informal ways in which consensus is achieved and action agreed in the workplace, is largely absent from this work.

Some commentators have leant toward the concept of a representative workplace leadership giving voice to members' issues (for example Heery and Kelly 1994; Gall 2003). However, this concept underplays the complex ongoing interplay of the relationship between members and leaders, and particularly in the immediate environment of the workplace (Hyman 1979; Fairbrother and Waddington 1990). The relationship between members and leaders is one aspect of union democracy. The question is how far leaders are the prime motivators in that relationship (Heery 2005) or whether in the presence of actively involved members a much more

complex relationship of mutual support and influence develops (Wills 2003). Fairbrother (2006) suggests that by using the concept of deliberative democracy where democracy is a process of open debate and discussion between members and leaders, union democracy becomes a collective process. How far these different concepts and practices of democracy influence a process of amalgamation becomes a relevant question in relation to the local workplace and branch.

Underpinning the debates on democracy is the tension between organisational effectiveness and a participative form of activity (Hyman 1979; Fairbrother and Waddington 1990; Darlington 1994). Both can be seen as features of union practice particularly during a period of uncertainty for unions' institutional security but also with the progressive decentralisation of bargaining, encouraging the growth of strong union organisation in local workplaces and branches. Both give rise to the development of bureaucratic tendencies to support the requirement for organisational effectiveness. The danger is an increasing commonality of purpose, activity and objectives for those occupying the bureaucracy and a distancing from the membership to which they are accountable. Hyman developed a theory of 'the bureaucratisation of the rank and file' (Hyman 1979: 58) to describe the development of these tendencies. Fairbrother and Waddington related the theory to workplace union organisation by commenting that:

> The bureaucratisation of shop stewards' organisation involves a change in the relationship between stewards and members from 'control for' to 'control over' membership (Fairbrother & Waddington 1990: 36).

'Member-led' implies 'control by' the ordinary membership whereas 'leader-led' implies 'control of' the membership. Bureaucracy provides the sinews of organisation by which both forms of control are able to operate. This observation does not imply that oligarchic tendencies are not also present in the 'member-led' form. However, it does suggest that the 'member-led' form is based on principles of member participation most often seen through deliberative democratic processes.

The inherent tensions in the relationship between members and leaders in the local workplace and branch have been the subject of analysis by Hyman (1979, 1989). Hyman also goes on to illustrate the tension between local and national levels of

union organisation and activity (Hyman 1989, 2001). He sees a pervasive tension between the perceived requirement for organisational effectiveness at national level and autonomous membership activity in the workplace (Hyman 1989: 166-187; also Fairbrother & Waddington 1990: 41-43). Hyman remarks that:

> There is value in conceptualising bureaucracy as a *social relation* pervading trade union practice at every level: a social relation corrosive of the foundations of collective solidarity (Hyman 1989: 181).

These arguments have a long history (Hyman 2001), memorably encapsulated by Gramsci when discussing the relations between Factory Councils and the national union and maintaining that:

> The trade union is not a predetermined phenomenon: it *becomes* a determinate institution, that is, it assumes a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that defines it (Gramsci 1920: 14).

As democratic institutions, unions should be susceptible to such influence and change generated by their members.

The problem identified by Hyman was, not only that national levels of union organisation may be subject to bureaucratic tendencies, but that bureaucratisation also extended to workplace union organisation (Hyman 1979, 1989). The potential impact of this relationship was to stifle and frustrate members' influence and self-activity and facilitate self-perpetuating oligarchies of full-time officials and local lay leaders. Yet, this pessimistic outlook has to find its place in organisations where bureaucratic effectiveness at national level is often reliant on activity at local level to implement its policies. Workplace and branch organisation that may challenge those policies from a basis of their own self-activity or, as suggested by Fairbrother and Waddington:

> The tensions between bureaucracy and democracy are rooted in the process whereby union members come together to realise their sectional interests and aspirations within organisations which attempt to generalise and formalise these interests (Fairbrother and Waddington 1990: 43).

The process of amalgamation inevitably involves bureaucratic procedures in organising and processing democratic processes of internal debate, decision-making and balloting for its approval and subsequent implementation.

FORM AND CHARACTER

Building on the work of Turner (1962) on the morphology of trade unions, which was mainly concerned with the recruitment and organising territories of unions, Fryer (2000) developed an analytical framework of 'form and character' to capture the characteristics of the individual unions involved in the UNISON amalgamation, their policies for the amalgamation and UNISON as a merged union (see also Waddington *et al* 2005: 5 for a wider use of this framework). 'Form' was:

> All those many explicitly 'rational' arrangements of structure – organisation, finance, rules, procedures and structures (Fryer 2000: 29).

'Character' was that:

> Rich collection of aims, values, purposes, ways of working, relationships, moods, signs, symbols, rites, 'feel', orientations and identities which go to make up what has sometimes been referred to as the *ethos* of an organisation (Fryer 2000: 29).

It will be apparent that the position of local workplace and branch organisation in individual unions at the point of amalgamation will be reflective of a unique combination of the relationships and tensions illustrated earlier in this chapter:

- Formal union organisation within the workplace in relation to the employer and through union branches with the wider union,
- Concepts of 'workplace', 'local' and 'collectivism',
- Distinctions between 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism,
- Relationships between leaders and members, and
- Democratic and bureaucratic tensions within and between workplaces and branches, and the wider union.

This complexity presents a problem for studying the position of the local context within individual amalgamations and then drawing comparisons between them. Fryer, when considering the UNISON amalgamation found a similar difficulty, commenting that:

> The otherwise valuable accounts of aggregated patterns of trade union amalgamation activity are, of necessity, couched in terms of high generalisations, which lose their analytical purchase when applied to the

natural history of one particular amalgamation (Fryer 2000: 28).

Useful as 'form and character' was in differentiating between the individual unions within the UNISON amalgamation it begins to break down once the intricacies of relationship between the local level and the wider union and between leaders and members are considered. Those intricacies are partly embedded in 'character' but work through the organisational mechanisms in 'form'. However, they have been shown to be essential to an understanding of local union organisation. Whilst the distinction between 'form and character' captures a way of evaluating unions in an amalgamation it is important to look at it in the context of the earlier discussion about organisation and locality, and leaders and led. Waddington *et al* remarked that:

> There is likely to be a continual interplay between issues of union character and issues of union form during the amalgamation process (Waddington *et al* 2005: 5).

In that context, 'form and character' will be used to capture these complex relationships.

CONCLUSION

This literature review leads to two further research questions:

- How do the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism influence the position of the local branch and workplace organisation in a process of amalgamation?
- How do the relationships of leaders within the local branch and workplace organisation and those in the wider union influence the position of the local level in a process of amalgamation?

The principal relationship for trade union activity in the workplace is that between members and leaders. This relationship is in a constant state of flux and adaptation as organisational, bargaining and legislative circumstances change. Amalgamation is one of a number of responses considered by unions to this changed environment (Dolvik & Waddington 2004). However, whichever response or combination of responses is chosen the local workplace and branches retain their central position in trade union organisation. Isolating amalgamation as the change agent at a

particular moment in a union's history makes it possible to envisage a situation in which the local level also has a particular set of characteristics and relationships, or 'form and character', relative to the pre and post-amalgamation period.

For an analysis concerned with the role of the local workplace and branch in a process of union amalgamation setting these relationships as 'member-led' and 'leader-led' is a complex process, involving pre-established forms of unionism and the 'amalgamated' form. The distinctions between the forms of unionism can be discussed around debates concerned with different patterns of workplace leadership, set within the debates concerned with the tension between bureaucratic and democratic practices within trade unions. These debates can be used to distinguish the differing sets of relationships to be found in the 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism. Amalgamation can be seen as an endogenous change agent that may upset such longstanding sets of relationships. For the local level, it is the facility and robustness with which its 'form and character' responds to that change which influences its role in the amalgamation process and, conceivably, the 'form and character' in which its relationships appear in the amalgamated union.

Two forms of unionism are relevant. The *'member-led' form of unionism* may be participatory and open to continuous dialogue between the various levels of the union's structure. Workplace and branch leadership exercises influence locally, with legitimacy and identification coming from the participatory leadership style and commitment to collectivist principles practised in the 'member-led' form. In a process of union amalgamation, such characteristics may enable the local workplace and branch to exercise influence by conferring on it three attributes. The *first* attribute is that members have the ability to formulate and express their own views and policy on the amalgamation. The *second* one notes that it is possible for members to use their facility to influence the process of amalgamation. In the *third* case, members' access to leaders accountable to local democracy may enable them to retain influence within the wider union.

The other form, representative democracy of the *'leader-led' form of unionism* allows for a relatively passive form of participation by the membership. The central leadership disseminates policy and directives from a national level and local leaders

gain their legitimacy from a position within the union rather than an identity rooted in the local workplace and branch. Such attributes stifle debate and favour decisions on policy formulated by the national leadership.

Inevitably, such characterisations can appear overstated, failing to account for the many nuances in behaviour and variations in practice to be found in organisations founded on principles that encourage debate and change. Nonetheless, they serve to illustrate how leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the position of the local level in a process of amalgamation. Seeing the presence of forms of unionism in the context of case studies on amalgamation will permit an understanding of its influence on the position of the local level in particular trade union amalgamations. This framework may enable a neglected dimension of the amalgamation process to be evaluated and considered. Based on this analysis it may then be possible to draw conclusions from comparisons between different amalgamations.

Chapter 4

METHODS

This chapter is concerned with the fieldwork for the thesis. It considers my own relationship to the process, the research methods I chose, the analysis of the results and my experience of the research itself. It will be apparent that the experience was a dynamic one. It was essential therefore, that rigour and objectivity were imposed on the process to ensure that the results had integrity and substance and were not just a passing reflection. The chapter will also address how I sought to impose that rigour and integrity.

The genesis of this research was my past experience as a lay union representative and leader (in particular that associated with NALGO and UNISON), my later employment as a tutor on training courses for union representatives and my earlier academic research on union mergers. Since I regard my research as progressing and developing that experience and research, the data I collected and utilised over that period is also an important and relevant resource for the research. This chapter will detail that data, say how it is integral to the research, and how it has enabled me to refine the research methods I chose.

Rigour and integrity are prime objectives of the research and because I have a particular position in relation to the research, I address that issue first. Then I will outline the data available from my personal experience and academic research and from this survey go on to describe the research methods I chose and the justification for those decisions. The next section elaborates those decisions with the necessary detailed work before the fieldwork could start. This description is followed by a section devoted to the fieldwork itself. This covers the initial steps in the research, my experience of carrying it out and the detail of what was done. Following this section there will be a description of the documents I accessed for the research. This will include their nature, origin and location. Next, the analysis of the raw data is explored showing, the problems encountered with the data, the objectives of the exercise, the method of analysis chosen and the experience of carrying it out. The

final section reflects on these research methods and provides an assessment of the research process as a whole.

GOING OUTSIDE

It will be apparent that I have long experience of trade union activity and the organisational and environmental context in which it happens. In addition, my earlier research meant that I was familiar with fieldwork research on the position of workplace and branch union organisation in a process of trade union amalgamation. My background and experience were the impetus and initial informant for this PhD thesis. Both had prompted research questions and generated further stages of research. From the literature research for this thesis, some questions had started to be answered and for others the issues were clearer. However, I was still puzzled over matters.

A methodology was required to achieve my research objectives but my personal background and prior trade union and research experience meant I already had a close connection with the research subject. This connection had to be recognised as both a potential liability and positive benefit to the fieldwork. In fact, it became a prime consideration in ensuring the rigour and integrity of the fieldwork. To achieve this rigour and integrity two closely interrelated issues are apparent and require elaboration and exemplification; my personal position as a researcher and bringing together a coherent set of research questions.

Coffey's work on the ethnographic self asserts that:

> The ethnographic self cannot be separated out from the facets and phases of qualitative research (Coffey 1999: 158).

The relationship with and prior knowledge of the research subject brought by the researcher should be acknowledged and welcomed (Coffey 1999: 159). In preparation for the fieldwork, I was conscious of my personal knowledge and opinions, and the advantages and disadvantages these brought to the research. The personal contact with respondents, which would form the core of the fieldwork and the prime source of data, would be with individuals of similar trade union background and experience to me (Coffey 1999: 17-37). Whilst that had the potential of enabling informed discussion from positions of mutual understanding of the issues and the

mechanisms involved, my personal beliefs must not be allowed to skew my response. To an extent, all social research is rooted in the common experience of researcher and researched, and establishing and maintaining objectivity in the research is a continuing issue. I was very aware that my close involvement heightened the problem.

As stated in earlier chapters the three research questions that guide the study are:

1. What is the place of the local branch and workplace organisation within the amalgamation process?
2. How do the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism influence the position of the local branch and workplace organisation in a process of amalgamation?
3. How do the relationships of leaders within the local branch and workplace organisation and those in the wider union influence the position of the local level in a process of amalgamation?

However, I already had a considerable corpus of data from my personal experience and earlier academic research that had contributed in part, to the development of these questions and would enable me to hone the research methods appropriate to addressing them. It is necessary for that data to be set out in some detail in order to provide the context for how I approached this task.

The data fell into four categories:

1. My experience of the UNISON amalgamation as a lay union representative and leader.
2. My academic research at Ruskin College, the University of Nottingham and the University of Warwick.
3. My employment as a tutor on training courses for union representatives.
4. My activity as a lay trade union representative and leader in MSF, Amicus and Unite the Union.

UNISON EXPERIENCE

My personal background has been the catalyst for forming and refining the research questions that motivated and focused the earlier academic research and now the current thesis. Table 1 provides a guide to my trade union activity and employment over a period of some forty years. I have been a trade union member since 1966 and the table illustrates the length and wide range of my trade union activity across all levels of union organisation.

Table 1. Personal experience 1966 to present.

YEAR	EMPLOYMENT	UNION	UNION POSITION	STUDIES AND RESEARCH	UNION MERGERS
1966	CORBY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION Auditor	NALGO	Member	None	
1967	NORTHANTS COUNTY COUNCIL Auditor Accountant				
1968			Branch Treasurer		
1980			Branch President		
1982			Branch Secretary		
1983			East Midlands District Council and Committees		
1991			National Executive Council and Committees		
1992				UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM Certificate in Trade Union Studies	
1993		UNISON	Branch Secretary. East Midlands Regional Council and Committees. National Executive Council and Committees.		UNISON
1995	NONE		Member	RUSKIN COLLEGE Diploma in Labour Studies	
1996				UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK MA in Labour Studies	
1997	WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION Course Tutor	MSF	Member		
1998				UNIVERSITY OF CARDIFF PhD	
2002			National Secretary		
2003		Amicus	National Secretary		Amicus
2007		Unite the Union	National Chair		Unite the Union

My membership of NALGO lasted some 23 years with little consideration of or any involvement in amalgamation, until 1989. The initial proposal in 1989 to amalgamate NALGO and NUPE was followed in 1990 with a proposal to include COHSE. The following four years of debate and negotiation eventually resulted in successful ballots in all three unions to create UNISON.

During this time (1989-1993), I was centrally involved in NALGO at branch, regional and national levels. The daily business of representing members, dealing with members' issues and negotiating with management and the employer continued unchanged. Despite attempts to engage members' interest in the amalgamation, most remained steadfastly concentrated on issues affecting them and their workplace. The grand descriptions of new concepts of representation within the union, working partnerships between lay leaders and paid officials and innovative aims and values seemed to have little relevance or reality in the context of grievance and disciplinary cases, budget cuts, departmental reorganisations and job evaluation. Amalgamation was an event happening elsewhere, orchestrated by unknown national leaders and of no relevance to the concerns of members and their workplace. There were virtually no attempts to bring NALGO and NUPE together to present a single voice with the employer, organise jointly in the workplace or even acquaint each other of their respective practices and structures. In practice, the historic hostility in the workplace between the two unions seemed to worsen as the prospect of them becoming members of the same union approached. Longstanding rivalries over recruitment, negotiating agendas, political affiliations and relationships between respective groups of members were exacerbated by prospective competition for leadership positions, rival forms of workplace and branch organisation. All of this accentuated personal animosities. Certainly in NALGO, and it was assumed in COHSE and NUPE, the local workplace and branch were said to be the core unit of organisation in the union, and workplace lay leaders the essential group of union activists (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1991). If amalgamation was the all-embracing benefit being promulgated by national leaders, that benefit should be seen locally if anywhere in the union. Yet my experience did not substantiate such claims.

By 1991, I was a senior lay leader in NALGO: the Branch Secretary of a large local government branch, a leading member of the East Midland District Council and its committees, a member of the National Executive Council and its committees, a

delegate to the annual National Conference. I was directly involved in or closely associated with much of the internal debate within NALGO, and the negotiations with COHSE and NUPE, over the 'form' of the amalgamated union (personal experience 1989-1993). Negotiation and agreement took place over such issues as:

- The size, composition and regularity of meetings of the National Conference.
- Similar considerations for the National Executive.
- The representation for women and other disadvantaged groups within the union.
- The financing of branches.
- The collection of subscriptions (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992).

The 'character' of the amalgamated union was dressed up in notions of it being 'new' and 'different' to its predecessors. These concepts were easily accepted because they seemed positive and forward looking but were devoid of any indication as to how it would actually 'feel' to be active in the amalgamated union or the sense of loss that might be experienced from losing its predecessors. Everyone felt safe arguing through details of rules and procedures and seemed to assume that there was a generalised set of principles such as unity, democracy and justice, which all trade unionists adhered to and did not require agreement (personal experience 1989-1993). These principles are expressed through an intangible web of informal relationships, ways of working, expression and experience, but were not discussed or even recognised. They make for individual unions having a set of definite, but ill-defined, characteristics. Each union knew their own characteristics but they could only be appreciated in comparison with that of others.

Argued from a straightforward principle of collective strength with common employers it was almost impossible to find anyone in NALGO who opposed the amalgamation (personal experience 1989-1993). However, once the detailed negotiations and proposals were debated there were intense and opposed arguments at all levels in the union. The arguments were mainly predicated on preserving the NALGO structure (in particular) and, implicitly, its characteristics in the amalgamated union. From this standpoint, other than their members, there was little that the other two unions could contribute to the new union. Partly it arose from strongly held views of the inferior nature of their 'culture' as opposed to 'ours'. Research commissioned by UNISON into the 'culture' of UNISON and its predecessor's defined 'culture' as an individual set of 'values and beliefs' (Ouroussoff 1993: 1). 'Culture' was epitomised

by the notion that NALGO was controlled and led by its members and lay leaders, whereas COHSE and particularly NUPE were controlled and led by their full-time officials, personified in the General Secretary (see Ouroussoff 1993: 3-6). The confirmation that it was only in NALGO that the interim proposals could be amended at the annual National Conference confirmed this perception and the superiority of NALGO in virtually any other facet of trade union activity. Against that, there was an equally well-organised and vocal opinion that supported compromise and new ways of working as the path to amalgamation. Eventually it was these arguments that succeeded and won support for the amalgamation.

The rancour within NALGO was undoubtedly compounded by the lack of knowledge of and often contact with those from COHSE and NUPE. My experience from attending three of the joint meetings that were organised was that they were stilted and awkward affairs and little was learnt of each other's 'culture'. It seemed that the suspicions and misconceptions rife in certain sections of NALGO were replicated in COHSE and NUPE. Despite a continuing commitment to its successful conclusion, the pre-amalgamation period was characterised by internal contention, misinformation and stereotyping. It was hardly surprising that this environment should spill over into the early days of UNISON. How far those in COHSE and NUPE had similar experiences was an open question for me but it seemed reasonable to assume that they were largely replicated.

My union activity in UNISON continued at the same levels of involvement and organisation as in NALGO. In the workplace and branch, apart from some details of administration and finance, nothing changed. NUPE had also organised in the same employer and relations with them had been characterised by distrust, personal animosity, and a lack of joint working. Largely, this division continued unabated. At regional and national levels, activists previously in the predecessor unions had to come together in new or revised structures. NALGO lay leaders had been relatively successful in the pre-amalgamation negotiations in ensuring these regional and national structures would replicate much of the NALGO structures. For me, therefore, there was a level of familiarity with the structures supplemented by the presence of new individuals. Initially we formed ourselves into separate groups at meetings and eyed each other with a certain level of suspicion and lack of understanding. In the smaller committees, the division began to break down within

the first year but elsewhere continued with little change throughout my two-year period of activity in UNISON. An unwritten but assiduously applied 'rule of 3' meant that individuals representative of the three predecessor unions had to be present in many positions and levels of organisation. Despite a gestation period of four years, intense negotiations, and isolated individuals promoting a forward-looking agenda for UNISON, any sense of a 'new' and 'different' union was largely a mirage. At the first National Conference and as a member of the National Executive Committee I recall being asked which predecessor union I was from, not how I saw progress in UNISON! There were two separate social evenings at the conference replicating the same events in NALGO and NUPE and the whole edifice almost fell apart over the question of exercising influence in the Labour Party.

Along with some other members of the National Executive Committee, I came to the conclusion that unless UNISON became a reality in local workplaces and branches by amalgamating branches from its predecessor unions into single UNISON branches, the amalgamation would never achieve its ambitions. This policy became a reality just as I took an opportunity to retire early from full-time employment. The implementation of this policy became the subject of part of my later research.

This history confirms the problems and advantages I would experience as an 'inside' researcher, those discussed earlier from Coffey's (1999) work on the ethnographic self. As Hammersley and Atkinson also commented:

> In studying such settings the ethnographer is faced with the difficult task of rapidly acquiring the ability to act competently, which is not always easy within familiar settings, while simultaneously privately struggling to suspend for analytical purposes precisely those assumptions that must be taken for granted in relations with participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 93).

My personal experience within NALGO and UNISON would facilitate the acceptance of certain assumptions over trade union practice and organisation in my relations with participants and so facilitate my access to them. However, my experience might also frustrate an ability to apply analytical research methods to the settings I was investigating by elevating assumptions over the behaviour of participants above the objectively researched reality of their experience.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH

My first engagement with trade union amalgamations for research purposes was in 1993 in the immediate aftermath of the UNISON amalgamation. I was then studying for a Certificate in Trade Union Studies at the University of Nottingham and, amongst other roles in UNISON, was a member of its National Executive Council. For a small research project (Payne 1994), I chose to circulate a short questionnaire on their experience of the amalgamation to other members of the National Executive Council, some national full-time officials, and interview a senior national full-time official.

It became apparent that while some were happy to co-operate, others saw my enquiries as a thinly veiled attempt to identify individuals for criticism or to destabilise the amalgamation at a critical early stage in its development. These reactions were common to individuals from each of the unions involved in the amalgamation and can be seen as an indication of the tensions involved in the merger process. I recall a very senior full-time official leaving a meeting solely to tackle me with concerns expressed by lay members. I was characterised as partial, through my activity in one of the predecessor unions to UNISON. It was claimed that the wording of certain questions betrayed a hostile predilection toward the policies and practices of the official's predecessor union.

The UNISON commissioned research into the problems of amalgamating the cultures of the three unions involved in the UNISON amalgamation identified the presence of stereotyping of those from the unions other than one's own (Ouroussoff 1993: 3-6). I experienced this sentiment at first hand. At an early stage, I had been confronted with a crucial issue for the researcher, adopting and being accepted as adopting an impartial position in relation to the research subject. However, in relation to amalgamation itself the experience was a stark illustration of the contentious nature of the process. Reflecting back on the almost four-year period of internal debate within each union and negotiation between them, it was a microcosm of the rancour and rivalry within my previous union and between it and the other unions during the pre-amalgamation period.

In 1995 I had the opportunity to pursue such questions, but in the context of the workplace and branch level of trade union organisation, with studies for the Diploma in Labour Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford. Ruskin has particularly strong links with

the trade union and labour movement and many lay trade union activists have completed the Diploma as a way of developing their knowledge and, on occasion, re-directing their union activity. The Diploma includes a requirement for a research project. My period of study coincided with implementation of the policy, which I had been promoting during my membership of the UNISON National Executive Committee that all branches in UNISON should be merged or re-formed as UNISON branches. It seemed appropriate for me to see how it would be achieved within employer boundaries where there could be a number of branches conforming to the pre-amalgamation union structures. I was also able to build on my previous research on the UNISON amalgamation by moving from a national perspective to one concentrated on the workplace and branch. The project (Payne 1996) included research on literature concerned with trade union mergers, documents on the UNISON amalgamation and fieldwork interviews with full-time officials and lay leaders involved with the branch merger process.

My position as a Ruskin College student seemed sufficient to distance me from direct association with the research subject, despite my previous close involvement. As a result, the fieldwork was conducted in an open fashion. In addition, I had personally identified and contacted the fieldwork respondents. There was no suggestion that I was associated with any part of the UNISON structure, had any interest in particular UNISON policy positions on branch mergers or had any 'hidden agenda' that I was working to on behalf of other interested parties. My experience illustrated the privileged position the academic researcher has in the fieldwork environment. As a result, I was the recipient of a wide range of conflicting views and personal standpoints. I was trusted that these responses would be treated with absolute confidentiality and only used in the context of academic work.

Two outcomes of the research are relevant for the following chapters. First, I was able to collect disparate views from respondents over the prospect of merging with other branches within the same union. Despite the presence of the same employer, pay and conditions, for some respondents it was as if the UNISON amalgamation had taken place elsewhere and had little or no connection with the local organisation of the union. As such, there was no rationale for merging UNISON branches and open hostility to its perceived imposition. Others were entirely sympathetic to the process. Significantly, the divergence in view could largely be located with

respondents based on their past association with one or other of the pre-amalgamation unions. As with the previous experience, it seemed that activity in individual unions coloured attitudes on the amalgamation and potentially affected its progress and outcome. Second, I became aware that the available literature on amalgamation paid little attention to the conditions I was finding in workplaces and branches whereas conversely the literature on local union organisation had little interest in the reality of amalgamation at that level.

The research opened up stark research themes for me, perhaps epitomised by the first question in my viva interview at the college: "Was the UNISON amalgamation more a take-over by NALGO of NUPE?" Attempting to unravel the underlying conundrums that were now interesting me, formed the basis of my dissertation for the MA in Labour Studies at the University of Warwick (Payne 1997). The MA in Labour Studies provided an opportunity to consider a wide range of research into the experience of work and the employment relationship. As a result of essay research for modules and my dissertation I was able to further explore themes about union merger in particular, and trade unionism in general. The research for the MA dissertation was based on existing research into trade union mergers and trade union activity in workplaces and branches. It amply illustrated the gap in research relating to the local context. The prevailing research on mergers concentrated on the national level of organisation whilst that on union organisation and activity in local workplaces and branches took little account of the effect of merger on their operation. The workplace and branch as the basic unit of trade union organisation and merger as an important moment for trade unions were not brought together in most research.

This earlier academic research left unresolved questions concerning the position of local union organisation within a process of amalgamation, the variation in the experience of amalgamation between those coming from the individual unions involved in the process and the influence of relationships between the local, regional and national levels of the unions on the process. These concerns were refined, modified and crystallised into the new research questions that form the basis for the thesis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The amalgamations

As is apparent the large majority of my trade union experience has been with UNISON and NALGO, one of its predecessors, including the whole period of the amalgamation negotiations and the first two formative years of UNISON. In addition, the other substantial case study fieldwork I carried out (Payne 1996) was located in UNISON and two UNISON workplaces. This background places me in a position of knowledge, affinity and research experience with UNISON. However, I was also conscious that concentration on UNISON as a research subject potentially raised real difficulties for the research itself and myself as the researcher. It was necessary to establish how far the UNISON experience of amalgamation was unique or replicated in whole or part in other amalgamations. My own close involvement in the UNISON amalgamation as an active member also meant that my research results might be contaminated by personal experiences, policy positions and prejudices. As a researcher, I needed checks on these results from sources other than UNISON to test their objectivity. Research which would allow me to investigate and compare a number of amalgamations and provide the necessary checks against any unique characteristics of the UNISON amalgamation and any subjective influences on the research results emanating from my own involvement in the union.

Subject to these limitations, but recognising the advantages of experience and knowledge, UNISON remained an appropriate choice. The other amalgamations would need to be selected against criteria that would provide a sustainable basis for providing credible research results within each one and in comparison with each other. Such credibility was necessary if conclusions of more universal relevance to the local context in union amalgamations were to be available.

I reasoned that the constraints of turnover in informants and experience of the amalgamation process, limited the selection of other amalgamations in addition to UNISON to little more than a ten-year timeframe. In practice, this produced a ten-year period up to 1999. It has been seen in Chapter 2 that the legal requirement in the UK for approving ballots in all the participating unions to an amalgamation and the associated acceptance of parity between them in the negotiations, inevitably limits the number of successful amalgamations. These conditions also predict that amalgamations invariably involve large unions with some equivalence of membership

size, resources or industrial affinity. Conversely, a similar timeframe would see a considerably larger number of transfers of engagement involving small unions being absorbed into much larger ones.

These limitations produced a population of eight amalgamations (including UNISON) for the period under consideration (Undy 1999a, 1999b). They were:

1988 MSF
1989 GMB
1992 AEEU
1993 UNISON
1995 CWU
1996 PTC
1997 PCS
1999 UNIFI

Of these, the GMB amalgamation involved two unions of very different membership size, GMBATU (797,000) and APEX (80,000) whilst PCS was effectively a continuation of the PTC amalgamation. The large difference in membership sizes in the GMB amalgamation suggested limitations to questions of parity between the amalgamating unions in comparison to UNISON and was eliminated from consideration. Given the constraints of time and resources for the research, I decided to limit consideration to two amalgamations in addition to UNISON. Consideration also had to be given to questions of contact and access with the remaining unions. These were not in question with UNISON from my past involvement and research but might be problematic elsewhere. However, I was a member of MSF and had been engaged in some educational work with the union through the WEA. As such, I had already established a level of contact that could be expanded in the context of the research. Of the remaining four amalgamations, I sought to identify a third union for investigation. PTC/PCS involved unions concentrated within the Civil Service giving a similar public sector location to UNISON and the rapidly succeeding amalgamations could be expected to add complications to any research. CWU and AEEU were both located in the private sector and for AEEU often with the same employers as MSF. However, a further perspective on the amalgamation process to set alongside UNISON and MSF could be provided by UNIFI, which organised in the financial sector. The outcome of these

deliberations was that MSF, UNIFI and UNISON were chosen as the subjects for the research. Table 2 summarises the three amalgamations.

Table 2. Summary of the amalgamations.

MERGER	PREDECESSOR UNIONS	METHOD USED	MEMBER CHARACTERISTICS	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	DATE OF MERGER
MSF	ASTMS TASS	Amalgamation	Professional Administration Technical Manual	Manufacturing Finance Health	1988
UNISON	COHSE NALGO NUPE	Amalgamation	Professional Administration Technical Manual	Local government Health Energy Transport	1993
UNIFI	BIFU NWSA UNiFI (Barclays)	Amalgamation	Professional Administration Technical	Finance	1999

It is appropriate to consider the characteristics of the members of the three amalgamations. UNISON was essentially a non-governmental public sector union with a high proportion of white-collar and skilled members alongside a substantial membership of low-paid manual workers. Like UNISON, MSF and UNIFI also had relatively high memberships from white-collar and skilled workers and to a lesser extent a membership of low-paid and manual workers. Despite some difference in their membership profile and UNISON being a predominantly public sector union, there did seem sufficient similarity between them to justify their selection for study.

The amalgamations also provided an opportunity for the research results to be examined in the context of amalgamation as long-term process. When this research project began, UNISON was some four years into its post-amalgamation period whilst UNIFI was at an early stage in its development. Meanwhile, MSF was some ten years old and had achieved a level of maturity. These timescales provided a point of comparison based on the longevity of the amalgamations.

Case studies

The number of amalgamations available for study totalled eight. Of these, the individual circumstances of the GMB, PTC and PCS amalgamations reduced that number to six. Selecting three as subjects for the research represented 50% of those available. The next decision was to design the research into the selected amalgamations.

One method that suggested itself was the use of surveys and questionnaires amongst members, lay representatives and full-time officials. However, achieving a representative sample given the heterogeneity of membership, employer locations and industries in such large unions presented resource implications beyond those available for PhD research.

It was also apparent from the literature search that other writers had mainly relied on interviews with key informants to support their results. However, a difficulty with this approach had been a concentration on responses from individuals in influential senior positions. This emphasis had contributed to perspectives on the amalgamation process that emphasised the presence and influence of the national leadership and discounted that of local union organisation in workplaces and branches.

Given the difficulties presented by a lack of resources and the necessity of giving proper attention to the local context, the case study approach appeared to be the most amenable research method. This could allow for an in-depth examination of three amalgamations and include the experience of an example of local union organisation. It could be argued that such a small sample, particularly for the local context, would be unrepresentative of an individual amalgamation and amalgamations as a prevalent process. However, the benefit would be a concentration on the amalgamation process in a single locality but set within the experience of the wider union. Such an approach would be manageable within the available resources and counter the bias of other writers toward a national perspective.

Case studies are a widely used research method in the social sciences. George and Bennett (2004) define the method as follows:

> The case study approach is the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalisable to other events (George & Bennett 2004: 5).

However, case studies need to be structured and focused if they are to provide data that is amenable to general application. Structure is provided with interview questions that are applied on a consistent basis between the case studies and focus by concentrating attention on particular experiences within the case studies (George & Bennett 2004: 67). For the cases in this research, structure is provided through use of the interview questions described in pages 74-75 and focus with the position of the local union organisation in the three amalgamations. In selecting case studies, George and Bennett suggest three factors that should be considered (George & Bennett 2004: 69). First, they should be representative of the subject for the research. For this research, the cases are representative of trade union amalgamations. Second, selection should be guided by an identified research objective. The setting down of an overall research question and supplementary questions in the earlier chapters satisfies this consideration. Third, the cases should lend themselves to analysis and evaluation with theories concerning the organisation and activity of the research subject. In this research, the theories on forms of unionism and the tension between bureaucratic and democratic tendencies within unions that have been discussed in earlier chapters will underpin much of the data collected from the case studies.

With a substantial body of data already available and in part directly relevant to the selected case studies, I was able to focus the fieldwork for this research on a relatively small number of carefully selected key informants located in an individual local union organisation and the wider union within each amalgamation. However, I also recognised that I would need to build on the academic writing already accessed as the writing developed through the period of the research and to ensure that the secondary research remained relevant and captured the current debates on the subject. Further, the current research extends the earlier literature research with its explicit focus on debates about workplace unionism, debates that received a much more limited treatment in the earlier work.

The workplaces

Selecting the local case studies within each amalgamation presented a number of problems. First, the available resources meant that only a single locality within each amalgamation could be studied. Within each amalgamated union, there would a large number of possible sites. For MSF and UNISON, these would be located in a wide range of industries and types of employer. Local union organisation in workplaces and branches would also be subject to variation, as would the profile of individual memberships. For example, amongst other industries, UNISON had a large membership in local government and the NHS. A study could be centred on a particular local authority or hospital. However, in either case, there was considerable variation in size of employer and membership between individual localities. Not only that, COHSE as an equal partner to the amalgamation had only organised in the NHS and the prevalence of former NUPE membership varied widely between individual hospitals and local authorities, whereas NALGO had been almost universally present in all the locations. MSF presented an even wider spread of industrial location and employers and, whilst UNIFI was constrained with the finance industry, its localities still exampled a wide range of employers between insurance companies and high street banks.

Second, the case study approach implied an in-depth local study of the amalgamation as a microcosm of the wider process. This meant that the selected locality would need to have had a history of robust union organisation from at least two of the predecessor unions and a single union organisation following the amalgamation. Such a parameter would exclude from selection a large number of localities where certain of the predecessor unions were not either present or were relatively insignificant, or where there was a continuation of pre-amalgamation local union organisation.

Third, there was a requirement for ease of access to informants within the selected locality and for that locality to be geographically convenient within the West Midlands. As nationally organised unions, this restriction would frustrate consideration of regional variations within and between the amalgamations and, through difficulties of access or availability of informants, reduce the number of possible sites even within the West Midlands.

It was apparent, therefore, that whichever localities were selected for study they could not be presented as representative of the heterogeneity of localities that was present within each amalgamation. However, by adopting the in-depth case study approach to the research, this difficulty could be countered on the basis set out earlier.

The site of the local case study for UNISON was a large metropolitan council in the West Midlands, where both NALGO and NUPE had large memberships. However, whereas there had been one large NALGO branch representing all non-manual occupational groups for the whole council plus some associated employers, there had been three much smaller NUPE branches representing mainly manual employee groups in the council. Whilst all these branches had been engaged in negotiation and representation with the employer before the amalgamation, the NALGO branch had a more formal and structured bargaining relationship across all departments of the council. It also had a facilities infrastructure of office space and equipment (partly provided by the council), employed administrators and a functioning structure of branch and stewards committees, all supported by a substantial financial allocation from member subscriptions. The bargaining arrangements of NUPE were on a much more informal basis and financial support was paid directly to branch secretaries rather than to a branch fund. The largest NUPE branch also enjoyed some office facilities provide by the employer. There had been a history of rivalry between these branches and personal antipathy between their lay leaders. Following the UNISON Conference decision that all such branches should merge into single UNISON branches there was friction and dissent within and between the previous branches, which was only resolved by the active intervention of Regional full-time officials. This process had only been completed in 1996 and was closely followed by the acrimonious resignation and subsequent early retirement of one of the former NUPE lay leaders. The whole episode was still fresh in the memories of the interviewees and provided a reference point for their responses.

The locality chosen for the MSF case study was a large tyre manufacturer in the West Midlands. During the 20 years preceding, the date of the interviews employment in this company had reduced from some 20,000 to 1,700 through a succession of take-overs, product and technological change, and reorganisations. This drastic change in circumstances was a backdrop to the trade union activity of

the interviewees and their experience of the MSF amalgamation. Although the workforce was much reduced, it retained a high level of union membership and relatively well-organised unions. Both ASTMS and TASS had organised in the workplace. Historically they had organised discrete groups of employees, differentiated by task or skill, but increasingly these boundaries had become blurred as technology and production techniques went through some radical changes. Any historic rivalry between the two unions had become increasingly irrelevant in the face of the serious industrial relations issues produced by the changes being instigated by the employer and amalgamation was a logical and sensible development. In the workplace, union organisation involved a stewards committee and joint negotiation with the employer, but the unions had continued to have separate stewards and convenors for their own membership. Although these arrangements survived the amalgamation, they rapidly broke down with the onset of employer-generated redundancies, restructuring and wholesale changes in production. However, formal local organisation through union branches was quite different. ASTMS had a branch based on the workplace whereas the TASS branch was based on a geographical area. ASTMS members, stewards and convenor were organised through the ASTMS branch but their TASS counterparts organised through a stewards committee. Both branches continued unchanged into MSF. Post-amalgamation the need to respond to the industrial relations issues in the workplace encouraged the development of a MSF organisation independent of both branches as the only practical way of organising and representing the membership with the employer. This organisation had no formal recognition in the MSF constitution and rules and the two branches remained the vehicles for member representation within the union, despite them becoming increasingly distant from the life of the workplace.

For the UNIFI local case study, it was decided to concentrate attention on one national institution and the local union activity associated with it. This institution was one of the UK clearing banks, which historically had been organised by BIFU and NWSA. The history of BIFU and NWSA in this institution had been characterised by bitter rivalry in recruitment and in negotiation with the employer. A history that the amalgamation was expected to nullify. Post-amalgamation the national negotiations continued but now from an amalgamated union basis and all members found themselves in branches coterminous with those previously established in BIFU. Local workplace issues continued to be dealt with by local representatives in similar

manner to the pre-amalgamation situation. However, for those from NWSA the establishment of a local branch structure was a major change from past practice, as was the autonomous form of the post-amalgamation National Company Committees for those coming from BIFU. These changes in local organisation and negotiating practice provided a particular backdrop to the fieldwork.

KEY INFORMANTS

The fieldwork interviews focused on a number of key informants, relying on their experience and knowledge as the primary source of data. Using key informants as an important source of data is a reputable and valuable research method for ethnographic research (Fetterman 1998: 47-51; Wolcott 1999: 156-159). Such individuals:

> Can provide detailed historical data, knowledge about contemporary interpersonal relationships (including conflicts), and a wealth of information about the nuances of everyday life (Fetterman 1998: 48).

The danger of the method is that the data may be partial and not reflective of the wider group. Careful selection of the informants and the checking of accounts through triangulation techniques are essential if that potential problem is to be avoided (Fetterman 1998: 48).

In a trade union setting, there is the added complication that the selected informants will be leaders if they are to be sufficiently knowledgeable of the issues and the intra-union relationships that relate to them. In an environment where 'membership apathy' is often ascribed to a scenario of low involvement by members in the activity of the union and a disjuncture between the views of leaders and members, selecting leaders as informants might result in a distorted view. However, the work of Tannenbaum (1968d) and van de Vall (1970: 102-108, 152-179) showed that, at least as far as those members participating at some level and more certainly for those holding representative roles, attending meetings is not the only prerequisite for knowledgeable participation. A more subtle process of communication is going on which produces a level of knowledge and accountability between leaders and members (also see the discussion on 'locality' and 'collectivity' in Chapter 3, pages 39-42). Selecting such individuals as informants potentially opens access to an appreciably wider and representative range of experience.

SELECTING THE INFORMANTS

At this stage, it was possible to predict that the collection, transcription and analysis of the fieldwork data would be a lengthy process. My earlier experience of fieldwork (Payne 1996) had also shown that unexpected and new questions would become apparent. The fieldwork also had to be set in the context of the existing and developing debates around amalgamation and the local context. For my research to be relevant and contemporaneous I would need to maintain and develop my grasp of the developing literature and use it to help explain the questions which were emerging or enable me to set out a critique of it from my own results.

My experience of union activity and my prior research had demonstrated that most individuals involved in trade union activity had an instrumental view of amalgamations. My subsequent work as a tutor on training courses for union representatives confirmed my experience from a wider canvas of workplaces and unions. Commonly held opinions were that: contention was 'part and parcel' of amalgamation, unions were just 'different' to each other, relationships vary between leaders and with members, union organisations in workplaces and branches vary within and between different unions, democracy is 'in the eye of the beholder', all organisations are bureaucratic and so on. I needed to find a way of getting beyond these accounts and I did this by focusing on the individual's experience of the union within the workplace and branch, looking back to the time of the amalgamation process. I could then relate their experience to the research questions and draw responses to them. To achieve this result I developed a set of interview questions for use with the respondents designed to elicit responses in a number of defined areas, some quite specific and others of a more general nature. The questions used related to a number of discrete but inevitably inter-linked subject areas concerning amalgamation. They had particular reference to its effect on workplace and branch organisation and operation, and the ongoing relationship between local organisations, the wider union, union members and employers (see Appendices 1 and 2 for the full questions). In summary the subject areas were:

- Introductory and concluding questions on the respondent's overall reaction to the amalgamation and its continuing effects.

- The changes in steward organisation within the local organisation resulting from the amalgamation.
- The rationale for the amalgamation.
- The procedure for the amalgamation.
- The changes in local organisation since the amalgamation.
- The reaction of union members to the amalgamation.
- The changes in the union's structures and government resulting from the amalgamation.
- The changes in the relationships between local organisation and full-time officials, national and regional levels, and employers, resulting from the amalgamation.
- The influence on the amalgamation of political views and organised groups within the union.

The intention was to collect sets of data that related experience of the amalgamation from the perspective of local, regional and national levels, and explored the relationships within the amalgamated union and its predecessors through which that experience was mediated.

Collecting data from local, regional and national levels was essential. Whilst they form discrete areas of activity and organisation within a trade union, they are, nevertheless, inter-connected and inter-dependent. A difficulty identified with the literature on union amalgamations was an over-concentration on the national level of organisation and that by largely failing to acknowledge the presence of the local level an important aspect of amalgamation had been ignored. I was seeking to redress that imbalance by considering the influence on and influence of the workplace and branch in a process of amalgamation. However, I was conscious of not falling into a similarly partial analysis by not taking into account the wider union organisation (*cf* for example Waddington *et al* 2005). Importantly the data would also allow analysis between and within the three case study amalgamations.

My next task was to identify appropriate key informants in each case study. I envisaged a case study on a particular branch and workplace organisation in each amalgamated union. However, it was important that this entity also matched the pre-amalgamation situation. The boundaries of the case study needed to have been unchanged by the amalgamation. This was most easily achieved by local union

branches based on single workplaces. The form was likely to vary with each union, reflecting their individual organisational structures. However, this arrangement would enable me to collect data that reflected the pre and post-amalgamation situation in a single locality. To gain a rounded appreciation of the position of the workplace and branch in the amalgamation I would also need to collect responses from regional and national levels of the union.

As key informants, individuals had to be (a) representative of the pre and post-amalgamation situation, (b) be in positions that provided them with a wide appreciation of the amalgamation, (c) have an understanding of the organisation and operation of their pre and post-amalgamation unions and (d) have wide experience of trade union activity. Since the data would be sourced from the standpoint of the same individuals, my conversations would encompass the full experience of the amalgamation. I envisaged that the workplace and branch respondents would be lay representatives and leaders whilst those at regional and national level would be employees of the union.

I knew that I would need a first contact that would facilitate my entry into the branches and provide an introduction to the key informants. Trade unions are complex social structures embodying significant groups of voluntary and employed participants at every level of their operation. Not only that, the location and parameters of the relationships between these participants varies widely within and between individual unions. The difficulty for a researcher is identifying a point of entry into this complex web. However, my long experience of union activity made me aware that personal contact with appropriate individuals was a necessary first step in gaining entry. My knowledge also facilitated me in identifying the regional full-time officials as the most amenable participants to act as gate-openers. The location and role of these individuals places them as the intermediary between the national and local levels of union activity and in close contact with participants at both levels. Each of the amalgamated unions in the study had a regional level office based in the West Midlands and it seemed appropriate and convenient to find support for the project there.

As a region, the West Midlands also resonates with other features of the environment for the case studies. As illustrated by Fairbrother (2000a: 63-80), it has a strong

tradition of trade union activity and particularly that located in the workplace (Fairbrother 2000a: 75-78). It also suffered from all the socio-political problems that formed part of the rationales for the amalgamations (Fairbrother 2000a: 70-73). Its tradition of workplace trade unionism was usually seen as emblematic of the engineering sector (the location of the MSF workplace case study). However, as Fairbrother showed, trade union members in all sectors are rooted in the same socio-economic environment (Fairbrother 2000a: 77) and the UNISON and UNIFI workplace case studies were likely to display a similar characteristic. Martin and colleagues (1996) were also able to show that the position of the West Midlands as the mid-point between the even stronger trade union traditions of the more heavily industrialised North and West and the relatively under-unionised service industries of the South and East made it an appropriate barometer for UK-wide considerations.

I had anticipated that the Regional Secretaries of the three unions would be amenable to their union being the subject of a case study on mergers. The Regional Secretary would also have the necessary level of authority to either agree to my proposal or liaise with the appropriate national full-time official to secure agreement, and have a good level of knowledge and experience of their union and its presence in the region. As a result I hoped to have fieldwork sites and respondents at local and national level suggested and 'doors opened' to facilitate me progressing the work. They would also qualify as key informants to reflect a regional perspective in the fieldwork data. Clearly, I would need to establish a good rapport with this individual if my intentions were to achieve success. Fortunately, I already had some contact with such individuals in UNISON and MSF and this acquaintance eased the contact process in both cases. With those contacts already established it was relatively straightforward to approach UNIFI on a similar basis. For all three I made formal and informal contact and supplied a copy of my research proposal. In each case, usually accompanied by discussion of the proposal and appropriate workplaces for conducting the fieldwork, the official was willing to co-operate with the research and facilitate contacting respondents. The basis for the three case studies had been established.

Further discussions with these key contacts established three suitable workplace sites, contacts for each and a contact at national level. Although all three undertook to facilitate these further contacts that proved to be problematic and after a number of

false starts it became clear that I needed to make the contacts personally. In practice, none of the contacts was resistant to being interviewed whether contacted by the full-time official or myself.

THE INFORMANTS

MSF, UNIFI and UNISON, their predecessors and the history and background to their respective amalgamations will be described in detail in the next chapter but to appreciate the environment in which the fieldwork was conducted it is necessary to provide an overview here. Constitutionally trade unions are democratic organisations accountable to their members, formally evidenced through processes of election and policy and rule-setting conferences. Organisationally each of the amalgamated unions had national, regional and local levels of organisation and these levels all had similar functions. The national level was responsible for overall policy, national negotiation, national and political campaigning, research, finance, publicity, education and training, and administration. The main responsibilities of regional level were for the provision of full-time official support for negotiation, representation, recruitment and organising, regional campaigning and publicity, and training courses. The local level was the principal focus for negotiation and representation, recruitment and organising, and for all three unions was structured as formal branches of the union, informal workplace organisations or a combination of both. The large majority of lay representatives and leaders were located at local level with a small number elected to lay regional and national committees. In these committees, they acted alongside full-time officials in the delivery of regional and national level responsibilities and provided governance of the union between national conferences.

In practice, this description of trade union organisation is very superficial. It could be applied to virtually all UK unions. Beneath the veneer there is a myriad of different formal and informal practices, understandings, trade-offs and relationships which together construct the individual features of each union. This complexity was something that I planned to document through the fieldwork. However, in each of the cases there were equivalent sets of individuals who had crucial roles, either in mediating the role of members, or in policy formulation and direction (such as that of amalgamation), or in both.

As such, I was able to identify three sets of informants. First, there were lay leaders who had the immediate relationship with members and provided the focus of member engagement in the union. Second, there were regional full-time officials who also had a close relationship with members and lay leaders through their professional support in negotiation and representation, but who also acted as conduits of communication for national policy as well as their administrative responsibilities. Third, there were national full-time officials and national lay leaders who were involved in the formulation and implementation of policy. This provided the rationale for my selection of key informants for the fieldwork.

These interviews took place at regional and national union offices, union branch offices, workplaces and homes. Before the interviews, I supplied the interviewees with copies of my research proposal and the interview questions. I also gave a guarantee of confidentiality. This is a necessary commitment from the researcher since otherwise some informants might feel constrained in their responses from a concern that sections of the thesis clearly reflected their personal views.

Gibbs remarked in discussing the ethics of collecting qualitative data that:

> Ensuring confidentiality and privacy is a particular problem in qualitative analysis because of the richness of data collected. It is an even greater problem with in-house research, where it will be harder to anonymise or hide the details that make respondents and settings identifiable (Gibbs 2007: 101).

Ensuring that informants have the opportunity to give informed consent to their participation in the research and making a commitment to anonymising the results are vital considerations in contacting prospective informants (Gibbs 2007: 101). In organisations like trade unions where personal relationships are endemic to their operation the association of views with particular individuals could adversely affect their position within the union. For the researcher searching for unbiased responses it is essential to eliminate such concerns and a guarantee of confidentiality is an important element of achieving that.

UNISON

National official

This official was Head of Organisation and Development and before the amalgamation had been employed by NALGO as a National Officer for local

government negotiations. Their current role had a strategic overview of staffing and lay organisation within the union with an emphasis on establishing a 'culture' for the union and dealing with the post-amalgamation issues of forging a new entity from the preceding three unions. Their role in NALGO had included the co-ordination of national bargaining activity and the provision of advice on nationally agreed terms and conditions. In addition, the official had a pivotal role at the NALGO Annual Conference in the conduct of debates. Both of these latter roles brought contact with lay leaders and branches, resulting in insights into the position of the workplace and branch in NALGO. An important element of their current work was the development and commissioning of research into workplace and branch organisation and activity (for example Fairbrother *et al* 1996).

Regional officials

Both officials had been employed before the amalgamation, one as a Senior District Officer in NALGO and the other as a Divisional Officer in NUPE. They were now employed in the West Midlands Region as the Regional Secretary having previously been the Deputy Regional Secretary in the East Midlands Region and the Acting Head of Negotiations and Member Services having previously been a Senior Regional Officer. Unlike the national official, they were individuals who had experienced the amalgamation from two of the predecessor unions and were now working together in the amalgamated successor.

Local lay representatives

Three leaders from the branch for a large metropolitan council in the West Midlands were selected. One was the Branch Chairperson having previously been the Chairperson of a former NUPE branch in the same council. Another was the Branch Employment, Terms, and Conditions Secretary for Former Manual and Craft Workers and was previously the Secretary of another former NUPE branch in the council. The third interviewee was the Branch Secretary, previously the Assistant Branch Secretary for Employment and Conditions, and had been the Branch Secretary in the former NALGO branch for the council. These individuals had wide experience of the pre and post-amalgamation situation and ongoing local union activity. They were working together in a newly merged branch, had been closely involved in both the formal amalgamation of the three unions and the subsequent merger of three former

NUPE branches and one former NALGO branch, and were all experienced lay representatives and leaders.

MSF

National official

This official was the Research Officer and held a similar position in former ASTMS. Their work included research into the development of workplace and branch organisation. This individual was able to take an objective view of the amalgamation process having had little direct involvement in the acrimony that had been a feature of the immediate post-amalgamation period when two factions battled for dominance in the amalgamated union.

Regional officials

One official was the Regional Secretary and had previously been a Regional Officer in ASTMS. The other had previously been a Regional Officer in TASS and had recently been elected as the National Craft Officer but retaining a regional role. As Regional Officers, they both had close and regular contact with workplaces and branches in representing members and negotiating with employers alongside lay stewards and representatives. They had also been actively involved in the amalgamation process and had either participated in or closely observed the confrontation of the post-amalgamation period.

Local lay representatives

Three leaders were selected. One had been the Senior Representative for TASS members during and after the period of the amalgamation and was the Secretary of a former TASS branch. Another had held the same position for ASTMS members and was currently the Secretary of a former ASTMS branch. The third was a workplace representative for TASS members at the time of the amalgamation. Now they were Senior Representative following the successive retirement of the other two interviewees. This individual was also Chair of the Shop Stewards Committee. They were members of two branches replicating the pre-amalgamation ASTMS workplace branch and a TASS geographical branch. These individuals had wide experience of the amalgamation period from the perspectives of the two individual unions involved alongside that of long and deep activity in the ongoing life of the workplace and branch.

UNIFI

I interviewed five individuals: a national lay officer, a regional full-time official, two workplace representatives and one ex-workplace representative. The last three also either had or currently held positions on a national negotiating committee. Four of these individuals were active in BIFU before the amalgamation and one in NWSA. This apparent imbalance reflected first, the considerably larger size of BIFU against NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) and second, the scarcity of current activists from pre-amalgamation unions other than from BIFU.

National official

This official was the National President. Previously they had been a Joint Vice-President and held the Vice-President position in BIFU prior to the amalgamation. These were all lay positions but the individual had secured full-time secondment from their employment with a major financial institution in order to carry out these roles. From these positions, the informant had been closely involved in the negotiations and eventual agreement of the terms for the amalgamation and its subsequent implementation, but retained a perspective rooted in the local level.

Regional officials

One official was a lay member of the Midlands Regional Council and previously had been a member of the National Executive. Previously, they had been a full-time Seconded Representative for NWSA and a member of NWSA's Executive Council. The other was a Regional Organiser for the Midlands Region having previously held a similar position in BIFU. They both had long experience of working with and supporting local lay representatives but with a perspective that also encompassed activity at national level. They had also been heavily involved in either the negotiation or the implementation of the amalgamation. This experience was also contrasted between two of the unions involved in the amalgamation.

Local lay representatives

I interviewed two leaders. They were both lay workplace representatives and members of the Royal Bank of Scotland (formerly NatWest) National Company Committee, one being the Chair of that committee. Both were also members of the Midlands Regional Council and, before the amalgamation, had held similar positions in BIFU. However,

their importance as key informants was their extensive activity in the workplace on both sides of the formal amalgamation and their insights into the relationship at local level between two of the unions involved in the amalgamation.

To summarise, I interviewed seventeen individuals. Seven of these individuals were employees of the amalgamated union, two at national level and five at regional level. The other ten were all or had been lay leaders as representatives and stewards in local workplaces and branches. Some were Secretaries of union branches or held elected positions on workplace stewards' committees and joint negotiating committees, whilst others also held representative positions on regional and national committees. All the respondents had held similar positions in the predecessor unions involved in the three case study amalgamations. They were selected for their wide experience of union activity at national, regional or local levels, their extensive involvement in the process of amalgamation and their representing most of the individual unions involved in the case study amalgamations. As such, they could be regarded as key informants for the fieldwork. I dealt with each case study in turn: first UNISON, then MSF, and finally UNIFI. The interviews for each case study were conducted in sequence and completed between July 1999 and August 2001. As such, I spent approximately 4/6 weeks collecting interview data on each of the cases. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes and, with the respondent's agreement, was tape-recorded.

The process of data analysis allowed me to reflect on the material I had collected and identify patterns of behaviour, relationships and influence within a process of amalgamation. However, the lengthy interval between the collection of the data and the commencement of the final writing-up of the thesis suggested an opportunity to strengthen and enrich it with a further set of interviews. These would benefit from the interval by widening the perspective offered by the informants on the case studies and providing a longer-term reflection on them. These interviews were conducted in 2007.

In selecting these interviewees, I sought a range of respondents who would be able to comment on the amalgamations from different perspectives. First, I was interested to re-interview individuals who I had talked with for the earlier fieldwork to see whether their view of the events and issues had changed and, with the benefit of

longer experience of the amalgamated union, whether their earlier assessments required modification. For these interviews, I was able to talk again with a senior full-time regional official from MSF (which by now had amalgamated into Amicus) and a similar individual from UNISON. Then I deemed it appropriate to discuss one of the amalgamations with a senior full-time national official, who had not been one of the earlier set of interviewees, but had also been involved with the process. Such an official would provide new insights on the amalgamation but with the benefit of hindsight. Here I was able to talk with such an official from UNIFI (which by now had transferred into Amicus). In practice, their intense involvement with the amalgamation at a national level and their earlier position as an equally senior full-time official in BIFU provided further valuable material on the UNIFI amalgamation.

Beyond these officials, who had all been directly involved with their respective amalgamations, I was also anxious to meet with those who were currently involved with the amalgamated union but had no involvement with the amalgamation which had created it. These individuals would have little or no knowledge of the amalgamation itself but would be able to provide insights into the operation of the amalgamated union untainted by association with its predecessors. For this group I was able to talk with another senior full-time official who worked with the Finance Sector of Amicus, the successor to UNIFI following its transfer of engagements into Amicus, and who had considerable contact with workplaces and branches in their development and the negotiation of national terms and conditions. In addition, I also used the opportunity provided by my being the tutor on a TUC Health and Safety course of discussing UNISON with a group of UNISON health and safety representatives.

Finally, I met with a senior full-time official of Amicus who had no direct connection with any of the predecessor or amalgamated unions apart from knowledge of MSF and UNIFI being merged into Amicus. This official had previously worked closely with a variety of workplaces and branches and was able to provide a perspective on amalgamation and the local position from outside the concerns of the case studies.

IN THE FIELD

Previously a lay activist in UNISON, I was in 1999 active as a lay representative for MSF members employed by the WEA. I had also undertaken some work for the union as a course tutor. This gave me some confidence in approaching both these case studies. However, I had no personal association with UNIFI or its predecessors. At the time, this amalgamation had only just been completed and, as it seemed prudent to allow this to settle in, it became the final case study for the fieldwork.

I had taken great care in preparing the ground for the interviews. My initial discussions with the Regional Secretaries had been helpful and my contacts throughout the area had been useful in identifying the cases and providing background information on each of them. Consequently, none of the respondents refused to be interviewed. My guarantee of anonymity also gave a level of security to the respondents that their responses would not be apparent to others in the union since for some, without this guarantee, their situation or job prospects might have been compromised.

With this guarantee and my expressed preference for its use, all respondents were content to allow the interviews to be tape-recorded. Apart from the benefits this method has for retaining all comment from respondents, I believe it also allows for a more conversational and discursive style of interview and this method potentially produces more open responses than a more tightly constrained one.

Each of the interviews was conducted in an open and frank atmosphere. I anticipated different perspectives on the amalgamation to be expressed from local, regional and national level and this expectation proved to be the case. Generally, respondents were very candid over their experience of the amalgamation. At no point did I gain a perception that responses were nuanced to reflect a position not held by the informant. I believe that was a reflection of the open nature of the interview questions, which enabled all opinions to be expressed. I also allowed considerable flexibility in the conduct of the interview not wanting to constrain responses when they strayed from conformity with the interview question. The experience of the interview process went to confirm that my careful preparation for it,

my selection of key informants and my formulation of questions were able to produce robust and credible data.

There were no particular difficulties in gaining access to these individuals but to provide a flavour of each case study I will now provide a brief impression of the atmosphere and context in which each series of interviews were conducted. In UNISON my earlier experience of talking to lay leaders and representatives at the workplace and branches selected for the case study (Payne 1996) was during the process of merging three former NUPE branches with a much larger former NALGO branch. Then, this process was proving a problematic and potentially divisive procedure characterised by personal animosities, concerns for personal leadership positions, and branch structures capable of accommodating a large and occupationally diverse membership. Subsequently I learnt from informal personal contacts that the merger had been secured, but with the loss of some individual workplace leaders who either refused to engage with the merged branch or resigned for personal reasons. I was particularly interested, therefore, to revisit the workplace and see how the merged branch was working out some three years after my earlier visit. It was gratifying to find a very different and overwhelmingly positive atmosphere to that I encountered previously, although the earlier experience still permeated many of the responses I received. This period also provided the backdrop for my conversations at regional and national level. Here informants were much more intent on considering the wider picture of the amalgamation and seeing the difficulties of the branch merger process in the context of a positive view of the future progress of the amalgamation.

My conversations in MSF were with a similar range of individuals to those in UNISON. The amalgamation had now reached a level of maturity but I was aware from my earlier research (Payne 1997) that the initial post-amalgamation period had seen bitter infighting between the ASTMS and TASS sections for control of the amalgamated union. This confrontation had permeated all levels of organisation and included full-time officials and lay leaders and representatives. For my interviews, I was interested to see that this legacy continued to provide a context for most informants' experience of the amalgamated union.

The interviews with UNIFI informants portrayed little of the rancour that had provided a substantial part of the context for those from UNISON and MSF. The whole process of amalgamation appeared to have been a virtually seamless and welcome development.

DOCUMENTS

The documents I accessed for the research had a variety of sources, included published and unpublished material and took a variety of formats. They had two important uses for the research. First, they were used as a primary source of data. Second, they provided a crosscheck on the interview data collected from key informants.

I used three sources for these documents. First, my earlier period of activity in UNISON and NALGO provided a quantity of material relevant to the UNISON amalgamation. Second, some full-time officials provide me with a small but highly relevant number of documents. Third, I accessed archived material held by the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. It was unfortunate that the Centre's archives were not comprehensive for all the unions involved in the case studies and for the unions involved in the MSF amalgamation a substantial quantity of relevant material was subject to closure periods. The inevitable result of using these sources was that documented material for some amalgamations was more readily available than for others. Mainly, this provided relatively good documentation for the UNISON amalgamation and a reduced quantity for the MSF and UNIFI amalgamations.

The UNISON documents I accessed included published and unpublished reports, minutes and agendas of NEC meetings and National Conferences, rulebooks and codes of practice and correspondence. The published reports included:

- Three joint NEC reports of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE on the UNISON amalgamation to their respective Annual Conferences in 1990, 1991 and 1992.
- A separate report of the NALGO NEC on the amalgamation to the 1992 Special Conference of NALGO.
- A NEC report on Branch Funding to the 1995 Annual Conference of UNISON.

- A UNISON report on Integration and Participation in UNISON.

The unpublished reports included:

- A UNISON report on Building a New Culture.
- A report by a lay member of the UNISON NEC on UNISON Finances.
- A UNISON report on UNISON Branch Organisation.
- A UNISON report on the activities of a 'far left' faction in UNISON.

The minutes and agendas I accessed included:

- The agenda for the NALGO Special Conference on the UNISON amalgamation held in 1992 and the NUPE internal report on its proceedings.
- The agenda for the NUPE Annual Conference held in 1992.
- The minutes of the meetings of the UNISON NEC and the agenda for the UNISON Annual Conference in the formative years of the amalgamated union.

The other documents available to me included:

- The rulebooks and standing orders for the conduct of the Annual Conferences of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE.
- The UNISON Code of Good Branch Practice.
- UNISON correspondence and reports on the merging of former COHSE, NALGO and NUPE branches into single UNISON branches.
- Materials produced by COHSE, NALGO and NUPE for consultation over the UNISON amalgamation in workplaces and branches.
- NUPE speaker notes on the UNISON amalgamation for use at the 1992 Annual Conference of NUPE.
- A note to the NUPE NEC by their academic advisor on the proceedings and outcome of the debates at the 1990 Annual Conferences of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE on the proposed amalgamation.

The MSF documents I accessed included:

- The MSF rulebooks and standing orders for the conduct of the Annual Conference for the early years of MSF.
- The agendas for the early Annual Conferences of MSF.
- Some early issues of the MSF journal concerning the MSF amalgamation and the early retirement of Clive Jenkins, the ex-ASTMS General Secretary and Joint General Secretary of MSF.

The only documents relevant to the UNIFI amalgamation I was able to access were the minutes and reports of the NEC of UNiFI (Barclays) for the period immediately preceding the amalgamation.

In addition to the documentation specific to the amalgamations studied in the thesis I also maintained a wider interest in union mergers through access to other documents. The principal source of this data was the publications of the Labour Research Department, in particular Labour Research and Workplace Report. Both of these publications include articles on developments in trade union structures in the UK and internationally. As a member and lay workplace representative in MSF, Amicus, and Unite the Union, I also received publicity on the Amicus and Unite the Union amalgamations. I used these two sources to maintain an overall perspective on the development of union mergers and as a cross-reference against the procedures and progress of the amalgamations in the thesis.

Prior (2003) maintains that the document has a dual relationship to social action:

> First, it enters the field as a receptacle (of instructions, commands, wishes, reports, etc.). Secondly, it enters the field as an agent in its own right, as a resource for further action, as an enemy to be destroyed, or suppressed (Prior 2003: 3).

This conception of a document sees it not just in terms of its content but also the social context of its production and use (Prior 2003). Thus, the documents accessed for this study were relevant for their content but they also played a role in promoting the position of some protagonists in the amalgamation process, frustrating the aspirations of others and guiding the eventual outcome. This dual role will become more apparent as the cases are analysed in the following chapters.

It follows that the documents were used in a variety of ways. For all three, they conveyed something of the socio-economic and intra-union contexts for the amalgamations and the atmosphere in which the amalgamation negotiations took place. This data contributed toward the development of an overall perspective on the fluctuating interaction between the unions within each amalgamation and in comparison with the other cases. The more comprehensive documentation for the UNISON amalgamation confirmed my own experience of its progress and provided a verifiable source of data to generate and support the narrative of the thesis. I also

sought to crosscheck the interview data against documents, where this referred to decisions and agreements in the amalgamations. Whilst this was mostly achieved with the UNISON interviews, the scarcity of documents for MSF and UNIFI made this problematic. However, the evident reliability of the UNISON interview data from this process provided some reassurance that the equivalent data for MSF and UNIFI had a similar level of integrity. The documents were an important source of data for the research, which provided substance and evidence for the bargaining process that resulted in amalgamation and from their content substantiated data from the interview material.

DATA ANALYSIS

Making sense of the mass of information collected from the interviews was my next task. Potentially every response had value however discursive it might be. Some interviews had, perhaps inevitably, strayed widely from the question being asked whilst others had been considerably more focused. It would be important to value the discursive alongside the incisive and not to lose an insight merely because of how the respondent presented it. Gibbs introduced the subject of qualitative data analysis by remarking that:

> The idea of analysis implies some kind of transformation. You start with some (often voluminous) collection of qualitative data and then process it, through analytical procedures, into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis (Gibbs 2007: 1).

These clear and laudable objectives had to be set against the particular nature of the interview data that was now available to me.

To give full value to all the interviews it was necessary to transcribe them verbatim. First, it seemed necessary to encapsulate the objectives of the exercise. Once those had been established an identification of the problems generated by them in relation to the actual data would be necessary. Then a form of analysis could be devised which would tackle the problems and meet the objectives

If the fieldwork were to contribute to a coherent response to the research questions driving the whole research it would be necessary to isolate from the data sets of key themes that related to those questions. The raw data evidenced a wide range of

responses to the questions asked at the interviews. Merely to reflect uncritically those responses would result in an analysis with little shape and few firm conclusions. A conclusion that, 'Trade union amalgamations in their impact on workplace organisation and workplace organisation's role and influence on the amalgamation produce a complex set of results incapable of informing the amalgamation process', would be a highly unsatisfactory outcome to the research. To avoid such a result there would need to be a framework of themes, which could then be used as the basis for setting out the findings of the fieldwork. Gibbs, as an exemplar of using this 'coding' process, defines it as:

> A way of indexing or categorising the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it (Gibbs 2007: 38).

In this way, a robust shape could be established for the research that would enable two forms of analysis. First, a facility for identifying examples of similar data from across the material and, second, an ability to analyse the relationships between the different themes once they could be seen in juxtaposition to each other (Gibbs 2007: 39).

To enable this primary objective to be achieved, a secondary objective was apparent. This goal was to devise a method of analysis, which would ensure that all responses relevant to the key themes were identified and located with them. However, it was also recognised that in achieving this objective the responses could become dislocated from the interview question that generated them. The context, which produced the response, might not be apparent and there would almost certainly be a need to access that context as the process of analysis proceeded. Therefore, it would also be necessary to incorporate a referencing system that would enable the question that gave rise to the response to be readily identified.

Identifying the objectives was straightforward. However, it was also quickly recognised that problems would inevitably be encountered in managing the process of analysis. Once started it might be difficult to retrace one's steps back to the raw data and it was best to try and identify the potential problems first and then take them into account within the method of analysis adopted.

The overriding problem was to isolate the key themes from the data whilst remaining conscious of the research questions being asked. Not only were many interviews

discursive and responses not always directly related to the question being asked but respondents placed different emphases on particular aspects of the amalgamation process. What was important to one was less to others. It would be necessary to have an intermediate stage in the analysis where each respondent's contribution could be distilled down to the particular issues that the respondents associated with the amalgamation process. Many of these issues would be the same or only slightly nuanced from those of other respondents. If they could be seen against each other, it would then be possible to gain an overall perception of the totality of the reactions and a sense of the themes that were underpinning the issues being raised.

Once it was accepted that there would have to be a two-stage process of analysis, first to identify the issues and then the themes associated with the research questions, the need for rigorous referencing of the data became even more of an imperative. Knowledge of the conversations that had taken place with respondents showed that the shape apparently imposed on the conversations by the interview questions would not be robust enough to survive the process of analysis now being advocated. In practice, responses would inevitably become separated from their associated questions and it would be very difficult to resurrect that connection once the analysis was underway. It was also not possible in advance to predict the extent to which those connections would need to be resurrected. The only safe course of action was to have a system of cross-referencing which would allow for the possibility of it being required.

The final problem identified was the need to be able to readily access quotations from the respondents that could be incorporated in the text of the chapters produced from the analysis of the data. From experience of using quotations from literature in other academic work, it was considered most expeditious to isolate potentially useful quotations during the first stage of analysis. It would also be necessary to reference them correctly at the same time. Referencing in this way would ensure they were in a readily useable form once the text was being produced and that they would be cross-referenced in the analysis along with the issues and themes with which they were associated.

With both the objectives and the problems identified, the next step was to actually devise and then implement a method of analysis capable of satisfying both

imperatives. Each interview was transcribed against the individual questions. This process was a lengthy one but it was extremely valuable. However, Gibbs also suggests that:

> There are dangers when moving from the spoken context of an interview to the typed transcript, such as superficial coding, decontextualisation, missing what came before and after the respondent's account, and missing what the larger conversation was about (Gibbs 2007: 11)

I countered these problems partly through the act of listening to the recording and mentally reconstructing the environment of the interview, and recording a verbal impression of the interview immediately after its conclusion (see also Gibbs 2007: 11). The transcription process enabled me to re-engage with the conversation and the atmosphere in which it was conducted. Being removed from the actual interplay of the occasion meant I could more readily appreciate the issues that concerned each individual but also see those in the context of the whole group of interviews for that case study. I was gaining wider and deeper insights into each case study, which could only benefit the research, and for the analysis of the data aid the identification of the themes that were emerging.

Insofar as I had immediate access to documents, as was often the case for the UNISON interviews, and subsequently when other documents became available, I was able to crosscheck a certain amount of the interview data against other sources. Although this was an incomplete process for the MSF and UNIFI interviews, given either the absence or unavailability of documents, I considered that the more comprehensive and affirmative crosschecking of the UNISON interviews provided a good basis for accepting their credibility. This process of triangulation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 198-200) also evidenced that the interview questions were enabling me to access data that was relevant to the issues I was concerned with in the amalgamation process, since it was being confirmed from other documentary sources.

With the transcription completed, the next part of the process of analysis was to identify, or 'code' (Gibbs 2007: 38-55), the issues that were being identified by each respondent. The process here was to bring together the issues for all the respondents in a single document for each case study. I set out a grid that mimicked the sequence of interview questions, with sections for the national, regional and local

respondents. Each respondent's issues were then mapped against this grid from the same sequence of transcribed interview questions and cross-referenced with their initials. Whilst recording the issues, accompanying quotes from the interviewee were also recorded on the grid and correctly referenced. Inevitably, this process resulted in the same or similar issues being recorded but from different respondents and from the perspective of the three groups of informants.

Working from the identified issues it was then possible to isolate the themes that were informing and generating them and start to see them against the research questions. Within each substantive theme there were also found to be sub-themes, which would benefit from being separately identified when a narrative came to be written from the themes. Rather than linking the issues with their associated themes by copying them across in text form, I decided to use a referencing system to link the two. Similarly, the issues were referenced to their associated themes as the process of analysis proceeded. By adopting this approach, the themes analysis document was much reduced in bulk from what it would have been had the issues been included in text form. This reduction was important in enabling an overall appreciation of the shape and content of the themes to be apparent and provide a framework that could be set against the research questions (Gibbs 2007: 73-89). In addition by referencing the themes and issues to each other there would always be a readily accessible trail between them and usefully to the respondents' quotes when they might be included in the narrative of the case study. Identifying the themes also enabled a further stage of crosschecking against other documentary sources so that their validity could be confirmed. This process, accepting the restrictions on the documentary data indicated earlier, successfully validated the themes evident from the interview data and provided further confirmation of the integrity of the fieldwork.

Clearly, this approach to the problem of data analysis was very systematic. It could be argued that it appealed to the tidy mind of an ex-accountant! An assessment that may have some credibility but would not be sufficient to support the use of this form of analysis and accordingly, some reflection on its use and appropriateness is necessary.

Looking back to the primary objective of the exercise, that of providing a framework of key themes for each case study from which a written narrative could be produced,

the method of analysis adopted appears to have satisfied that objective. With the analysis completed, there was a set of themes for each case study, which were amenable to the production of such a narrative. In addition, the process of analysis had ensured that all relevant responses and quotations from respondents had been captured and were readily located to the context in which they were given. The process ensured that the raw data was examined in a systematic way and reviewed at each stage of the analysis. The secondary objective of accessing all relevant responses in a form that enabled them to be tracked to their source has also been satisfied.

Were there any disadvantages and practical difficulties in using this method of data analysis? It cannot be denied that the process was a lengthy one and required a high level of concentration. Against that, it had the advantage of ensuring a scrutiny of the raw research material and that produced a real appreciation and deep knowledge of it. There always remained the danger that the process would see all responses as relevant however contradictory and irrelevant they actually were. The distillation of the raw material through issues and then to themes enabled those contradictions and irrelevances to become apparent and capable of being eliminated in the narrative. The referencing of the material was an intensive process and the extent to which it was necessary difficult to assess in advance of the narrative being produced. However, what can be said is that in its absence, the analysis would not be amenable to being sourced back to its context and raw data and a potentially valuable facility would not be available. Overall, it seems that the disadvantages and practical difficulties are more than outweighed by the benefits.

CONCLUSION

My intention in this chapter has been to take my research journey on to its next stage, the fieldwork. The methods I used, the rationale for those methods and my experience of using them 'in the field'. However, it is important to recognise that the research process is an integrated, dependent and responsive one. There is a continuing and dynamic process of primary and secondary research informing and responding to each other. 'Fieldwork' is not a standalone exercise but one organically grown from and responsive to all other aspects of the research project.

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My personal history of trade union activity and experience, related research and continuing work as a course tutor on union training courses provided an important and relevant source for this research and I have needed to acknowledge the benefits and dangers of this history elsewhere in the thesis. Here I have seen the benefit of relating to the experience of amalgamation and trade union activity of informants from my own knowledge and experience. The potential barriers to accessing a particular social environment, which might be there for a researcher from the 'outside', have not been there for me. Being an 'insider' has provided me with benefits of access, affinity and understanding which have undoubtedly aided the responsiveness of my fieldwork interviews. However, my close association with the research subject heightened the need for me to use objective research methods and I have been intent to show how I sought to achieve this requirement.

My chosen research method was to investigate three case study trade union amalgamations and the experience of an individual local union organisation within each of the amalgamated unions. I decided to base these investigations on data collected from interviews with a number key informants. These individuals were to be representative of participants in the amalgamation process at local, regional and national levels of the unions, and were to include lay and employed union representatives and officials. In addition, documents and literature relevant to the amalgamations would also be collected and accessed. These would be utilised both for their intrinsic contribution to the research and to triangulate with the analysis of the interview data. These research methods were well-attested in the literature on qualitative research and enabled me to access my own experience as a positive contribution to the research.

There were a number of benefits that came from integrating my experience in the research. First, I used UNISON as one of the case study amalgamations. This enabled me to access my own detailed knowledge as a contribution to the data and in triangulating the data collected from other sources. With the other case studies my experience was a real benefit in establishing contacts with informants and facilitating the interviews, and again it was used to triangulate some of that data. My close affinity with the research subject meant I had to be continually conscious of the need for objectivity when applying it within the research. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that the results are richer because of its contribution.

It has also been important to show the context and atmosphere in which my interviews took place. By setting the respondents in their particular social constructs, it becomes evident that the primary data collected is not just a straightforward response to interview questions but also a reflection of much wider influences on their experience and behaviour.

The research has shown two particular problems with the existing literature on trade union mergers. First, that the local context is noticeably absent from consideration and second, that merger is too often seen as a one-off national event rather than long-term process permeating all levels of union organisation. Then the literature on the workplace and branch level of union organisation has highlighted issues of the forms of unionism in different unions and the crucial role of leaders in mediating and influencing relationships between union members, leaders and full-time officials throughout the union. From this literature and my own previous knowledge and experience, I have been able to develop the set of research questions set out in the second section of the chapter. My interviews have sought to illuminate these concepts from the perspective of those actually experiencing them in a variety of workplaces, branches and trade unions but always in the context of an amalgamation involving the informants' own union. Subsequent chapters will show how this data illuminates understanding of these concepts and makes a substantial contribution to a more complete appreciation of trade union amalgamations and, in particular, the presence of the local context within them.

Chapter 5

THE UNIONS IN CONTEXT

This chapter is concerned with the three unions and their local contexts: who they were, their history and background, the environment for their amalgamations. Brief histories are presented of the eight trade unions that participated in the amalgamations, and the three new unions that were the outcome. It is also important to set those descriptions in the environment where the participants engaged with their amalgamations.

Amalgamations do not emerge in a vacuum. Chapter 3 sought to set out the various theories on why mergers happen (in particular Waddington 1995; Undy 1993; 1999a, 1999b; Undy *et al* 1981) but as suggested, for a full appreciation of the case studies they need to be set in the environment which encouraged, facilitated or frustrated them. Attention will also be given to the endogenous and exogenous circumstances of the individual unions and the interplay between those circumstances within each amalgamation case study. Here the formulation of 'form and character' (Fryer 2000) in trade unions exemplified in Chapter 3, pages 50-51 will be utilised as an analytical tool to mark out the differences and synergies between the participants.

The MSF, UNISON and UNIFI amalgamations roughly occupy the 1990s. This was a period when the political and socio-economic convulsions of the 1980s and their impact on UK trade unions became embedded in the fabric of the UK. As Chaison remarked:

> Declining membership, financial hardship, bargaining setbacks and political impotency forced the unions to explore new ways to recruit and represent workers. Not surprisingly, mergers were a top option (Chaison 1996: 79).

In the UK, there had also been a marked historical tendency toward seeing merger, whether as transfers of engagements or amalgamations, as a solution to such problems (Chaison 1996: 79). It follows that a reflection on the period provides a necessary context for these amalgamations.

Nineteen seventy-nine had been the zenith of union membership and influence in the UK. However, the following two decades saw total union membership fall from some 13 million in 1979 to just under 8 million in 2004 (Undy 2008: 24), and union density fall from 54% to 29% (Undy 2008: 33). The industrial and political influence of unions in 1979 was epitomised by the 'Winter of Discontent', but as Young recorded:

> By the late 1980s, British unions would have been incapable of launching a winter of discontent of the kind that ushered Mrs Thatcher into power even if they had wanted to (Young 1989: 533).

Such an apparently dramatic decline in the fortunes of an institution once characterised as the 'Fifth Estate' (Undy 2008: 32), requires an explanation.

Undoubtedly, it is overly simplistic to see the decline solely in terms of the policies pursued by the Tory government following their victory in the 1979 election. Nevertheless, 'Vanquishing Lucifer' (Young 1989: 352-378) was a consistent theme of the Thatcher and Major administrations, producing no less than seven pieces of legislation directed at weakening union power and influence (Chaison 1996: 88; Undy 2008: 26-27). These were supported by direct and more surreptitious interventions in industrial disputes, most obviously in the Coal Strike of 1984-85 (Young 1989: 367-378).

Alongside the political attack, unions were also challenged by cyclical and structural economic change (Chaison 1996: 80-84; Undy 2008: 23-26). There were recessions early in the 1980s and 1990s. The resulting unemployment had a disproportionate impact in manufacturing, a sector previously characterised by large plants with a high level of union organisation and membership. Economic recovery and a long-term re-orientation of the UK economy largely manifested itself in an expansion of service industries and a requirement for more highly qualified employees. The employment patterns in these new and developing industries favoured smaller sites of employment, part-time jobs and a dramatic growth in female employment (Undy 2008: 24-25). Particularly for unions which largely organised in the private sector (such as those involved in the MSF and UNIFI amalgamations) these changes had a debilitating impact on their membership levels.

Employment levels in the public sector remained at more stable levels through the period and even started to expand following the election of a Labour government in

1997. However, the pattern of employment was heavily influenced by policies of the preceding Tory government for denationalisation, deregulation, privatisation and competitive tendering of public services (Chaison 1996: 89). These provided serious challenges in recruiting and organising members for public sector unions such as those involved with the UNISON amalgamation. Nevertheless union density in the public sector remained at a relatively high level of 59% in 2004, whereas in the private sector it had plummeted to 17% (Undy 2008: 25).

Finally, the period also experienced considerable change in employment practice generated by employers (Chaison 1996: 84-87; Undy 2008: 30-31). In both the private and public sectors there were wholesale moves away from national bargaining forums toward decentralised processes at individual plants and localities as employers sought more flexible responses to global competition in adverse economic conditions. Concomitant and complimentary to these developments were a growth in human resource management techniques directed at an individualisation of the employment relationship and a consequential diminution in the scope and relevance of collective bargaining. Both of these changes produced difficulties for unions entailing a need for revised responses and increased resources when membership levels were falling and fragmenting.

However, alongside any decline, unions retained an important and relevant position in many parts of British industry and this presence attests a continuing resilience and sense of purpose (Chaison 1996: 90-91). In the private sector, where unions had previously been recognised and collective bargaining practised these continued through the period and similar circumstances prevailed in the public sector. This is not to suggest that unions' bargaining power, status and resources were not adversely affected by the difficulties of the period (Undy 2008: 32-39) but that predictions of their progressive demise were very misplaced (Chaison 1996: 90-91).

In the chapter, there is a section on each of the case study amalgamations. These sections set out the details of the amalgamation, and the history and 'form and character' of the participant unions. These features are located with reference to the environment surrounding the amalgamation. The intention is to provide a template for each amalgamation that will enable the underlying interplay of tensions and relationships set out in the succeeding chapters to be examined. Following these

sections on the individual amalgamations there is an overview of the experience of amalgamation to help inform the following chapters.

MANUFACTURING SCIENCE AND FINANCE

MSF was founded in 1988 from an amalgamation of the Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) and the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Staffs (TASS). At the time, ASTMS membership was said to be about 390,000 and TASS 260,000 (Carter 1991: 45). The total membership of 650,000 made it the largest private sector white-collar union in the world (Carter 1991: 37) and a position as the sixth largest union in the TUC. Table 4 illustrates its history.

Table 3. History of MSF

PREVIOUS UNIONS	YEAR FOUNDED	PREVIOUS UNIONS	AFFILIATION TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC) LABOUR PARTY	YEAR OF AMALGAMATION	AMALGAMATED UNION
Association of Supervisory Staff, Executives and Technicians (ASSET)	1968	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS)	TUC Labour Party	1988	Manufacturing Science and Finance (MSF)
Association of Scientific Workers (AScW)					
Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association (DATA)	1970 Section Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) 1985 Independent	Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Staffs (TASS)	TUC Labour Party		

Source: Carter (1991); Eaton & Gill (1983)

ASTMS had been founded in 1968 from the merger of The Association of Supervisory Staff, Executives and Technicians and The Association of Scientific Workers. Subsequently it had seen a period of rapid growth in membership under the leadership of Clive Jenkins, its charismatic General Secretary (see Melling 2004

for Jenkins' leadership of ASTMS). Mainly, this expansion had been through the union positioning itself in new and expanding areas of employment, or in areas where union organisation was at a low level. It had also grown through a number of mergers with smaller specialist or employer-based unions (Eaton & Gill 1983: 123-132). However, the harsher economic and political climate of the 1980s had seen a tailing off in this growth. Membership started to fall and the aura of success, personified in the ebullient Clive Jenkins, began to tarnish. By now, ASTMS was organising scientific, technical and managerial employees in manufacturing, finance, universities and health.

Organisationally all members were placed in one of 900 branches. The boundaries of these branches were a mixture of geographic, including members from a number of different employers and workplaces, or (particularly in large manufacturing companies) single employer or workplace branches. The branches were represented on one of the 16 Divisional Councils and at the Annual Delegate Conference, whilst the National Executive Council largely comprised individuals elected by the whole membership. The heterogeneous nature of its membership spread over a number of different industries. Its rapid growth sometimes outstripped its organisational development and its constitution and rules, resulting in a loose organisation where branches and Divisional Councils had their own funds and a degree of autonomous control over their intra-union affairs (Carter 1991; Carter & Cooper 2002; Fairbrother 2000a: 43).

TASS had been established in 1970 when its predecessor, Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association, had become the white-collar section of the loosely merged Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW). Never a harmonious merger, the fundamental and unresolved differences between TASS and the other sections of AUEW over the appointment (TASS) or election (AUEW) of full-time officials eventually led to TASS establishing itself as an independent union in 1985. Its growth through recruitment had been much slower than ASTMS and it had a much lower propensity to attract merger partners (Eaton & Gill 1983: 111-119). Its membership was also far more concentrated in the manufacturing sector, although those members held a wide range of occupations. If anything, this concentration had made it even more vulnerable than ASTMS to the wholesale job losses and tough

political climate of the 1980s, which had particularly affected the old established engineering industries where the majority of TASS members were employed.

If the membership profile of TASS had many synergies with at least a significant section of ASTMS's membership in engineering (Carter 1991: 40-42) its organisational profile could not have been more different. Superficially there was the same structure of local branches, Divisional Councils, Annual Representative Council (or Conference), Executive Committee and an equally dominant General Secretary in Ken Gill (see Taylor 1978: 225-228 for Gill's leadership of TASS); but there the similarities ended. The 320 branches and 26 Divisional Councils had no funds of their own or any real level of autonomy over their activity within the union. The 165 delegates to its Annual Representative Council were elected at Divisional Conferences where all branches were represented, but that was the closest most branch activists got to national activity. This small conference then selected most of the other lay representatives and national committees within TASS. These arrangements were in contrast to the 1,100 delegates to the ASTMS Annual Conference representing every branch in the union. This funnelling of representation through to the Representative Council enabled the Communist Party (CP) led Broad Left faction in TASS to control every aspect of the union's activity (Carter 1991; Parkin 1975). As Fairbrother subsequently remarked in looking back at the two constituents of MSF:

> ASTMS had a tradition of organisation where the branches had considerable financial and political independence, whereas TASS branches were tightly circumscribed, the union organising on the basis of full-time officer leadership and control (Fairbrother 2000a: 43).

Carter (1991) provides a succinct history and description of the MSF amalgamation although an emphasis on the ASTMS side of the story (prompted by a reluctance to engage with the research from former TASS lay leaders and full-time officials (Carter interview 1997)) results in an occasionally skewed presentation. However, it is apparent that the political, economic and industrial environment of the 1980s had adversely affected the membership growth and organisational and financial stability of both ASTMS and TASS. Within ASTMS, the engineering section had seen its previously dominant position of influence whither as the union rapidly expanded into the financial and health sectors. Often working and bargaining alongside

counterparts in TASS there was a commonality of interest between them and the possibility of a restoration of power and influence for a combined engineering membership within an amalgamated union. For both leaderships amalgamation would be a straightforward response to their mutual organisational, financial and membership problems, and would provide a platform for increasing their influence in the TUC and the Labour Party. To the outside world and the membership at large these 'old tensions inherent within trade unionism' (Carter 1991: 38) were dressed up as an exercise in creating a 'new' form of trade unionism.

The problem for the amalgamation was that 'new' was never adequately defined, either in terms of 'form' or in terms of 'character' (Carter 1991: 37). In the impetus to secure the amalgamation, these more fundamental issues were largely brushed aside by the rhetoric of the leadership and particularly the two General Secretaries, Ken Gill of TASS and Clive Jenkins of ASTMS (MSF 1988b). The amalgamation was secured based on two separate divisions (Division 1, ASTMS and Division A, TASS) with equal representation on all policy-making forums and a future National Rules Conference when the 'form' of MSF would be agreed. In the meantime, the two old unions would continue to operate as almost separate entities under this enabling umbrella. However, there were inherent problems of both 'form' and 'character' in forging the amalgamated union under this arrangement. Immediately, the disparity between the 50/50 representation and the almost 3:1 majority of ASTMS membership betrayed an apparent imbalance in internal power between the two divisions in favour of TASS. These statistics give an early indication of the genesis of the battle over 'form' that was to consume the energies of many lay leaders and full-time officials in the early years of MSF. Without any consideration of 'character' the widely disparate 'forms' of the two old unions would have created considerable problems in producing a single 'form' acceptable to both. However, when married to the fundamental differences of 'character' between the 'anarchic, diverse and de-centralised' ASTMS and the 'democratic centralism' of TASS (MSF national full-time official interview 1999) the blood-letting of the subsequent battle for control between the two divisions was of little surprise. The confrontation is graphically illustrated by Carter (1991) and will not be rehearsed in detail here except to note that four years after the first unified National Executive meeting at the election of Roger Lyons as General Secretary Designate, Ken Gill (the incumbent General Secretary) stated that the vote had split along ASTMS/TASS lines (Carter 1991: 38).

The interviews for the MSF case study were mainly conducted in 1999 some ten years after the formal amalgamation, yet the infighting of the early years was a reference point for all the respondents. In essence, it seems that those from TASS in Division A attempted to use their tightly controlled 50 per cent block vote to dominate MSF and create it as a mirror image of the 'form and character' of TASS. After some initial success with this tactic those from ASTMS in Division 1, together with some allies from Division A countered this approach. The superior organisation and numbers of this alliance eventually saw the outcome as a union very much in the 'form and character' of ASTMS (Carter 1991; Carter and Poynter 2002; Fairbrother 2000a: 46). Fairbrother commenting that,

> A union which was born out of a merger between two unions organised on the basis of very different traditions and practices has ended up affirming the importance of workplace organisation and sovereignty (Fairbrother 2000a: 46).

The local level of MSF was composed of formal branches and informal organisations where members worked. The boundaries of these two forms of local or workplace organisation could be coterminous but in large part rarely occurred and this was the situation for the workplace case study. Branches established in ASTMS and TASS simply transferred unchanged into MSF with no subsequent attempt made to rationalise what became an increasingly irrational and confusing structure. All members were also members of a branch but this membership often bore little relationship to where they were actually employed. The result was the development of informal workplace organisations for dealing with industrial relations issues with the employer. However, branches were the only local level of organisation recognised in the constitution and rules and, outside of direct elections for the General Secretary or the National Executive Committee, were the forum for democratic governance. This dichotomy between workplace and branch had a real influence over the presence of the local context in the MSF amalgamation.

The overriding characteristic of the MSF amalgamation was a battle for control of the amalgamated union. Ostensibly, this confrontation was between the CP-led Broad Left faction that had exercised hegemonic control over TASS and sought to extend its hegemony into MSF, and an alliance between those from ASTMS and TASS who resisted this policy. However, the contention was also between opposed forms of

unionism, the 'leader-led' form of TASS and the 'member-led' form of ASTMS. The latter emerged as the dominant form in MSF. The procedure adopted for the amalgamation seemed to either, fail to acknowledge this divide or be manipulated to advantage the agenda of the Broad Left. Superficially, the location where members worked appeared to be a bystander in this confrontation but the extent to which its position in the amalgamation was influenced by the confrontation is an important issue.

UNISON

UNISON was formed in 1993 from the amalgamation of the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) and the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). Immediately before the amalgamation COHSE claimed a membership of 190,000, NALGO 700,000 and NUPE 510,000 and the combined membership of 1.4 million made it the largest British trade union (Ironside and Seifert 2000). Table 3 illustrates its history.

Table 4. History of UNISON

PREVIOUS UNIONS	YEAR FOUNDED	PREVIOUS UNIONS	AFFILIATION TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC) LABOUR PARTY	YEAR OF AMALGAMATION	AMALGAMATED UNION
Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers' Union Hospitals and Welfare Services Union	1946	Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE)	TUC Labour Party	1993	UNISON
	1905	National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) (formerly *National Association of Local Government Officers*)	TUC		
Municipal Employee's Association (formerly *London County Council Employees' Protection Society*)	1908	National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) (formerly *National Union of Corporation Workers*)	TUC Labour Party		

Source: Eaton and Gill (1983); Terry (1996)

The history of COHSE until just before its amalgamation into UNISON is set out in Carpenter (1988). Briefly, it was formed in 1946 from the merger of the Mental and Institutional Workers' Union and the Hospitals and Welfare Services Union. Following the foundation of the NHS, it saw a rapid increase in its membership although this growth had largely halted in the 1980s with the development of competitive tendering and privatisation in the NHS. 70 per cent of its members were women although this proportion was not reflected in the gender profile of its lay and full-time official leadership. Within the NHS, it had a long history of rivalry and competition for members with the RCN and NUPE (Eaton and Gill 1983: 227-232). A

core attribute of COHSE, which was heavily promoted in its rivalry with the RCN and NUPE, was as a specialist NHS union affiliated to the TUC and the Labour Party. This attribute also underpinned many of its aspirations in the negotiations to form UNISON (Fryer 2000).

COHSE's organisation was on familiar trade union lines. Members were also members of local branches (often based around individual hospitals, but including branches for managers and other specialist groups). Branches sent delegates to one of 13 Regional Councils and the Annual Delegate Conference, and there was a National Executive Committee directly elected by the members. As an exclusively NHS union much bargaining was carried out at national negotiating committees. This feature encouraged a centralised approach to the conduct of the union's affairs, although the development of local bonus schemes had also shown the need for workplace representatives to police their introduction and operation (Eaton and Gill 1983: 227-232). Nevertheless, COHSE remained a centralised union where full-time officials were very influential in bargaining and internal affairs (Fairbrother 2000a: 54; Terry 1996).

NALGO's history is presented in three substantial volumes, Spoor (1967) for the period 1905-65, Newman (1982) covering 1965-80 and finally Ironside and Seifert (2000) for 1979-93. The union was founded in 1905 as the National Association of Local Government Officers and subsequently changed its name (but not its acronym) in 1952 to reflect members employed by nationalised energy, water and transport industries, universities and the NHS, as local government services were reorganised after 1945. The post-war growth of public (and particularly local government) services and white-collar jobs saw NALGO's membership expand rapidly to some 780,000, making it the largest white-collar union in the TUC. Although the harsher public sector climate of the 1980s had seen some retrenchment from this high in the 1990s, its members had been largely unaffected by the threat of privatisation and competitive tendering which impacted on the membership levels of COHSE and, in particular, NUPE. Like COHSE, NALGO had a high proportion of women members at about 50 per cent but it had made efforts to enhance their presence and influence in the union's affairs. NALGO pioneered a policy of 'self-organisation' to address the issue and extending the policy to include other social groups such as black members. Unlike COHSE, NALGO recruited members over a wide range of occupations, pay

levels and public sector employers, although the large majority of its members remained employed in local government. As a largely white-collar union, there was relatively limited competition for membership with COHSE and NUPE although competition had increased as the pressures on membership numbers had accelerated during the 1980s. NALGO only adopted a strike clause in 1961 and finally affiliated to the TUC in 1964:

> Some 43 years, 12 conference debates and 6 membership ballots after it was first suggested (Eaton and Gill 1983: 237).

It never affiliated to the Labour Party. This history provided some evidence of an independent 'character' to the mass of trade union practice.

NALGO's members were organised into some 1200 branches based on single employers, which were all represented on one of 12 District (or regional) Councils and the Annual National Conference. There was also a National Executive Council directly elected by the membership. Branches had considerable autonomy over the provision of training, campaigning, affiliations and local industrial relations with relatively high levels of resources to support their activities. Perhaps reflecting its roots in local government the union also had a committee structure of lay representatives at District and National levels. It espoused the principle of the union being organised and led by its members, through their elected representatives at all levels of organisation. Full-time officials had a supportive rather than participative role in policy formation and national bargaining activity and those engaged in representation and negotiation on behalf of members were even appointed by lay interview panels. Historically most bargaining over pay and conditions was conducted at national level. However, these arrangements began to fragment during the 1980s complemented by a growing steward system in branches. This development further enhanced the autonomy and influence of NALGO branches. A cadre of articulate, educated lay leaders with insights into management practice on a par with that of full-time officials often populated these branches. These lay leaders were able to use the autonomy of branches to challenge the policies of full-time officials. Factionalism, in the form of Broad Left, Far Left and Moderate/Right Wing groups, was also a feature of NALGO that set it apart from COHSE and NUPE (Terry 1996). Decentralisation and lay involvement were particular features of NALGO's 'character' that permeated the negotiations over amalgamation (Fairbrother 2000a:54; Terry 1996).

NUPE's earlier history is in two volumes by Craik (1955, 1968). The union had originated in 1908 as the National Union of Corporation Workers becoming NUPE in 1928. Like COHSE and NALGO, it saw rapid growth in its membership with the post-1945 development of local government and NHS services to a maximum of some 700,000 members. However, it had suffered significantly greater deprivations on its membership from the mid-1980s with the introduction of government and employer policies for privatisation and competitive tendering, reducing membership to some 550,000 immediately prior to the amalgamation. Two-thirds of NUPE's members and about 50 per cent of its stewards were women. Many of these members worked part-time on low pay as cleaners, school meals staff and domestic staff in local government and the NHS (Eaton and Gill 1983: 242-250). Like NALGO, the union had started to make provision for greater involvement in its affairs by its women members. NUPE members were employed in many of the same workplaces as those of NALGO in local government, universities, water and the NHS. In the NHS, they also worked alongside members of COHSE although mainly in low paid manual jobs. The union also recruited smaller numbers of white-collar employees and there was some competition for members with NALGO but even more with COHSE where both unions were often recruiting from the same employee groups in the NHS. However, NUPE's relationship with NALGO was also coloured by NALGO's members being seen as the managers of NUPE members and the administrators of the policies of privatisation and competitive tendering that were adversely affecting them but with no equivalent impact on their own employment (Fryer 2000: 26; Personal experience 1982-1992; Undy 1999: 453). NUPE was a longstanding affiliate of the TUC and the Labour Party and within both organisations had continuously championed the cause of low paid employees and the need for a statutory minimum wage. Since 1928, it also had a policy of promoting the creation of one union for all public employees (Eaton and Gill 1983: 242-250; Fryer 2000).

NUPE's local organisation was based on a network of 1600 branches usually based on individual employers or occupational groups within one employer. The union had also sought to more closely integrate its growing number of workplace stewards into the union's affairs by bringing them together in District Committees matching individual employers together with the secretaries of all branches organising in that employer. These District Committees then sent delegates to the Area Committee for

each service (for example local government, health, etc) who were in turn represented on one of the 11 Divisional (or regional) Councils. There was also an Annual Divisional Conference where each District Committee was represented together with the Divisional Council. At national level, the National Conference with delegates from most branches met annually and there was an Executive Council directly elected by the membership. NUPE's full-time officials played a more active role in the internal affairs of the union than those in NALGO and regularly attended branch meetings in addition to their representation and negotiation work. Within NUPE, their relationship with lay representatives and leaders was seen as one of partnership although the union was characterised as 'officer (or leader) led' by those in NALGO espousing the principles of 'member-led' (Fairbrother 2000a:54; Terry 1996).

The UNISON amalgamation in 1993 was the largest in British trade union history. It has been variously referred to and examined since its inception (for example Carter and Poynter 1999; Dempsey 2004; Fairbrother 2000a; Ironside & Seifert 2000; Waddington *et al* 2005) but for fuller accounts the work either edited (2000a) or written (1996) by Terry is particularly insightful. Perhaps reflecting on the internal battles that consumed MSF immediately after its amalgamation; COHSE, NALGO and NUPE adopted an approach to their amalgamation of resolving issues of organisational structure before the formal amalgamation (Carter & Poynter 1999). The initial impetus for the amalgamation had been motions to the NALGO and NUPE Annual Conferences in 1988 followed in 1989 by COHSE's decision to join the talks (although on a twin-track basis which allowed for the possibility of continued independence) (Fryer 2000; Terry 2000b). None of the three unions was in financial difficulties and remained strong, well-organised unions despite the difficulties of membership losses and consequent reductions in resources suffered by COHSE and (particularly) NUPE from the imposition of privatisation and competitive tendering. There was no compelling rationale of survival as an impetus for the amalgamation (Fryer 2000). Rather the 'cold logic' (Ironside & Seifert 2000: 383) for the amalgamation was based on a single union enhancing independence from employers and the government, strengthening collective bargaining and a greater ability for campaigning and industrial action in support of its aims (Ironside & Seifert 2000: 384-385). There was strong support for the amalgamation across all three unions despite such deep-seated divisions as:

- The long and often bitter rivalry between COHSE and NUPE in the NHS,
- NALGO and NUPE crossing each other's picket lines and poaching each other's members in local government, and
- NUPE regarding NALGO members as being the 'bosses' and accusing them of implementing cuts affecting its members (Fryer 2000).

However, the earlier descriptions of each union would suggest a fundamental schism between the 'member-led' characterisation of NALGO and the 'leader-led' one of COHSE and NUPE. Although these labels were always simplistic, they did point to fundamental differences of opinion between the respective lay activists over the best way to run a union (Terry 2000b). As was shown by subsequent research carried out for UNISON (Ouroussoff 1993) they were also strongly held beliefs by the lay activists of each union about the 'culture' of the other two. Unsurprisingly, therefore, much of the ensuing negotiation between the unions revolved around devising a structure that could reconcile this divide (Fryer 2000; Terry 1996). NALGO stressed branch organisation and autonomy plus a strong centre for policy development and engagement with government, while COHSE and NUPE emphasised the latter but accepted the need for decentralisation to reflect moves away from national bargaining. As Terry described it:

> [There was a search for] 'controlled decentralisation' to rebalance the articulation between branch and centre to reflect new needs and pressures (Terry 2000b: 5).

The debate and negotiation over UNISON's 'form and character' continued unabated over a period of four years, four sets of Annual Conferences, one special NALGO Conference and three joint reports (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1990, 1991, 1992). As Fryer remarked:

> Talk of matters to do with its 'character' in the merger discussions themselves was always bound to sound rather strange. It could all too easily appear somewhat vague or 'waffly', even exciting suspicion and being seen as potentially dangerous (Fryer 2000: 45).

When this danger was suspected, other partners resorted to questions of organisational 'form' to constrain and nullify any ulterior motive. NALGO largely set the agenda for the negotiations by asserting their 'bottom lines' of 'lay control and representation at all levels' and 'branch autonomy' (Fryer 2000, Terry 1996: 94-96).

Against this, NUPE and to a lesser extent COHSE tried to restrict the NALGO practices of 'internal' campaigning, indiscipline and factionalism, of which they were highly critical.

The intense internal debate within NALGO over the amalgamation confirmed the concerns of COHSE and NUPE over these features of NALGO's 'character'. Thus, each of the Joint NEC Reports to the three Annual National Conferences was up for amendment at that of NALGO but had to accepted or rejected in full by COHSE and NUPE conferences (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5-7). These reports were the result of a yearlong process of detailed negotiation and agreement. Thus, only one of the parties to the amalgamation could nullify or radically change their substance. Understandably, this ability did not sit well with the other two. However, they were unable to influence the 'form' of NALGO's conference, which allowed for such debate and amendment.

To compound this frustration they saw the debate in NALGO being largely orchestrated by well-organised factions. Two of these factions appeared to be acting in defiance of the recommendations of a National Executive Council elected by the NALGO membership, but itself riven by factionalism. These factions were allowed free-reign to campaign and organise throughout the union facilitated by the substantial resources allocated to branches and District Councils. Such perceived levels of factionalism, indiscipline and use of union resources to support open campaigning against national policy were anathema to COHSE and NUPE (Personal experience 1982-1992; Terry 1996: 90; Undy 1999: 454-457; Undy *et al*: 118-124).

Not only that, the NALGO process of amendment further extended national negotiations over the amalgamation as its conference's proposals had to be negotiated before further progress could be made. NALGO even had to have a Special National Conference in March 1992 to resolve its internal wrangling over the amalgamation, before the joint Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992) could be taken to the three penultimate National Conferences in 1992. Although never openly acknowledged, there is little doubt that the four-year period of pre-amalgamation negotiation was largely the result of the internal machinations of NALGO. However, even if COHSE and NUPE were intent on containing or curtailing such dissent and debate in UNISON, legislating for the change within the 'form' of the new union

proved to be very problematic and inevitably provoked even more accentuated unrest and amendment from NALGO. One example of the high level of debate within NALGO was the NALGO Special National Conference in 1992. This event was unique to NALGO but despite it being held after nearly three years of intense negotiation over the amalgamation and called to debate a report only produced by the NALGO NEC (NALGO 1992a), that report still attracted 84 amendments and 2 emergency motions (NALGO 1992b). In practice, the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992) attenuated or qualified most of COHSE and NUPE's proposals to achieve a more disciplined approach to policy-making. The debate over this continued into UNISON.

The outcome was a 'form' of union organisation and operation that was closer to that of NALGO with considerable autonomy for large, well-resourced branches, branch-based Regional Councils and a large branch-based Annual Conference (Terry 1996). To counter the concerns of COHSE and NUPE that such a 'form' would come to be dominated by the articulate, educated lay activists of NALGO and to provide mechanisms to reflect the heterogeneous membership of the new union in its democracy, concepts of Proportionality and Fair Representation were also introduced. Initially, Proportionality provided for the membership of the National Executive and delegates to the Annual Conference to be proportionate to the number of low paid women members in the union, but was intended for implementation at all levels of organisation in the union. Subsequently, this principle was to be extended to reflect pay levels and other categories of difference (Fair Representation). For COHSE and NUPE, since they had proportionately more women members than NALGO and overwhelmingly they were low paid, Proportionality provided a means of ensuring the continued presence of their lay activists at national level. It also instituted an innovative policy that developed NALGO's longstanding advocacy of equal rights and self-organisation. It appealed to all three unions (Terry 1996).

COHSE and NUPE were also concerned to ensure that their close relationship with the Labour Party was retained in UNISON. NALGO had always eschewed affiliation, historically from a position akin to that of Civil Service unions of its members having to work to elected local government councillors of all political persuasions. More recently, however, (at least for its lay leaders) the policy enabled the union to adopt policies more 'left-wing' than those of the Labour Party (Ironside & Seifert 2000: 4,

61, 215-217). The pragmatic expedient of having two political funds solved what could have been a contentious issue of whether or not to affiliate the amalgamated union. There would be an Affiliated Fund for affiliation to the Labour Party and a General Fund for other political campaigning. A solution that enabled both traditions to be continued (Fryer 2000).

The establishment of Service Groups for each employment sector such as Health and Local Government satisfied the concern of COHSE to retain an identity for the specialist NHS union within the new union. These Groups had a high level of autonomy over their bargaining activity and continued a 'form' already present in NALGO.

However, despite these developments in 'form' there is a view that there was a 'split' between head office organisation and branches:

> In practice [UNISON] retained much of an idealisation of the principles informing the NALGO membership during the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, there was a view that the only effective way to deal with the impact of restructuring was via relatively centralised forms of organisation and activity. In this respect, there was an attempt among the head office staff to affirm the full-time officer traditions associated with NUPE (Fairbrother 2000a: 61).

A significant development in UNISON following the amalgamation was the process of establishing UNISON branches throughout the union, as opposed to branches continuing unchanged from the predecessor unions. This process involved merging individual branches to create single 'employer-based' branches as envisaged in the Final Report of the amalgamation negotiations (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27-28). Branches were to be the core element of UNISON'S structure with boundaries that were synonymous with those of individual employers and any others engaged in delivering services previously carried out by that individual employer but now privatised or contracted out. As such, they were also the principal forums through which negotiation and representation with that employer and its associates were to be organised. Within the union, they would also be the local manifestation of democratic governance and enjoy a relatively high level of resources to support autonomous action over a wide range of local activity. For most purposes, the process involved merging an existing NALGO 'employer-based' branch with one or

more COHSE and NUPE employer-based, occupation-based or geographical-based branches. Geographical and other branches disappeared and their members were distributed amongst the new 'employer-based' branches in the same geographical area. The resources and autonomy of the new UNISON model were much closer to NALGO branches than COHSE and NUPE branches. Initially this process took place on a voluntary basis but following an Annual Delegate Conference decision in 1995 was enforced on a national basis and was largely completed during 1996. The resulting UNISON branches vary markedly in membership numbers and exhibit a range of steward and representative organisation within a consistent model of branch organisation. It follows that the transition of local organisation from pre to post-amalgamation in UNISON was a complex and potentially problematic process and these difficulties are strongly reflected by the fieldwork evidence.

During the course of the case study interviews, the Birmingham Branch of UNISON was suspended from operating as a branch. The ostensible issue was a concern by national full-time officials with factionalism in the branch (see chapter 7, pages 191-192). Birmingham is the largest single branch in UNISON with some 18,000 members. It had been created from a merger of five former NUPE branches and a single former NALGO branch, with a long history of mutual antipathy and rivalry between them. The suspension involved national, regional and local levels of organisation and for the West Midlands Region, in particular, intensive activity by full-time officials and numbers of lay leaders. Whilst the circumstances and outcome of the suspension is not a feature of the study, the event impinged on the responses of a number of interviewees.

It is possible to isolate issues that framed the environment of the amalgamation and its aftermath. The 'form and character' of NALGO and COHSE/NUPE had marked differences for those shaping the amalgamation. Often characterised as 'member-led' for NALGO and 'officer-led' for COHSE/NUPE, labels that were often gross over-simplifications of 'character' but nevertheless accepted as reality and zealously wielded to support positions in the negotiations by many of those influencing the amalgamation. How far those characterisations impinged on the emergent 'form and character' of UNISON is an important issue. COHSE, NALGO and NUPE sought to resolve questions of 'form', but much less those of 'character', before the amalgamation and this decision also played a crucial role in setting the environment

for the amalgamation and the stage for what followed. It is also apparent that factions played a role in the amalgamation, not between the participants but within NALGO. Further, the union's membership was heterogeneous in ways that were potentially divisive. It appeared in a number of guises, mainly involving relations between better-educated and articulate white-collar members and blue-collar members, and between managers and managed when both groups were members. The introduction of policies of Proportionality and Fair Representation can be seen as a partial response to these divides. Such policies were unique to the UNISON amalgamation as was the post-amalgamation process of merging branches and these policies form further issues for the environment of the amalgamation.

THE UNION FOR THE FINANCE INDUSTRY

UNIFI was formed in 1999 from the amalgamation of the Banking Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU), the NatWest Staff Association (NWSA) and The Union for the Finance Industry (UNiFI). At the time of the amalgamation, BIFU claimed a membership of 110,000, NWSA 40,000 and UNiFI 40,000. The total membership of 190,000 made UNIFI the largest solely finance sector trade union in Britain and one of the largest worldwide (Morris *et al* 2001). Its history is illustrated in Table 5.

One point of terminology needs to be addressed, distinguishing between the use of UNiFI and UNIFI in the text. UNiFI was the result of a name change by the Barclays Bank Staff Association and was one of the three unions party to the amalgamation, whereas UNIFI was the name chosen for the amalgamated union. To avoid confusion between the two, UNiFI will henceforth appear as UNiFI (Barclays) and UNIFI as itself.

Table 5. History of UNIFI

PREVIOUS UNIONS	YEAR FOUNDED	PREVIOUS UNIONS	AFFILIATION TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC) LABOUR PARTY	YEAR OF AMALGAMATION	AMALGAMATED UNION
Bank Officers' Guild Scottish Bankers' Association	1946	Banking Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) (formerly *National Union of Bank Employees*)	TUC	1999	Union for Finance Industry (UNIFI)
District Bank Staff Association and Ladies Guild Westminster Bank Guild	1969	NatWest Staff Association (NWSA)			
	1918	Union for Finance Industry (UNiFI) (formerly *Barclays Bank Staff Association*)	TUC		

Source: Eaton and Gill (1983); Morris and colleagues (2001)

BIFU could trace its history back to 1946 and the merger of the Bank Officers' Guild and the Scottish Bankers' Association as The National Union of Bank Employees, the subsequent name change reflecting a number of mergers with staff associations in the insurance industry. It had seen a period of steady membership growth on the back of expanding employment in the finance sector supported by aggressive recruitment. Within the sector, BIFU portrayed itself as the only 'real union' being independent of the employers, organising across the sector, with a strike clause, employing specialist union officials and affiliated to the TUC. These features marked it out from the staff associations (like NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)) who historically had been fostered by individual employers and had none of the other attributes extolled by BIFU. This differentiation had established a long period of intense rivalry between BIFU and the staff associations in which neither had ever been able to secure a decisive victory and employers became adept at playing off the unions against each other. Latterly, however, a decline in retail banking through high street

branches, the development of call centres and internet facilities, and consequent changes in employment practices from secure 'jobs for life' to part-time and agency work had impacted on union recruitment and imposed new pressures on negotiation and representation of members (Morris *et al* 2001; Gall 2001).

Reflecting its 'real union' status BIFU's 'form' was on 'union' lines with members organised in some 350 branches (mainly geographical but with some based on single employers or workplaces and occupations), 14 branch-based Regional Councils, a branch-based Annual Conference and an Executive Committee elected by the membership. The union was also a longstanding affiliate of the TUC but of no political party (Eaton and Gill 1983: 288-293). Negotiation with individual employers was dealt with through separate National Institution Committees and, even as national industry-wide bargaining disintegrated, the Executive Committee retained the final authority to approve all agreements. BIFU remained a quite centralised union (Morris *et al* 2001).

NWSA was formed in 1969 when the District and Westminster banks merged to become the National Westminster (NatWest) and their respective staff associations, The District Bank Staff Association and Ladies Guild and the Westminster Bank Guild, similarly merged. Historically NWSA, like the other staff associations, had a close affinity with and its resources largely provided by its associated employer, the NatWest Bank. Along with the other staff associations in the Clearing Banks Union and with BIFU, negotiations over pay and conditions were largely conducted on an industry-wide basis. However, with the 1986 deregulation of the finance industry this system disappeared, to be replaced by direct negotiation with individual employers. This harsher competitive climate encouraged employers to move away from industrial practices based on pluralism and paternalism and largely severed the consensual relationship with their respective staff associations. In response, they were soon adopting practices such as industrial action and employed union officials (Gall 2001; Morris *et al* 2001).

However, as a single employer union, NWSA never felt the need to change its 'form' to one closer to standard 'union' practice. There was an elected Executive Committee but then a system of area and regional representatives, loosely organised in Area Committees, to provide the link between local workplaces and the Executive

Committee. This committee was also the focus for negotiation and representation with the employer. This structure made it possible to develop a close relationship between local and national within the union. Although some union officials were employed by NWSA there remained a considerable number of seconded employees from the NatWest Bank involved in negotiation and representation and it was only in 1994 that a General Secretary from outside NatWest was selected (Morris *et al* 2001).

UNiFI (Barclays) was first established in 1918, as the Barclays Bank Staff Association. Its trajectory as a staff association was similar to that of NWSA, as was its development after deregulation in 1986. The name change in 1995 also signified ambitions to recruit across the finance sector and, as a further indication of its progress into the trade union mainstream; it affiliated to the TUC in 1996. NWSA had developed similar recruitment ambitions but rejected a name change and remained unaffiliated to the TUC (although it did send a delegation to the TUC Congress).

The fullest account of the UNIFI amalgamation can be found in Morris and colleagues (2001) in the context of wider changes in the finance industry. Gall (2001) also considers the main elements within an assessment of the development of industrial relations in the banking sector. In contrast, Sayce (1999) provides some useful insights on UNiFI (Barclays) from an insider perspective. Given the history of enmity and competition between BIFU and the staff associations an amalgamation between BIFU and two staff associations might seem a surprising development, yet circumstances combined in the late 1990s to make amalgamation logical and necessary. The dismembering of national cross-employer bargaining after deregulation in 1986 generated a new set of demands on unions to engage with individual employers in a far more difficult industrial relations environment (Gall 2001). BIFU and either NWSA or UNiFI (Barclays) were both organising in relation to their respective major employers and the new situation increasingly encouraged them to see the benefits of working together on issues rather than allow the employer to divide them. Union memberships had also been adversely affected by the development of individualised employment contracts, performance pay systems, and a rapid growth in part-time working and use of agency employees in call centres and internet banking. When the demand for union services was rising rapidly, the resources to provide them were diminishing.

Although BIFU had three times the membership than either NWSA or UNiFI (Barclays) its asset base was only at the same level and if anything its membership loss was at an even higher rate (Morris *et al* 2001). Therefore, resources and bargaining imperatives were both important drivers for amalgamation and the relative weakness of BIFU's membership and resources position created an equal balance of position between the three, despite the disparity in membership numbers. Yet internal changes of 'form and character' in all three were also necessary before amalgamation could become a realistic objective. The changes in the profile of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) removed BIFU's difficulties with them not being 'real unions', whilst NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)'s wish for autonomous bargaining arrangements was potentially satisfied by BIFU dropping its previous demands for amalgamation to be on the basis of full integration into BIFU's structures. The final barrier to be removed was the presence of General Secretaries in all three who harboured personal antipathies and adherence to previous rivalries. Coincidentally all three individuals retired in the mid-1990s and their successors were all ready to move beyond the old enmities and seek a mutual solution to the difficulties facing their unions.

In 1997, formal amalgamation talks started between BIFU and NWSA but were soon joined by UNiFI (Barclays) (Sayce1999). The outcome was a 'form' that married elements of both BIFU and NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays). The autonomous company bargaining practised by NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays) was preserved alongside the existing structure of BIFU's branches, regions and annual conference (Morris *et al* 2001). When put to ballot BIFU voted 96 per cent for amalgamation on a 37 per cent turnout, NWSA voted 91 per cent on a 43 per cent turnout and UNiFI (Barclays) voted 93 per cent on a 39 per cent turnout (Gall 2001). These were remarkably high majorities and turnouts for such ballots and provided strong evidence of the support of members for the new venture.

UNIFI's local level of organisation was largely based on geographical branches. However, as a union organising in the finance sector much of its negotiating activity was with large national financial institutions, conducted at a national level, and with considerable autonomy for each institution's National Company Committee. Local workplace activity was located in regional centres and local branches of these

institutions and was mainly concerned with representation and immediate health and safety issues. The branch system was a legacy of BIFU, autonomous National Company Committees that of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

It would appear that issues of 'battles for control', 'rival factions' and 'heterogeneity' did not feature in the UNIFI amalgamation. It appeared to be a seamless and amicable transition from rivalry and competition to a new unity and strength. Yet this description does indicate clear differences of 'form and character' between BIFU and NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays) and the amalgamation did precipitate the loss of numbers of lay activists, particularly from NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays). How far these differences influenced the outcome of the amalgamation in terms of the 'form and character' of UNIFI is a relevant issue to consider.

CONCLUSION

From this survey of the three unions, it can be seen that there is a certain commonality between them in the rationale for their amalgamations. Principally this rationale is located around an industrial logic conditioned by a conjunction of economic and/or political circumstances. In the early eighties, many members of ASTMS and TASS found themselves working in similar occupations, often for the same employer and subject to the depredations of a harsh economic climate. This environment generated major changes in production techniques and skill requirements accompanied by major restructuring and job losses, particularly in the manufacturing sector where many of their members were located. Later on those in COHSE, NALGO and NUPE found themselves in similar circumstances, often working for the same employers and under attack because of industrial change, largely generated by government-imposed policies. The depredations on COHSE and, particularly, NUPE members from government and employer led policies of competitive tendering for and contracting-out of work undertaken by these members were damaging to pay, conditions and jobs. NALGO members could easily see the attacks also moving in their direction. Later still in the 1990s, despite being employed in the successful and expanding finance sector, members of BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) found themselves working alongside each other in the same occupations and under attack from employer-generated changes. For all three groups of unions the threatening industrial environment was associated with an atmosphere of open political antipathy to trade union organisation

from successive Conservative governments (McIlroy 1991). A particularly damaging effect for them was seeing their membership base either stagnating or (for most) falling with resulting impacts on their resources, even more damaging when increased resources were necessary to defend members against the industrial attack. The logic of joining to present a larger, stronger and better-resourced resistance was inescapable.

However, it is apparent that the 'form and character' of the partners to these amalgamations were often different to each other. In all three, these variations appear to have been recognised and even seen as a problem to be addressed if a successful amalgamation was to be achieved. The catch-all phrase 'new union' was often used to describe the edifice which would replace the 'old' and would, by definition, be 'different' and untainted by association with 'form and character' from the past, with the prospect of an innovative and confident future. The vision of those who promoted these amalgamations should not be denigrated. As Fryer (2000) aptly set out in discussing the UNISON amalgamation these motives inescapably concern 'form' and 'character' and in the maelstrom of negotiation 'form' is a far more tangible issue to argue and agree over. It also suits the predilections of individuals whose day-to-day experience revolves around similar activity of negotiation over pay and conditions with employers. 'Character' all too easily descends into highly subjective labels for your own and other organisations, which bear little objective analysis but succinctly ascribe values that support your own beliefs about union practice. Thus for NALGO lay leaders their union = 'member-led' whereas COHSE/NUPE = 'leader-led', whilst for their COHSE/NUPE counterparts 'member-led' = undisciplined factions and disunity and 'leader-led' = mutually beneficial partnership with full-time officials. Similar labelling can be observed in the other amalgamations. The negotiations tended to be partial in their attempts to move beyond the 'old' despite the high and laudable ideals that often initially imbued the negotiators and those they represented. The observed result from this survey is that the amalgamated union bears a much closer resemblance to one of the participants than the others. Thus, for UNISON read NALGO, for MSF read ASTMS and for UNIFI read BIFU. Inevitably, this assessment is superficial and for UNIFI, the presence of National Company Committees with autonomous bargaining powers evidences a strong element of NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays).

This concentration on 'form' presents a problem since the much more intangible but equally important concept of 'character' and its presence, change and transition in a process of amalgamation has not been addressed. What is also described as the 'feel' or 'ethos' of a union has an equal status to 'form' for those involved in union activity. It is a difficult concept for a researcher to set down objectively and without the danger of making value judgements on its shape and ingredients in advance of the voice of informants being heard. Nevertheless, that it was present and constituted an influence in the process of amalgamation will become readily apparent and it is important to identify it when setting a context for the fieldwork.

However, underpinning this analysis are identifiable issues that characterise each of the case studies, although in different ways. First, the actual mechanics of the amalgamation process were distinct. In MSF, the formal amalgamation took place under an umbrella agreement that left ASTMS and TASS in two separate divisions until a common rulebook was eventually agreed after a period of acrimonious debate and infighting. In UNISON much of the debate over the amalgamation, and particularly the 'form' of the new union, took place in the four years that preceded the formal amalgamation. Whilst in UNIFI any debate appears to have been very amicable and agreement easily reached once bargaining autonomy had been agreed.

Second, the role of leaders and factions within or between the participants coloured the negotiations and subsequent outcomes. Between the individual unions and their amalgamated successors the characterisations of 'member-led' and 'leader-led' encapsulate a distinctive role and influence for leaders, whether full-time officials or lay members. Factions were not present in UNIFI but were a strong feature of MSF and UNISON. However, whereas in UNISON they were a feature of internal debate in NALGO over the amalgamation, in MSF the factions were initially focused on the TASS Broad Left and then MSF for Labour (largely former ASTMS) as the early battle for control developed.

Third, the question of heterogeneity must be considered. Certainly, for UNISON and MSF the amalgamation brought together similar but disparate groups of members. To an extent, of course, heterogeneity already existed in some of the participants (NALGO and ASTMS, for example, recruited across a number of industries, occupations and pay levels) but heterogeneity was more easily accommodated when a union had grown

organically and retained the tribal loyalty of its members. There was little evidence of this issue emerging as a problem in UNIFI, probably because the participants' members already worked together and no new element was put into the mix. However, within UNISON and MSF creating a 'form' that might grapple with the problem of heterogeneity became a persistent problem. Although it was barely tackled by MSF, UNISON did make a real attempt at creating a response with new policies of Proportionality and Fair Representation. These were designed to introduce mechanisms that ensured the presence of all sections of its heterogeneous membership in its structures, and ensure that particular groups did not come to dominate the union.

Fourth, there was a transition and development of local organisation in the three case studies. There were similarities of 'form' between the local levels of the three case studies. Branches were a common post-amalgamation feature, as was their place in the constitution and rules of the amalgamated union as the local level of collective democratic governance. However, only UNISON had an explicit policy of establishing branches on a common basis. Their boundaries were to be coterminous with those of individual employers (including employers associated with the principal employer). They would also have considerable resources allocated to them to facilitate local activity and substantial autonomy over bargaining and intra-union activity. Achieving this commonality meant a process of merging previously individual COHSE, NALGO and NUPE branches within a strict time-scale. Almost by default previously BIFU branches became the *de facto* branches in UNIFI but bargaining autonomy was firmly placed with National Company Committees and UNIFI continued the BIFU practice of a low level of branch resources. MSF branches did have a common level of resources allocated to them and a level of autonomy over their use. However, their boundaries were an array of geography, occupation and employers inherited from ASTMS, TASS and their predecessors, and local bargaining activity was increasingly located with stewards committees that had no formal place in the union's structure.

Encapsulating all these facets of the amalgamations, we can see questions of 'form' becoming the focus of the negotiations over amalgamation in all three case studies. However, the actual or perceived 'character' of the individual unions informed the negotiations over 'form'. For UNISON the debate over 'form and character' meant a

prolonged period of pre-amalgamation negotiation and for one participant (NALGO) an equally extended and fractious period of intra-union debate. The negotiation resulted in an agreed 'form' being available at the point of formal amalgamation including policies of Proportionality and Fair Representation and the establishment of branches on a common basis. In contrast, the negotiation and fractious debate in MSF over 'form' took place after the formal amalgamation and resulted in a 'victory' for that of ASTMS. Whereas for UNIFI negotiation and debate was at a much more amicable and accommodating level, resulting in the adoption of administrative and democratic 'form' from BIFU and bargaining 'form' from NWSA/UNiFI (Barclays).

Here, I have sought to describe the case study amalgamations, the economic, political and intra-union environment within which they developed and how they moved forward from the formal date of amalgamation. Literature concerned with the amalgamations themselves and the history and background of the participants have informed these descriptions. Finally, the common themes and issues have been drawn out and an overall appreciation of the subject accessed. This analysis leads into a consideration of the position of the local union organisation in a process of amalgamation or the role of leadership in mediating that position. How those resonate with the issues just illustrated, their relevance and influence on the progress of 'form and character' through an amalgamation and placing all that in the environment of the individual amalgamation is the task of succeeding chapters. These chapters will employ a common format where each amalgamation is first considered through its pre-amalgamation context and that of its predecessor unions. Then there will be a section devoted to the actual process of amalgamation and finally, consideration will be given to the important post-amalgamation period when the outcome of the negotiations and decisions for the amalgamation are fully implemented. Informing these sections will be the presence and influence of the issues identified in this conclusion within the analytical framework of 'form and character' and the 'member-led/leader-led' continuum.

Chapter 6

MSF
A BATTLE FOR CONTROL

The MSF amalgamation occurred in 1988. It brought together two established and well-known unions, ASTMS and TASS. For MSF the argument will be that the principal effect of the amalgamation on local union organisation was to legitimate and consolidate a situation of joint working between ASTMS and TASS in many work locations. However, this development was only on a voluntary basis and the historical divisions between them continued in other work locations. The continued presence of union branches from the predecessor unions accentuated this pattern of joint working. Branches were mainly separate local organisations to organisations in work locations but were the only ones recognised in the structure of MSF. However, at regional and national levels, the amalgamation resulted in an organisation that was far more redolent of ASTMS than TASS.

Before embarking on the detailed analysis of the MSF amalgamation, I should indicate my personal experience of membership and activity in MSF. This experience started in 1997, eight years after the amalgamation, and, therefore, unlike the deep and lengthy experience I had of UNISON, the UNISON amalgamation and one of its predecessor unions, I have no direct personal experience of the MSF amalgamation or either of its predecessor unions.

Research on MSF is mainly restricted to that of Carter (1991) and there are a number of problems with relying on this study. First, it virtually ignores the presence of the local context in the amalgamation except as local lay leaders participating in debates on the amalgamation at regional and national levels. Second, it tends to concentrate its attention on the sharp divisions between ASTMS and TASS at national level and particularly at the National Conference. This aspect concerns the political and factional divide which characterised the period and the tactics adopted by both sides in what amounted to a battle for control of the union. The approach tends to

marginalise other influences over the progress of the amalgamation such as the workplace and the recent histories of ASTMS and TASS. These influences produced their rival 'member-led/leader-led' forms of unionism and underpinned the policies and negotiating positions the two unions adopted during the amalgamation process. Third, it is also apparent that most of the fieldwork for Carter's research was restricted to respondents from former ASTMS, individuals from former TASS being reluctant to participate in the research (Carter interview 1996). Inevitably, this partiality tends to skew the results toward a former ASTMS perspective and encourages a degree of caution over the validity of the research's conclusions.

PRE-AMALGAMATION

The trajectories of ASTMS and TASS toward their amalgamation were quite different and produced models of 'member-led/leader-led' forms of unionism that informed their policies and attitudes toward the amalgamation. This history was not just concerned with their internal structures, management, leadership and ways of working, but also their previous experience of merger. If ASTMS could be described as being anarchic and loosely organised then TASS was tightly controlled and centralised. Elaborating on these labels establishes the position of the local union organisation in each union, sets the environment for the amalgamation, and anticipates the period of fractious infighting that characterised the early days of MSF.

ASTMS

The rapid growth of ASTMS through the 1970s was much associated with its dynamic General Secretary, Clive Jenkins. He had identified the growth of 'white-collar' work as providing fertile ground for trade union organisation and set ASTMS on the path to seeing itself as the pre-eminent white-collar union in the private sector (Melling 2004: 80-81). In addition to its own aggressive recruitment, Jenkins also fostered in ASTMS a merger policy with small white-collar unions and staff associations. This policy was often facilitated by the provision of autonomous status to merging unions (Undy *et al* 1981: 51-59, 154-155). Jenkins' management of this rapidly growing organisation was often idiosyncratic and marked by internal rivalries between political factions (Melling 2004: 79, 84, 89-90) and between the national management and regional full-time officials (Melling 2004: 82-83). Melling commenting that:

> One of the ironies ... is that this scientific and managerial union remained an under-developed and idiosyncratic organisation, which benefited from a series of opportunistic initiatives and agreements. Always a brilliant entrepreneur, Jenkins remained a poor administrator and an erratic manager (Melling 2004: 91).

Attempts by Jenkins and the National Executive to rationalise this increasingly diverse structure were strongly resisted by alternative power bases in Divisional (regional) Councils and the autonomous groups, and the national union remained more of an umbrella organisation in the overall structure (Undy *et al* 1981: 117). If managerially weak and subject to open internal dissension, this loose structure allowed for a 'formal democracy' and open debate (Fairbrother 2000a: 43; see also Undy *et al* 1981: 53).

The position of branches and lay leaders outside the National Executive was a relatively influential one within this structure. ASTMS branches were directly funded by a retention from subscriptions and had a level of autonomy over local education and training for members and representatives, publicity, affiliations, funding campaigns and policy decisions in the wider union (Fairbrother 2000a: 43). They also had direct representation at the Annual Conference and at Divisional Councils. These forums were an important and influential level of organisation within ASTMS between the National Executive and the branch and were organised by lay leaders and branch delegates (Carter 1991: 51). Nevertheless, it is relevant to recognise that:

> The most familiar unit of association among members remained the workplace group within the individual plant and among distinct grade of employees (Melling 2004: 76).

It was within workplace groups that most representational and negotiating activity with employers was carried out (Melling 2004: 75). In this environment, lay leaders could direct their activity to issues within the union itself, or within the workplace, or both. Some of these leaders increasingly concentrated their energies within the union as the harsh external environment impinged on their ability to achieve successes in the workplace (Carter 1991: 41). ASTMS had also increasingly sought to attract professional and managerial employees into membership by openly acknowledging their individualistic and supervisory status (Carter 1997: 16) and from those positions developed their union activity within the union rather than the

workplace. The structure and membership characteristics of the union encouraged and facilitated an isolated and introverted autonomy based on a division between union branches and workplace groups, and individualistic lay leaders (Carter 1997: 12).

TASS

If Jenkins' leadership of ASTMS was 'erratic' (Melling 2004: 91), Ken Gill's leadership of TASS was in complete contrast. He was appointed as General Secretary in 1973, as opposed to the election of Jenkins, and then:

> Gill helped to turn TASS into a highly disciplined monolith under Communist domination (Taylor 1978: 227).

This process was facilitated by the appointment of cadre of young full-time officials, many of whom were Communists, and a reduction in both the size of the TASS Executive Committee and a change to the election procedure (Parkin 1975; Taylor 1978: 227). The outcome was a shift from a membership based electoral process to a more easily manipulated electoral college. Under Gill's leadership:

> [The union remained] one of the most aggressive and uncompromising unions in the TUC (Taylor 1978: 227).

The membership growth of TASS had been less spectacular than for ASTMS (1964-1975: 94 per cent TASS, 346 per cent ASTMS (Smith 1987: 277)). Mainly this divergence was the result of TASS concentrating its recruitment and organising in engineering (Smith 1987: 277) and eschewing ASTMS's initiatives in other industries and its expansionist merger policy.

Through the 1960's and encouraged by the successes of the plant by plant organised Minimum Wage Campaign (MWC) the union:

> Had a small number of full-time officials, a high degree of lay member participation and commitment to the linking of recruitment and politics to industrial action (Smith 1987: 287).

However, this environment changed in the 1970s with the domination of the union by Gill and the Communist Party (CP) led Broad Left, the failed amalgamation with the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), and subsequent development of merger as an aid to growth. The result was a distinctive organisational 'form', characterised as

democratic centralism (Smith 1987: 271-292). A development described by Smith as:

> A movement away from the working class militancy of the 1960s, to a 'political' strategy divorced from the activity of the membership. ... TASS, from having an integrated policy and practice, has moved closer to the ASTMS position where 'political' ideology was separated from the industrial activity of the membership (Smith 1987: 288).

The crucial difference between the two was the hegemonic control of the Broad Left in TASS against the relative anarchy of ASTMS.

TASS branches had no direct funding, little autonomy within the union and were heavily influenced and monitored by full-time officials (Fairbrother 2000a: 43, 44). Their ability and that of local lay leaders to influence union policy was tightly constrained by a structure of indirect representation which resulted in an Annual Conference of 165 delegates who effectively controlled the union and consolidated that by electing most other positions within the union (Fairbrother 2000a: 44). As Fairbrother remarked:

> The dominance of the Broad Left political bloc meant there was little opportunity for dissent, debate or contestation over policy or practice (Fairbrother 2000a: 44).

This environment was the antithesis of the diverse and loose structure of ASTMS and TASS lay leaders were appreciably more homogenous in their working class and political backgrounds and narrow job range in the engineering industry than their counterparts in ASTMS.

In the workplace, negotiation and representational activity was conducted through workplace groups in similar fashion to ASTMS (ex-TASS local lay leaders interviews 1999) and where both unions were represented often took place on a joint basis (see Smith 1987: 267-292 for a description of TASS in the workplace). An ex-TASS local lay leader confirmed that:

> When we came to terms and conditions, we had a committee, which we called the Staff Trade Union Council. ... So we always worked together (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 2000).

Away from the branch in the workplace, TASS members had a very similar relationship with their union as ASTMS members. An ex-TASS local lay leader commenting that:

> The average member really doesn't want to know much about the wider union in my experience. The only time they want you is when they're in trouble or they want information (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

The hegemony of the Broad Left was of little interest or knowledge to most members. As reflected by an ex-TASS local lay leader remarking that:

> People see the union role as more of an association that negotiates part of their life than a labour movement and/or a political body (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 2000).

Member-led or Leader-led

The position of branch and workplace organisation, and lay leaders and full-time officials in ASTMS espoused a 'member-led' form of unionism. In ASTMS these principles were in the context of branches and overlain with elements of individualism and elitism. However, workplace groups that had no formal recognition in the structures of the union conducted most representational and bargaining activity in the workplace. In the workplace, a similar practice of negotiation and representation also applied to TASS, but the Broad Left dragooned branches into an apparently disciplined and seamless unity through its leadership and the structures of TASS. These characteristics had closer associations with the homogenous and unified 'leader-led' form of unionism, but with the crucial difference of the presence of an all-powerful controlling faction.

The synergies of industry, job characteristics and political bias (both ASTMS and TASS were affiliated to the Labour Party and 'on the left' (Carter 1991: 40-44)), which gave the appearance of a logical and potentially powerful alliance to the MSF amalgamation, concealed deep and potentially destructive divisions. Within ASTMS, the workplace, in the guise of the branch, was imbued with qualities of autonomy and as the platform for lay leaders representing the views of members in the higher echelons of the union. However, alongside the branch, workplace groups (often with the same lay leaders) together with full-time officials engaged in most of the union's activity with employers, but could only access and influence the internal structures of the union through branches. For TASS, the Broad Left portrayed the workplace and

branch as synonymous with the union as a whole, even though union activity in the workplace was actually much closer to that of ASTMS. There was a seamless progression from the member through all the structures of the union, which through the discipline and coherence of its activity took account of members' views without the need for extensive internal debate. The presence of a Broad Left faction orchestrated this process and reflected the ability of that faction to ensure the union acted within those parameters. Here lay the crux of the division, between a politically motivated, highly disciplined and controlling faction in TASS, which saw workplaces and branches as the outer reaches of its hegemony, and a fractious and erratically managed organisation in ASTMS where workplaces and branches had a high level of autonomy and an independent presence in the union. The forms of unionism of ASTMS and TASS were the result of spectacular growth and idiosyncratic leadership for ASTMS and the relatively recent ascendance into control of a single political faction for TASS. How this divide played out for the presence of local union organisation in the amalgamation is the subject of the next section.

AMALGAMATION

There was a period of negotiation between ASTMS and TASS to reach agreement for the formal amalgamation. This was influenced by:

- The particular procedure chosen for the amalgamation.
- The different negotiating positions or objectives of ASTMS and TASS for the amalgamation.
- The presence of 'the workplace' as an issue in the negotiations for the amalgamation.
- The role of leaders at local, regional and national levels in the process of amalgamation.
- The role of factions in the process of amalgamation.
- The presence of 'the workplace' in the outcome of the negotiations for the amalgamation.
- The process by which local union organisations progressed from ASTMS and TASS into MSF.

Objectives

From the outset, 'politics' were at the centre of considerations for an amalgamation between ASTMS and TASS. This manifested itself in issues such as who controlled the union, where its 'character' lay in relation to conceptions of 'proper' trade unionism and political positions to the 'right' or 'left'.

In ASTMS, the 1985 National Engineering Consultative Conference pressed for a merger with TASS (Carter 1991: 40). This initiative was not just on the rational grounds of the obvious synergies between the two unions' large memberships in engineering but also on questions concerning the 'character' of ASTMS. The engineering section had seen its previous dominance in the union whittled away as successive mergers had established a powerful rival position for the insurance section. The engineers also considered that the union's development had seen its 'character' shifted to the 'right' and away from what they saw as 'proper' trade unionism. A merger with TASS would re-establish the position of engineering as the leading group within a merged union and bring its 'character' back to their vision of a trade union (Carter 1991: 41). The ASTMS national lay leadership also favoured the merger although the General Secretary, Clive Jenkins, remained ambivalent about the proposal, perhaps fearful of a threat to or diminution of his powerful position in ASTMS from the equally powerful TASS General Secretary, Ken Gill (Carter 1991: 40-44).

Such concerns were probably well founded. National trade union leaders would have been well aware of the hegemony of the CP-led Broad Left in TASS and Gill was clearly an important figure in that domination and control (Taylor 1978: 225-228). Not only that, the collapse of the AUEW Federation was mainly due to the refusal of TASS to modify any of its policies and procedures toward their equivalents in the AEU (Parkin 1975; Taylor 1978: 225-228). This refusal coincided with 'the right' regaining control in the AEU and the TASS Broad Left's assessment that any prospective advance of CP leadership and control in the Federation was unachievable (Smith 1987: 285-286). In a merger with ASTMS they could be expected to adopt similar tactics and, maybe, with better prospects of success. An ex-TASS full-time official confirmed TASS's view that:

> ASTMS came in and although they'd got a lot more numbers, the viewpoint of TASS was that if we can tie up the rulebook, we tie up the union. There might

be a lot more of them but they're nothing compared to us, we've got a machine, a very powerful machine, and they had. ... I think the plan of action was to shape it, well I don't think, I know it was, shape it as we want it. Let's create it into a giant TASS (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

Procedure for amalgamation

The form of amalgamation agreed between ASTMS and TASS was a familiar pattern for amalgamations between relatively equal partners where a new rulebook and structure would be the result (Waddington *et al* 2005: 3-5). There was a brief outline agreement meeting the minimum legal requirements for a trade union amalgamation leading to a ballot of each union's membership for approval of the amalgamation. If agreed both unions would enter the amalgamated union unchanged but with an additional layer of structure to deal with matters concerning the amalgamated union. There would then be a period of negotiation between the parties to agree a new rulebook and structure for the amalgamated union, which, once approved by the amalgamated union's Annual Conference, would result in a unified structure and the ending of the initial division into two sections. This procedure was new territory for both ASTMS and TASS. Their recent mergers had been transfers of engagements with much smaller staff associations and unions, whilst TASS had previously been a completely separate section within the AUEW Federation (Melling 2004; Smith 1987:256-297).

The advantage of this particular form of amalgamation was that it 'locked-in' the parties at the outset of the amalgamation process. TASS had left the AUEW Federation after a period of dispute with the other members and this procedure was seen as an advantage to those in ASTMS who wanted to ensure that TASS would not take similar action in MSF. These concerns were confirmed by an ex-ASTMS local lay leader, who commented that:

> We knew a bit of the background from the AUEW and the problems they were having with TASS. They were always falling out, and it was quite a shock when we had this merger between ASTMS and TASS (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

The disadvantage was that the outcome of the amalgamation in terms of the rulebook and structure of the amalgamated union would be unknown until it was too late for either party to leave if they were dissatisfied with the result. If those visions were

diametrically opposite, as has just been demonstrated with ASTMS and TASS, the post-amalgamation period was always likely to be one of intense and potentially destructive infighting. The agreement for the amalgamation was that it would be:

> On the basis of parity and equal representation on all interim decision-making bodies (Carter 1991: 44).

This agreement was despite the numerically larger membership of ASTMS and effectively set the stage for the ensuing confrontation.

The local context

Lay leaders in ASTMS outside of the National Executive had two positions in relation to branch organisation that they were intent on retaining in MSF. First, that all branches should be represented at the Annual Conference and second, that branches should continue to retain a proportion of subscriptions for their own use (Carter 1991: 45). These 'bottom-lines', or the Cardiff Principles (Carter 1991: 50), sought to retain a 'form and character' where debate and dissent with the national leadership's policies was predicated on a 'bottom-up' basis. This aspiration was despite the imperfect connection between many branches and the workplace groups where most bargaining and representational activity took place and the facility for individuals disconnected from workplace group activity to engage with intra-union affairs. In relation to the amalgamation, a former ASTMS local lay leader encapsulated this approach when remarking that:

> Clive had a hell of a job pushing [the merger] through our Conference. He had much more of a job on his hands than Ken Gill. As far as Ken Gill was concerned ... it was cut and dried and they were all for it. ... That's why [ASTMS] had so many conferences on the merger (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

These conferences and the role played by semi-autonomous branches were anathema to TASS who saw the workplace as simply the furthermost extension of an integrated union. In such a 'form and character', debate and dissent at large conferences were unnecessary since integrated communication within the union allowed for all voices to be heard and dissent could not arise when all parts of the union were aware of and supported its policies. In addition, there was always the danger of 'renegade' voices at a large conference portraying indiscipline within the union and weakening its position with employers and government. In this

construction, branches also had no need of funding separate from the wider union. All expenditure should be centrally controlled and directed toward a common purpose. An ex-TASS full-time official described TASS in this way:

> TASS were a machine. The CP was very influential at the top; they'd got an organisation called The Broad Left. I believe the decisions were taken at the very top, at the CP. They were fed then into the Executive, who were not appointed, but they were all the right people if you know what I mean. Then they were fed down to Conference. You didn't go to Conference unless you were in The Broad Left. The whole union was The Broad Left. There were people who didn't believe in the philosophy of it who had to go along with it; else they'd never get anywhere. We've had ridiculous situations where people have gone to Conference, voted against the wishes of the Broad Left and been threatened with being sent home or told you'll never come again. You'd got a union that was completely controlled through its Executive, but really by somebody else (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

Three characteristics of TASS are apparent from this description. First, TASS was characterised by the hegemonic control exercised by the Broad Left, an organisation directed by the CP. Effectively a political party exercised control over TASS by subverting its internal government. Second, there was nascent internal opposition to this dominance but to gain any influence in TASS meant engaging with the controlling faction. Third, the Broad Left partly maintained its control by its ability to manipulate the representative structures and exclude any opposition.

Leaders

It seemed to lay leaders outside of the ASTMS National Executive that:

> Integration of two radically different structures would necessitate one or the other organisation to abandon current practice (Carter 1991: 45).

However, the Executive appeared unwilling to promote the ASTMS structure as part of the price in reaching agreement with TASS for the amalgamation (Carter 1991: 45). The amalgamation was to be achieved at any price and to raise questions over future structures was characterised as attempting to defeat the whole enterprise. An ex-ASTMS local lay leader commented that:

> The unions had various meetings chaired by Clive Jenkins and Ken Gill and it all seemed inevitable that the merger was going to go through, regardless of

what the lay representatives thought about it (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

The one pre-condition that the ASTMS Annual Conference set down was that:

> [The MSF Special Rules Conference] shall be constructed to allow each ASTMS branch direct representation (Carter 1991: 47).

The somewhat grudging TASS response to this condition was to concede a conference of 400 delegates from each union, making the TASS delegation over twice the size of the TASS Annual Conference but half the actual number of branches for ASTMS (Carter 1991: 49). The increase in size called into question the ability of the Broad Left to control the makeup of the TASS delegation and its voting patterns and this concern may well have influenced their reluctant agreement to the increased numbers (Carter 1991: 49).

These differences were a reflection of the presence and influence of lay leaders and full-time officials in the unions. Branches in ASTMS were directly represented at Divisional Councils and Annual Conference. These forums provided vehicles for a number of articulate, well-educated lay leaders to engage in argument over policy with the national leadership (Carter 1991: 51). How far the activities of some of these individuals was a real reflection of the views of branch members, or more an individualistic approach based on the greater attractions of activity within the union against an alienation from the rigours of a harsh industrial climate, is a moot question. An ex-ASTMS full-time official considered that:

> There's almost two separate unions in any union. There is the union of the 'activists' that go through the branches, regional councils, national executives and, to some extent, full-time officials, and there's the people on the shop-floor. Very often you get the motives of the people on the lay activist side of it is quite different from the motives of the people on the shop-floor. The motive of the people on the shop-floor is I want to get the best terms and conditions of employment out of my employer. The motive of these guys is really a political motive, maybe with a small 'p', and sometimes this sort of thing goes on and fights on. Really, this other side, this sort of industrial side, is totally unaware of it (ex-ASTMS regional full-time official interview 1999).

The implication of these comments is that lay leaders may not properly represent the aspirations of union members. They are more concerned with the internal debates of the union than promoting the pay and conditions of members with employers. Carter's analysis of the MSF amalgamation suggests that for some ASTMS lay leaders their concern over the negotiating position of the ASTMS Executive was as much related to their personal positions of influence within the structures of ASTMS, as reflecting the concerns of ASTMS members over the amalgamation (Carter 1991). However, this pessimistic view of lay leaders' representative role needs to be contrasted with other work which affirms the importance of that role for the majority of lay leaders (see Undy *et al* 1981: 38-41 on union government; Tannenbaum 1968b on control and leadership; van de Vall 1970: 102-108, 152-179 on leader representation).

Whatever the motives of lay leaders, the structures of ASTMS allowed the voice of branches to be present at influential levels within the union. Retaining that facility became a prime objective in the amalgamation for branches and their lay leaders. The TASS structure, based on a system of indirect representation where delegates through to District Conferences and Annual Conference were channelled through successive lower levels of structure, enabled the Broad Left to control the election process and ensure its supporters retained an absolute majority (Fairbrother 2000a: 44). Opening up the structures, as in the ASTMS model, would seriously undermine that control and strike at the heart of the cohesive, disciplined model of trade unionism espoused by TASS.

The role of full-time officials at regional level was similarly divided between ASTMS and TASS. Full-time officials in ASTMS fulfilled much more of an advisory and supportive role over policy formation and had virtually no leadership role in branches, Divisional Councils and Annual Conference. An ex-ASTMS full-time official saw their different roles in ASTMS and TASS as:

> Before the merger, there were quite a lot of officials who were very much involved in the democratic structure in TASS and they were often branch secretaries themselves. I think the ASTMS officials were there as an advisor, a supporter, an encourager in terms of workplace organisations. Essentially, the decisions were taken by the members. ... That's probably more so in

MSF than it was, even in ASTMS, certainly changed from the TASS point of view (ex-ASTMS national full-time official interview 1999).

However, in TASS their role was closely intertwined with activity at all levels of the structure and, being appointed through the presence and influence of the Broad Left, they played an influential role in promoting and implementing Broad Left policies within the union (Fairbrother 2000a: 44). Partly this role was facilitated by the much higher proportion of full-time officials to members at 1:2500 in TASS as against 1:4500 in ASTMS (Fairbrother 2000a: 44) but also between the tightly controlled model of TASS and the diverse and argumentative model of ASTMS. The same full-time official commented further that:

TASS had a very clear idea of how the union should function, democratic centralism. ASTMS was always a bit anarchic. It was about not having any centralised structure at all, decentralised in many ways (ex-ASTMS national full-time official interview 1999).

The national lay and full-time official leadership conducted the negotiations over the MSF amalgamation (Carter 1991). In addition, they also had the prime role in consulting with members and other levels of organisation within their own unions and feeding the results back into the negotiations. Their ability to influence the amalgamation process was very evident, as these comments of an ex-ASTMS local lay leader confirm:

Clive was a very influential person you know. He didn't answer a lot of what people were saying. The officers more or less had to fall in line with him. They were sort of percolating propaganda to the Regional Councils. He had a meeting of the Regional Council Chairmen and Secretaries. He worked on the right people and that was it (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

However, there remained the problem of the frequent friction between the national leadership and local and Divisional lay leadership that had been a longstanding feature of ASTMS's 'form and character', an ex-TASS full-time official observing that:

I believe with ASTMS, it was a completely different philosophy [to TASS]. I never went to their Conference but I believe that they used to see it as the annual arse-kicking contest, to kick the Executive. Anything that Jenkins and the Executive proposed, well they'd kick against that (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

This outsider description sees the ASTMS Conference as irrationally disputatious. Within ASTMS, it was maintained that the atmosphere of argument and debate evidenced the ability of the wider union to question and challenge the policies of the General Secretary and the National Executive (ex-ASTMS full-time official and local lay leader interviews 1999). This ability soon surfaced, as the concerns of some lay leaders in ASTMS over the dangers of merging with a highly centralised union, dominated by an all-powerful Broad Left faction, appeared to be of little concern to the national leadership engaged in the negotiations (Carter 1991: 44-47). The ASTMS national leadership were not 'free agents' in the negotiations but subject to influence and criticism from leaders representing concerns at regional and local level (Carter 1991: 44-47).

Factions

The TASS national leadership had no such constraints, the Broad Left machine was able to stifle any dissent by ensuring the 'correct' delegates were elected to the District and Annual Conferences and the National Executive, and then portrayed a picture of total unity and agreement over the amalgamation (Carter 1991: 44). This practice was exampled by the criticism levied at the ASTMS National Executive by visiting TASS leaders at the 1987 ASTMS Annual Conference for their, 'failing to control the Conference' (Carter 1991: 47) by allowing motions critical of aspects of the amalgamation to be openly debated. In TASS, the rules and structure of the union enabled a faction like the Broad Left to control the presence and influence of the local level in the wider union (Carter 1991: 44). However, the portrayal of unity could conceal levels of concern, which only became apparent once the grip of the Broad Left loosened in the early days of MSF.

Factions were not just a feature of TASS; ASTMS too had experience of their presence and influence (Undy *et al* 1981: 117-118). However, factions in ASTMS were much more diverse, based on industrial and workplace groupings as well as political affinities (Undy *et al* 1981: 118). Coupled with the open representative structure of ASTMS, they were unable to exercise any overriding influence and control in the union.

Factions had very different roles and influence in the amalgamation process and had particular impacts on the presence of the workplace and branches in the process.

For the Broad Left in TASS the objective was the retention of their absolute control of the organisation (ex-ASTMS, ex-TASS regional full-time official interviews 1999). Within a tightly centralised and disciplined structure, this objective meant the subjugation of workplaces and branches as potential sources of rival opinion and leadership (Carter 1991: 44). Groups in ASTMS were concerned to promote the presence of branches throughout the structures of the new union. As a result, groupings within ASTMS coalesced into loose associations of branch and regional lay leaders (Carter 1991: 44-47).

Agreement and the local context

ASTMS and TASS arrived at the point of their amalgamation in 1988 with none of these divisions over the 'form and character' of their new union resolved, least of all over the position of 'the workplace'. ASTMS's 'bottom lines' of branch representation at regional level and at Annual Conference and the continuation of separate funding for regional councils and branches were barely acknowledged by TASS. In contrast, the TASS leadership saw both positions as establishing alternative power bases and sources of dissent and indiscipline against their vision of a disciplined unity facilitated through a highly centralised organisation, a vision that effectively replicated and extended that of TASS. TASS being under the control of a faction that had no place in the rules and structure of the union was not the issue. It was the self-evident advantages of this 'form and character' that was important. The TASS response to the issues raised in the ASTMS Cardiff Principles was limited. First, the TASS leadership acknowledged that separate funding for former ASTMS branches in MSF might be acceptable, but on no wider basis (Carter 1991: 50). Second, in response to the demand by ASTMS for full branch representation, TASS agreed to larger representation for both former unions' delegations at the Special Rules Conference to decide the rulebook and structure for MSF (Carter 1991: 47-49). Meanwhile those in ASTMS who raised issues of branch autonomy and branch representation remained concerned that their National Executive was either failing to advance these concerns with TASS or were naïve of TASS's 'real' agenda for the 'form and character' of MSF (Carter 1991: 44-47).

Formally, the result was that ASTMS formed Division 1 and TASS Division A in MSF. There was a joint National Executive and parity of representation for the two divisions. All other structures, including full-time officials, remained entirely separate

pending the decisions of the 1988 Special Rules Conference (MSF 1988a, 1988b; Carter 1991: 50). For workplaces and branches, the amalgamation agreement meant transferring into MSF in unchanged form and with no joint agreements or policies in place over their development in the amalgamated union.

POST-AMALGAMATION

Battle for control

With no agreement in advance of the creation of MSF, the development of local union organisation in the amalgamated union was unpredictable. Those coming from ASTMS held to a belief in branch autonomy and an organisation where the voice of branches was heard and acted on at regional and national levels. However, they were faced with an organisation in the TASS division which adhered to centralised control as the most prized attribute of a union and which was intent on shaping MSF to that vision. The scene was set for an internecine battle over whether MSF would be 'member-led' or 'leader-led'.

The ASTMS 'bottom lines' over branch autonomy, separate funding and branch representation in the structures of the union were enshrined in the Cardiff Principles (Carter 1991: 50). With a degree of naivety, the ASTMS side of the MSF Joint National Executive anticipated an effective resolution by incorporating them in the new rulebook, to be proposed to the Special Rules Conference. However, the orchestrated bloc vote of the TASS side, in conditions of parity of representation, only required a single vote, an abstention or an absence from the ASTMS side for the TASS position to be adopted in the rulebook. Unsurprisingly none of the Principles found their way into the recommendations to the Special Rules Conference (Carter 1991: 50). All that was evident were proposals for a weakening of the influence of regions and branches by turning them into administrative units, enhanced by the creation of larger branches with full-time officials acting as branch secretaries, a similar enlargement of regions and a reduction of the number of delegates to the Annual Conference (Carter 1991: 52).

Resisting the TASS style rulebook which emerged from the Joint National Executive was the only option if the Cardiff Principles and the 'form and character' of ASTMS as it related to Divisional Councils and branches were to be preserved in MSF. The

immediate result was some 2,500 amendments to the rulebook from former ASTMS Divisional Councils and branches against about 100 from former TASS (MSF 1988d). As Carter remarked:

> The primary explanation for this disparity rested with the difference in structures and traditions of leadership [between ASTMS and TASS] (Carter 1991: 53).

The scene was set for confrontation over the two conceptions of trade unionism.

The initial skirmishes at the Special Rules Conference reaffirmed the strength of the TASS division bloc vote. However, this action emboldened lay leaders in the ASTMS division to adopt similar tactics and, with the defection of some TASS division delegates, votes in favour of separate funding for all Regional Councils and branches were won (MSF 1988c, 1988d). Commenting on the situation at the first conference an ex-TASS full-time official remarked that:

> At the first joint Conference, ASTMS were all over the place. They were voting different ways and doing what you do in a conference, what you're supposed to do in a conference. ... They were meeting a block of hands that were all voting the same way. But I think that ASTMS got to find out very, very quickly that unless we play this same game we're just going to end up [losing] (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

The defections indicated that the hegemony of the Broad Left had its limitations and in part relied on the centralised structure of TASS. Representation at the Special Rules Conference was open to wider sections of branch delegates, as had been reluctantly conceded by TASS, and this situation fatally weakened the ability of the Broad Left to control the membership of the TASS delegation and the discipline of its voting patterns. The defections also showed that the Cardiff Principles had an appeal for certain sections of the former TASS lay leadership reflecting nascent concerns over the lack of debate inside TASS, its centralised leadership and the 'machine politics' of the Broad Left (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999). An ex-ASTMS local lay leader saw this divide in the ex-TASS delegation as:

> The craft unions within TASS didn't seem to be able to make any headway. They weren't able to get much from the National Executive. Everything they wanted to do, the craft unions, they were overruled, with the predominance of the staff within TASS. ... When we went to Conference, there was a ganging up to make sure that resolutions you wanted were passed. There was a better

relationship certainly amongst the craft foremen and the shop-floor people, [between the former ASTMS and the former craft section of TASS] (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

The craft section of TASS had originated from mergers with smaller craft unions in the 1980s (Smith 1987: 287). However, the hegemony of the Broad Left had prevented any influence from them within TASS and they became increasingly marginalised. An ex-TASS full-time official remarked that:

> We used to joke as Metal Mechanics, well why don't they just send us a sheet and tell us what we've got to vote on (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

Within MSF, they found an affinity with the ASTMS section that could challenge the dominance of the Broad Left and foster the creation of a semi-autonomous Craft Section (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

With this victory, the ASTMS delegation and its new allies had every expectation of also winning the vote on branch representation at the Annual Conference but legal advice was announced to the effect that such a vote would be against the Instrument of Transfer (Carter 1991: 54). It was clear to many that this advice was as much a political manoeuvre as legal opinion. Earlier defeats had already motivated some leaders in the TASS division to question the continuation of the amalgamation and leaders in the ASTMS division began to counsel a tactical retreat until a time when TASS would find it impossible to leave (Carter 1991: 54).

Nevertheless, the overall outcome of the Conference was re-affirmation of the 'member-led' form of unionism captured by the Cardiff Principles. For workplaces and branches, MSF was inexorably moving in the direction of the ASTMS principles of branch autonomy, separate funding and wide branch representation at regional and national levels (MSF 1989a, 1989b). These principles carried with them issues of 'character' to facilitate debate and dissent and a 'bottom-up' approach to the development of policy. An ex-TASS full-time official, who applauded these principles, maintained that:

> I think the pyramid's the right way up. TASS was everything I thought a trade union shouldn't be. It should have been [the members] driving the policy

rather than it being driven from the top. I think we've got it just right inside MSF (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

Subsequently the 1989 Annual Conference decided that branches with over 600 members should have an automatic right to representation at the Conference moving toward the Cardiff Principle for all branches to be represented. This stance also favoured the former ASTMS branches, which were generally larger than branches from former TASS (Carter 1991: 61).

Leaders, both lay and full-time officials, played a pivotal role in the post-amalgamation period. The different relationships of full-time officials as employees of the union and lay leaders as elected representatives applied to MSF, except in one respect. The close affinity between full-time officials in TASS and the Broad Left faction that effectively controlled and directed the union's activities was distinct in its political reference. It seemed that many of these individuals were employed, not just based on their skills and competence to bargain and represent the interests of members, but also their political allegiance and loyalty to the Broad Left. An ex-ASTMS full-time official saw the relationship in these terms:

> [In TASS] the decisions were taken centrally. ... That system would set the policies of the union and the full-time officials were then employed to promulgate those policies amongst the members (ex-ASTMS regional full-time official interview 1999).

With their proportionally greater presence in TASS as compared with their equivalents in ASTMS (Fairbrother 2000a: 44) these full-time officials were able to wield political (Broad Left) leadership throughout the structures of TASS.

Post-amalgamation local union organisation

The post-amalgamation decisions in MSF re-affirmed an ASTMS 'form and character' of local union organisation in relation to the presence and influence of branches at Regional Councils and Annual Conference. However, it did little to complement this situation at local level. There was no framework or agreements:

- To establish branches based on common boundaries such as geographical area, single employers and/or workplaces.
- To merge existing branches based on these or any other common boundaries.
- To have a common framework of branch practice.
- To have a common structure of branch and workplace organisation.

Although there was some acknowledgement of the desirability of achieving a coherent model of local union organisation that had a clear place in the structures of the union there had been only faltering progress on a voluntary basis toward such an objective. An ex-TASS full-time official described the difficulties in advancing such an objective as:

> Where we could get the two unions to immediately come together at workplace we did. That meant instead of two different bargaining units with the employer we were able to bargain as one unit on behalf of the new union, MSF, and that obviously strengthened our position with the employer. In some areas that took a longer time to do and people still bargain separately as ASTMS and TASS. ... It's a question of learning to trust each other and I know it's took ten years and we still haven't got that. But there were big political differences between the two unions. ... There are still some areas where we've been unable to [bring groups together] because activists have been steeped in the political dogma that's existed for the last ten years. ... I think it's starting to get a bit better. One would hope after ten years, it would actually have resolved itself. But it's starting to get a bit better (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

This description highlights three issues for the local level that arose from the amalgamation. First, that merging previously ASTMS and TASS workplace groups produced benefits in bargaining strength. Second, that the continuing internal divide within MSF, stemming from the initial confrontation over control of the union, frustrated some mergers of workplace groups. Third, that familiarity with the amalgamation was progressively weakening the historic divisions and bringing workplace groups together. The overall assessment was that the benefits in bargaining strength progressively encouraged many workplace groups to merge. However, former ASTMS and TASS branches were mostly peripheral to the bargaining activity of workplace groups. With no policy directive toward merger and no obvious benefit from merger, many branches continued in unchanged form.

It did appear that a combination of the debilitating effect of the early infighting and a stifling of debate in order to avoid any return to it (Carter 1997: 14, 16), militated against any definite decisions being taken on fundamental issues concerning branches and workplace organisation. The result at local level was that the division

between union activity in branches and with employers in workplaces, already evident before the amalgamation, became even more accentuated (Carter & Poynter 1999: 509; Fairbrother 2000a: 115). An ex-ASTMS full-time official commented that:

> What the branch is seen as is not an industrial force but an administration force. But it equally has tagged on to it a sort of political, union political that is, sort of role (ex-ASTMS regional full-time official interview 1999).

The bargaining and representational autonomy of workplace groups continued in MSF, as described by an ex-TASS local lay leader:

> [The merger] didn't make any changes because, as I say, the number of people who wanted to be stewards has always been small. As long as we covered the areas, it doesn't really matter if it was an old ASTMS rep or it was an old TASS rep. ... We'd always got together for the Joint Trade Unions, so as a staff area we'd always acted together (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

Effectively the amalgamation consolidated and legitimised an extant situation for bargaining and representational activity. Branch autonomy complemented by independent funding also continued (Fairbrother 2000a: 45), as confirmed by an ex-ASTMS lay leader commenting that:

> There hasn't been any change whatsoever as far as that's concerned. As far as the merger is concerned, there's been no sort of change at all (ex-ASTMS local lay leader interview 1999).

Thus, the branches in the amalgamated union became the site for playing out the divisions encapsulated by the amalgamation.

The MSF workplace

As described in Chapter 5 the MSF workplace study was located on a large tyre manufacturer in the West Midlands. Before the amalgamation, both ASTMS and TASS had roughly equivalent memberships in the plant and the previous boundaries between their occupations and membership of one or the other union were increasingly breaking down. The employer had also gone through a long period of restructuring and massive technological change, which had visited intensive periods of job change and job losses on both ASTMS and TASS members. Against this background, the two unions had developed a joint position for bargaining, representation and recruitment in the plant involving lay leaders from both unions. Alongside the workplace, ASTMS had a branch that was based on the workplace

whereas the equivalent TASS branch covered a geographical area that included a number of other TASS organised workplaces. At the time of the study, some eleven years after the MSF amalgamation, this structure remained essentially the same.

An ex-TASS branch secretary commented that:

> When the merger came along it consolidated something at national level that was already happening with us at local level. But we had the peculiarity that you were all members of one union on the same site but you were still polarised into these two branches (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

For bargaining activity, the amalgamation had removed any remaining encumbrances to joint working between the former ASTMS and TASS workplace groups. It had produced a more effective voice with the employer and a merged MSF workplace group with a considerable level of autonomy over its bargaining position (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999). However, there had been no equivalent merging of the former ASTMS and TASS branches. In effect the decision from the amalgamation not to rationalise workplace and branch organisation on a common basis had resulted in a well organised and effective 'MSF' workplace group and two branches from the former unions, neither of which had any close connection with industrial relations activity in the workplace.

It was apparent that for this workplace, rationalising the structures of the workplace group on a single MSF basis was not only a sensible simplification of what was already a high level of joint working but also a necessity in the context of grappling with continuing issues of industrial change and job losses being instigated by the employer. An ex-TASS lay leader remarked that:

> We seem to go through restructuring every two or three years. Through all this process there's been constant change, the jobs we did became more the same. TASS would cross areas that were solely ASTMS; the areas of influence became blurred. Basically, we changed and evolved coincidental with the union's change and evolvement (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

This rationalisation was a process handled by lay leaders in the workplace and achieved through a history of mutual respect and joint working, and the imperative of confronting the employer with a single voice. Job change and retirement eased any

possible competition for leadership positions. An ex-TASS lay leader described the process as:

> Outside of the branch activity, we worked together on the site and it worked very well. In some large departments, you'd have an ASTMS rep and a TASS rep but the company only wanted to talk to one. We got round that eventually by people leaving. Really, it was natural wastage, a senior rep would leave and you wouldn't replace him. It was fairly amicable over the years. Came out right in the end (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

However, without either the imperative of facing up to the employer or any national decision within the union over rationalising branch structures, the two branches from the partner unions continued to operate with little change from their previous practice. The same ex-TASS lay leader went on to describe the situation for the branches:

> We became members of one union but the peculiarity ... was that we were still in two different branches. ASTMS had a site branch so all the branch members worked [there], whereas TASS was an open branch for all members within a certain geographical area. There was no way that they were going to agree to merge with us and become part of an open branch and we didn't really want to merge with them because we didn't agree with the way their finances were run (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

In MSF, only recognised branches had their own funds and had representation at Regional Council and Annual Conference. However, in practice there was a growing gap between the unified workplace group and the separate branches. The distancing of lay activity within the union from that experienced in the workplace was becoming a problem. Local lay leaders were extolling the benefits of a single voice with the employer and the autonomy of action they had through the single workplace group, whilst recognising the problem of influencing policy within MSF in a situation where two individual branches were recognised in the rulebook. The same ex-TASS lay leader described these difficulties as:

> Workplace organisation could be improved by bringing together the branches because they are two separate groups of members even though they work together. It would give members a sense of being one group and that would improve the workplace organisation (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 1999).

Full-time officials at national and regional level also recognised the problem. An explanation for it, advanced by an ex-ASTMS national full-time official, was that the initial division into two sections led to a concentration on issues of internal democracy and representation in the early formative period, whilst structures in workplaces were allowed to develop of their own volition. This official commented that:

> The structures went apart, democratic and workplace organisation. I think it is largely the result of decisions taken and the concentration on political issues and the democratic part of the structure. The industrial structures were part of the industrial work and left to develop themselves (ex-ASTMS national full-time official interview 1999).

At the workplace, via the workplace group and the two branches, MSF was shaped as a 'member-led' union for negotiation and a disembodied branch for representation within the union. In this way, a 'member-led' basis for representation was laid, to be formally realised some time in the future.

The Wider Union

The role played by full-time officials in the post-amalgamation period, particularly at regional level, certainly appeared to encompass on occasion some direct involvement in the political infighting. As an ex-ASTMS full-time official asserted:

> To put it simply we outplayed them (ex-ASTMS regional full-time official interview 1999).

With workplaces and branches, it was mainly one of encouraging joint working and even merging workplace groups and branches, but always on a voluntary basis. An ex-TASS full-time official describing their role commented that:

> There's been plenty of circulars saying branches should merge but there's always that little sentence that says but it must be with the permission of both branches. There's never been a drive from the top, a decision that's been taken at the Executive and you're going to do it. Never had that sort of philosophy (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 1999).

They recognised the haphazard nature of this arrangement. The deep-seated antagonism in some workplaces spilled over from the partner unions, consolidated by the early infighting. As a result, there was little willingness to adopt a common policy toward all workplaces and branches. Nevertheless, they were certainly of the view that the outcome for workplaces and branches of the early post-amalgamation period was a situation where autonomy of action in workplaces and a presence and facility

for raising issues and entering debate over them were present. These features were far more redolent of the 'member-led' unionism of ASTMS than TASS. An ex-ASTMS full-time official confirmed a position where:

> [Workplace organisations] are more independent. To an extent, of course, [workplace organisations] in ASTMS was quite independent but TASS was certainly not so independent and they've sort of adopted the independent type role (ex-ASTMS national full-time official interview 1999).

In MSF, a section of lay leaders and full-time officials engaged in an internecine struggle for control of the new union, a struggle mainly played out at regional and national level. Meanwhile at local level, union activity continued much as before the amalgamation, although with a strengthening of the workplace industrial groups. Here some lay leaders took the initiative of using the amalgamation to rationalise an existing situation of joint working in workplaces on to a single MSF basis. However, without the imperative of utilising the benefit of a larger single voice with employers and the absence of any agreed policy in the union on the rationalisation of local union organisation, branches remained much as they were before the amalgamation. The inevitable result was an incoherent structure of local union organisation that mostly worked well with employers but produced a variable and sometimes fragile presence in the wider union.

Lay leaders had to grapple with the fact of the amalgamation in the context of their workplaces. How they dealt with the problem was conditioned by two factors: the framework for local union organisation agreed between the partners to the amalgamation and the emergent form of unionism of the new union. The form of unionism of MSF came to be 'member-led' where local autonomy, debate, and dissent from local level became increasingly prominent features. Lay leaders were able to use the 'form and character' coming from the amalgamation, alongside its creation of a single voice, to forge a stronger bargaining relationship with the employer. However, within the union there remained a dissonance in representation.

One local lay leader remarked in relation to the operation of their workplace group in MSF that:

> You get the feeling that we're controlling what's going on here rather than we're being controlled (ex-TASS local lay leader interview 2000).

This remark expresses a level of autonomy that is far more a reflection of the 'member-led' unionism of ASTMS than that of TASS. Bureaucratic tendencies that could lead to leadership dominance at the expense of member self-activity (Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001) were evident in ASTMS and TASS. The 'leader-led' hegemony of the Broad Left in TASS showed this tendency in its extreme form. However, in ASTMS, bureaucratic tendencies were frustrated by the ability of lay leaders to work through branch and regional levels and question and dispute the policy of the national leadership. In MSF, the 'member-led' form of unionism eventually predominated.

CONCLUSION

What is the picture we have of the MSF amalgamation? Straightforwardly there were two large 'white-collar' unions, both with a strong presence in engineering and frequently organising in the same workplaces and the same employers, affiliated to the TUC and the Labour Party. In their policies and political standpoints, both were 'on the left'. Both had 'big' figures as General Secretary, Clive Jenkins in ASTMS and Ken Gill in TASS. The prospects for amalgamation were promising, especially as the leadership question was resolved by the early retirement of Jenkins soon after the amalgamation (Carter 1991: 55; MSF 1988e).

The outcome of the amalgamation was for the form of unionism of MSF to be much closer to the 'member-led' unionism of ASTMS and this result provided MSF branches with an appreciably greater presence and influence than would have been the case within the 'leader-led' unionism of TASS. As Fairbrother maintained:

> An ASTMS model more or less prevailed, combining two features of branch organisation. First, ASTMS activists were able to retain control over branches, keeping full-time officials at a distance. ... Second, branch autonomy and sovereignty was retained *vis-à-vis* the centre, focused on independent regional and branch funding (Fairbrother 2000a: 45).

To appreciate how it was that the local level influenced and was influenced by an apparently national directed process, the amalgamation process and all the influences on it need to be drawn together and seen in the context of 'form and character'. Those influences were:

- The process by which local union organisation transferred from the partner unions into MSF.
- The presence of agreements and policies from the amalgamation that impinged on local union organisation in the amalgamated union.
- The presence and influence of leaders and factions in the amalgamation process.
- The format of the amalgamation process chosen by the partner unions.

Despite the stark divide between their forms of unionism, and the presence of a dominant faction intent on extending its dominance into the amalgamated union, the partners to the MSF amalgamation decided to amalgamate as two divisions with parity of representation. Attempting to reconcile these differences within the amalgamated union almost inevitably resulted in a bitter confrontation. It also meant that the position of the local level in the amalgamated union would be a product of that confrontation but that the altercation would frustrate its detailed consideration.

Leaders and factions in MSF were intent on using rival constructions of forms of unionism to legitimate their respective positions in a confrontation that was essentially concerned with control of the union. Control, for the TASS Broad Left, meant a highly centralised 'form', for leaders in ASTMS it was closely related to the concept of 'lay control'. Leaders and factions in MSF consciously organised themselves and confronted each other based on individual concepts of 'form and character', even if this activity was partially a camouflage for control of the union. It was a 'member-led' model that prevailed, one that favoured autonomy for and representation of the local level. This result is partly testimony to the organising abilities of leaders and factions promoting that model, partly the difficulty of maintaining a position of hegemony once a highly centralised organisation starts to disintegrate, but also the relative attraction of that model to others once they were liberated from the dominance of a relatively small controlling faction.

The outcome of the infighting would have a direct impact on branch and workplace organisation. Had the outcome been the agenda of TASS, the Cardiff Principles would have been jettisoned in favour of highly centralised control orchestrated through the Broad Left faction. However, the ASTMS model prevailed and, with its emphasis on 'branch autonomy and representation', limited the former TASS

approach. However, the failure to make any agreements or develop new policies with regard to the organisation of the union in workplaces and branches allowed for their somewhat haphazard and incoherent development subsequent to the amalgamation. Even before the amalgamation, organisation in workplaces was developing around industrial relations issues, often involving lay leaders in the workplace working jointly with those from ASTMS or TASS. Branches became increasingly separated from this activity. In ASTMS, their involvement in internal ASTMS issues increased at Divisional Councils and Annual Conference and they became vehicles for the activity of some individualistic lay leaders disenchanted with the industrial struggle. In TASS, they became increasingly subservient to the hegemony of the Broad Left. With much energy and attention being directed at the national battle for control in the early days of MSF, this model of workplace and branch organisation continued to develop. However, once the argument was largely settled in favour of the ASTMS position, the development was in an environment of autonomy of action, representation (for branches) in the wider union and a facility for promoting and debating issues of concern to the local level.

The 'member-led' unionism of MSF and the position of local union organisation within it is a largely divided and incoherent one in the context of the whole union. Yet there is the ultimate emergence of what is mostly the form of unionism of one partner to the amalgamation (ASTMS). The features of this form are closely concerned with autonomous action at local level and an influential presence in the wider union. This outcome suggests the attributes of the 'member-led' form of unionism favours its emergence in a situation of amalgamation. This suggestion will be further explored in the following chapter on UNISON.

Chapter 7

UNISON
ONE UNION FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The theme that becomes apparent in this chapter is that from a disparate set of models for local organisation in the unions participating in the UNISON amalgamation a single model emerged in UNISON and that model was similar to one of the predecessor unions. It will be argued that this result was an outcome of the process of amalgamation and the various influences on it.

It is important to note that the local case study only had members from NALGO and NUPE whereas the UNISON amalgamation also included COHSE. Although COHSE was much smaller than NALGO or NUPE and only organised in the NHS, COHSE was a full and equal partner in the amalgamation (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5). However, the 'form and character' of COHSE and its local organisation was very similar to that of NUPE and in the discussions over the amalgamation the two unions usually worked in tandem (Terry 1996). It seemed permissible, therefore, to use a case study that excluded one of the participants and draw implications from it across the whole process of amalgamation.

PRE-AMALGAMATION

Prior to the start of negotiations over the UNISON amalgamation COHSE, NALGO and NUPE had all experienced a period of change in the organisation of their activities at a local level and the relationship the local union organisation had with full-time officials and the leadership at regional and national levels. Partly, these adjustments arose from changes in the bargaining environment where localised bargaining became much more prevalent than national agreements. Partly, it was the development of local steward systems as a response to this change and the need to promote closer connection between members and their union representatives (Terry 1996: 89-90).

NALGO

For NALGO these developments were built on longstanding principles of branch autonomy and an arms-length relationship with full-time officials. Table 6 illustrates the wide range of activities and powers enjoyed by NALGO branches, enabled by the rules and structure of the union and the considerable level of funding provided from member subscriptions. Localised bargaining increased the range and significance of branch activity and the growth of steward organisation introduced to union activity a new cadre of articulate, educated and (on occasion) politically motivated individuals (Fairbrother 2000a: 56-58). These new activists were soon using the changed environment to challenge the established leadership at regional and national level for leadership positions and over policy (Fairbrother 2000a: 57; Terry 1996: 90; Personal experience 1982-93). NALGO also largely stood aloof from the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978-79 and its membership was relatively unaffected by the ravages of privatisation and competitive tendering imposed by the incoming Conservative government. It was also unaffiliated to the Labour Party and often saw its policies, promoted by its radical local stewards, as being to the 'left' of party thinking. As such, it saw little need to re-assess its policies on local union organisation and branch autonomy (Terry 1996: 93).

Table 6. UNISON branches.

	UNISON	NALGO	COHSE NUPE
Single employer based	Yes	Yes	No
Steward based	Yes	Yes	Yes
Specialist Officers (Treasurer, Equality, Education, Publicity, etc)	Yes	Yes	No
Branch Committee	Yes	Yes	Yes
Annual Branch Meeting	Yes	Yes	No
Commission payments	No	No	Yes (NUPE) No (COHSE)
Branch rules	Yes	Yes	No
Agreement to visit by full-time official	Yes	Yes	No
Retired members as Branch Officers	No	No	Yes
Central collection subscriptions	Yes	No	Yes
Branch funding from subscriptions	22%	25%	17% (NUPE) 15% (COHSE)
Branch strike fund levies	Yes	Yes	No
Branch affiliations	Yes	Yes	No
Branch donations	Yes	Yes	No
Motions and amendments to Annual Conference	Yes	Yes	Yes
Branch education	Yes	Yes	No
Branch publicity	Yes	Yes	No
Branch employees	Yes	Yes	No

Source: COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1991, 1992; Evans 1993; UNISON 1995a.

The bureaucratic tendencies and tension between the local and other organisational levels set out by Hyman (1979, 1989, 2001), are exemplified by NALGO. Yet the inherent dangers of a distancing from members associated with the development of an elite cadre of local lay leaders, and sclerosis and disunity in union policy and direction from contention between the local, regional and national levels, were not experienced in NALGO. The first was dismissed as misunderstanding of the close and supportive relationship between members and leaders at a local level and the second seen as evidencing the ability of members and local union organisations to exercise control within the union. For NALGO, its 'form and character' accorded with the 'member-led' form of unionism (Fairbrother 2000a).

COHSE and NUPE

In contrast, table 6 shows the narrower range of activities of COHSE and NUPE branches. They had appreciably lower levels of autonomy, and funding was either directed at individual branch officers by way of commission payments related to

branch membership numbers (NUPE) or by a small payment to branch funds (COHSE) (Evans 1993). The relationship between branches, full-time officials and the wider leadership was also much closer, with officials regularly attending branch meetings to provide advice and support (a comparatively rare occurrence in NALGO) (Fairbrother 2000a: 58-61). However, the growth of local bargaining (particularly over issues like bonus schemes) and recognition of the need to improve communication and involvement with members encouraged both unions to develop steward systems (Fairbrother 2000a: 58-61; Terry 1996: 89-90). Industrial action in the public sector around the 'Winter of Discontent' was largely led by COHSE and NUPE and supported through the increased numbers of local stewards. However, the relative failure to secure substantial improvements and the accelerating programme of privatisation and competitive tendering directly affecting COHSE and NUPE memberships that followed the 1979 election victory of the Conservatives, led to a re-assessment of local union organisation. A perceived need for greater discipline in the prosecution of industrial action and policies geared to the re-election of the Labour Party (to which both were affiliated) encouraged the re-assertion of the predominance of a centralised leadership and of full-time officials (Fairbrother 2000a: 60; Terry 1996: 93).

The close-knit relationships within COHSE and NUPE appeared to deny the dangers coming from bureaucratisation and the concomitant tensions between leaders and members and the different levels of organisation set out by Hyman (1979, 1989, 2001). Their 'form and character' placed them as 'leader-led' on the 'member-led/leader-led' continuum (Fairbrother 2000a) but that was seen as a necessity in the pursuance of their policy objectives.

Member-led or Leader-led

Thus the three unions arrived at the amalgamation negotiations with very different versions of the 'form and character' of local union organisation and how they saw it developing into UNISON. If anything NALGO's espousal of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' had been enhanced through its development in the 1980s. Whereas the equivalent experience of COHSE and NUPE moved their thinking in the opposite direction. The substance of the next section is the working through of these two visions in the amalgamation negotiations.

AMALGAMATION

The approach adopted by COHSE, NALGO and NUPE to the negotiations over their amalgamation was at odds with that usually seen in amalgamations of major trade unions. Leaving aside 'transfers of engagement' mergers when one union (invariably much smaller) accepts the rules and structure of the larger, most amalgamations take the form of an 'umbrella' organisation which leaves the amalgamating unions' organisations intact pending a period of internal negotiation leading to the formulation of a new rulebook and structure (Undy 1993: 4-5). The clear advantage of such a process is that it 'locks-in' the parties to the amalgamation and provides an imperative to reach an agreed settlement of differences between them. The disadvantage, and this problem has been seen in the context of the MSF amalgamation, is that the internal negotiation can be a fractious, divisive and debilitating period when the main purpose of the amalgamation is lost amid squabbles and battles for control (see Chapter 6).

Objectives

The Final Report on the amalgamation of the COHSE, NALGO and NUPE National Executives to the 1992 Annual Conferences, maintained that:

> The exciting prospect of forming a New Union would only be possible if there was widespread consultation among those who were affected. This meant establishing wide ranging consultative and educational arrangements both within each of the existing unions and jointly (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE: 1992: 5-6).

An insider perspective would suggest that, at least for NALGO, an additional consideration was that agreement would not be reached on any basis acceptable to the NALGO Annual Conference without detailed consideration of its provisions, including the opportunity for amending them (Personal experience 1988-92), and that NALGO's national leadership were well aware of this constraint (Terry 1996: 100).

Whatever the motivation, the ensuing three years of negotiation included three joint reports to Annual Conferences (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1990, 1991, 1992) and a NALGO report to a NALGO Special Conference (NALGO 1992) that all allowed many opportunities for two visions of union organisation to be debated and argued. This process encompassed compromise and trade-offs to achieve final agreement and

any of the parties could have withdrawn if the price was regarded by them as too high. However, the overall ambition kept everyone at the negotiating table.

At the outset of the discussions, the NALGO National Executive laid down two 'bottom lines' for NALGO's participation, which permeated much of the subsequent negotiations. These 'bottom lines' were confirmed in Composite Motion D at the 1990 NALGO Annual Conference, proposed by the NEC and most of the NALGO District Councils (NUPE 1990). According to the motion agreed by the NEC these 'bottom lines' were in a list of 'the areas of greatest concern to NALGO members and branch activists' (Terry 1996: 94) but soon assumed an iconic status, 'branch autonomy and finance' and 'lay control at all levels' (Fryer 2000: 34; Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 94). COHSE and NUPE wanted to know what was meant by these constructions and were particularly concerned over the second since they envisaged a shared responsibility between lay leaders and full-time officials (Terry 1996: 94).

NALGO's response set out three aspects of 'branch autonomy and finance'. First, the union proposed that branches collected member subscriptions directly from the employer who deducted subscriptions from pay, retained their portion and then remitted the balance to national level. This proposition was the opposite of the COHSE and NUPE system where subscriptions were paid by the employer to the union nationally. For NALGO's lay leaders their system allowed the use of branch funds without the sanction of national level and full-time officials for purposes such as expenses, publicity, employing administrators, donations, affiliations and campaigning. Second, the union advocated that 'branch autonomy' be translated into an 'arm's-length' relationship with full-time officials, who, for example, only visited branches or engaged in local negotiation and representation by invitation of the branch. Again, this relationship was entirely different to the situation with COHSE and NUPE, where full-time officials had an intimate relationship with branches based on frequent visits and active engagement in negotiation and representation. The third strand of 'branch autonomy' was the ability to adopt and campaign for policies opposed to those of the national union and use branch funds for this purpose. This proposition was also anathema to COHSE and NUPE who saw in it inherent risks of indiscipline, an incoherent policy position with a hostile Conservative government,

and a failure to provide support to the Labour Party and the TUC (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 95).

For NALGO, 'lay control at all levels' was also a distinctive concept. As democratic organisations with directly elected National Executives and Annual Conferences composed of lay members, all trade unions can be characterised as 'lay controlled'. NALGO could also point to its District Council officers as elected lay positions, as were the majority of its members on national Whitley Councils. However, the concept had much deeper connotations for NALGO lay leaders than those evident in the 'form' of the union. For them it signified that lay leaders had the lead role in all aspects of the union's activity including bargaining, policymaking, campaigning, and even the appointment of full-time officials with a negotiation and representation role (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 95-96). As Terry remarked:

> Lay control was not just something to negotiate *about*: it was a factor that would influence the success or failure of the enterprise itself (Terry 1996: 100).

COHSE and NUPE subscribed to the generalised notion of 'lay control' in the context of a democratic organisation, but saw a role for full-time officials which was not subservient to that of lay leaders but complementary and shared (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 95-96). The issue encapsulated the 'member-led' and 'leader-led' labels (Fairbrother 2000a) attaching to the unions illustrated in Chapter 5 (see also Terry 1996: 95).

Both of NALGO's 'bottom lines' contained detailed questions of 'form' but even more importantly they encapsulated the 'character' of NALGO as it was perceived by the union's lay leaders and the local level was an inextricable element of that process. 'Branch autonomy' was the local manifestation of 'lay control', and 'lay control' throughout the union was based on 'branch autonomy'. There was a seamless synergy between the two that captured the 'character' of the union (Personal experience 1988-92).

Essentially COHSE and NUPE had three 'bottom lines', all concerned with questions of 'character'. The first 'bottom line' was the relationship between full-time officials and lay leaders, which they saw as one of 'partnership' rather than leadership by one of the other. Second, the unions focused on the relationship between the union and its members, which they wanted to establish as one concentrated on the needs and

aspirations of members or 'member-centred' rather than a perceived over-influence by union activists. Third, they saw a need to configure the amalgamated union as a disciplined and coherent force in bargaining and opposition to the Conservative government (Fryer 2000: 33; Terry 1996: 93-96). Elements in NALGO saw 'partnership' and 'member-centred' as implied critiques of 'lay control', 'partnership' demoting the supremacy of lay members in decision-making and 'member-centred' suggesting that lay activists were not representative of members real interests (Personal experience 1988-92). Both had potential relevance for NALGO conceptions of branch autonomy, lay control and the relationship lay leaders had with full-time officials, and laid the foundations for ongoing debates through the following negotiations (Fryer 2000: 33).

In these negotiations:

> NALGO tended to set the agenda to which the others responded (Terry 1996: 96) (see also Waddington *et al* 2005: 163-164).

COHSE and NUPE's 'bottom lines' were concerned with the 'character' of the new union whereas NALGO's harked back to a conception of its own 'form and character'. My personal experience of NALGO (1982-93) confirms that 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' were deeply embedded elements of NALGO's 'character' for most of its lay leaders. In relation to debates over national policy, this 'character' manifested itself in particular ways. The growth of a more radical group of branch lay activists through the 1980s saw them utilising these concepts in opposition to the more conservative policies of the NEC and full-time officials, and was particularly apparent in debates at Annual Conference and District Councils (Fairbrother 2000a: 56). An example of the internal dissension this opposition could cause was the debates over the representation of disadvantaged groups within the union (Ironside & Seifert 2000: 210-213). More moderate branch lay activists were also not immune to mounting similar opposition when they objected to NEC policy, an example being their mobilisation of support for a Special Conference in 1984 in opposition to financial support by NALGO for the National Union of Mineworkers in the 1984-85 Miners' Strike (Ironside & Seifert 2000: 171-173).

Procedure for amalgamation

Standing Order 16(b) for the NALGO Annual Conference (NALGO 1993: 57) provided for the amendment of NEC reports and this provision provided the opportunity for branches to amend reports on the progress of the amalgamation discussions, despite them being agreed jointly by the three NEC's (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5-7). It is also apparent that NALGO's national negotiators over the amalgamation were very conscious of the possibility of such amendments and the need to satisfy the agenda of branch activists (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999). In practice, many of these amendments were concerned with the preservation of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' (Personal experience 1988-92). The same considerations permeated the deliberations of the NEC who were receiving regular updates on the negotiations and reporting those back to District Councils and branches between Annual Conferences (Personal experience 1988-92). In addition, certain branches and lay leaders were involved with factions within NALGO and these factions had a considerable influence over the debates at Annual Conference (Personal experience 1988-92). Their agenda was also often concerned with 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control'. Thus, in NALGO the local union organisation had a variety of forums and routes by which its voice could be heard in the amalgamation debate. When this facility was added to the general acceptance of the principles of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' their continued prevalence in the amalgamation talks becomes a reflection of widely held beliefs in a particular vision of trade union 'character'.

The situation in COHSE and NUPE was very different. For them the notion of any divided view between the local level, full-time officials and the national leadership went against their vision of a single union where all its elements worked together for the benefit of members. In that vision 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' were irrelevant, dangerously divisive and provided opportunities for subversive elements to sow discord in the union (Payne 1994). In the same vein, under Rule 11 of COHSE and Standing Order 13 of NUPE, the joint NEC reports on the amalgamation were not amended at the COHSE and NUPE Annual Conferences (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5-7). Their main concern was NALGO's apparent intent to frustrate progress by continually reinforcing their 'bottom lines' with the amendments agreed at its Annual Conferences (NUPE 1992; Personal experience 1988-92). As a UNISON national official remarked:

> There seemed to be much less debate in [COHSE and NUPE] on what was in the Final Report and there were certainly some misconceptions about what things meant and particularly about whether or not [branches] would have to merge (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999).

'The local level', as an entity imbued with qualities of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control', was not a concern of COHSE and NUPE. Its presence in their internal deliberations over the amalgamation and in negotiation with NALGO was subsumed in their promotion of a united, politically sensitive and disciplined union where all its elements were interdependent and mutually supportive.

The local context

Chapter 3 described the crucial role of leaders in the life of the local level and relations between the local union organisation and the wider union. As the individuals who were present in the forums where the amalgamation was discussed and agreements reached, their influence on the presence of the local level in that process was vital (Personal experience 1988-92). Leaders at regional and national levels played their part in this process but we must first give attention to local leaders since they had the closest connection with the local level and the greatest interest in seeing it have a prominent position in the talks. In NALGO, there was a widely held adherence to attributes of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control', and the branch as the bedrock for these features within the union. Branch leaders were resolute in seeing that these features were kept at the forefront of the amalgamation discussions and they had a series of forums where their voice could be heard. At District Councils, Annual Conference and in the National Executive they were forthright in promoting the ideals of the NALGO branch through the formal processes of debate, motions and amendments. Complementing these procedures were the informal, and often even more influential, processes of private discussions and working through internal factions (Personal experience 1988-92). These activities could involve the same individuals, their role being characterised by a regional official as:

> A number of regional and national generals, the activists who were involved on a broader level than their workplace would have had significant input (ex-NUPE regional full-time official interview 1999).

Being present in this way enabled a consistent message to be delivered and one that could be claimed as rooted in the experience of the local level.

The situation in COHSE and NUPE was different. As illustrated earlier there was a different conception of the local level as an element of the whole union and there seemed little need to promote its interests as simultaneously separate and complementary to an essentially inclusive concept of trade union 'form and character'. Local lay leaders had no agenda to promote ideals specifically attached to the local level as an organisational entity. Their intimate relationship with full-time officials and national leaders encouraged an environment where dissent and division was against the 'character' and interests of the union and contributed to their leadership positions becoming individualised. Some in NALGO saw this relationship as subservience to the agenda of full-time officials and national leaders, described by a former NALGO regional full-time official in this way:

> My perception was that COHSE and NUPE had a much more centralised, demand and control structure and stuff coming down, whereas NALGO was less that and more going up (ex-NALGO regional full-time official interview 1999).

However, this remark betrays a misunderstanding of the relationship and a somewhat patronising attitude toward lay leaders with a generally low level of educational achievement, mostly engaged in low paid manual work. As Terry remarks:

> [COHSE and NUPE] practice, enshrined in rule, gave full-time officials the right to attend branch meetings; NUPE negotiators in particular made it clear that they expected staff to attend; this was a mark of officer accountability and hence good unionism. ... The NUPE concept of the 'active partnership' between lay and employed officials ... provided a better service to members than might be provided by lay officials alone (Terry 1996: 97).

A result of the individualisation of their personal positions as local lay leaders was that their positions in the union became the main concern of some lay leaders. This concern had ramifications within the negotiations and even more in the post-amalgamation period (Payne 1996).

Leaders

The leadership role of regional full-time officials in all three unions was mainly directed at promoting the advantages of the amalgamation at a local level and providing a two-way link for consultation over the amalgamation proposals between the national leadership and the local level. However, the different environment for the discussions in NALGO meant that their regional full-time officials were more

conscious of a need to relate the consultation process to the prospective position of branches in the amalgamation and to be sensitive to their concerns (Payne 1996; Personal experience 1988-92; ex-NALGO regional full-time official interview 1999). Regional full-time officials in COHSE and NUPE had a similar role except that it was often orientated to the position of individual local leaders rather than questions of organisation at the local level (Payne 1996; Personal experience 1988-92; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999).

Full-time officials and lay leaders at national level had the main role in the ongoing negotiations between the three unions (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5-7, Fryer 2000; Ironside & Seifert 2000: 311). Not only were they concerned with the detail of the amalgamation agreement but also with the consultation process in the wider unions and the joint reports to each union's Annual Conferences (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 5-7). Clearly, they were in a prime position to exercise considerable influence over the amalgamation process. The initial impetus for the amalgamation had come from national level, as had the first skirmishes over NALGO's 'bottom lines' and COHSE and NUPE's alternative vision for the amalgamated union (Terry 1996: 94-95, Fryer 2000). However, for the NALGO side of the joint negotiating team this position of influence was tempered from the outset by their need to secure the agreement of the NALGO Annual Conference as each joint report was produced. They had to respond to the proposed amendments to the reports and then argue for the revisions within the negotiation team (Personal experience 1988-92; ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999; Waddington *et al* 2005: 163-164). For the COHSE and NUPE sides any misgivings at their Annual Conferences were satisfied with verbal assurances, since the reports could not be amended and had to be accepted *en bloc* (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999). The constraint on the NALGO negotiators required them to pay particular attention to the position of the branch in the amalgamation since it was branches, either individually or collectively through District (regional) Councils and organised factions who exercised considerable influence at the Annual Conference. Without a similar constraint on those from COHSE and NUPE there was the distinct possibility of NALGO branches exercising a disproportionate influence over the outcome of the amalgamation negotiations (Personal experience 1988-92; ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999; Waddington *et al* 2005: 163-164).

Factions

Mention has already been made of NALGO branches and lay leaders being associated with organised factions within the union and a national full-time official remarked on the eventual decision of the 1992 NALGO Annual Conference to proceed with amalgamation, that:

> It would not have happened without [the Broad Left] (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999).

Clearly the Broad Left and other factions had a real influence in the NALGO debates over the amalgamation (Terry 1996: 90) and it is necessary to explore in more detail their presence and role in the process.

Factions as an influential and ongoing feature of NALGO's internal operation can be traced back to the formation of the NALGO Action Group (NAG) in the late 1960s (Undy *et al* 1981: 237-238). The partial successes of NAG over bargaining policy, industrial action and in elections of its supporters to leadership positions (including the NEC) were enhanced by a wider influence over policy and militancy completely out of proportion to its actual membership. NAG had also shown that an organised group could use the constitution, rules and standing orders of the union to achieve policy positions against the normal ascendancy of the General Secretary and NEC (Undy *et al* 1981: 237-238). NAG developed into a wider group incorporating elements from the Communist Party, Labour Party and others on 'the Left', generally referred to as the Broad Left (Personal experience 1982-93). Meanwhile adherents of the Socialist Workers Party and Militant came together in a much looser and frequently divided group rather dismissively titled by the Broad Left and others as 'the Trots' (after their espoused allegiance to the writing and policies of Leon Trotsky) (Personal experience 1982-93). Conservative Party and other right wing elements also made faltering attempts at establishing factions but their relative failure to achieve any level of organisation and co-ordinated activity rendered them peripheral as influential groups (Personal experience 1982-93). Some District Councils also operated in a similar fashion to these factions. The Scottish District in particular, and on occasion the North West and North Wales and Metropolitan (London) Districts achieved a high level of discipline in co-ordinated voting patterns at Annual Conference and elections to national lay leadership positions, mostly in co-operation with the Broad Left (Personal experience 1982-93). This factional organisation

worked through local lay leaders and those individuals influenced policy and election positions in branches and District Councils (Personal experience 1982-93).

To appreciate how these factions exercised their influence at Annual Conference it is necessary to describe the make-up and layout of the conference. One delegate, with additional delegates proportionate to its membership, represented each of the 1200 NALGO branches at the conference. These provisions resulted in the conference having around 2000 delegates and necessitated accommodating them in a very large conference hall. Each of the 12 Districts had two delegates to the conference. These individuals were seated together and were able to communicate freely on policy and voting positions. In such a large gathering; co-ordinating speakers, votes, and use of the standing orders was the only effective way of enhancing the possibility of securing voting majorities in crucial debates, particularly in opposition to the position of the NEC or other organised positions (Personal experience 1982-93). Over a number of conferences, factions and certain Districts became skilled at such organisation of the conference 'floor' (Personal experience 1982-93) (see Minkin 1978: 207-242 for equivalent arrangements at the Labour Party Conference).

These skills became crucial in the debates on the amalgamation at the 1992 Special Conference of NALGO. There, an 'unholy' alliance of 'the Trots' and some Right Wing elements opposed the final recommendations for the amalgamation agreement, based on NALGO's 'bottom lines' of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' not being fully met (Personal experience 1988-92). It was only through the superior organisation of the Broad Left and selected Districts that this opposition was defeated. This defeat came from a position that the agreement achieved a compromise that met most of NALGO's objectives and that the greater importance of securing the amalgamation outweighed any outstanding reservations (Personal experience 1988-92).

The importance of this highly influential factional organisation for the position of the branch in the amalgamation was that all the factions saw 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' as vital elements of any amalgamation agreement (Personal experience 1988-92). The difference between the rival groups was over the degree of compromise that was acceptable in achieving that objective in the context of a negotiated agreement (Personal experience 1988-92). It was also essential to the position of branches that the factions could only operate effectively through the co-

ordinated voting of branch delegates; that the position of branches was uppermost in the policy position of all factions; and that factional organisation at Annual and Special Conferences was eventually a pre-requisite for securing the position of the branch in the amalgamation.

Agreement and the local context

The amalgamation agreement that was eventually hammered out between COHSE, NALGO and NUPE was set out in the Final Report of the three National Executive Committee's that was submitted to the 1992 Annual Conferences (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992). Chapter 6 of this Report sets out the main elements that relate to branch organisation and Chapter 12 sets out those on branch resources and the collection of subscriptions. Briefly, these sections proposed:

- Branch boundaries based on individual employers.
- A steward-based organisation.
- A 'common' core' structure comprising:
  - An annual membership meeting.
  - A branch committee.
  - Branch officers - Secretary, Chairperson, Treasurer, Equalities.
- Guidelines for good branch practice.
- Rules to 'underpin the 'partnership' between branches and employed officials' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 28).
- Reimbursement of activists' expenses, including continuation of the NUPE system of 'commission' payments for a transitional period.
- Administrative support.
- Rules for the accountability of lay leaders to members and for members to raise grievances against the activities of lay leaders.
- Limited voting rights for retired members and to act as branch officers.
- Pre-amalgamation levels of branch funding to continue for existing branches.
- Merged branches to have funding no less than that previously provided.
- Central collection of subscriptions.

Table 6 sets these and certain post-amalgamation provisions against those existing in NALGO, and COHSE and NUPE. As Terry commented:

> The model for branch organisation was very close to that existing within NALGO. Branches in the new union would be relatively large, well off and well

resourced, and with considerable scope for local activity (Terry 1996: 100) (also see Waddington *et al* 2005: 168).

The aspects of the agreement that caused concern for branches were how far continuity with past practices would be maintained. This concern can be seen most clearly in the issue of branch finances. For NUPE there was the prospect of a radical change, from direct payments of 'commission' to local lay leaders to a system of payments to branches. This arrangement was very much the NALGO system of providing finances at local level for administration, publicity and training costs, including reimbursement of expenses incurred by stewards and lay branch officers. The problem for NUPE was a substantial loss of income for a number of lay leaders, which subsequently persuaded some to drop out of activity (ex-NUPE regional full-time official interview 1999). For NALGO there was a complete change in the method of providing finances to branches. From one where subscription income was collected from employers by branches, out of which branch finance was retained before the balance was remitted to national level, to one where subscription income would be paid by employers directly to national level who then made separate payments to branches. This change was the subject of much debate within NALGO. Many lay leaders saw it as national level attempting to introduce a vehicle for controlling branch activity by controlling their funds. Many claimed that it represented a naked attack on the cherished NALGO principles of branch autonomy and lay control (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 97-98). These concerns were never completely assuaged. To counter them the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992) contained the following provisions:

- A transitional period before introduction of the new system,
- A branch 'float' to ease over the transition, and most importantly
- A lay appeals committee independent of the National Executive to adjudicate on disputes over the operation of the system (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 64-65).

These arrangements were eventually sufficient to secure the agreement of NALGO's 1992 Special and Annual Conferences (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 97-98).

However, aside from these issues and as is evident from the comparisons in table 6, it was the NALGO 'form' which largely resulted from the amalgamation agreement. A

'form' that went hand in hand with the 'character' of NALGO branches. The NALGO 'bottom lines' of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' had largely been maintained in the amalgamation agreements relevant to the branch. As Waddington and colleagues (2005) remarked on the objectives of NALGO and NUPE for the 'character' of UNISON:

> Issues defined as comprising the character of the new union are not independent of the form adopted for the new union (Waddington *et al* 2005: 165).

Post-amalgamation policies

However, the COHSE and NUPE agenda of a partnership between full-time officials and lay leaders and the need for the amalgamated union to be disciplined and united in bargaining and opposition to the Conservative government had also been incorporated into the agreements (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992; Terry 1996: 93-96). These objectives were more evident as a set of distinct policies for implementation in the new union than explicit issues of 'form'. Nevertheless, they also potentially impinged on the local union organisation. Three were particularly relevant:

- Member-Centred.
- Partnership Working.
- Proportionality and Fair Representation.

Member-Centred, and Partnership Working, were based on creating:

> New kinds of relationship between the union's officials and its lay members, based on 'partnership', and to shift influence from the minority of union 'activists' to the membership at large (Fryer 2000: 33).

They found their way into the Final Report in various guises. 'Member-Centred' appeared as:

- A Key Characteristic: 'the new union ... should be open and accessible to all members, not just activists' and 'its structure should be built from the membership upwards and the whole approach would be member-centred' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 11).
- An Aim: 'To promote and establish a member-centred union and to carry out and fulfil the decisions made by members in a spirit of unity and accountability' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 82).

'Partnership Working' appeared as:

- A Key Value: 'Partnership; in which members, activists, representatives, officers and all staff join together in the service of the union and its agreed policies' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 14).
- An Aim: 'To encourage solidarity and an effective working partnership between members, activists, representatives, officers and all staff in the service of the Union and its agreed policies' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 82).

To the dispassionate observer these proposals might appear as laudable policies in tune with core trade union values of the unity and involvement of all sections of the union in its work and purpose (TUC 2006: 5). However, for COHSE and NUPE they also encapsulated their vision of an integrated and seamless relationship between members, lay leaders and full-time officials, where identification was with the whole union rather than any section of it (Fryer 2000: 39). NALGO, however, saw within them the potential for questioning the presence of their cherished values of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' and a thinly veiled attack on 'the activist' and the operation of factions (Personal experience 1988-92). Member-Centred appeared to deny the leadership role of members and role of 'activists' representing that within the union. Partnership Working also seemed to deny that control was the prerogative of lay members and their leaders and elevated full-time officials to a position of equivalence. Both policies suggested that autonomous branches and factions constituted alternative power bases that had no place in a union based on a contiguous unity through its structures, membership and full-time officials.

Proportionality and Fair Representation have already been expounded in Chapter 5 as a policy intended to address issues of equal opportunities and heterogeneity in the new union (Terry 1996: 101-107; Waddington *et al* 2005: 168). Like Member-Centred and Partnership Working it made a number of appearances in the Final Report:

- Fair Representation: 'In the New Union, all structures, systems of representation, organisation, provision of services and policies should provide for fair representation in the following ways:
  - Fair and balanced representation from each of the three partner unions in all initial arrangements and throughout any interim or transitional periods.
  - Fair and balanced representation of the membership of the union as a whole. This includes fair representation for women and men; black and

white members; lesbians, gay and heterosexual members; members of all abilities and disabilities.

- Fair and balanced representation of members, both part-time and full-time; in manual and non-manual work; in different occupations and at various levels of authority, status, pay and position.
- Fair and balanced representation of members with different skills, qualifications and levels of supervisory or managerial responsibility' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 19).

- Proportionality for women: 'The New Union should reflect the fact that two-thirds of the members will be women. ... It should aim to move towards proportional representation for women' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 19-20).
- An Aim: 'To promote fair representation in all the Union's structures for women, members of all grades, black members, members with disabilities and lesbians and gay men' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 82).

The aim of achieving Proportionality and Fair Representation 'in all the Union's structures' clearly included branches. Whilst legislating for the policy at national level was readily agreed and set out in the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 37, 46, 52-53), progressing it at regional and local level was left as more of an aspiration. To legislate for the introduction of such a policy in branches was even more problematic in the context of NALGO's principle of 'branch autonomy' (Terry 1996: 103). The fight for equal opportunities in employment and in the union was a longstanding one in NALGO and within the union had seen the development of self-organised groups as one response (Terry 1996: 102). Proportionality and Fair Representation had wide support as a principle but any suggestion of instructing branches over the issue was bound to offend branch autonomy. Waddington and colleagues (2005) confirmed that:

> Adoption of the principles of fair representation and proportionality was relatively straightforward. More complicated were debates concerning the groups to which the principles should apply and the application of the principles (Waddington *et al* 2005: 168).

Set against NALGO's 'bottom lines', all three policies had inherent problems for their implementation in UNISON. Member-Centred and Partnership Working were seen as the antithesis of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' or simply a coded attack on the supposed 'unrepresentativeness' of lay activists and factions. Support for the

principles represented by Proportionality and Fair Representation could not be allowed to translate into a directive that undermined branch autonomy.

UNISON branches

The final influence on the presence of the branch in the UNISON amalgamation coming from the arrangements that were agreed prior to the formal amalgamation was over the migration of branches from each of the individual unions into UNISON. Whilst the 'form' of UNISON branches was set out in Chapter 6 of the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 25-32) and has been examined earlier in this section, the situation at Vesting Day on 1st July 1993 was of a conglomeration of branches moving from the three old unions into UNISON. There was no expectation that the 'form' set out in Chapter 6 (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 25-32) would be present on that day; a period of transition would be necessary.

Chapter 6 in the Final Report laid down a Common Core of an Annual Membership Meeting, Branch Committee and Branch Officers that all branches had to adopt from Vesting Day (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 25-26). These features were familiar to former NALGO branches, but much less to those from COHSE and NUPE (Personal experience 1988-92). For the future there was to be a Flexible Framework (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27-31), but one constrained by the following provisions:

- Guidelines on good practice (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27).
- Employer and employment based branches but with a constraint that 'a completely permissive approach to branch structure is not advocated. There are many compelling reasons why employer level branches should be the norm' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27).
- Oversight by Regional Committees through powers delegated to them by the National Executive (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 28).
- 'Clear rules ... to underpin the 'partnership' between branches and the employed officials of the New Union' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 28).
- Reimbursement of activists' expenses set out in the guidelines on good practice and protection of the current system of 'commission' payments to NUPE office holders for a transitional period (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 28-29).
- Guidelines on the accountability of lay officers to lay members and procedures for the pursuit of grievances (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 29).

- A recommendation that 'branches should start establishing 'shadow' New Union branches' (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 30).
- Limited eligibility for retired members to stand for branch officer positions (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 31).

Again, there was little in the framework that went against either existing practice or structure of current NALGO branches apart from the envisaged rules on 'partnership' (Personal experience 1988-92). However, for COHSE and NUPE branches there was the prospect of radical changes particularly over issues like 'guidelines', employer-based structures, reimbursement of expenses and the loss of 'commission', and the eligibility of retired members to be branch officers. Compounding this discrepancy were the 'verbal' assurances that it appeared had been given within NUPE that their arrangements would continue in UNISON unless branches agreed otherwise (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999; Personal experience 1988-92).

The major change for NALGO branches was the change from local to central collection of subscriptions described earlier and set out in Chapter 12 of the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 64-65). However, for the immediate changeover period the change was to be ameliorated by a transitional period up to 1st January 1996 when the existing systems would continue unchanged (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 65). Chapter 12 also set out that the current levels of branch resources would continue unchanged into UNISON and that:

> At the time of integration, the level of funding and resource provision to an integrated branch will be no less than the total previously made to the merging branches (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 63).

Since the level of resources made directly to NALGO branches was considerably in excess of that made to either COHSE or NUPE branches, even when 'commission' to individual lay leaders was taken into account, merged branches were likely to have lower resources than those of NALGO (UNISON 1995a).

The transition process set up a situation where existing branches from the three predecessor unions could migrate into UNISON with little change to their practice, structures and resources. However, the Final Report was clear that the basis on which that took place was a temporary one. Although not completely explicit, the implication was for a rapid transition into UNISON branches and the 'form' of these

branches was far closer to that of NALGO than either COHSE or NUPE. The next section will explore how that transition actually played out.

POST-AMALGAMATION

A UNISON regional full-time official remarked that:

> Following the merger, the workerist inclinations of COHSE and NUPE came to the fore and the assumption of branch autonomy from NALGO also came to the fore. This created a kind of tension, which was based partly on reality, partly on perceptions and a huge distrust on both sides (ex-NUPE regional full-time official interview 1999).

It seems clear from this comment and others that reflected a similar view (Payne 1994, 1996; Personal experience 1993-95) that despite the investment of time, commitment and energy that went into the pre-amalgamation period and the amalgamation agreement, the early years of branch organisation in UNISON were likely to be difficult. In this section, the agreements and policies that came from the amalgamation will be examined in the circumstances of their implementation during this period. A period which largely influenced the 'form and character' of UNISON branches as they appear today.

Post-amalgamation branches

The negotiations over the amalgamation produced a package for a model of branch organisation in UNISON that was very close to that in NALGO (Terry 1996: 100). This model was overlain with policies of Member-Centred, Partnership Working and Proportionality and Fair Representation. These policies partly reflected COHSE and NUPE's concerns for moving UNISON away from criticised NALGO practices of 'activist leadership' and factionalism through the Member-Centred policy, and away from the principles 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' through the Partnership Working policy (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992; Terry 1996). Whilst Proportionality and Fair Representation built on all three unions' agendas for equal rights and in NALGO, self-organisation, but could also ensure the continued presence of COHSE and NUPE's low paid and female membership in leadership positions (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992; Terry 1996). These policies were more concerned with questions of 'character' than 'form' and, apart from arrangements for proportional representation of women at national level, appeared as aspirations rather than

agreements on 'form' in the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992). However, the Final Report was much more explicit about achieving a model branch organisation in UNISON and clearly envisaged changes involving: the merging of existing branches, branch resources and the collection of subscriptions, and the issue of guidelines on the operation of UNISON branches (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992).

Apart from the change from local to central collection of subscriptions for former-NALGO branches, which was incorporated into the Instrument of Amalgamation and UNISON's rulebook (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 65), the new NEC was given the responsibility for implementing the branch model set out in the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992). A Code of Good Branch Practice (UNISON 2003) brought together the guidelines variously referred to in the Final Report and will be reviewed shortly in the section concerned with implementation of the model. However, implementing those parts of the model that involved merging branches and branch resources was much more problematic (Personal experience 1993-95; ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999; UNISON 1996).

Branches had migrated into UNISON unchanged. A tiny number merged at or soon after Vesting Day but the large majority did not attempt to change their situation (UNISON 1996). Despite the claimed benefits of creating a single united voice with the employer there were in practice a set of disincentives from the amalgamation or local circumstances that prevented voluntary moves to achieve the model of branch organisation envisaged by the amalgamation:

- Dealing with personal power and position.
- Fear of take-over.
- Fear of loss of members and loss of activists.
- Fear of loss of commission and honoraria.
- Fear of having to represent other grades of staff.
- Political problems with both a big P and a small p.
- Loss of facility time as the employer rationalised on a new merged branch.
- Some branches resisting central collection of subscriptions (UNISON 1996).

There was an end date of 1st January 1996 for the change to central collection of subscriptions and the system of commission payments to former-NUPE branch officers, but introducing a common branch funding system and creating model

UNISON branches had no such time limit. The Flexible Framework (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27-31) was clearly making only small inroads into achieving the objective. Those few branches which had merged and were complying with the model found that the funding provisions in the Final Report penalised their resources when compared to the unmerged situation, compounding this hesitancy over branch merger (UNISON 1995a: 31-33).

Branch mergers

Within the UNISON NEC, amongst those associated with the former NALGO Broad Left, there was also a developing view that unless branches merged on the basis outlined in the Final Report, UNISON would be stillborn as an integrated union and develop in many locations as more of an umbrella organisation (Personal experience 1993-95). Since effective local union organisation was the foundation of the whole union (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 25-32) that had to be functioning on a UNISON basis for the whole edifice to achieve its objectives (Personal experience 1993-95). There was an awareness of the slow progress with branches merging (UNISON 1996) and the deep-seated problems between individual branches and local lay leaders in many of the largest concentrations of membership. The considered view was that the Flexible Framework and voluntary initiative set out in the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992: 27-31) was unlikely to achieve a common UNISON branch structure in the near future (Personal experience 1993-95). Compulsion to merge was the only viable option. A successful motion to the 1994 Annual Conference on Funding of UNISON Branches (UNISON 1995a: 31-32) raised concerns over disparate funding of branches when branch mergers had only occurred on a piecemeal basis and asked for a comprehensive review of branch funding on the basis of completing all outstanding branch mergers within a strict timescale. The motion provided the opportunity to produce a NEC report and recommendations to the 1995 Annual Conference setting out a common basis for branch funding but one that was only achievable based on a strict timetable for completing the branch merger programme (UNISON 1995a). Whilst there was a well-argued case for making the application of common funding dependent on the completion of branch mergers, those on the NEC looking to consolidate the UNISON model of branch organisation throughout the union could also see the report achieving their objectives (Personal experience 1993-95).

The NEC report on Branch Funding to the 1995 Annual Conference (UNISON 1995a) made a number of recommendations that collectively endorsed the model of branch organisation set out in the Final Report and established a timetable for its achievement. The principal recommendations were:

- A common system of branch funding to apply in full from 1st January 1998.
- A wide range of activities, costs and expenses to be met from branch funds.
- All branches to merge no later than 1st January 1997.
- All existing arrangements for remission, commission and expenses payments from national level in respect of branch expenditure to cease with effect from 1st January 1997.
- Each UNISON branch to submit an Annual Return in respect of branch income and expenditure.
- Penalties for failure to submit the Return.
- Merged branches entitled to create branch levies for purposes approved by the National Executive (UNISON 1995a: 3-7).

In effect, with the approval of these recommendations the 1995 Annual Conference endorsed a system of branch funding, purposes for which it could be used, a requirement for an Annual Return and a facility for branch levies that all mirrored the funding and practice of former NALGO branches. In addition, the system of funding and reimbursing expenses used in COHSE and NUPE would cease. The report argued that these changes would only be possible, in the context of the finances of the whole union, if all branches were merged on the same timescale (UNISON 1995a: 25-26). Those merged branches would be employer-based with large memberships, considerable resources and a large level of autonomy, a model familiar to those from former NALGO (Terry 1996: 100). Within a short two years of Vesting Day the UNISON Annual Conference had adopted an essentially NALGO 'form' of branch organisation and consigned the branches of COHSE and NUPE to history.

Approving motions at Annual Conference is one thing, implementing them in branches quite another. Faced with the resistance and issues illustrated earlier alongside the decisions of Annual Conference, strategies had to be developed at national and regional level to ensure implementation was completed within the laid down timetable (UNISON 1996). In essence, implementation involved national co-

ordination of the process with regions responsible for dealing with individual branch mergers.

Some lay leaders in unmerged former COHSE and NUPE branches had already seen the issue of the Code of Good Practice (UNISON 2003) as indicating a NALGO take-over. The Code contained sections providing for such issues as:

- Communication with full-time officials.
- Dealing with members.
- Achieving proportionality and fair representation.
- Organising at local level.
- Branch structures.
- Branch officers.
- Branch administration and finance.
- Branch rulebook.

These provisions represented a bureaucracy at the local level unknown in COHSE and NUPE. Their branches had simply relied on the union rulebook to govern their affairs. Now, within the first year of UNISON, they were being expected to comply with a booklet of 101 pages that laid down every aspect of their branches' operation (Personal experience 1993-95). Although not mandatory, it was a NALGO take-over when most were still operating as pre-amalgamation COHSE and NUPE branches. For former NALGO branches attuned to branch rulebooks, committee structures, officer groups and responsibility for a considerable level of administration and finance, the Code merely translated their existing practice into UNISON terms.

The Code also contained recommendations for the application of the policies on Proportionality and Fair Representation and Partnership Working within branches and promoted the policy of UNISON as a Member-Centred union (UNISON 2003). However, there was no absolute requirement on branches to implement these measures in circumstances where finding individuals of any definition to take on leadership roles at local level was already becoming difficult (UNISON 2003).

However, the decisions on central collection of subscriptions (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992) and branch mergers and branch funding (UNISON 1995a) were mandatory. There remained some resistance to the introduction of central collection within former NALGO branches (UNISON 1996; ex-NALGO national full-time official interview

1999). However, the intense debate over the issue within NALGO prior to the amalgamation did seem to have exhausted the protagonists and the cocktail of safeguards built into the amalgamation agreement satisfied most of their concerns (Terry 1996: 97-98; Personal experience 1988-92). It was a *fait accompli* and had to be accommodated in a context that clearly favoured the NALGO model of branch organisation (Terry 1996: 100). The decisions on branch mergers and branch funding at the 1995 Annual Conference (UNISON 1995a) only went to confirm the dominance of this model in UNISON. In essence, therefore, implementing these decisions was non-controversial for former NALGO branches. For numbers of former COHSE and NUPE branches, however, merging branches and radical changes to branch funding confirmed the concerns already aroused from the introduction of the Code of Good Branch Practice (Payne 1996; Personal experience 1993-95; UNISON 1996; ex-NALGO national full-time official, ex-NUPE regional full-time official, ex-NALGO and ex-NUPE local lay officer interviews 1999). In a number of large local authorities, particularly those in metropolitan areas, this perception of take-over was in the context of a long history of rivalry, distrust and mutual antipathy between a single employer-based NALGO branch and one or more NUPE branches (Payne 1996; Personal experience 1993-95; UNISON 1996; ex-NALGO national full-time official, ex-NUPE regional full-time official, ex-NALGO and ex-NUPE local lay officer interviews 1999).

Some saw real advantages for local union organisation in the change, not as a specifically 'NALGO' model but for its intrinsic benefits. Those from COHSE and NUPE would find the greater resources and autonomy available in the model considerably enhanced their ability to provide a better service for their members and that:

> Would be a revelation to people who'd run their office out of their back room (ex-NALGO national full-time official interview 1999).

There was an overall benefit for local organisation from extending the advantages of well-organised and well-resourced former NALGO branches into UNISON. As expressed by a regional full-time official commenting that:

> There was a streak of organisation that ran through NALGO, which was a really welcome addition to UNISON because by and large ... COHSE and NUPE were a mess organisationally (ex-NUPE regional full-time official interview 1999).

The whole post-amalgamation process of taking what sometimes appeared as aspirations for UNISON's 'character' and piecemeal elements of a complete package for branch organisation from the Final Report (COHSE-NALGO-NUPE 1992) to implementation in local union organisations was mediated through the presence and activity of leaders at local, regional and national level. The role and influence of these individuals had different emphases but were often interrelated and interdependent. Lay leaders were present at all three levels of organisation and some individuals combined roles in all of these levels. Full-time officials in leadership positions were present at regional and national levels. It is important to recognise that full-time officials and lay leaders have different relationships with the union and their role and influence is partly conditioned by these relationships. As employees, full-time officials are subject to the usual constraints of the employment relationship (Kelly & Heery 1994). Whatever their role and influence in the development of policy and agreements on the amalgamation once decisions had been taken their role became one of implementing those decisions and was particularly the case with seeking to ensure the success of the amalgamation and the process of merging branches. For lay leaders implementing Annual Conference decisions, such as that on branch mergers and funding, had to be completed through the crucible of informal and formal local democracy (Undy *et al* 1981: 38-41). When that often involved lay leaders in a number of branches from the former unions the tensions between conference decisions, personal positions, inter-branch rivalry and internal branch organisation, became an all too ready source of obstruction and manipulation. Implementation would involve detailed and difficult negotiation against the backdrop of a strict timescale imposed by conference decision.

The UNISON branch

These processes of change were played out at the local level. The local UNISON case initially presented all the characteristics of a problematic branch merger (Payne 1996). There were four former NUPE branches and one much larger former NALGO branch, a history of rivalry and hostility between the branches, separate negotiating forums with the employer, the presence of powerful lay leaders in each branch and personal antipathy between certain of these individuals (Payne 1996). However, by the time of the interviews for the case study the merger of these branches had been

completed and the lay leaders were able to reflect on their own and other leaders' roles and influence in the process and the outcome which had been achieved.

For all these leaders the merger of their branches to create a single employer-based UNISON branch had been a difficult and at times traumatic experience (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay officer interviews 1999). However, despite this recent history, they all had positive views of the benefits gained from the newly merged branch (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay officer interviews 1999). Former NUPE leaders identified an increase in bargaining strength through the presence of a single large voice and the employer no longer being able to patronise the small former NUPE branches (ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). For former NALGO lay leaders it was more a question of former NUPE gaining the benefits already enjoyed by NALGO, one seeing it as:

> A higher profile in joining a bigger organisation (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999).

Two results of the branch merger were particularly noticeable. First, there was the continued presence of lay leaders from the former individual branches and second, a continuation of organisational forms from the former NALGO branch. Continuing the presence of lay leaders from the former branches was seen by former NALGO lay leaders as enabling the merger to take place, by assuring these powerful individuals of a continued role in the merged branch and securing their support and participation in the merger (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999). It also gave reassurance to members over the merger that their lay leaders would continue to have an important role in the new branch (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999). This outcome is reflected in a former NALGO lay leader remarking that:

> Generally, we went out of our way to accommodate those people in the hope that we would be seen to be inclusive and that would reflect back through them to the membership, who would see that their former senior officers had been accommodated in the new organisation (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999).

The same lay leader went on to comment that:

> What NALGO had built itself into lent itself nicely to take on board these other unions, form UNISON and give them the benefit of the strong NALGO structure. ... [Former NUPE stewards had] taken on board the NALGO way

> of doing things. There were now stewards committees in all areas and regular JNCs reporting to the Branch Committee. Very much ... the NALGO model ... [They have] recognised they are part of a bigger organisation with the benefits that brings especially in terms of communication and they have been well on board in their trade union activity (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999).

These somewhat patronising remarks toward former NUPE branches and their lay leaders suggest that for former NALGO local lay leaders it was not the merger as such which had led to the benefits, but the continued presence and expansion of an essentially NALGO model of branch organisation.

Former NUPE local lay leaders saw the virtual disappearance of their organisational forms and, at least for some lay leaders, the danger of a diminished presence for former NUPE low paid manual workers in the new branch. As one former NUPE lay leader commented:

> I was concerned that manual workers would lose their identity and status underneath the branch merger. They would probably be swallowed up by the APT&C staff (ex-NUPE local lay leader interview 1999).

The policy on Fair Representation was often appropriated in these interviews as a justification for the continued presence of former NUPE lay leaders, thus ensuring the voice of manual workers continued to be heard in the new branch. The difficulties for former NUPE lay leaders can be seen in the difficulty of reconciling the role and status of a former NUPE lay leader in the merged branch with that individual's own aspirations. Partly the situation can be seen as a straightforward power struggle but at another level, it also reflected the loss of those organisational forms that had provided this lay leader with their role and status. As another former NUPE lay leader commented:

> He could not take in that we were merged; he still wanted to run his own little area as though he was running it before (ex-NUPE local lay leader interview 1999).

Significantly, the situation was ultimately resolved through a decision of the Branch Committee that the branch structure had to incorporate all sections of the branch. Following this decision, the lay leader resigned from their branch officer position and subsequently took early retirement (ex-NUPE local lay leader interview 1999).

Within this maelstrom of accommodating individual lay leaders, merging branches and implementing new processes for branch funding and the collection of subscriptions, the other policies coming from the amalgamation were sidelined. As will be discussed later, UNISON was transformed into a 'member-led' union at the first Annual Conference (Fryer 2000: 37; Terry 1996: 108). However symbolic the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' labels were of particular concepts of union organisation and the relative influence and control exercised by members, lay leaders and full-time officials, their relevance to local union activity was little acknowledged (Payne 1996; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). The close interaction between members and local lay leaders in the case study branch provided a synergy between it being 'centred on' or 'led by' members; they were synonymous. A former NUPE lay leader encapsulated the relationship in this way:

> Everybody thinks they are part of the union. Before they were just thinking, well I pay my subs, so what, because I have had to. Now, they pay it because they want to. ...They are involved because we send them information and they are involved because it allows them to talk to us (ex-NUPE local lay leader interview 1999).

Partnership Working between lay leaders and full-time officials also seemed to have little connection with the local relationship between them. This dimension was much more conditioned by the skills and personality of individuals than any notions of change in the modalities of the relationship (Payne 1996; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). Equally, Proportionality and Fair Representation had little purchase on branch organisation. Fair Representation was utilised to justify the continued presence of former NUPE lay leaders as representative of the voice of manual members and Proportionality was portrayed as the increased presence of female lay leaders (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). However, there had been no progress toward a systematic implementation of the policies within the branch. This failure is not to suggest any incidence of outright hostility to these policies. It was more that their relevance to the local level was either limited in the context of relationships between members, local lay leaders and full-time officials or impractical when set against the limited numbers of members prepared to take on leadership roles (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999).

The activity of local lay leaders was mainly concentrated at a local level. As one lay leader remarked over the requirement for branches to merge, the view of the national leadership over any difficulties experienced by branches in the process appeared to be:

> That it had got to happen, so get there and if you can get there in as good a shape as you can manage, then god bless (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999).

Once the requirement for branch mergers was visited on branches, the involvement and influence of local lay leaders became deep and ongoing. Now the amalgamation was a 'real' event affecting 'real' people. For the case study branch, the only involvement in the process from the wider union was from the regional full-time official and that role was largely one of cajoling the different branches and individuals into accepting and then shaping the merger (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). National lay leaders and full-time officials were seen as completely absent from the process (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE local lay leader interviews 1999). It was up to local lay leaders to engineer the merger and see the formation of a successful UNISON branch.

It did appear that it was the 'form and character' of the former NALGO branch organisation which was dominant in the merged branch. However, its benefits of bargaining strength, resources and strong organisation appealed to those from former NUPE despite any residual problems of under-representation and influence of manual worker members. The other dominant feature of the branch was the continued presence of lay leaders previously present in NALGO and NUPE. Although there had been some loss of lay representatives from both previous unions following the merger, most of those active at a senior level continued. It seemed that these lay leaders were ready to work within new UNISON policies or work with those from the other union to implement them. Without that level of co-operation, it seems doubtful that the merger could have been a success, providing evidence of the crucial contribution made by lay leaders to union activity at local level.

The wider union

In the wider union, the UNISON NEC reported in 1995 that:

> There is a serious risk of under-representation of certain key groups in UNISON. These are particularly:
>
> a) Manual workers generally
> b) Male manual workers in particular
> c) Women, especially in representative positions
> d) Black workers (UNISON 1995b: 43)

In terms of membership of the predecessor unions, the first two groups were concentrated in COHSE and NUPE and, whilst all the unions had a majority female membership, those in COHSE and NUPE were predominately low-paid and often occupied part-time jobs. Proportionality and Fair Representation had been partly designed to secure representation for these groups and this report illustrated the difficulty in promoting that objective throughout the union. National and regional full-time officials both regretted that the amalgamation and the merging of branches had resulted in a loss of COHSE and NUPE local lay leaders (UNISON 1995b). Their view was that this outcome was partly attributable to branches in UNISON being much closer to the NALGO model and alienating some former COHSE and NUPE local lay leaders. These leaders either did not agree with the changes or found it difficult to deal with the associated increase in bureaucracy (ex-NALGO national full-time official, ex-NALGO and ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999).

The role and influence of national and regional full-time officials in the post-amalgamation period in relation to the branch was particularly focused on achieving implementation of the amalgamation agreements and the subsequent Annual Conference decision on branch mergers and branch funding (UNISON 1996). National full-time officials were mainly concerned with setting the framework for this process and monitoring its achievement (UNISON 1996). It fell to regional full-time officials to work with individual groups of branches in achieving this objective.

A particular problem for regional full-time officials was resistance from some long-standing lay leaders who saw the policies in the amalgamation agreement, and particularly that for branch mergers, adversely affecting their positions and power

(ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999). Dealing with that and the personal animosities between individuals in the context of the policy on branch mergers had been difficult (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999). In practice, they had largely been overcome through growing familiarity or the departure of individual lay leaders (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999). They also took the view that there was a degree of inflexibility endemic to branch organisation that was resistant to change (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999). Since the model of branch organisation was largely a NALGO one this resistance tended to be concentrated on former COHSE and NUPE branches and their lay leaders (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999). Accommodating these individuals in lay leadership positions within the new merged branches was an effective strategy for ameliorating some of this resistance (ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official interviews 1999).

Overall, national and regional full-time officials took a straightforward view of implementing the amalgamation within branches. For them the problems associated with the branch merger process came down to personality clashes, loss of lay leadership positions and power struggles. 'Getting the job done' took precedence over any underlying issues in the amalgamation. Achieving that imperative might involve dealing with a range of post-amalgamation administrative problems, ensuring branch mergers were completed, seeking to maintain lay leaders and representatives at a local level or working on everyday issues of negotiation and representation. UNISON was a reality; the 'job in hand' was to make it work. Their responses reflected an environment of practical problems and the imperative of finding solutions to them, whether associated with the amalgamation or ongoing issues of industrial relations.

What was the 'form and character' of UNISON branches after implementation of the agreements and policies from the amalgamation and the subsequent decisions which they generated? 'Form' was the dominant point of negotiation in reaching the amalgamation agreement (Fryer 2000: 33-34), and for branch organisation the agreement resulted in a model far more redolent of NALGO than either COHSE or NUPE (Terry 1996: 100). The subsequent decisions on the Code of Good Branch Practice (UNISON 2003), a timetable for branch mergers and a common method of

branch funding (UNISON 1995a) confirmed and implemented that 'form'. However, implicit in that 'form' was the 'character' of branch organisation, epitomised by the principles of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' heavily promoted by former NALGO as their 'bottom lines' in the negotiations over the amalgamation (Personal experience 1988-92; Terry 1996: 94-97). In UNISON, this outcome produced:

> Participative and relatively autonomous branch forms of organisation, supported by full-time officials but not controlled by such officials (Fairbrother 2000a: 61).

Both the 'form' and 'character' of NALGO branch organisation, one that was heavily redolent of the 'member-led' form of unionism (Fairbrother 2000a), had been relatively successfully replicated in UNISON.

Waddington and colleagues (2005) remarked that:

> Tension between centralisation and decentralisation was central to the merger negotiations [and] continued long after the settlement of the merger agreement (Waddington *et al* 2005: 213, 214).

They went on to comment further that:

> The tension between leadership and activists was marked in the UNISON merger process. This tension, however, was not between leaders and activists of one union, but between leaders of NUPE and activists from NALGO (Waddington *et al* 2005: 227).

Setting these remarks against the preceding description of the UNISON amalgamation it can be seen that centralisation and decentralisation translate as 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism (Fairbrother 2000a) confirming the centrality of that debate in the amalgamation, whilst the tension between leaders of NUPE and activists from NALGO places NUPE as 'leader-led' and NALGO as 'member-led'. The evidence suggests that a 'member-led' form of unionism came to predominate in UNISON. This form was more redolent of NALGO than NUPE and, by inference, COHSE. The tensions arising from bureaucratic tendencies identified by Hyman (1979, 1989, 2001), those between leaders and members and between local, regional and national levels of organisation, are more conducive to a 'leader-led' form where leaders at all levels are consolidated in positions of power at the expense of member self-activity. In UNISON, it seems that despite the presence of bureaucratic practice in all three of the predecessor unions, the presence of a resilient 'member-led' form of unionism in one outweighed those malign influences.

Two events subsequent to the amalgamation illustrate how 'form and character' in terms of branch autonomy and lay control, and a 'member-led' form of unionism, continued to resonate with other interpretations in the form of Member-Centred and Partnership in the formative years of UNISON. First was the rule change at the first UNISON Annual Conference in 1994 when the description of UNISON as 'member-centred' was changed to 'member-led' (Fryer 2000: 37; Terry 1996: 108). Requiring a two-thirds majority to succeed, this change had to garner support from across the constituent parts of the union. It could not be said to be a solely former NALGO issue, even though they were the prime movers in the campaign for the change (Fryer 2000: 37; Personal experience 1993-95). As Fryer remarked:

> This apparently simple, even innocuous and almost self-evident shift of vocabulary in a trade union, touched deep into the intended identity and character of UNISON. ... It added up to a notable change of philosophy and orientation (Fryer 2000: 37).

For branches, and particularly those who continued to be dominated by former NALGO lay leaders, the change appeared to cement in the rules of the union principles of lay control and by extension branch autonomy, and a 'member-led' form of unionism.

Such perceptions fed directly into the second event, that of the National Executive suspending the Birmingham Branch and taking disciplinary action against individual local leaders in 1998 and 1999 (Birmingham UNISON Branch 1999; Carter & Poynter 1999: 505-506; Rogers 1998; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official and local lay leader interviews 1999). The ostensible issues around these events was the presence and influence of members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in local lay leadership positions and the activities of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union (CFDU), a faction largely organised by the Socialist Party (see UNISON 1997 for a report to the UNISON NEC on the CFDU) (Birmingham UNISON Branch 1999; Carter & Poynter 1999: 505-506; Rogers 1998; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official and local lay leader interviews 1999). All were accused of infiltrating branches, and subverting and openly organising opposition to union policy (Birmingham UNISON Branch 1999; Carter & Poynter 1999: 505-506; Rogers 1998; ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE regional full-time official and local lay leader interviews 1999). Whether

credible or upheld such activities were anathema to those from former COHSE and NUPE whereas they were endemic in parts of former NALGO. However, the action taken also had a much wider relevance to the principles and now union rule of UNISON being a 'member-led' union. In this construction, it was up to the membership to elect its leaders. Individual candidates were eligible for election whatever their membership of particular political parties or factions and the national leadership should not take action against them because of that membership. The former NALGO principles of branch autonomy and lay control, now enshrined in the UNISON rulebook as a 'member-led' union, established those parameters and an ex-NALGO local lay leader encapsulated this 'character' as:

> Within those [union rules], they should be allowed to do what they do to the best of their ability and not be constrained by other agendas. In this case, the views of the NEC. That's the name of the game isn't it, in UNISON. It's member-led and the membership, in my view, should have the paramount decision, not the NEC trying to stop them being active in whichever area they want to be (ex-NALGO local lay leader interview 1999).

Thus, 'member-led' also implied a continuation of some of the factionalism of the past.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 showed that the period of debate, negotiation and agreement leading to the formal amalgamation of UNISON often revolved around questions of 'form'. Those on 'character' proved to be appreciably more thorny to approach and all too easily degenerated into coded language and labels such as 'member-led' and 'officer or leader-led' unions, 'indiscipline', 'factional conduct' and 'branch autonomy'. Most of this activity appeared to take place at the level of the NEC, Annual Conference and the national negotiating team for the amalgamation, and suggested a top-down process. The result was that the local level grappled with imposed policies from the amalgamation over which they had no influence and which may have had little relevance to their experience of union activity.

Yet the pre-amalgamation debates and the post-amalgamation experience of the local union organisation suggest that the working through of amalgamation at their

level benefited their operation and favoured the 'member-led' unionism of one predecessor union (NALGO) over the other two. To understand this apparent dichotomy between a top-down process producing results sought from the bottom-up it is necessary to draw together the amalgamation process within a framework of 'form and character'. In this way the amalgamation, the role of leaders and the emergent policies from the amalgamation in relation to the local level can be seen as an integrated reflection of the 'member-led/leader-led' unionism of the predecessor unions. How these influences played out can be illuminated by utilising the mechanics of the amalgamation process, the presence of leaders and factions, the heterogeneity of membership, the agreed policies for the amalgamation, and the migration of local union organisation.

Taking these issues in reverse order enables this discussion to concentrate on the local level. The branch merger process and establishing of branch funding arrangements can be seen as a seamless progression through the pre-amalgamation negotiations, post-amalgamation decisions on implementation and their introduction at local level. Pre-amalgamation the debates over branch funding were as much concerned with 'character' in the preservation of NALGO ideas of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control' (or 'member-led') as they were with the 'form' of its future operation. Whilst the commitment to branch boundaries based on single employers again cemented an essentially NALGO 'form' it also pre-figured large, well-resourced branches with high levels of autonomy. Although there was to be a transitional period when the pre-amalgamation arrangements would continue unchanged, the inevitable consequence of these agreements was the post-amalgamation process of branch merger on 'forms' analogous to those of NALGO. This outcome was despite any loose assurances given to former COHSE and NUPE branches that the transitional period, and post-amalgamation decisions on implementation, would protect their positions. These assurances were partly responsible for the majority of the difficulties with implementation being concerned with reconciling local lay leaders from COHSE and NUPE to the change. Meanwhile, former NALGO lay leaders experienced an organisationally straightforward transition.

Although much promoted in the pre-amalgamation period as innovative policies marking out UNISON as distinct from its predecessors, Member-Centred, Partnership Working, and Proportionality and Fair Representation were curious amalgams of

'form' and 'character' which largely withered in the context of branch activity. Member-Centred and Partnership, were laudable concepts to sign up to: Who could object to seeing members as the focus of the union's activity and working alongside others committed to the same objectives and principles as you? All too easily, however, that aspiration fell foul of the 'member-led/leader-led' debate. Some lay leaders in NALGO saw the proposals as thinly veiled attempts to wrest control away from those seen by COHSE, and particularly NUPE, as undisciplined members of political factions who were unrepresentative of the membership. Inevitably, these constructions were caricatures but were strongly held beliefs by those on either side of the debate. The responses of lay leaders showed divided opinion over the relative failure to progress these policies. Full-time officials at national and regional level regretted the failure and placed the difficulties mainly with ex-NALGO lay leaders. These policies had little resonance at local level where the relationship between lay leaders and members were already very close and that with full-time officials far more conditioned by the personal attributes of individuals than any policy directive.

Proportionality and Fair Representation also had twin personalities. The stated principle appealed to most, that countering the problems of integrating a heterogeneous membership in the life of the union ('character') could in part be achieved by mechanisms ('form') ensuring the proportionate representation within the union of the various sections of members. However, the policy could also be seen, and was openly acknowledged by some, as a bulwark against domination of UNISON by the well-educated, articulate and (occasionally) politically motivated lay leaders of NALGO. To be achieved by ensuring the presence of low paid and predominately female lay leaders from COHSE and NUPE at the various levels of organisation. The implication was that without this presence there was a danger of the NALGO 'member-led' form of unionism becoming the *de facto* writ of UNISON. However, implementation of the policy was a top-down process, first affecting elections to the National Executive and delegates to Annual Conference, then membership of Regional Committees, but hardly impinging on representative and lay leadership positions at local level. Those at national and regional levels saw the policy as an important building block for a different model of unionism. However, at the local level the pragmatic demands of securing the branch merger had overtaken it. Formal implementation had largely been ignored, and the responses of those from former

NUPE betrayed an attitude more concerned with countering the presence of those from former NALGO than the innate principles of the policy.

The presence and influence of factions was a feature of the amalgamation for former NALGO lay leaders, although largely confined to NALGO's internal debate. Their presence at local level appeared patchy, non-existent at the case study but the progenitor of the suspension of the Birmingham Branch. Nevertheless, that suspension evidenced in microcosm the wider incidence of the debate over branch autonomy within a 'member-led' union and the continued presence of a 'character' more associated with NALGO than COHSE or NUPE. Certainly, the responses from former NALGO lay leaders at all levels implied support for 'branch autonomy' (particularly from local lay leaders) and 'lay control'. The presence of factions can be code for the presence of a NALGO 'member-led' unionism that encouraged and facilitated internal dissent and debate and decentralised government, and provided the resources for autonomous branch activity. Whilst these features were evident within the formal structures of NALGO, it also allowed the development of informal forms of organisation, most evident as organised factions. Their influence in NALGO's internal debate over the amalgamation and NALGO's negotiating stance with the other unions was a pointer to the agreements and policies that created UNISON.

The long pre-amalgamation gestation of UNISON was a decision taken at national level. However, its long-term effect for local level can be seen as allowing for extended debates and eventual agreements and policies largely concerned with questions of 'form', 'form' which contained an implicit acceptance of a largely NALGO form of unionism. A form that centred on a high level of branch autonomy, strong branch organisation and resources to facilitate those practices, and a cadre of lay leaders to ensure its operation. These practices had been replicated in UNISON. The implication is that whatever the actual level of involvement local lay leaders had in the pre-amalgamation period, these parameters of 'form and character' about branch operation were the ones being promoted by NALGO and which largely transferred into UNISON.

This chapter has concentrated on UNISON and the presence of the branch in UNISON. By considering the position of the branch from perspectives at national,

regional and local levels, a more integrated and mutually dependent picture of the presence of the local level in the process of amalgamation has become apparent. Embedding the analysis within a framework of 'form and character' and 'member-led/leader-led' forms of unionism has enabled this connectivity to become apparent and has also facilitated tracing the progress of the local level through the amalgamation and seeing it as an integral part of the process, both reflecting and influencing its outcome.

Chapter 8

UNIFI
A UNION FOR THE FINANCE INDUSTRY

The UNIFI amalgamation took place in 1999, eleven years after that of MSF and six after that of UNISON. In contrast to the internecine confrontation of the early years of MSF and the intense debate over the terms of the amalgamation within and between the partner unions to UNISON, an appearance of amicable agreement between the parties marked the UNIFI amalgamation. Given the history of mutual animosity and rivalry between the unions involved in the amalgamation, such an outcome might seem remarkable. This chapter will unpick the underlying tensions that were successfully overcome in the amalgamation process and show how that was achieved.

The unions involved in the amalgamation were very different to each other. NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had developed from the staff associations of the NatWest and Barclays Banks respectively and continued to organise solely in those institutions. BIFU, in contrast, was an established trade union and organised in most financial institutions. The important structural distinction at local level was that NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had no branch structure whereas BIFU did. There was a high level of national bargaining in the finance industry, conducted either by their National Committees in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) or by semi-autonomous National Institution Committees in BIFU (Blackburn 1967: 81-111). It will be argued that these structural distinctions did not diminish the centrality of the local level in the UNIFI amalgamation.

The concept of unionism which is endemic to research on the development of the unions involved in the UNIFI amalgamation (for example Blackburn 1967: 18-19, Gall 1997: 219, Gall 2001: 356, Morris *et al* 2001: 242, Wills 1996: 363) is that of 'unionateness'. First developed by Blackburn and Prandy (1965) unionateness was

'a measure of the commitment of a body to the general principles and ideology of trade unionism' (Blackburn & Prandy 1965: 112) and comprised seven elements:

1. Whether a given body declares itself a trade union,
2. Whether it is registered as a trade union,
3. Whether it is affiliated to the TUC,
4. Whether it is affiliated to the Labour Party,
5. Whether it is independent of employers for purposes of negotiation,
6. Whether it regards collective bargaining and the protection of the interests of members, as employees, as a major function, and
7. Whether it is prepared to be militant, using all forms of industrial action that may be effective (Blackburn & Prandy 1965: 112).

Blackburn showed a marked distinction between BIFU's high level of unionateness and the lower levels of the staff associations (Blackburn 1967: 79-111). A theme running through subsequent research is the increasing unionateness of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) and a consequent closing of that gap (Gall 2001: 356).

In common with the work of Carter (1991) on the MSF merger, a major problem with the academic research on the UNIFI merger (Dempsey 2004, Morris *et al* 2001, Sayce 1999) is an almost complete absence of consideration of the position of the local context within the process. For Dempsey (2004), UNIFI is one of four case studies on union mergers concentrated on the role of full-time managers in the process, whilst Sayce (1999) is more concerned with the historical development of trade unionism in the banking industry with the UNIFI amalgamation as the culmination of that process. Morris and colleagues (2001) are primarily concerned with the UNIFI amalgamation but their focus is very much on relations between BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) as organisational entities. Macroeconomic influences such as changes in employment patterns and bargaining are considered, alongside the part played by national leaders in bringing the parties together. The position of the workplace is noticeably absent from these studies.

PRE-AMALGAMATION

BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) all organised employees in the finance industry and particularly in the banking sector. As such, their membership characteristics were far closer than in the partner unions to MSF and UNISON. Yet this apparent

affinity of membership and employer engagement concealed a long history of rival concepts of trade union principles and organisation and intense competition for membership, bargaining positions and recognition (for a useful survey of this history with particular reference to BIFU and UNiFI (Barclays) see Sayce 1999). A crucial historical distinction between them was their relative unionateness. The considerably greater size of BIFU compounded the rivalry, competition and degree of unionateness of the three unions.

The genesis of these distinctions lay in the foundation of BIFU as an independent national trade union, organising in the finance industry and affiliated to the TUC. As a corollary, employers created staff associations to represent the interests of their employees (see Blackburn 1967: 130-193 for a full history up to the 1960s and Sayce 1999 for subsequent developments). Initially these staff associations were highly dependent on their respective employers for resources and benefited from their very paternalistic stance over the employment relationship. Labelled as 'internalism', Blackburn described the relationship between employers and staff associations in the following terms:

> Banking is different from other occupations; in banking there is no split between labour and capital; no 'us' and 'them', for everyone is one of 'us'. Therefore, we can best settle our problems amongst ourselves without interference from outsiders who do not understand us (Blackburn 1967: 98-99).

The foundation of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) was as staff associations in NatWest and Barclays banks. The breakdown of industry-wide national pay bargaining and increasingly restrictive employment policies from employers as technological change and restructuring followed de-regulation in 1986, led in the 1980s to increasingly combative industrial relations with both BIFU and the staff associations (Gall 2001). Consequently:

> The traditionally pluralist and paternalistic employment practices have broken down, with many large employers adopting more robust and uncompromising positions towards employees and unions. This has been "matched" by the increasing unionateness of the unions [including the staff associations] as a response to this (Gall 2001: 357).

NWSA, UNiFI (Barclays) and the other staff associations adopted increasingly unionate policies including industrial action clauses, registration as independent trade

unions, affiliation to the TUC, closer co-operation with other unions, employed officials and independence from employers (Gall 2001: 362, Morris *et al* 2001: 245).

However, the rival claims to unionate status, bargaining position and competition for members had irrevocably soured personal relations between past General Secretaries. There was mutual recrimination over the failure to surmount these divisions and move toward amalgamation. Not until the arrival within a short period of new General Secretaries in BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), untainted with this history and keen to progress joint working against common employers, did amalgamation become a realistic prospect (Morris *et al* 2001: 245). One ex-BIFU full-time official gave a graphic description of the change in relations between the General Secretaries, and remarked that:

> Ever since I've been involved with this union, we've been pushing the one union approach. We didn't get anywhere for years because our leader, the old General Secretary Lief Mills, didn't get on with the leaders of the other two. Fortunately, all the leaders were changed within a very short space of time. The industrial logic for merger was even more pressing then. We were all losing members because of redundancies, and there was a will with the new people to get together and talk (ex-BIFU regional full-time official interview 2001).

From this quote, it is possible to isolate factors that favoured an amalgamation. First, a longstanding objective for a single union in the finance industry from BIFU, second the conjunction of changed leaderships supportive of amalgamation and third, industrial logic encouraging amalgamation. Enhanced by the increased unionateness of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) the catalyst was there for starting the amalgamation process.

From its foundation BIFU had a policy of a single union for the finance industry but the coterminous founding of employer-supported staff associations in virtually all banks and finance bodies had almost immediately frustrated this objective. BIFU's policy was one where:

> The associations were to be worn down and obliterated with no compromise, their memberships appropriated and their ideology exposed as false (Morris *et al* 2001: 242).

This approach was not one that would foster good relations or establish an environment in which merger could be rationally considered! Meanwhile the staff associations became established and effective organisations in representing and bargaining for employees. Whilst membership for both continued to expand, and despite the antagonistic employment policies increasingly adopted by the employers, an effective stalemate established itself in the inter-union war (Morris *et al* 2001: 243). There were tentative merger discussions but in such an environment, they soon perished (Morris *et al* 2001: 243). Thus, BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) arrived at their amalgamation with no experience of previous mergers and established structures.

BIFU

BIFU, with its long history as an independent, unionate, TUC affiliated trade union had developed a 'union' structure familiar to most TUC unions; local branches, regional committees, national executive committee, annual conference and elected General Secretary (Undy *et al* 1981: 41-45). Semi-autonomous National Institution Committees for bargaining activity with individual banks and finance companies supplemented this structure (Blackburn 1967: 81-93). In addition, there had been a recent development of branches associated with large workplace sites such as call centres, which also had a level of autonomy over bargaining activity (Rose 2002). An ex-BIFU national full-time official elaborated on this development and commented that:

> BIFU had quite a lot of institution branches. We had some huge branches that were basically white-collar factory branches. There was a Barclays Barclaycard Branch in Kirby. The only successful growth in any form of branch network, in any form of Office Reps, steward structures was in institution branches (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

Whilst there was no independent funding of branches and much organisational activity was centralised on the National Executive and the General Secretary there was an expectation and facility for debate and dissent with the national leadership. An ex-BIFU local lay leader describing the Annual Conference maintained that:

> There would be a lot of debate on issues and things that the NEC wanted to do. National Institution Committees didn't have autonomy so they would be lining up people from branches. All the National Committees would say, you go and you speak about this or you vote about this because we don't feel the

decision that the NEC made was right (ex-BIFU local lay leader interview 2001).

BIFU arrived at the point of amalgamation with the 'form and character' of a unionate trade union. It had membership across the finance industry and, if much of the bargaining with individual employers took place at a national level; its structure was justified in unifying and co-ordinating membership activity within the union itself. Most local union activity was concerned with individual member representation and workplace health and safety issues. Local geographical branches sought to co-ordinate and support this activity, and provide a local forum for engagement with the wider union (ex-BIFU national lay leader interview 2001). 'Institution' branches in some large workplace sites combined both these activities and often engaged in full bargaining activity (ex-BIFU regional full-time official interview 2001).

NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)

Meanwhile NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had largely retained their 'staff association' structures despite developing more unionate policies vis-à-vis the employer (Blackburn 1967: 93-111 for their earlier development and Morris *et al* 2001: 243 for moves toward a more unionate status). This structure was highly centralised on the National Executive Committee and the General Secretary for bargaining and organisational activity with only very informal links and communication elsewhere. As an ex-NWSA lay leader remarked:

> I feel that [the UNIFI NEC] have far more control over the full-time officials than we used to have in NWSA. Although we didn't think it at the time I probably think that we were there to rubber-stamp most of the decisions (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

The close internal relationships within the unions generated through employment in a single institution and a desire to distinguish them from a 'union' (such as BIFU), had resulted in no provision for local or regional levels of organisation. In addition, the practices of debate and dissent endemic to unionate unions were seen as unnecessary in the environment of a staff association where notions of a conflictual employment relationship had only been experienced in the very recent past. The same ex-NWSA lay leader commented on the introverted concerns of NWSA in remarking that:

> We'd have never have thought to have commented about something that we didn't think touched NatWest (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had become increasingly unionate but their bargaining activity focused on a single large employer and their much smaller membership was spread over the entire country. The representation of individual members and dealing with such issues as health and safety, took place in the context of that single employer. Member identification was with that employer and its associated staff association. These close links did not produce an imperative to establish a network of local branches to co-ordinate local workplace activity or communicate through the union. The intimate relationship between the union and the employer, supplemented by a few specialist committees to represent the concerns of particular job specifications, could achieve that outcome (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

Member-led or Leader-led

The tensions between local, regional and national levels of organisation and leaders and members exposed by Hyman (1979. 1989, 2001) appeared least evident in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). Their earlier distancing from unionate practice and intimate relationships within the boundary of a single employer encouraged a lower level of the bureaucratisation which Hyman saw frustrating workplace self-activity and debilitating democratic accountability. Yet evidence suggests a relatively powerful national leadership, albeit communicating relatively freely with members, but nevertheless intent on pursuing its own policy agenda. The facility for challenging this leadership from the workplace was constrained by a lack of democratic forums, an apparent affinity of purpose between leaders and members that discouraged debate and dissent, and a legacy of differentiation from unionate practice. On the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum (Fairbrother 2000a) the 'form and character' of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) were concentrated toward 'leader-led' arrangements and practice.

BIFU, in contrast, presented a contradictory picture. There was a level of bureaucratic practice at regional and national levels of the structure occupied by full-time officials and lay leaders. The national leadership held an influential position

within the union power relationships, in part consolidated by the prevalence of national bargaining. However, evidence suggests that the ability of the national leadership to promulgate its policy was constrained by the need to accommodate the concerns of lay leaders promoting the position of workplace influence or scrutinising and debating national policy at regional and national democratic forums. The tensions outlined by Hyman in relation to democratisation and bureaucratisation were evident in BIFU but workplace influence was still an important presence in the power relationships that defined the union. Partly this democratising aspect is attributable to a structure of branches and regions that provided the formal facility for expressing dissent and engaging in debate. This approach was attributable, partly to BIFU's unionate status that encouraged the practice, but also to the presence of local lay leaders interacting with and reflecting the concerns of members. On the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum the 'form and character' of BIFU displayed a 'member-led' characterisation when contrasted with that of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

In an earlier period, Blackburn had concluded for unions in the finance industry that:

> Both [BIFU and the staff associations] wished to be seen as responsible and respectable bodies, democratically run, without political strings and preferring co-operation and negotiation with the employers to the use of militancy (Blackburn 1967: 80).

If increased militancy in the face of employer antagonism had latterly changed this assessment, that change was prevalent for all the parties to the UNIFI amalgamation. In contrast to the heterogeneous characteristics of membership and industries in the MSF and UNISON mergers, BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had close affinities of both membership composition and industry location. However, their very different historical and organisational origins still set a scenario for their amalgamation that had the potential for an uncertain outcome in the context of local union organisation.

The UNIFI amalgamation brought together one union with a network of local branches constitutionally linked to regional and national levels of organisation. It also had wide experience of bargaining and representation across different employers. In contrast, the two other unions had hardly any of the same organisational features and a bargaining framework concentrated on one employer. The wider synergies of all three unions organising in a single industry and members with the same job profiles often working alongside each other were very clear. However, the

disparities, which were particularly apparent in local workplaces, would require resolution within the amalgamation process. How that was achieved and the consequence for the position of the local context in the amalgamated union is the subject of the next section.

AMALGAMATION

An ex-BIFU senior national full-time official remarked that in approaching the amalgamation they had discussed the process of amalgamation with the General Secretaries of six recently merged unions to establish what they did and seek advice on what to avoid. The consensus was:

> Not to get completely consumed in the process. Every one of them got consumed! You had to smooth people over, you had to argue with them, and you spent a lot of time dealing with that. Whereas, to a large extent, from the trade union members' point of view all they want to know is that the union's on the doorstep doing the job for them at their place of work. We did that but I think I took my eye off that quite a lot. That's not what should have happened (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

Such a comment re-emphasises the centrality of union activity at a local level as the priority for union members and the need to maintain that within a process of amalgamation.

Procedure for amalgamation

Like UNISON, there was an elongated period of negotiation over the terms of the amalgamation before the ballot of members to approve it. The formal amalgamation was followed by a shorter transitional period before implementation of the full terms of the amalgamation. Whereas in MSF, the pre-amalgamation period of negotiation was shorter but the post-amalgamation transitional and implementation period was much longer. Of note, there was a very amicable environment for the discussions and voting on the amalgamation with little evidence of dissent to the proposal (ex-BIFU national lay leader interview 2001). This environment was in marked contrast to that in UNISON and MSF where from the outset, and despite widely held commitments to the principle of amalgamation, issues of control and 'form and character' within the amalgamated union were hotly debated between and within the parties (Fryer 2000). As one local lay leader remarked:

> Just prior to the merger there was a lot more working together, so when the merger actually came about it was a good thing. Everybody was ready for it, everybody wanted it, all the members wanted it. It was welcomed (ex-BIFU local lay leader interview 2001).

Like UNISON, the expectation of the amalgamation process was that points of difference and potential disagreement between the partners could be resolved before an irrevocable decision to amalgamate had been taken. It also allowed for consultation and debate within each union over the direction of the negotiations, outside of the national leadership who were directly involved in those negotiations. A senior ex-BIFU national full-time official described the period like this:

> The negotiations were long because we decided to do a rulebook before we did the merger. We needed to do it because people wouldn't have signed up to it, the two staff unions wouldn't have signed up to it. That was very difficult, because we then spent 18 months in purdah doing rules. The negotiations were longer than the Amicus merger, much longer in real terms. I was elected in '96. We didn't form UNIFI until May 1999 and it was three solid years of meetings (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

BIFU had three times the membership of either NWSA or UNiFI (Barclays) but, and a possible source of contention, the value of BIFU's assets were similar to both of them (Morris *et al* 2001: 249). BIFU sought to counter concern that the amalgamation was not simply a takeover of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) by acknowledging equal status for them in the negotiations and adopting a position of no preconditions. This comment from an ex-BIFU regional full-time official confirms the position of BIFU:

> I think that's what was the catalyst for actually getting the talks going, that the bigger union wasn't trying to grab them, at least not overtly but was willing to say, it's all up for grabs. Let's just talk (ex-BIFU regional full-time official interview 2001).

This position was particularly important, since BIFU's policy for a single finance union had always been on a basis of its own structure and rules (Morris *et al* 2001: 242-243). As the largest union, with the strongest unionate background, and a familiar 'union' structure, the adoption by BIFU of a no preconditions and equal status position was of particular significance, as evidenced by a senior ex-BIFU full-time official who remarked:

> For us to say we were giving equal status when we were three times bigger was a huge concession. We were saying to NWSA and little UNiFI (Barclays) we will treat you as an equal, we will give you one third of everything, there won't be any complications (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

The local context

However, once the negotiations got underway it soon became apparent that the three unions had 'bottom lines' which had particular relevance for the position of the local level. The single-employer unionism practised by NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) required the provision of autonomous bargaining arrangements for individual national employers. An ex-BIFU full-time official described the contrast with the practice in BIFU in this way:

> [NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)] wanted National Company Committees that would be totally responsible for making all the decisions on national bargaining. In BIFU, the [National Institution Committees] would have their meetings, have their negotiations and make recommendations, but unless those recommendations were endorsed by the National Executive Committee they were sent back to rethink (ex-BIFU regional full-time official interview 2001).

In BIFU, their multi-employer bargaining and 'union' structure required the continuation of a similar form into UNIFI. Two particular aspects of this arrangement were identified by another ex-BIFU full-time official, who remarked that:

> Whether or not there would be a regional structure in the new organisation. We said there had to be, because we were national and you had to have some regional recognition that financial institutions operate regionally. The other big one was how would you elect the NEC, would it be by direct election from institutions or would it be by direct election from regions? A lot of BIFU people were wedded to the principal of regionalisation saying we don't want to have people from institutions on the NEC (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

These positions epitomise two conceptions of the local level within the wider union. In NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), the local level was located with a single employer, prompting the close connection between workplaces within a single employer and the ability of members in individual workplaces to identify with workers in other

workplaces. It may be argued that the close affinity of working for a common employer enhanced the 'trade union collectivism' of these members (see Ward 2007 and Stephenson & Stewart 2001). Their demand for National Company Committees with bargaining autonomy sought to maintain that ethos within a multi-employer union.

BIFU already was a multi-employer union where the local level allowed for a bargaining relationship with individual employers, promoting or enabling a close connection between workplaces within an employer. These connections facilitated co-operation between the separate workplaces that made up the branches that defined the union. Branches were drawn together via the regional form of representation. However, activity with individual employers also had to be integrated within the activities of the wider union. BIFU's regions were an integral part of the structure which provided those opportunities and which included a structure of National Institution Committees with semi-autonomous bargaining powers which mirrored the single company bargaining relationship of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

The 'bottom lines' of the partners to UNIFI did not assume the positions of dissent and difference which marked their presence in the amalgamation negotiations of MSF and UNISON. The negotiations resulted in industrially autonomous National Company Committees meeting NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)'s aspirations and fitting well with BIFU's existing semi-autonomous National Institution Committees. Complementing these arrangements a regional and branch structure closely mirroring that of BIFU was established. Morris and colleagues (2001) concluded that:

> The outcome was a geographic structure based around regions and a company-based negotiating structure. The former had responsibility for recruitment and organisation plus the execution of national policy; the latter has responsibility for bargaining (Morris *et al* 2001: 248).

Underpinning this structure was the network of individual workplaces. These were closely integrated into the negotiating structure through the National Company Committees, and the operation of the wider union through branches and regions. It appeared that the extended pre-merger period of negotiation had enabled two apparently divergent constructions of union organisation to be incorporated within a single structure.

Leaders

The willingness of the three new General Secretaries to be active in promoting the amalgamation was a crucial part of its successful completion (Morris *et al* 2001: 245). However, despite their pre-eminence, without the support and co-operation of lay leaders the amalgamation would not have been concluded. Certainly, in BIFU, the presence of these leaders at branch and regional level was an important influence in the outcome. As confirmed by an ex-BIFU full-time official in this way:

> BIFU had a strong branch and regional structure. Part of the process of doing the Rules Commission [for UNIFI] was for me to go out round the country holding meetings of Regional Chairs and prominent players and talk to them on the progress we were making. They were very influential and had we not persuaded them then the merger would not have taken place (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

The apparently seamless congruity of relationships in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) allowed their national leaderships to proceed in the negotiations with little hindrance. An ex-NWSA lay leader contrasted the structure of NWSA with that of BIFU showing how it produced these close relationships, and remarked that:

> Our structure was very different to BIFU's because they did have a central function, a regional office function, officers, and so on. We just had our central function being the Executive Council. We didn't have any regional function at all. We had national officers, Assistant General Secretaries and their assistants. But then below that there were just the Regional Organisers. We didn't have as many layers of structure (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

These two comments show that in BIFU, as with the partners to MSF and UNISON, a structure with lay leaders active at various levels required meetings across the country for meaningful consultation, whereas in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) their smaller size and the close affinity between leaders allowed for a continuing two-way flow of consultation. The influence of leaders was an important factor in the ultimate success of the amalgamation but mediated through the quite different characteristics of each partner union. These practices reinforced their experience of union activity and went with them into UNIFI.

This experience of the amalgamation negotiations illustrates the divergent 'form and character' between BIFU and the other two unions. In NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), the apparent ease of communication and close affinities within a single employer countered the distancing of members from effective influence over their leaders. However, the role and activity of the National Committee, personified in that of the General Secretary, was the focus of this relationship. In practice, the position of the national leadership was a hegemonic one even if expressed in a congenial and inclusive manner; NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) were 'leader-led' unions. The insistence on bargaining autonomy for National Company Committees in UNIFI partly reflected that relationship. Against that, BIFU saw the influence of members on their leaders. The presence of National Institution Committees with a high level of bargaining autonomy was a particularly stark example. The diffuse nature of the organisational practice via the General Secretary and full-time officials, National Executive Committee, Annual Conference, Regional Councils and branches opened up forums where dissent and debate took place. The unionate 'character' of BIFU encouraged those features. The evidence of widespread consultation over the merger proposals supports a view that the workplace membership retained a capacity to influence the national leadership. Comments from an ex-BIFU national full-time official (Interview 2007) suggested a high level of national organisational activity in BIFU accompanied by challenge and debate over questions of policy. Contrasted with 'leader-led' NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), BIFU was 'member-led'.

The concentration on structure in the amalgamation negotiations excluded appreciation of these different internal relationships and ways of working. Thus NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)'s insistence on autonomous National Company Committees as a condition for the amalgamation might preserve the close and amicable relationships characteristic of their single company identity. Equally, continuing the presence of BIFU's structure allowed its associated features of dissent and debate to be maintained in the amalgamated union. As an ex-BIFU full-time official commented in relation to the three sets of lay leaders:

> [In BIFU] we were a bit more politically savvy, with a small 'p'. Their lay people believed that if the General Secretary said the moon is green and it flows round the sun on a Tuesday afternoon then that's what it did. Whereas ours were a bit more spiky, you had to justify your existence (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

everybody going phew, oooh! (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

The twin-track structure of industrial autonomy in the National Company Committees and organisational integrity through BIFU's structure seemed to satisfy the aspirations of all the partners, although they had different conceptions of unionateness.

Post-amalgamation local union organisation

The major structural issue that had particular relevance for local union organisation was adapting the structure of regions and branches in BIFU to accommodate NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). The transitional National Executive decided on the regional boundaries and the need for an elected regional committee to oversee regional activity. These decisions mainly replicated the existing BIFU model (Morris *et al* 2001: 249). Decisions on the branch structure then devolved to the new regions but again the result largely replicated the existing pattern of BIFU. This outcome was confirmed by an ex-BIFU lay leader in replying to a question on whether the UNIFI branch structure continued that in any of the predecessor unions:

> Yes, it has. You've got to understand the only model for branch structure that existed prior to merger was in BIFU. We got all the activists within a region together to decide what branches there would be. Unfortunately, the debate was dominated by old BIFU people. That's a good thing and a bad thing. It's a good thing in the fact that if there hadn't been any BIFU people there we would never have ended up with a branch structure and the bad thing is that there is a perception that it's BIFU mark 2, which we didn't want it to be (ex-BIFU national lay leader interview 2001).

However, a former NWSA lay leader had no difficulty with this outcome, and commented that:

> There wasn't that much wrong in the structure of the old BIFU. It was working for servicing the members, so there was no need to change it (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

The crux of the issue lay with the bargaining relationship practised by the predecessor unions, its presence in the workplace and translating it into the context of the merged union. This was whether the relationship was with a single employer as in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), or multiple employers as in BIFU. Members in

workplaces co-operated with each other to achieve common objectives, either against a single employer in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), or against one of many employers in BIFU. Members were located in individual workplaces but acted across many others to achieve their bargaining aims (see Ward 2007). The different practices of BIFU against those of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) are a reflection of its multi-employer basis rather than more fundamental divisions of union practice.

Integrating local bargaining activity in the work of the union was compounded by wider issues of democratic accountability and debate on questions of union policy and organisation. In NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), their relatively small membership and location in single institutions meant that accountability and debate centred on a single national committee, supported by a few specialised and area committees. In BIFU, these issues required a network of local branches to co-ordinate and legitimate decision-making.

Leaders

The role of full-time officials and lay leaders in fostering this phase of the amalgamation process was crucial. Their continued commitment to maintaining an environment of goodwill, compromise and an absence of preconditions gave reassurance (particularly to NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)) that the amalgamation remained on a basis of equal status for the three partner unions. Not only did this commitment lubricate the amalgamation process and avoid the dissension that had been a feature of the MSF and UNISON amalgamations, it was also expected to facilitate lay activists from the predecessor unions participating in the new and revised structures of UNIFI. However, those from former BIFU rapidly populated the structures once they were opened up to elections. An ex-BIFU local leader described the early development of the UNIFI structures as:

> If you look at the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the NEC, the first one following the merger had some people on there from [NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)]. If you look at it now, apart from the Vice-President, everybody else on F&GPC is old BIFU (ex-BIFU local lay leader interview 2001).

This development might have been anticipated in those parts of the structure that strongly reflected the structures of BIFU but it also manifested itself within the NatWest and Barclays National Company Committees that had been expected to be

the redoubt of lay leaders from former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). An ex-BIFU national official stated that:

> Rory (the former NWSA General Secretary) thought that the NWSA people would dominate the RBS/NatWest structure but within a year, the chair of the committee was an ex-BIFU person. You had to stand for election, and people from BIFU said OK we'll do it. Plus the fact I think people from NWSA felt as though their time was over. We had the numbers and we probably had the talent, both in the lay and full-time structure (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

In branches, there was a similar lack of involvement from former members of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). An ex-BIFU local leader suggested that the main problem was unfamiliarity with a branch structure, and remarked that:

> It was a real problem for [NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)] because they didn't have a traditional union branch, which fed into a region and it was a very hard concept for them to latch onto. What we have found across the country is that very few old NWSA people go to branches or to regions. They still don't see a need for them; they don't see how they help (ex-BIFU local lay leader interview 2001).

Some suggested that the problem was partly attributable to individuals from former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) simply using the opportunity provided by the change to cease active involvement. However, the consensus from a number of interviews with former BIFU and NWSA lay leaders and full-time officials was that a combination of factors persuaded some former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) lay leaders to cease activity and advantaged those from former BIFU in contesting for positions.

- Former BIFU was numerically larger and so its activists were in the majority and had the support of the largest group of members.
- Former BIFU's lay leaders were more used to campaigning in contested union elections.
- Former BIFU's lay leaders were more challenging of employers.
- Former BIFU's lay leaders were more challenging of the national leadership of the union.
- Former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) lay leaders were unused to activity within a unionate union structure.

- Former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) lay leaders dealt with a single employer rather than a large number (ex-BIFU local lay leader interview 2001, ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

Apart from the issue of numerical size, these factors reflected differences between the partner unions. BIFU's structure was largely replicated in UNIFI. Former BIFU lay leaders had long experience of this structure and the use of its electoral processes to secure positions within it. They understood and had the ability to utilise the formal procedures prescribed by the structure to achieve their policy objectives. They understood the use of informal contacts and influence, facilitated by those formal procedures. In addition, the structure was characterised by an environment of dissent and debate, one with which they were familiar. For them, the establishment of National Company Committees and changes to the representation on other committees was understood as variations to a familiar structure and thus they were able to accommodate to the new arrangements relatively easily.

In contrast, the experience of former NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) lay leaders had been in unions whose structure was centralised on a single national committee that incorporated bargaining and organisational functions and was characterised by informal and congenial personal relationships. This environment was directly related to the unions' bargaining relationship with single employers and their origins as staff associations. The formal and informal procedures of BIFU's 'union' structure, including that of contested elections, was outside their experience as was the environment of dissent and debate which was facilitated by it. Faced by the twin disadvantages of inexperience of a new and potentially more contentious structure and the numerically larger cohort of former BIFU lay leaders, it appears that a sizeable proportion decided against continuing activity in what must have seemed an alien environment.

The different experiences of these lay leaders can also be seen as a reflection of the tensions endemic to their previous unions, those between national and workplace, leaders and members, democracy and bureaucracy, and characterised as 'leader-led' or 'member-led'. An amiable hegemony exercised by the national leadership characterised NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). 'Tensions', in the sense of rivalry between alternative positions of policy or power, were barely evident and the result

was dominance by a small national coterie of experienced lay leaders and full-time officials. In contrast, there was dissent and debate within BIFU, evidenced through its structure and the involvement of full-time officials and lay leaders within it. This environment extended to national bargaining activity in the National Institution Committees where most members experienced their closest and regular connection with their union and so with their leaders. The unionate process of dissent and debate in BIFU allowed for the voice of members to be heard at the interface between members and leaders, and local and national. Mediated through the activity of their leaders, a 'member-led' form of unionism was produced. Senior lay leaders in all the partner unions were prepared to accommodate themselves to the change, and often welcomed it as the price of continuing their active involvement.

The UNIFI workplace

These developments are illustrated in the post-amalgamation history within the NatWest bank where employees had been organised by NWSA and BIFU. In UNIFI, the former BIFU NatWest National Institution Committee and the bargaining function of the NWSA National Committee subsumed into the new NatWest National Company Committee. Below the previous national committees, both unions had organised a network of local representatives in high street branches and other work locations. In BIFU these representatives were complemented by its regional and branch structure. For UNIFI members in the NatWest there had been a virtually seamless transition from the partner unions' organisations. In the words of an ex-NWSA lay leader:

> We knew from day 1 that the 19th May we were no longer the constituent unions, we were UNIFI, and that was how we had to deal with things. And that message going down worked because we united almost instantly so to speak. And I'd say that, that was at all levels as well (ex-NWSA national and local lay leader interview 2001).

In the new National Company Committee, many of the senior lay leaders from BIFU and NWSA continued in active involvement. However, within a relatively short period individuals from former BIFU occupied the leading positions, as evidenced by the earlier remarks of an ex-BIFU full-time official. However, at local level the change had been even more marked with proportionately more former NWSA lay leaders

stepping down from union activity in favour of their former BIFU counterparts. Two ex-BIFU lay leaders described the situation in their workplace:

> In some offices you've got two reps. You've got one from the Staff Association and one from BIFU. It has tended in my experience that the BIFU rep has sort of taken a full lead in the most part and the NatWest Staff Association reps have fell by the wayside. They would say, you seem to know what you're doing, I don't want to be political, I'm not an activist but BIFU are activists so you get on with it (ex-BIFU local lay leader interviews 2001).

These remarks suggest perceptions about BIFU and NWSA that were current in the workplace, and which were a crucial influence over the post-merger development of UNIFI:

- BIFU was a much larger union overall and so its workplace representatives were going to be more experienced and better trained than those in NWSA.
- BIFU had a 'political' edge to its activities against the apolitical stance of NWSA. This 'political' edge would translate into UNIFI and those from NWSA had little interest in that form of activity.
- BIFU representatives were seen as being more antagonistic against the employer. Those from NWSA either saw this as a benefit to the union but one where their inexperience ruled them out of participating in it, or activity that could jeopardise their future career if they were too closely associated with it.

In the context of the amalgamated union, the ascribed character of BIFU prevailed.

The wider union

Morris *et al* argue that:

> The structure of [UNIFI] is closer to the organising principles of staff unionism in a number of respects. This suggests that the UNIFI merger was analogous to a reverse takeover in which the larger party formally acquires the smaller one but the latter assumes control (Morris *et al* 2001: 249).

The presence of National Company Committees with bargaining autonomy, redolent of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), would support this conclusion. However, the dominant position of lay leaders from former BIFU in many of these committees and to an even greater extent at regional and branch level suggests an alternative analysis. It seems that whilst the structure of UNIFI and the position of the local level within it represent an amalgam of structures from the partner unions, those from

NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) in the form of National Company Committees and representative of a 'leader-led' form have become subsumed into the 'member-led' form characteristic of BIFU.

CONCLUSION

The UNIFI amalgamation took place in an environment of compromise, amicable agreement and a seamless transition into the amalgamated union. This outcome might seem surprising given the history of rivalry in the bargaining relationship, intense competition for membership and stark ideological differences between the unionate trade unionism of BIFU and the staff association antecedents of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). However, this chapter has illustrated that a threatening industrial situation, an undoubted synergy of industry and member characteristics, a marked move toward more unionate positions by NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) and the coincidental arrival of General Secretaries committed to breaking with the historical mould, all produced propitious conditions for a successful amalgamation. This environment was in stark contrast to the internecine battle for control in MSF and the intense period of debate and negotiation in UNISON. For MSF and UNISON, this experience revolved around rival conceptions of union organisation with issues of 'ethos' and 'character' often being unsaid and concealed within issues of 'form', but keenly understood and fought over by the rival protagonists. If anything the national orchestration of the amalgamation was even more apparent in UNIFI than in MSF and UNISON, and local union organisation appeared to have an even lower influence over the process. However, the outcome of the UNIFI merger, as in MSF and UNISON, was for a model of union organisation involving of workplace representation and involvement to predominate in the internal organisation of the new union. This was as much concerned with the lay leaders and workplace representatives who populated it as the new structure itself.

The structure largely reproduced that of BIFU. It included local branches and regional committees but more importantly, in the context of the centralised employer engagement and consequently stretched form of local union organisation characteristic of the finance industry, a 'form' which facilitated and encouraged dissent and debate within the union. On the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum, it was closer to the 'member-led' formulation. Married to this 'member-led' form of

unionism was NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays)'s enterprise unionism in the form of National Company Committees with bargaining autonomy. These committees had a level of national hegemony that placed them toward the 'leader-led' formulation. The twin-track approach to 'form' neatly incorporated two potentially rival conceptions of unionism. It established organisational integrity through the adoption of BIFU's structure and industrial bargaining autonomy analogous to that of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) through the National Company Committees. Implicit in the formalised structure of BIFU, however, were features of dissent and debate that were in contrast to the highly centralised but harmonious and informal operation of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

Once the process of nomination and election got underway former BIFU lay leaders and workplace representatives rapidly populated the new structure. Even though UNIFI appeared to synthesise successfully the structures of all its predecessors, the operation of these structures largely became the province of lay leaders accustomed to the 'member-led' unionism of one. The factors that produced this outcome were associated with the familiarity those from BIFU had with the 'member-led' form of unionism, their greater numbers and an aura of greater antagonism with the employer. The overriding outcome was for UNIFI to adopt the 'member-led' form of unionism previously associated with BIFU.

As with the MSF and UNISON mergers, a similar pattern associated with dissent and debate and so 'member-led' forms of unionism was evident, rather than one where a centralised organisation sought to exclude such influence in favour of discipline and adherence to the national leadership's policies or 'leader-led'. The amicable and integrated, but 'leader-led' relationships of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) are distant from the 'leader-led' discipline of COHSE, NUPE and TASS. However, there remains a common synergy of 'member-led' dissent and debate between ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO which is reflected in the 'form and character' of the amalgamated unions.

Chapter 9

FORM AND CHARACTER
A COMPARISON

All three case studies have now been analysed and their circumstances related to the experience of each other. This chapter has a wider purpose. It will compare and contrast the amalgamations and summarise the differences and similarities between them, laying particular emphasis on the position of local union organisation. Outcomes for local relationships in the three amalgamations will be identified and explained. The argument is that the progress and outcome of a trade union amalgamation is determined by the interaction of the 'form and character' (as defined by Fryer 2000) of the participants with particular reference to the local context. It is the individual tensions between 'form and character', national and local, bureaucracy and democracy, and the relationship between leaders and members that shape the outcome (Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001). Where those features emphasise the centrality of the local level, or 'member-led' rather than 'leader-led', it means that members within workplaces may be able to shape the progress and outcome of the amalgamation (Fairbrother 2000a). The corollary to this argument is that without a full appreciation of the local context a full understanding of the process of amalgamation will not be available.

The research questions that have guided this research are repeated here (page 56) since this assessment will seek to provide responses to them from the data and analyses contained in the earlier chapters.

1. What is the place of the local branch and workplace organisation within the amalgamation process?
2. How do the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism influence the position of the local branch and workplace organisation in a process of amalgamation?

3. How do the relationships of leaders within the local branch and workplace organisation and those in the wider union influence the position of the local level in a process of amalgamation?

The chapter will present the distinctiveness of the three amalgamations. It will then be possible to concentrate attention on the local context in these amalgamations. Five issues are considered:

- The structure and features of local branch and workplace organisation and their relationship with the wider union,
- The process by which local branch and workplace organisation transferred from the predecessor unions into the amalgamated union,
- The presence of agreements and policies from the amalgamation that impinged on local branch and workplace organisation in the amalgamated union,
- The presence and influence of leaders and factions at all levels on the position of the local branch and workplace organisation in the amalgamation process, and
- The influence exercised by the particular procedure of amalgamation chosen by the predecessor unions on the position of the local branch and workplace organisation.

Then the outcomes that confirm the argument and respond to the research questions will be isolated, together with the influences that produced them.

The MSF amalgamation represented a recently confidant and buoyant period of private sector trade union growth in the 1970s (Eaton & Gill 1988). In contrast, the UNISON amalgamation was a product of the Thatcherite 1980s and clearly located in the public sector (Ironside & Seifert 2000) whilst UNIFI was firmly positioned in the finance industry and the more defensive period of the 1990s (Morris *et al* 2001). The partners to the MSF amalgamation, ASTMS and TASS, also epitomised the powerful and charismatic left-wing trade union leader in the person of Clive Jenkins and Ken Gill, respectively the General Secretaries ASTMS and TASS. TASS also exhibited the continued influence of the Communist Party in trade union affairs through the centralised leadership and control of TASS by a CP-led faction. This history was in contrast with the public sector ethos of UNISON, the more accountable leadership of

the UNISON partners and the apolitical introverted world of the finance unions in UNIFI.

The trade unions involved in the UNISON amalgamation mainly organised in local government, the NHS and, to a lesser extent, further and higher education. Together, they would hold very strong positions across all occupations excluding the medical and education professions. Amalgamation would consolidate and strengthen their existing positions and retain a clear identity as a public sector trade union, despite the depredations of privatisation and outsourcing. For UNIFI there was a similar situation. BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) were all located in the finance sector and recruited across all occupations. Amalgamation would maintain that identity and strengthen their position within it. MSF would have a different experience. ASTMS and TASS were predominantly private sector trade unions but did not hold dominant positions in the sector or with individual employers. ASTMS, in particular, had membership in a wide variety of technical, supervisory, professional and managerial occupations in engineering and finance, and smaller presences in the third sector, the NHS and universities. TASS was more closely identified with engineering, although this only covered the numerically smaller technical, professional and managerial occupations within it. Amalgamation would result in a disparate organisation, albeit with some strengthening of its position in engineering.

If the industrial location of the amalgamations, at least for UNISON and UNIFI, had a particular identity and provided a good rationale for amalgamation, the characteristics of the members of all three unions were heterogeneous. MSF members occupied a wide variety of skilled, professional and managerial jobs (Eaton & Gill 1988). UNISON members had similar occupations to these but also included a high proportion of low paid manual and clerical occupations, most of whom were female (Terry 2000a). UNIFI too, had a high proportion of low paid female members and like UNISON recruited across all job categories (Morris *et al* 2001). Although all three amalgamations were sometimes categorised as being of 'white-collar' workers (providing another rationale for them to amalgamate), the reality was different.

Unlike the predecessor unions to the UNISON and UNIFI amalgamations both predecessors to MSF had developed through a series of mergers and, for one, de-merger. For ASTMS, merger had resulted in rapid diversification from its genesis in

engineering. Some of these mergers had been facilitated through the establishment of autonomous sections and varying patterns of workplace and branch organisation. For TASS, the disintegration of the AUEW Federation merger confirmed its location in engineering but also encouraged its expansion into professional and managerial membership. Their recent history meant that ASTMS and TASS came to the MSF amalgamation with very recent experiences of merger. In UNISON and UNIFI, the predecessor unions had relatively coherent structures, settled membership patterns and clear identities in the public sector and finance industry, but they had little recent experience of merger.

However, this thesis is concerned with the local context in a process of amalgamation and when that is opened up to scrutiny further levels of distinctiveness become apparent. Reflecting back on UNISON, most members were located in workplaces within large local employers such as local authorities and NHS hospitals and represented a substantial proportion of the total workforce. Although historically there had been a high level of national bargaining over pay and conditions, local issues of individual representation, reorganisation and implementation of national agreements had also been present. Increasingly it was the latter and a diminution of national bargaining that concentrated union bargaining activity with individual employers. The amalgamation sought to rationalise UNISON's structure by associating a single UNISON branch with each employer and other employers providing privatised and outsourced services to it, and integrating those branches into its regional and national structures. The branch became the focus of local bargaining with employers and the basis for representation and activity within the union itself. Many of these branches had 100s and even 1000s of members, and to facilitate their functions and activity the union allocated considerable resources and autonomy to them.

COHSE, NALGO and NUPE, the unions that came together to form UNISON, had grown through the post-war development of public services. Until the 1970s, the three unions were highly centralised in line with the conduct of national bargaining. However, policy in COHSE and NUPE was heavily influenced by full-time officials in contrast to a high level of lay member involvement in NALGO. NALGO branches also had a much higher level of autonomy over activities such as education and publicity in the workplace and considerably more resources than did their COHSE

and NUPE counterparts. From the 1970s, all three saw the development of steward systems in workplaces (for NUPE see Fryer *et al* 1974). In NALGO, this development of decentralisation built on an existing level of lay involvement and influence. However, in COHSE and NUPE their more direct experience of the harsher industrial and political environment of the 1980s encouraged a re-assessment in favour of a disciplined and co-ordinated form of unionism under the direction of full-time officials. At the commencement of the discussions for amalgamation these histories produced a situation where COHSE and NUPE were close-knit organisations where the General Secretary and full-time officials played a prominent role in directing policy and organisation whereas NALGO still prided itself on the prominent roles played by its lay leaders and the autonomy of its branches (see Terry 1996).

Most UNIFI members also worked for large employers and in some represented the majority of the workforce. Many of these employers were national organisations such as the Clearing Banks where pay and conditions continued to be bargained at a national level whilst employees were located in much smaller high street branches and administration centres where union bargaining activity mainly concerned individual representation. In addition, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had their origins as staff associations with the NatWest and Barclays Banks respectively and their memberships were still overwhelmingly located with these two institutions, with a relatively unstructured but close communication between local workplaces and the National Committee. This background was in contrast to BIFU, which had membership across the finance industry and had organised itself as a unionate trade union with local branches, regional councils and a national conference, none of which were part of the NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) structures (see Blackburn 1967, Morris *et al* 2001). BIFU, NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) were settled organisations, but with a long history of mutual rivalry and contention emanating from this history. In practice, the national bargaining framework with large financial institutions encouraged a level of centralised leadership in all three that was distinctive.

Like BIFU, ASTMS and TASS had familiar union structures (see Undy *et al* 1981: 41-45), but their members' workplaces were quite different. Whether employed in engineering, finance, the NHS, the third sector or universities their members invariably constituted a relatively small, if distinct, section of the total workforce. The

size and location of their employers also varied widely, from the plants of large national and multi-national manufacturers through large single-site insurance companies and NHS hospitals to much smaller specialised engineering firms. Bargaining too, had rapidly changed from formalised national arrangements to a situation where it was largely concentrated at the level of local employers and local plants of large conglomerates. Members were firmly located in local workplaces where bargaining often took place alongside much larger union groups and in engineering with the other amalgamation partner. Local branches were an incoherent structure with an often tenuous connection to workplaces even though they remained the basis for representation and activity within the union itself.

The bureaucratic tendencies identified by Hyman (1979, 1989, 2001) as potentially stifling internal contention and leading to the hegemony of national leaders were most clearly evident in COHSE, NUPE and TASS. Whilst not as exposed in the centralised leadership of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), the introverted and close relationships engendered within a single national employer produced a similar lack of dissent and debate. ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO were all large multi-employer unions with a level of bureaucracy in their organisational activity. What distinguished them was the potential for local influence on the activity of their leaders. The incidence and power of that influence was inevitably variable and sometimes fragile, but remained an essential feature of their operation and activity. With reference to the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum identified in chapter 3 (see also chapters 6, 7 and 8), COHSE, NUPE, NWSA, TASS and UNiFI (Barclays) were 'leader-led' while ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO were 'member-led'.

Local union organisation has two functions that will be particularly relevant to the later discussion, bargaining activity with the employer and a constitutional relationship with the wider union. In ASTMS and TASS, and subsequently MSF, the two functions were largely separated. In a situation where bargaining became increasingly localised for specialised sections of the workforce this produced a high level of autonomy for union workplace groups engaged in bargaining whilst union branches maintained the relationship with the wider union (Smith 1987). Branches carried out both functions in all the predecessors to UNISON and subsequently in the amalgamated union. However, a crucial difference was that NALGO branches related to one employer and had a high level of autonomy whereas those in COHSE

and NUPE were more reliant on full-time official support and often only represented sections of the union's membership within a single employer. The same functions in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) related to a single employer and were largely carried out at a national level. The whole union constituted a workplace group and a branch within a single organisation. Meanwhile, BIFU had the same national bargaining relationship with employers, but established geographical branches to undertake the constitutional relationships within the wider union (Blackburn 1967).

The distinctiveness portrayed here also extended to the progress of the amalgamations and the attention paid to local union organisation. The MSF amalgamation was effectively an enabling decision that left ASTMS and TASS as two separate sections with a co-ordinating national structure. Decisions over the structure and rules of the fully amalgamated union, including the position of local union organisation, were left to a post-amalgamation Rules Conference. In practice, the subsequent internal contestation for control of the union, one almost exclusively played out at a national level, consumed attention to such an extent that local organisation was largely left to develop by itself (Carter 1991). The UNISON amalgamation was a very different process. The decision to amalgamate was made on an agreement that encompassed a wide range of organisational and policy issues, including the future position and shape of local branch organisation. It was also an elongated process with a high level of debate and negotiation between and within the parties (Fryer 2000). The failure to resolve the issue of the branch in the Final Report that formed the basis for the amalgamation and the post-amalgamation decisions in UNISON on workplace organisation, illustrated its iconic status for the three participant unions. The parties to the UNIFI amalgamation also engaged in a lengthy pre-amalgamation period of negotiation. Unlike MSF and UNISON, this was a largely amicable and non-confrontational experience, which agreed the future shape of local representation, but left the detailed work on its implementation until after the amalgamation (Morris *et al* 2001).

WORKPLACES AND BRANCHES

In each case study, the workplace was a key level of union organisation and operation. It follows that amalgamation cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the local context within the amalgamation process.

In MSF, the prevalent situation was for autonomous workplace groups or committees to be the principal focus of the bargaining relationship, with local branches having the constitutional relationship with the wider union. A senior former TASS full-time official confirmed in 2007 that this was a continuation of the situation in ASTMS and TASS before the amalgamation, and remarked that:

> For branches little changed. In MSF, branches should have merged but that didn't happen for long periods and for some it never happened and continues to this day. So life carried on much as it always had. In workplaces things also continued as before where different groups of employees were represented. Change was sometimes generated by employer pressure to reduce representation now there was a single union but otherwise there was little change in many places (ex-TASS regional full-time official interview 2007).

The arrangements reflect the bargaining environment for most members of MSF where, even within large conglomerate companies, it was localised and MSF often represented smaller specialised groups within a much larger workforce. The haphazard nature of the dramatic expansion of MSF's predecessors (particularly ASTMS) compounded this situation. The legacy was one of fragmented workplace bargaining autonomy and branch boundaries variously based on workplaces, groups within workplaces and geographical areas, all of which transferred into MSF.

In UNISON, branches co-ordinated and led much of the bargaining with employers, and represented the interests of workplace members within the wider union. The autonomous and powerful position of UNISON branches was confirmed by the comments of a group of UNISON Health and Safety representatives in 2007, who said that:

> Everything runs smoothly, the branch seems to know what they're doing and the majority of employees are members. The senior reps negotiate with the top managers including the Chief Executive and this gives confidence to other reps that issues are taken forward. UNISON is constructed to help branches. Issues in other branches are known about and support is given to them (UNISON Health and Safety representatives interview 2007).

It should be recognised that the organisational and bargaining context of UNISON branches and its antecedents was mainly that of large, localised public bodies. In

addition, following amalgamation the union represented either the large majority or a substantial proportion of union members. Bargaining had also become increasingly devolved from the previously dominant national structures. This environment was a very different situation to the fragmentary bargaining environment that characterised MSF.

UNIFI illustrated a further variation where the constitutional relationship within the union was conducted through geographical branches, workplace groups were engaged with the employer in representing members, but the bargaining relationship was mainly conducted through autonomous National Company Committees. A former BIFU senior full-time official confirmed in 2007 that this largely reflected the BIFU practice and, even where they were adopted from NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) as the National Company Committees, BIFU representatives rapidly gained ascendance:

> The BIFU system dominated. We moved from Area Councils under BIFU to Regional Councils under UNIFI. On the National Company Committees for employers where NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) had been dominant, BIFU had 50 per cent of representation after elections. The branch structure reflected the BIFU structure (ex-BIFU national full-time official interview 2007).

UNIFI and its predecessors had a similarly settled background to UNISON. The major difference in their bargaining environment was that, whilst union members were employed by national financial institutions and with amalgamation constituted the majority in many locations, bargaining was concentrated at a national level.

PROCESS OF TRANSFER

At the point of amalgamation, local union organisation transferred into the amalgamated unions in an unchanged form. Straightforwardly there were pre-amalgamation agreements on the future of local organisation in UNIFI and UNISON presaging some form of change but in MSF, agreement was limited to maintaining the status quo. What is important is the underlying tension between divergent constructions of trade union practice that produced these agreements and then moulded their implementation.

In practice, the formal agreements for the UNIFI amalgamation allowed the structures of both NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) and that of BIFU, to transfer with little change or rancour. This produced an integrated structure for the amalgamated union of National Conference, Regional Councils and branches from BIFU and National Company Committees with bargaining autonomy from NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). However, there appeared to be little acknowledgement or appreciation that the genesis of this structure was two divergent concepts of trade union practice. In contrast, agreement (in UNISON) or victory (in MSF) was achieved only after much argument and negotiation. Only in UNISON did this result in an integrated form analogous to that of UNIFI, one redolent of NALGO branches. In MSF, the amalgamation process only regulated branch funding arrangements and branch representation at Annual Conference. However, there was a real understanding that the practice and ethos of MSF was also being decided and this would have a greater influence on the presence of the workplace in the amalgamated union. The question in the negotiations for all three amalgamations became: Would there be nationally centralised control or influence from and accountability to autonomous workplaces, a dominant role for full-time officials or one circumscribed by lay leaders accountable to the local level, discipline and direction in policy or dissent and debate (see Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001)? These were debates at the heart of the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum (see Fairbrother 2000a).

In UNIFI, these issues came to the fore once its integrated form was populated at the termination of the initial one-year transitional period. Then it became apparent that the lay leaders and workplace representatives of BIFU would be advantaged through their familiarity with its structure, their greater numbers and their expertise with electioneering. They quickly populated the key local levels and beyond, even to the National Company Committees that were modelled on NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) arrangements.

A similar process occurred in the transition of COHSE, NALGO and NUPE branches into UNISON. The policy of Proportionality and Fair Representation was only legislated for at national level and ensured a strong presence of low paid female lay leaders from former COHSE and (particularly) former NUPE when the first elections to the National Executive took place, but it was a different story in branches. There the formal structures, autonomy and employer-based boundaries were familiar

territory to former NALGO lay leaders and representatives but relatively unknown to the informal and more full-time official dependent experience of those from COHSE and NUPE. Once the transferring branches merged into or became fully-fledged UNISON branches, the former NALGO cohort of lay leaders mostly gained ascendance (for an example see Cunnison 2002). As a senior former NALGO official remarked in 2007:

> The merger hasn't changed the culture in workplaces as much as I wanted. It is still male dominated on the lay side with power still with former NALGO male Branch Secretaries. It is not as much a manual worker union as I hoped it would be. There is a dichotomy between the formal policies of the union [on Proportionality and Fair Representation] and the situation in workplaces. There is a parallel universe in some workplaces where merger does not appear to have taken place. The structures and profile are as in the former union and that tends to be NALGO (ex-NALGO full-time regional official interview 2007).

In UNIFI and UNISON there was post-amalgamation implementation of an integrated form of structure which was closely analogous to one or more of the predecessor unions but, importantly, was imbued with a character and facility which encouraged lay leader and workplace representative participation, or 'member-led'. This arrangement soon allowed those from the predecessor unions who were accustomed to this form of unionism to assume leader and representative roles at the expense of those used to a 'leader-led' formulation. Their presence effectively consolidated the 'member-led' form of unionism in the amalgamated unions.

In contrast to this structured transformation, workplace organisation in ASTMS and TASS, whether as autonomous workplace bargaining groups or branches, transferred into MSF in unchanged form with no expectation of any future alterations. Partly this reflected the haphazard and separated arrangements already prevalent in ASTMS and TASS but also the seeming impossibility of reconciling the stark divide between the hegemonic and centralised, or 'leader-led', control of the Broad Left in TASS and the anarchic and disputatious, or 'member-led', organisation of ASTMS. The position of local organisation was inextricably entwined with both. This situation allowed lay leaders and workplace representatives from both unions to continue their roles into MSF with little change. However, the post-amalgamation playing out of the

divide at national level, which eventually resulted in the dominance of the ASTMS position, also meant a continuation of the ASTMS 'member-led' tradition in workplaces and branches and its extension to those transferring from TASS.

AGREEMENTS AND POLICIES

The presence or absence of agreements and policies facilitated the transition of local union organisation into the amalgamated unions. They either preceded the formal amalgamation or were part of the implementation period. This process involved the policies of the predecessor unions, the influences on the process of negotiation, the agreements that produced the amalgamated unions and the position of local union organisation within them.

The decision of the partners to the UNIFI amalgamation to resolve points of difference between them and reach agreement on the structure of their new union in advance of the formal amalgamation produced a relatively harmonious and seamless transition into UNIFI. None of the bitter infighting that followed the MSF amalgamation took place or the further period of debate, decision, and difficult implementation in workplaces, that occurred in UNISON. Against those experiences and allied to the non-confrontational and no preconditions stance of the partners, the chosen process could be counted a success. The difficulty was that the further objective of ensuring the continued presence of lay leaders and workplace representatives from all three partners to the amalgamation was much less successful. It was suggested earlier that this result was partly attributable to the ultimate prevalence of a particular form of unionism, but it could also be argued that by consciously seeking to avoid confrontational questions within the formative process, sections of the new union were left unprepared for such an outcome.

Bolting together the 'union' structure of BIFU and the autonomous national bargaining arrangements of NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays) appeared to satisfy both positions and avoided confrontation. What was not apparent was that the concession made by BIFU over the autonomy of the National Company Committees had much less relevance to the actual structure or bargaining practice of BIFU. A senior ex-BIFU full-time official remarked in 2007 that:

> Autonomy was not a real issue for BIFU since the [BIFU] National Executive rarely stopped [BIFU] National Institution Committee agreements. It was always a myth but fostered to prevent earlier mergers (ex-BIFU full-time national official interview 2007).

From this basis, there can be little surprise that former BIFU lay leaders were readily able to accommodate themselves to this change at national level. Against that, the structure of Regional Councils and branches had no equivalence with the informal network of lay leaders and workplace representatives that complemented the National Committees in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). When agreement on the detail of this structure became necessary during the implementation period, and with no alternative models available, that of BIFU was adopted *en bloc*. The straightforward accommodation to the structure of UNIFI available to those from BIFU was not repeated in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

As illustrated in chapter 8 the position of the workplace in BIFU and then UNIFI was a largely separated one. National bargaining and representation in the workplace was separately organised to representation and influence in the wider union through branches. The amalgamation agreement replicated existing practice and particularly that of BIFU. Nevertheless, and despite its separated structure, what it did enable was a predominance of lay leaders and workplace representatives used to the operation of such a 'member-led' structure and its associated facility for expressing influence and dissent from local level. Evidence suggests this was the expected outcome for those from BIFU and even those from NWSA were accepting of the change in ethos that it represented. In no sense was there any suggestion of disagreement, more that of agreement over a better way of doing things.

There were two sorts of agreement on the future shape of UNISON: those that set down the structure ('form'), and those that established new ways of working ('character'). However, the latter might also affect questions of structure. The agreement on structure effectively embedded that of NALGO in UNISON. This structure emphasised an integrated branch organisation for bargaining and influential representation within the union, branch autonomy, and a high level of branch resources. Meanwhile, whatever the undoubted benefit of the policies on Proportionality and Fair Representation for widening participation in union activity, a sub-text of these policies was of ensuring power in UNISON (at least at national

level) was not to be the domain of articulate, well-educated, male activists from NALGO (Terry 1996: 102). Post-amalgamation the structural agreement on the branch was reinforced with further decisions on branch funding and branch mergers that would cement in place the NALGO form. There was little disagreement between the parties over the principle of Proportionality and Fair Representation. However, it became apparent that the laudable aims of the policies would whither, against power struggles and the overriding need to retain lay leaders and representatives in the workplace (whatever their gender, job or pay level) (Cunnison 2002; UNISON full-time regional official interview 2007).

The most intense debate and negotiation between and within the parties was over questions of structure. The intensity of the debate reveals a sub-text of rival concepts of union practice between the disciplined 'leader-led' approach of COHSE and NUPE and the atmosphere of 'member-led' dissent and debate that partially characterised NALGO (see Fryer 2000). The position of the branch in any UNISON structure would facilitate and encourage one of these conceptions. Finally, these developments proved to be more redolent of NALGO. That position enabled former NALGO lay leaders and representatives to continue their involvement in a familiar terrain and became a disincentive to those from COHSE and NUPE. The continued presence of individuals from former NALGO went to reinforce the structure and ensure its associated ethos continued into UNISON (see Terry 1996, 2000a).

The only agreement on the position of local union organisation in MSF was not to have one (see Carter 1991). Considering the wide variation in member and workplace location, bargaining arrangements and branch boundaries (even within ASTMS and TASS as separate organisations), instituting any common structure would have been fraught with difficulty. The straightforward and 'easy' answer was to leave arrangements where they were and, after all, this had been the practice through the predecessor unions' previous experience of merger (see Melling 2004, Smith 1987). However, the position of branches (as opposed to workplace groups or committees) in ASTMS and TASS was sharply contrasted on the 'leader-led/member-led' continuum, between the hegemonic control of the Broad Left in TASS which heavily restricted their participation and presence in the wider union and their open, if argumentative, presence in ASTMS. Bargaining arrangements in workplaces were often located outside the branch structure and here Broad Left

control in TASS became increasingly patchy, with groups from both unions often meeting and acting together. In the hothouse of the post-amalgamation confrontation for control of MSF, the position of branches became one of the iconic battlegrounds, particularly over their representation at Annual Conference and their independent funding (see Carter 1991). Once this had been settled, largely in favour of the 'member-led' position of ASTMS, the environment of debate and questioning of the national leadership's policies was also reasserted.

Within this messy and separated structure, many lay leaders and representatives continued their activity in environments little changed from their previous experience, apart from the introduction of branch funding for former TASS branches and a dramatic increase in their representation at Annual Conference. For former TASS workplaces, the defeat of Broad Left centralised control enhanced autonomous workplace bargaining autonomy, and increased representation provided opportunities for influence over policy formation and organisation at regional and national levels. A former TASS official reflecting back on the change commented in 2007 that:

> I liked the democracy in ASTMS, the ability to voice opinion and not be pilloried for not being in the correct club (i.e. the Broad Left) (ex-TASS full-time regional official interview 2007).

Comments in chapter 6 show that these changes were largely welcomed by those from former TASS whilst the initial concerns of those from ASTMS over subjugation to Broad Left control were allayed.

LEADERS AND FACTIONS

In all three amalgamations, national leaders conducted the negotiations to achieve amalgamation. Their role in taking account of the position of local union organisation was critical to the outcome. Organised factions also played a crucial role in two of the amalgamations.

The national leaderships of the partner unions to UNIFI adopted positions open to compromise and agreement. This position particularly applied to those from BIFU who insisted that they brought no preconditions to the discussions even though BIFU was numerically much the largest union to the amalgamation and it had a longstanding policy of creating a single finance industry union (although one in its

own image) (see Morris *et al* 2001). This open approach undoubtedly assisted the reaching of agreement on structure, but obfuscated the deeper and potentially more troublesome issues of 'character'. The particular characteristics of workplaces associated with large employers conditioned to national bargaining (see Ward 2007) ensured that the position of local organisation in the amalgamated union was acknowledged in the negotiations, and communicated and consulted on with lay leaders in the wider union.

Leaders in MSF and UNISON in the amalgamation process were far more intent on promoting rival constructions of union practice in relation to the position of local organisation (see Carter 1991 for MSF and Fryer 2000 for UNISON). Whilst this resulted in a level of friction and argument, it also exposed the fissures of disagreement for debate. From the outset in UNISON, national leaders from NALGO promoted a position in the negotiations of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control'. They were also very conscious of the need to satisfy the NALGO Annual Conference that these ideals were being met. Equally, leaders from COHSE and NUPE were just as concerned to maintain the unity and discipline under national leadership that they saw as their unions' most valuable attributes. Both constructions included a complimentary position for local union organisation. A divide was established at the start of the amalgamation process between 'member-led' and 'leader-led' approaches, albeit within an overall commitment to achieve the amalgamation. As the debate and negotiation within and between the parties ebbed and flowed, it was NALGO, through its leaders, which effectively set the agenda to which the leaders of COHSE and NUPE had to respond (see Fryer 2000, Terry 1996).

In retrospect, it seems clear that the prime objective of national leaders in ASTMS and TASS came to be who would control MSF (see Carter 1991). Evidence suggests that national control of the union, including branches, was the objective of the Broad Left faction of TASS well before the amalgamation. How far the national leadership of ASTMS acknowledged and responded to this threat is unclear, although the evidence suggests they did little to combat or organise against it. However, comments from ex-ASTMS and ex-TASS leaders show that the prospect was well known and was very effectively organised against after the amalgamation to such an extent that ASTMS gained the ascendancy. The position of local organisation, and particularly that of branches, became part of the key reference of

the two groups that attempted to define the focus of the amalgamation. The success of ex-ASTMS leaders at national level established the position of local organisation in MSF as one that broadly followed the ASTMS model. Nonetheless, while it remained a separated and fragmentary one, the prospect of a 'leader-led' Broad Left control was removed and 'member-led' autonomy of bargaining activity at local level and representation and influence in the wider union was retained.

Organised factions were not a feature of the UNIFI amalgamation but in MSF and UNISON their role was very influential. The Broad Left exercised hegemonic control in TASS. Its controlling position had shaped the union's structure and controlled both the appointment of its full-time officials and the selection of delegates to its Annual Conference. Its hegemony meant that any suggestion of opposition or questioning of national policy or organisation could be rapidly nullified. Having failed to extend its writ within the AUEW Federation, and then being largely instrumental in its collapse (see Smith 1987), it clearly saw the anarchic ASTMS as easy prey for its well-oiled machine (see Carter 1991). A level of self-delusion built on the stifling of opposition and debate, seemed to confirm agreement throughout TASS with its policies and control.

The success of the ASTMS stance in the confrontation of the early years of MSF was built on the latent ability of the ASTMS section to engage in disciplined voting patterns at the Rules and Annual Conferences of MSF. However, this capacity was enhanced by gaining the support of elements in the TASS section anxious to escape from Broad Left dominance. Subsequently those supportive of the ASTMS position formed their own faction as MSF for Labour, ostensibly as a support for the Labour Party but soon acting as an organised opposition to the CP-led Broad Left. MSF for Labour certainly represented a political divide with the CP but it also consolidated the values of ASTMS within MSF ensuring there would be no resurgence of Broad Left hegemony after its earlier defeat (see Carter 1991).

The position of local union organisation was intrinsically bound up in the ultimate ascendancy of the ASTMS position. For the Broad Left, the workplace was at the furthest extension of its dominance but capable of being controlled through its restricted representation in the wider union and the influence of Broad Left appointed full-time officials. What the faction failed to recognise was that once the local level

had the opportunity to regain representation and influence in the union and bargaining autonomy in the workplace, the ability of the Broad Left to exercise 'leader-led' control would be fatally undermined.

The influence of factions in the UNISON amalgamation was mainly restricted to their roles within NALGO, but that did not diminish their influence over the position of local union organisation. Much of the internal debate within NALGO was orchestrated between a widely based Broad Left faction and an alliance between Trotskyite Far Left and Right Wing factions. The latter portrayed the amalgamation as leading to a weakening of the sacrosanct NALGO values of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control'. For the Far Left, the amalgamation involved an objective of constraining their ability to promote Far Left policies and support for industrial action. For the Right Wing, the amalgamation amounted to an attack on their large branch-held assets and the imposition of full-time official control of their activities. The Broad Left upheld the same NALGO values but saw them being translated into a stronger and more influential public sector union. The confrontation between the two eventually saw success for the Broad Left and, as the evidence shows, those 'member-led' NALGO values were embedded in UNISON.

Thus, the ultimate success of 'member-led' concepts was a conscious objective of certain leaders and factions in MSF and UNISON. If leaders in the UNIFI amalgamation did not openly expound such objectives, their reticence contributed to an analogous outcome. Nonetheless, in each case the 'form and character' of the local level provided a fertile ground for the emergence of participative branches in each amalgamated union.

PROCEDURE FOR AMALGAMATION

The final issue to be considered is how far the form of amalgamation procedure chosen by the participant unions in the amalgamations influenced the position of local union organisation. Two can be identified, the lengthy pre-amalgamation period of negotiation and agreement to realise a form and policies for the amalgamated union in the UNIFI and UNISON amalgamations, and the much shorter pre-amalgamation negotiation to produce an enabling agreement in the MSF amalgamation. Both of these formats resulted in a post-amalgamation

implementation period. In UNIFI and UNISON, this period implemented agreements from the amalgamation, whilst in MSF it produced arrangements to amalgamate two autonomous sections into a single entity.

Evidence on the UNIFI and UNISON amalgamations suggests that without this lengthy pre-amalgamation period and the detailed agreement on form and (for UNISON) policies, an amalgamation would not have been possible. In BIFU and NALGO, the period also involved meeting the concerns of lay leaders, regions and local level and meant an extensive process of internal consultation, debate and agreement alongside that going on between the parties to the amalgamation. The reality was that, without internal agreement, the wider union held a prospective veto over the final decision. The chosen procedure reflected a distinctive working out of the relationships that made up 'form and character' as expressed through representation and influence at local level. There was no equivalent representation and influence for local union organisation in NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays), and whilst constitutionally a similar position existed in COHSE and NUPE, the dominant and influential role of the national leadership made its use an unlikely prospect. This extended pre-amalgamation period of internal debate presaged a continuation of the representation and influence of local union organisation.

Evidence on the MSF amalgamation suggests three concerns in the wider ASTMS over the pre-amalgamation agreement. First, that the intentions of TASS and the Broad Left were to gain control of the amalgamated union and that the agreement to accord equal status to the two post-amalgamation sections (despite the larger membership of ASTMS) might allow them to achieve this through the exercise of disciplined block voting within the NEC and National Conference. Second, that the ASTMS national leadership did not share these concerns. Third, that the engineering section of ASTMS, in conjunction with the engineering based TASS, had an objective of restoring their previous dominance in ASTMS within MSF. For TASS and the Broad Left these divisions confirmed their view that the disputatious and heterogeneous ASTMS would be easy prey to their disciplined and well-organised agenda to take control of MSF. What they failed to take account of was that the considerably more open post-amalgamation process for determining the rules of MSF might allow the local level to become prominent. The result was defeat for the Broad Left and the adoption of those values through the rules and practice of MSF.

Despite the clear intention that the format for the amalgamation would facilitate TASS's agenda for taking control of MSF, this foundered in the face of a newfound unity and discipline from those in the ASTMS and TASS sections favouring a 'member-led' alternative (see Carter 1991).

The intentions of national leaders in choosing a particular procedure for the amalgamation process could be to facilitate or frustrate representation and influence for the workplace in the amalgamated union. National leaders' assessment of the relative strength of their own union's 'form and character' and the policies they were intent on pursuing for the amalgamated union against those of their partners, also influenced the decision. Values associated with autonomy, representation and influence for the local level as against centralised control and influence from the national leadership were the outcome in these amalgamations. Ultimately, it was the promotion and support for those 'member-led' values that was ascendant whatever the role and influence of any particular form of amalgamation process.

CONCLUSION

It is now necessary to draw out the outcomes and provide some rationale for them. This will show that the evidence from the research supports the overall argument of the thesis and responds to the research questions.

The local context is a potent influence in the amalgamation process. In an exposed form this has been seen within the structural 'bottom lines' of negotiating positions, as exampled by NALGO and BIFU over the constitutional position of branches, and as autonomous bargaining agents by NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays). In the process of debate, negotiation and agreement within and between the individual partners the local branch became a crucial site of the amalgamation process in its own right, as in NALGO, UNISON and the ASTMS section of MSF. Leaders and factions have also appropriated the position of the workplace as a union branch in the amalgamation process to support arguments and agendas for centralised control (TASS, COHSE, NUPE), dissent and debate (ASTMS, BIFU, NALGO), and representation and influence for the local level (ASTMS, BIFU, NALGO). However, it is a particular set of characteristics and structural location for the workplace, as focused through branches within particular unions, which have enabled particular concepts of trade

union practice to predominate over alternatives in these amalgamations. Those are representation, influence and autonomy and, in various constructions, are evident in ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO, in contrast to the centralised leadership and control found in COHSE, NUPE, NWSA, TASS and UNiFI (Barclays). In response to the question of the place of local union organisation within the amalgamation process, this assessment shows its crucial influence in various elements of the process.

The tensions exposed here between the workplace, expressed via branches, and national structures, and between leaders, example the concerns identified in Hyman's bureaucratisation theory (1979, 1989, 2001). These tensions appear in their extreme form in COHSE, NUPE, NWSA, TASS and UNIFI (Barclays) although this is not to suggest that ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO exhibited no pressures toward the bureaucratisation of these relationships. ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO all had larger memberships than the other unions and had complex organisational structures. It is suggested that the equivalent tensions in these unions evidenced an emphasis in favour of workplace and member leadership and that this prevailed in the transformation into the amalgamated unions. As Fairbrother (2000a) and others (see Heery & Kelly 1994, Terry 1986) have suggested, bureaucratic tensions are better envisaged as being on a continuum between 'leader-led' and 'member-led' characterisations and the assessment supports that contention.

The assessment suggests that the application of those features within the amalgamation process resulted in 'member-led' forms of organisation within branches but based on workplaces. 'Leader-led' control relies on an ability to either manipulate the structure to nullify opposition (TASS) or construct a practice where there is an environment of implicit trust and/or resistance to criticism of the national leadership (COHSE, NUPE, NWSA, UNiFI (Barclays)). The evidence suggests that the grip of national leaders loosened once an atmosphere encouraging dissent and debate was established. Some of those previously accustomed to a centralised leader approach, as happened in the TASS section of MSF, could no longer promote or maintain this form of control in the open environment of MSF and UNISON. These participatory values also equate with core trade union values of debate, accountability and representation and they became the accepted principles attaching to the position of local union organisation in all three amalgamations. Thus, the assessment responds to the questions of the influence within a process of

amalgamation of forms of unionism and relationships of leaders by seeing the forms of unionism as the overarching influence on the position of local union organisation in the process, and the relationships of leaders as the medium through which that influence is mediated.

Finally, the assessment and evidence point to an advantage that accrued to lay leaders and workplace representatives familiar with the operation of a 'member-led' model. In UNISON and UNIFI, those from NALGO and BIFU were able to populate the form more readily than their counterparts and consolidate their ascendancy. A 'member-led' form was remade in the amalgamated union. Since local union organisation in MSF largely continued unchanged (albeit in an environment redolent of ASTMS), the need to re-populate it did not arise and most lay leaders and representatives continued their activity.

The local context has now been examined in all three amalgamations. There has been considerable variation between the location and nature of 'the workplace' and the experience and process of amalgamation. Despite this variation, a 'member-led' concept of trade union practice and values that favours the voice and autonomy of local union organisation and its leaders in an environment that facilitates and encourages dissent and debate became dominant in the amalgamated unions. The assessment suggests it is not the process of amalgamation that determined the result, but the presence of a particular construction of union practice.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

As this thesis nears completion, I am voting in elections to the first NEC of Unite the Union. Unite the Union will be the largest affiliate in the TUC with 1.4million members. Even before being fully formed, its Joint General Secretaries have postulated on the union's close links with the United Steelworkers in the USA developing into a full merger. Unite the Union is the result of an amalgamation between Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), it could have been even larger if the General Municipal and Boilermakers (GMB) had not decided against continuing with the initial three-way discussions for the new union. Amicus itself was the result of an amalgamation between MSF and the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) that subsequently attracted the Graphical Print and Media Union (GPMU) and UNIFI to join with them. The union grapevine is speculating that GMB will now amalgamate with UNISON. Of the three amalgamations used as case studies for this thesis MSF and UNIFI have disappeared into Unite the Union and UNISON appears to be actively considering amalgamation with a union that many regarded as its archrival in local government.

Meanwhile my trade union activity remains concentrated on the local organisation of my union's members and the bargaining relationship with their employer. Little seems to have changed here apart from a migration through name changes, from MSF through Amicus to Unite the Union. The question that first started to interest me in the UNISON amalgamation remains: What is the position of local union organisation within a process of trade union amalgamation? This thesis has attempted to tease out some answers to this question from other research complemented by empirical research located in three actual amalgamations: MSF, UNIFI and UNISON.

It soon became apparent that there were significant gaps in current writing. Research on trade union mergers was almost exclusively concerned with action at a

national level whilst that on the workplace and local union organisation had no place for consideration of its position within a situation of merger. It seemed self-evident from the research and my personal experience that union activity in the workplace was central to an understanding of trade union practice. Meanwhile, trade union mergers had been a prevalent feature of unions' organisational behaviour throughout their history and, if anything, had accelerated in recent decades. It seemed that without consideration of the local context a full understanding of amalgamation would not be available. Connecting the two, therefore, seemed an important and relevant exercise that would contribute to filling gaps in existing research and expanding knowledge on trade union practice. From the survey of the literature on union amalgamations, a first research question was formulated:

- What is the place of the local branch and workplace organisation within the amalgamation process?

The research concentrated on three forms of relationship within a process of amalgamation and within trade unions:

- Between local, regional and national levels of structure,
- Between the lay leaders, full-time officials and factions who inhabit the structure, and
- Between the individual unions engaged in the amalgamation.

To provide an analytical basis for exploring these relationships within the three case study amalgamations three complementary areas of research were utilised. First, attention was given to the presence of bureaucratic tendencies within unions, which can encourage leadership domination and influence at the expense of member self-activity and is seen in the presence of tensions between levels of structure and between members and leaders (on this theme, see Hyman 1979, 1989, 2001; see also Tannenbaum 1968a and van de Vall 1970). Second, the research drew on the writing of Fairbrother (2000a) and others (for example Batstone *et al* 1977; Heery & Kelly 1994; Terry 1986) on forms of unionism, which sought to distinguish between 'member-led' and 'leader-led' unions. This work starts to identify the unions involved in the amalgamations and the amalgamated union in terms of their operation and ethos. Third, and closely related to the work on 'member-led' and 'leader-led' unions, is the work of Fryer (2000) and Waddington and others (2005) on developing an analytical framework for examining the position and policies of unions within a process of amalgamation. Their writing uses a construction of 'form and character' to

distinguish between the structure and practice of individual unions. Consideration of these relationships and the associated literature generated two further research questions:

- How do the 'leader-led' and 'member-led' forms of unionism influence the position of the local branch and workplace organisation in a process of amalgamation?
- How do the relationships of leaders within the local branch and workplace organisation and those in the wider union influence the position of the local level in a process of amalgamation?

The contexts within which these relationships took place were identified as those external to the trade unions and those that were internal to their operation. The external circumstances were the socio-economic environment prevalent during the period of the amalgamation and the contemporary bargaining relationship trade unions had with their associated employers. The internal environment of the trade unions was their historical development and the features that distinguish trade unions from each other.

THEMES

To engage with these concepts and their associated research questions in the context of union amalgamations, the literature on union mergers and union activity in the workplace was supplemented with that on the case study amalgamations and the unions involved in them. This literature was used to shape and underpin the empirical research with individual unions. The resulting empirical study investigated a number of interrelated themes and provided the basis for a comprehensive assessment of the research questions.

Amalgamation

Amalgamation is often seen as an event in trade union organisational development by the literature. As an event, it is largely influenced by the national leadership working in the context of the contemporaneous bargaining relationship with employers, the organisational and financial stability of the union and the socio-political and economic conditions (Waddington 1995; Undy 1999; Undy *et al* 1981). However, amalgamation is not simply an event. It is a process with the potential for

long-term effects on the organisation and activity of the union. These effects are seen internally with its members, its lay leaders and representatives and between its various levels of organisation, and externally with employers (Waddington *et al* 2005). The long-term effect determines the final shape of the amalgamated union. The research was concerned, not just with the 'urge to merge', but also with the long-term effects and outcomes, and particularly with how these play out in the context of local union organisation.

Once amalgamation was seen as a process that includes the actual event of amalgamation, the presence of local organisation as a key player became much more apparent. Within this process, two features were seen to either facilitate or frustrate the position of local union organisation. A procedure that allowed for an elongated pre-amalgamation period of negotiation was likely to represent, at least for some of the parties to the amalgamation, recognition of an internal need to consult with and satisfy the concerns of local union organisation. This experience was particularly evident in BIFU and NALGO. A short pre-amalgamation period, which left all questions of structure for resolution within the amalgamated union, frustrated the raising of concerns from outside the national leadership, as occurred with ASTMS. The presence of agreements and policies from the pre-amalgamation period could have a similar effect. Thus, the agreements for the formation of UNISON and UNIFI predicted a form and position for local union organisation that replicated the form of particular unions, NALGO and BIFU. Against that, the UNISON policies of Proportionality, Fair Representation, Member-Centred and Partnership Working, whatever their intrinsic merits, were seen to have sub-texts that might frustrate the position of local union organisation. One anticipated effect of Proportionality and Fair Representation was to secure a permanent voice within UNISON for lay leaders analogous to those leaders in COHSE and NUPE. An interpretation of the objectives within Partnership Working was to ensure a continuing influence for full-time officials within UNISON as it had been experienced in COHSE and NUPE, whilst Member-Centred appeared to question the ability of lay leaders to represent the interests of members. Potentially the four policies struck at the NALGO values of 'branch autonomy' and 'lay control'.

Workplace practice and ethos

Two forms of unionism were identified for the research, 'member-led' and 'leader-led' (Fairbrother 2000a). 'Member-led' unions encourage the involvement of union members at a local level through the availability of democratic forums and a strong identification with local union organisation. They exhibit a relatively high level of workplace autonomy in their bargaining activity and relationship with full-time officials, some control of local resources and a significant input into the development of union policy. The national leadership's role is more attuned to the promulgation of advice and provision of support than direction of activity (Fairbrother 2000a). As a result, the local lay leader is in a stronger position to influence policy and express opposition to national advice. In the case studies ASTMS, BIFU and NALGO epitomised different constructions of 'member-led' unions.

'Leader-led' unions rely more on identification with the union itself to gain the active support of their members, although they also provide democratic forums. They are characterised by a strong national leadership that uses a hierarchical structure to direct the operation of the union through to the local level. The local union organisation tends to be one that is relatively dependent on the support and advice of full-time officials and national level in its bargaining activity, and accepting of nationally driven policy and national control of resources (Fairbrother 2000a). The role of the local lay leader is limited by constraints from the national leadership and a difficulty in gaining a purchase on the formulation of policy without their support. COHSE, NUPE, NWSA, TASS and UNiFI (Barclays) were characteristic of 'leader-led' unions.

Both forms of unionism have common features: some form of local union organisation, democratic structures, full-time officials, and local and national lay leaders (Undy *et al* 1981). Given these commonalties, discerning a difference between the behaviour and influence of the two forms appears difficult. Yet differences are readily apparent to those involved in union activity as members, lay leaders or full-time officials.

In 'member-led' unions:

- Members relate more closely to their local union organisation,
- Lay leaders locate themselves more firmly with their local union organisation,

- There is a greater propensity to take local decisions over issues,
- Full-time officials have less influence and involvement over local issues, and
- The policies and actions of national leaders are more likely to be questioned.

In 'leader-led' unions, these experiences are nuanced away from the local level and directed towards full-time officials and national leaders (Fairbrother 2000a). However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this pattern was in any sense a complete reversal of membership-led experience. Local activity remained an important element of 'leader-led' unions. Nonetheless, it did appear that 'member-led' unions were more likely to emerge in the post-amalgamation situation, as the members of the predecessor unions sought position in the new union.

In the amalgamation process, the 'member-led' unions sought retention of the position and role of the local union organisation and were largely successful in achieving this goal. As a result, member-led forms of union organisation played a distinct role in the amalgamation process and with that role came the ability to influence the outcomes in ways favourable to such organisational arrangements. Against this, the 'leader-led' unions were more the recipient of policy formulated by the national leadership and had little facility to question or modify it, particularly at the local level. Thus, working within an already existing and valued organisational form, the influence of the 'member-led' form was inevitably going to be exercised in favour of its own form of unionism at the expense of rivals.

Leaders and factions

The research showed that lay leaders in both forms of unionism had a crucial role in the workplace, where they were frequently the immediate representatives of members with the employer (Batstone *et al* 1977; Darlington 1994, 2002; Fosh & Cohen 1990; Greene *et al* 2000; Heery & Kelly 1994; McBride 2004). As such, they held important and personally rewarding positions in the union. Tenure of office often led to closer involvement, leadership positions and increasing facilities from the employer to engage in union activity (Hyman 1979). Some assumed very entrenched roles in the union and in the workplace. A small number used the advantages that flowed from their local activity to secure election to regional and, for a few, national leadership roles.

For those in the 'leader-led' unions there was a tendency to emphasise 'individual' leadership capacities, in the absence of an effective set of membership active procedures and practices. Without an organisational form requiring periodic elections and reporting procedures through the union, accountability could be tenuous and the basis of the role unclear or confirmed more by the authority of the union's full-time officials than any local union organisation (Fairbrother 2000a). Against that, the lay leader's role in the 'member-led' unions was likely to be secured through the local union organisation, apart from those few elected to national positions. Their position was secured on a 'trade union collectivity' based on regular elections, membership activity and accountability to the union through robust local union organisation (Fairbrother 2000a).

Both sets of leaders were important means of communicating union policies and encouraging members to support them. As such, they held important roles for the national leadership to utilise and influence in promoting their policies to the membership. The nature of their position in the 'leader-led' unions potentially made them susceptible to such influence. Their counterparts in the 'member-led' unions were much less susceptible to this type of influence since their positions were secured through a local union organisation that was an integral part of the union's structure.

In the amalgamation process, the influence of lay leaders could be pivotal in securing the amalgamation (Terry 1996; Waddington *et al* 2005). In both 'member-led' and 'leader-led' unions, they had two characteristics in common: as promoters of the amalgamation amongst members in the workplace, and holding a level of concern over their personal positions in any amalgamated union. However, leaders who were active in the 'member-led' unions had the greater facility to influence the amalgamation process. They exercised this influence in terms of its overall shape, its progress and in securing their positions in the amalgamated union. They were able to exercise this influence through location in local union organisations that had the constitutional facility to promote policies replicating their pre-existing organisational forms in the amalgamated union. Two immediate advantages accrued from this process. First, it was possible to preserve a structure that they were well used to working within and second, they were able to preserve their positions in local union organisations. The outcome was either transfer in an unaltered form into the

amalgamated union or adaptation to the new situation but with essentially the same organisational form.

In contrast, those from the 'leader-led' unions were much more reliant on their personal relationships within the union to either influence the amalgamation process or secure their positions in the amalgamated union. Not only that, they were then faced with an unfamiliar structure populated by those from a predecessor union with experience of its operation and secure positions in transferred or adapted local union organisations. In such circumstances, many only briefly survived the transition and that only served to increase the influence and presence of those from the 'member-led' union (see also Cunnison 2002; UNISON 1995).

Full-time officials in the 'member-led' form of unionism had more of an advisory and support role, whereas in the 'leader-led' form they also had a more directive role in promoting the national leadership's policies and, often, a leadership role in bargaining with the employer. This role implied that in the amalgamation process, full-time officials were likely to be more successful at promoting the national leadership's policy and resisting alternatives in the 'leader-led' unions (Carter 1991; Terry 1996). In the 'member-led' unions, the presence of formal local union organisation meant a facility to foster alternatives to the policies being promoted by full-time officials, a facility either absent or imperfectly formed in those that were 'leader-led' (Carter 1991; Terry 1996).

The relationship between national leaders and local union organisation could be difficult but also mutually supportive. These features were particularly evident in the 'member-led' unions where local union organisation constituted a considerable power base in its own right with workplace members developing the ability to challenge the national leadership over policy issues (Carter 1991; Terry 1996). In the 'leader-led' unions, alternative power bases were much less apparent. In this instance, there was the appearance of a seamless congruity of view from the General Secretary to the ordinary member (Carter 1991; Terry 1996). Where this form of association was not apparent, forms of factionalism were more likely to emerge.

Lay national leaders were invariably the prime promoters of amalgamation. Along with the General Secretary, they were directly elected into their positions and had

democratic legitimacy, a legitimacy that could be used in support of a policy of amalgamation. In the 'leader-led' unions, that legitimacy was more apparent because of the relative weakness of formal local union organisation and the remote prospect of challenge to the national leadership's policy. However, in the 'member-led' unions not only did local union organisation have democratic legitimacy to challenge that of the national leadership but it also had the facility through the structure of the union to promote such challenges. Almost by definition, the national leadership was more predisposed to heed the views of local union organisation in the 'member-led' than in the 'leader-led' unions (Carter 1991; Terry 1996).

Self-evidently leaders acting individually or in concert initiated and promoted the amalgamations and then took them through the process which saw a re-formed union emerge. The research showed that leaders acted within and gained their influence from particular forms of unionism. The initiative and promotion of amalgamation was a product of individual action. Once that 'event' was completed and produced a 'process', the forms of unionism within which those leaders acted and which characterised the unions participating in the amalgamation became the major influence on its eventual outcome.

Factions were an influential presence in the UNISON and MSF amalgamations but in markedly different ways, ways that were redolent of the 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism. In the UNISON amalgamation, NALGO was subject to a high level of internal debate heavily influenced and organised through factions. However, all these factions had the objective of securing representation and influence for local union organisation. The debate was over the precise form in which this objective would take place and preventing the 'leader-led' leanings of COHSE and NUPE from circumscribing the position of local union organisation in UNISON. In the MSF amalgamation, the Broad Left faction in TASS had a clear objective of extending their centralised control of TASS into MSF (Carter 1991). This agenda did not succeed largely due to the greater resilience, deeper roots and stronger adherence to the 'member-led' form promoted by the ASTMS section in the post-amalgamation confrontation (Carter 1991).

What the research has shown is that although many union amalgamations aspire to the creation of an organisation, which is recognisably different to any of its

predecessors, in practice the form of unionism of one tends to prevail. Where a union did not have an active form of local union organisation, as was the case in two of the predecessors to UNIFI, the seeming vacuum was filled by the model of member representation in the third union. At least for one of the parties to the amalgamation their institutions are embedded in its successor. Thus, the case studies for UNISON, MSF and UNIFI show a tendency in UNISON for a NALGO 'form and character' to be evident at the workplace, in MSF for the legacy of ASTMS to be dominant and in UNIFI that of BIFU. NALGO, ASTMS and BIFU are all examples of the 'member-led' form of unionism. The position of local union organisation becomes central to the outcome of a process of amalgamation and it is a position that emphasises its representation and influence that has the greatest influence over the progress and outcome of the amalgamation. This outcome is through its ability to utilise organisational practice, its ethos of local representation and influence and its institutional presence, to secure its 'form and character' in the amalgamated union. The outcome also responds to the research questions by showing the crucial place of local union organisation within the amalgamation process, the influence of forms of unionism on the position of local union organisation within an amalgamation and the relationships of leaders within unions mediating the place of local union organisation and the influence of forms of unionism.

IMPLICATIONS

The pace of merger activity for British trade unions in the 21st Century shows no sign of abating and, if the pronouncements of the Unite the Union Joint General Secretaries have credibility, could extend to an international basis. What this research has shown is that these grand visions take a lengthy period to reach a settled situation and, in the meantime, an often painful and disorganised period has to be endured. As a senior Unite the Union official remarked in relation to the Amicus amalgamation,

> Those involved in branches went through a period of uncertainty after the merger over reduced funding, questions of control and power and the ability to get things done. There was also a pain factor in workplace industrial activity with more difficulty in activists and members getting hold of full-time officials. That could benefit workplace organisation by forcing them to do more but there was no time for officers to build organisation and the demands on

officers remained the same (Unite the Union full-time national official interview 2007).

Taking account of this downturn in activity, particularly in workplaces, ought to be a real concern for unions when considering the prospect of amalgamation.

However, the principal lesson for unions from this research is to ensure the position of local union organisation, whether as a workplace union group or as a union branch, is taken account of within a process of amalgamation. This objective means recognising that its position is largely dependent on the 'member-led' or 'leader-led' form of unionism that characterises individual unions and in a process of amalgamation the presence of these alternatives are likely to result in competing agendas to replicate one of them in the amalgamated union. Whilst the research suggests that these issues were acknowledged in the UNISON amalgamation, the outcome still favoured the agenda of NALGO over those of COHSE and NUPE. In the MSF amalgamation, local union organisation barely featured as an extant issue in the negotiations for the amalgamation and yet it became a crucial influence in the post-amalgamation confrontation between the rival forms of unionism of ASTMS and TASS. The divergent conceptions of the workplace between the participants to the UNIFI amalgamation left the resolution of its formal position in the amalgamated union to the post-amalgamation implementation period. However, even within this harmonious process its presence and influence epitomised different conceptions of unionism and contributed to an outcome, which favoured that of BIFU over the alternative that was practised by NWSA and UNiFI (Barclays).

Unions should also be concerned over the role and influence of leaders in a process of amalgamation. Whether as lay individuals within workplaces and the wider union or as full-time officials the research showed their importance. It also demonstrated that, like local union organisation, their presence was mediated through the 'member-led' or 'leader-led' form of unionism that characterised their unions. The relative role and influence of leaders, between lay individuals and full-time officials and between those present within workplaces and those in the wider union, was shown to be conditioned by these divergent forms of unionism. Unless these differences are acknowledged and taken account of within the amalgamation process, the result can be a loss of valuable expertise and resources as leaders conditioned to one form of

unionism become marginalised within the amalgamation process, an outcome that was particularly evident in the UNIFI and UNISON amalgamations.

The role and influence of factions were particularly evident in the MSF and UNISON amalgamations. Although these were differently expressed, between the objective of the dominant Broad Left in TASS to achieve an equivalent hegemony in MSF and the internal debate within NALGO over securing its ideals in UNISON, their presence was indicative of either 'leader-led' (TASS) or 'member-led' (NALGO) forms of unionism. The evidence in the study suggests that factions could become the progenitors of internal and intra-union dissent and debate based on rival forms of unionism and this could result in extended periods of introspection and confrontation. Within a process of amalgamation, unions need to look for ways of surmounting such problems whilst acknowledging the presence of influential groups outside the formal structures of the unions.

When promoting the union amalgamations in this study national leaders were invariably ready with valedictory promises of a 'new union' rising from the ashes of its predecessors, newborn with no taint of past practices and ethos (for an example see MSF 1988b). The research shows that this objective was largely unachievable against the deeply embedded and reified practice and ethos of those predecessors. It was better to face up to these competing issues and seek solutions before the amalgamation degenerated into the internecine warfare seen in MSF.

It has to be admitted that this research is limited by the range of case studies. Extending it to a wider range of union amalgamations and failures to amalgamate would provide a more rounded picture. Thus, the focus of the research on the position of local union organisation in a process of amalgamation could be extended into other successful amalgamations such as that which created Public and Commercial Services in the Civil Service or the relative failure to achieve amalgamations between unions in the railway industry or in the teaching profession. Such a broader focus would enrich the research with further comparison from a particularly circumscribed sector like the Civil Service and sectors such as the railways and teaching where the synergies for amalgamation appear inescapable but remain unachieved.

Unions are also becoming increasingly heterogeneous in terms of membership characteristics and industrial location. Taking account of that development is important for a fuller understanding of union amalgamations. Since the start of this research, MSF and UNIFI have both merged with other unions eventually to create Unite the Union. As unions become increasingly diffuse and internationalised, the position of local union organisation, as the core site for members' affinity with their union, becomes an ever more crucial issue in terms of its organisation and activity, and its relationship with the wider union. Developing the research into these expanding dimensions would open up the research beyond the current remit, although the result may be analytically rich.

An important issue within the research was the role and influence of 'member-led' and 'leader-led' forms of unionism and that of leaders and factions within the amalgamation process. Whilst that built on a substantial body of previous research and extended it to encompass the position of local union organisation within amalgamations, the continuing progress of amalgamations is generating changed conditions and relationships within individual unions and in the context of amalgamation. It follows that research in these areas needs to be continuously re-appraised against these developments.

This research has concentrated on local union organisation in the context of amalgamation, not just as an isolated facet of union organisation but also as an integral part of the whole union. The presumption is that amalgamation should be viewed as a 'process' rather than an 'event'. In this respect, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of 'member-led' and leader-led' forms of unionism and note how these different forms influence and replicate themselves within the amalgamation process. By adopting this approach, the study demonstrates how local union organisation has been affected and influenced by amalgamation and in turn how local union organisation has affected and influenced amalgamation in the whole union. Leaders play their part within the amalgamation process, and in the course of this history shape the outcome, the emergent form of unionism of the amalgamated union. The 'member-led' form of unionism has been most successful in influencing the amalgamation process and laying the foundation for a lasting impact. Thus, local union organisation continues to be important, both for members at work, and for the amalgamated union.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR STEWARDS ETC

1

Describe the merger from your point of view?

2

What, in your view, has been the impact of the merger on workplace organisations?

STEWARDS AND OTHER LAY ACTIVISTS

3

Has your role in the union changed as a result of the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

4

Has the merger changed the steward organisation within the workplace? If so, give one example of

1. How it has improved.

2. How it has deteriorated.

If there has been no change, why not?

RATIONALE FOR MERGER

5

What, in your opinion, were the main reasons for the merger?

6

What, in your opinion, was the relevance of the merger to workplace organisations?

MERGER PROCESS

7

Did any elements within the proposals for merger generate opposition within workplace organisations? If so, what were the reasons?

8

How was any opposition within workplace organisations about the proposed merger answered?

9

Did any proposals for merger generate support within workplace organisations? If so, what were the reasons?

10

What, if any, were the problems and successes for the workplace organisation as a result of merger? Give one example of

1. *A problem.*
2. *A success.*

11

If there were problems for the workplace organisation resulting from merger, how were they overcome?

12

If there were successes for the workplace organisation resulting from merger, how were they produced?

13

What was the involvement in discussions and debate within and between the unions over merger of:

1. *Workplace organisations?*
2. *Members?*

14

How influential was the involvement in discussions and debate within and between the unions over merger of:

1. *Workplace organisations?*
2. *Members?*

15

To what extent were negotiations over the merger influenced by the presence in the merging unions of:

1. *Different forms of decision-making? E.g. central, regional, officers, lay members.*
2. *Different organisational structures? E.g. branches, conference, regions, National Executive.*

16

Was workplace organisation and operation affected by the period of discussions and debate over merger and implementation of the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

17

What was the effect on stewards' activity and their relationship with members during the period of discussion and debate over merger?

18

Was there any effect on the bargaining strength of the workplace organisation during the period of discussions and debate over merger and implementation of the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

19

Did national leaders seek the support of workplace organisations for the merger? If so, how? If not, what did they do?

20

If there was opposition from workplace organisations to the merger, what did national leaders do?

WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

21

Describe the changes that have taken place in the workplace organisation in the period since merger.

22

Has the workplace organisation improved or deteriorated as a result of merger? Give one example of
1. *How it has improved.*
2. *How it has deteriorated.*

23

Were there any changes in the organisational structure of the wider union as a result of merger? If so, how did these affect the workplace organisation?

24

Were there any changes in the wider union in the way decisions are made as a result of merger? If so, how did these affect in the workplace organisation?

25

As a result of merger, has the workplace organisation become more or less independent from the wider union? If more, how? If less, what happened?

26

How effective has the workplace organisation been as a result of merger? Give one example of it being more effective and one of it being less effective
1. *In bargaining with the employer.*
2. *In influencing wider union policy.*
3. *In involving members.*

27

Is the workplace organisation different in the merged union from that in the preceding union? If so, how? If not, what happened?

MEMBERS

28

Have members become more or less involved with the workplace organisation as a result of merger? If more, how? If less, why?

29

Have members become more or less involved with the wider union as a result of merger? If more, how? If less, why?

30

Has merger changed the way in which the workplace organisation deals with members' interests? E.g. Pay, Conditions, Grievance and Discipline. If so, how? If not, what happened?

UNION STRUCTURES AND GOVERNMENT

31

Were any reforms of wider union structures and government as a result of merger intended to impact on workplace organisations? If so, in what ways?

32

Has merger changed the union's democratic accountability to its members? If so, give one example of
1. *How democratic accountability has been enhanced?*
2. *How democratic accountability has been reduced?*

33

Who exercises power and control over resources and policy within the union? How has this changed as a result of merger?

RELATIONSHIPS

34

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with FTOs changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

35

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with national and regional levels of the union changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

36

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with employers changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

37

Has merger affected the relative levels of power of national and workplace levels of organisation within the union? If so, how? If not, why was this?

POLITICS

38

Did political views influence the merger? If so, were these from within the union or from political parties? How did they influence the merger?

39

Were groups within the union involved in influencing the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened? Was this at every level in the union?

40

Are you a member of a political group? If so, how did this influence your involvement in the merger? If not, what happened?

FINALLY

41

What is your view of the merger?

42

Following the merger, how do you think the workplace organisation could be improved?

43

What, if anything, do you think the merger:

1. *Has achieved?*
2. *Will achieve?*

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR FULL-TIME OFFICIALS

1

Describe the merger from your point of view?

2

Describe briefly what, in your view, has been the impact of the merger on workplace organisations?

STEWARDS & OTHER LAY ACTIVISTS

3

Has the merger changed the steward organisation within the workplace? If so, give one example of
1. How it has improved.
2. How it has deteriorated.
If there has been no change, why not?

RATIONALE FOR MERGER

4

What, in your opinion, were the main reasons for the merger?

5

What, in your opinion, was the relevance of the merger to workplace organisations?

MERGER PROCESS

6

Did any elements within the proposals for merger generate opposition within workplace organisations? If so, what were the reasons?

7

How was any opposition within workplace organisations about the proposed merger answered?

8

Did any proposals for merger generate support within workplace organisations? If so, what were the reasons?

9

What, if any, were the problems and successes for the workplace organisation as a result of merger? Give one example of
1. A problem.
2. A success.

10

If there were problems for the workplace organisation resulting from merger, how were they overcome?

11

If there were successes for the workplace organisation resulting from merger, how were they produced?

12

What was the involvement in discussions and debate within and between the unions over merger of:

1. *Workplace organisations?*
2. *Members?*

13

How influential was the involvement in discussions and debate within and between the unions over merger of:

1. *Workplace organisations?*
2. *Members?*

14

To what extent were negotiations over the merger influenced by the presence in the merging unions of:

1. *Different forms of decision-making? E.g. central, regional, officers, lay members.*
2. *Different organisational structures? E.g. branches, conference, regions, National Executive.*

15

Was workplace organisation and operation affected by the period of discussion and debate over merger and implementation of the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

16

What was the effect on stewards' activity and their relationship with members during the period of discussion and debate over merger?

17

Was there any effect on the bargaining strength of the workplace organisation during the period of discussion and debate over merger and implementation of the merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

18

Did national leaders seek the support of workplace organisations for the merger? If so, how? If not, what did they do?

19

If there was opposition from workplace organisations to the merger, what did national leaders do?

WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

20

Describe the changes that have taken place in the workplace organisation in the period since merger.

21

Has the workplace organisation improved or deteriorated as a result of merger? Give one example of

1. *How it has improved.*
2. *How it has deteriorated.*

22

Were there any changes in the organisational structure of the wider union as a result of merger? If so, how did these affect the workplace organisation?

23

Were there any changes in the wider union in the way decisions are made as a result of merger? If so, how did these affect in the workplace organisation?

24

As a result of merger, has the workplace organisation become more or less independent from the wider union? If more, how? If less, what happened?

25

How effective has the workplace organisation been as a result of merger? Give one example of it being more effective and one of it being less effective

1. *In bargaining with the employer.*
2. *In influencing wider union policy.*
3. *In involving members.*

26

Is the workplace organisation different in the merged union from that in the preceding union? If so, how? If not, what happened?

MEMBERS

27

Have members become more or less involved with the workplace organisation as a result of merger? If more, how? If less, why?

28

Have members become more or less involved with the wider union as a result of merger? If more, how? If less, why?

29

How has merger changed the way in which the workplace organisation deals with members' interests? E.g. Pay, Conditions, Grievance and Discipline. If so, how? If not, what happened?

UNION STRUCTURES AND GOVERNMENT

30

Were any reforms of wider union structures and government as a result of merger intended to impact on workplace organisations? If so, in what ways?

31

Who exercises power and control over resources and policy within the union? How has this changed as a result of merger?

32

Has merger changed the union's democratic accountability to its members? Give one example of

1. *How democratic accountability has been enhanced?*
2. *How democratic accountability has been reduced?*

RELATIONSHIPS

33

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with FTOs changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

34

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with national and regional levels of the union changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

35

Has the workplace organisation's relationship with employers changed as a result of merger? If so, how? If not, what happened?

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