

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/125709/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Heery, Edmund 2018. Fusion or replacement? Labour and the 'new' social movements. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 39 (4) , pp. 661-680.  
10.1177/0143831X18777616

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0143831X18777616>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



# Fusion or Replacement? Labour and the 'new' social movements

Edmund Heery

## Abstract

A neglected element of *Rethinking Industrial Relations* is its critique of post-modernism. This article argues that this is regrettable on three grounds. First, core claims that characterized the post-modern account of employment relations at the time that Kelly was writing continue to be made today; particularly with regard to the characteristics of 'new' social movements and their capacity to replace labour as the main dynamic force advancing employee interests. Second, Kelly's critique of post-modernism remains relevant and his observations with regard to the multiple forms and modes of action of new social movements continue to have force. Third, Kelly suggested that rather than replacing labour, new social movements were natural allies of trade unions. His argument here anticipated much later work on union-community coalitions and the final purpose of the article is to update Kelly's 'fusion thesis' by identifying the ways in which labour and new social movements work together.

## Introduction

The part of *Rethinking Industrial Relations* (Kelly, 1998) that has attracted least attention in the years since the book's publication is the chapter on 'Postmodernism and the end of the labour movement'. This is deeply regrettable. The chapter addresses themes that remain pertinent today and foreshadows much later discussion of the role of civil society organizations in industrial relations. It broached the now, pivotal question of the relationship between labour and other social movements and whether this is likely to be characterized by institutional rivalry or alliance and cooperation. It has retained its relevance.

The chapter itself comprises an exposition of the 'postmodern' theory of industrial relations together with Kelly's critique. The latter proceeds through three stages. First, Kelly rebuts the philosophical relativism that lies at the heart of postmodernism, making use of Sayer's (1992) work to argue that empirical research can enable us to choose between more and less plausible theoretical explanations of social phenomena. This critique anticipates the subsequent embrace of philosophical realism by industrial relations (IR) scholars, partly to mount a defence against later waves of postmodernist attack (Edwards, 2015). Second, Kelly rejects the postmodern account of economic change, which, he argues, rests on the claim that the contemporary economy has entered a new, Post-Fordist phase of development characterized by the replacement of mass production and

consumption with flexible specialization and customized services and niche markets. These changes, in turn, have provided an impulse for renewed cooperation in the relationship between capital and labour. Kelly's response, in this case, rests on his theory of long waves of capitalist development. The economic phase during which he was writing, he argues, is best understood as a cyclical downswing, similar in many respects to the 1930s, including a marked counter-mobilization on the part of state and capital against the independence and power of the labour movement. The resonance here is with the wider debate on labour-management partnership, in which opposing sides have viewed partnership at work, on the one hand, as the reflection in union-management relations of a new phase of high commitment management (e.g. Johnstone, 2015) and, on the other, as part of a concerted attempt to neuter labour unionism in a period of restructuring (e.g. Upchurch, 2009).

The final element of Kelly's critique targets the postmodern account of new social movements. The defining feature of the latter, according to Kelly, is the belief that the period since the 1960s has witnessed a new wave of social movement that has displaced labour as the primary source of challenge and progressive social development within contemporary societies. Although fragmented into numerous strands, the different currents in this new social movement wave possess common characteristics. They express identities and accord priority to interests grounded in the experience of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability rather than class, which in turn reflects a wider privileging of the field of consumption over that of production. They are also believed to use distinctive methods and Kelly notes the emphasis on direct action and the presumed contrast with reliance on formal and bureaucratic forms of representation within the labour movement. Kelly's response takes issue with each of these elements in the postmodern account. New social movements, he argues, do not form a coherent class, in part because they have separate and distinctive histories, which in some cases are coterminous with that of the 'old' movement of labour. With regard to the interests pursued by new social movements, Kelly notes both that advances in the realm of consumption may require mobilization in the realm of production to redistribute resources and that interests emerging from new identities can be followed alongside those grounded in social class rather than serving as an alternative basis for collective action. There is scope, he argues, for multiple identities to overlap and reinforce one another, rather than simply compete. With regard to methods, Kelly argues that while reliance on informal organization and direct action may be characteristic of newly created social movement organizations the latter are likely to experience the same pressures towards formalization and bureaucratization that have been seen in the labour movement, while both 'old' and 'new' movements may undergo organizational renewal during 'cycles of protest'. Effectively, Kelly counter-poses a cyclical to an essentialist account of the methods used by new social movement organizations. The ultimate purpose of Kelly's critique of the postmodern account of new

social movements is to make the case for a progressive alliance between unionism and these newer currents and he cites the example of lesbian and gay support for the British miners during the great strike of 1984-5. In response to the displacement thesis advanced by postmodernists Kelly advances what might be described as a 'fusion thesis', arguing that it is both possible and necessary for unions and civil society organizations to work in concert.

The remainder of this article is concerned solely with Kelly's exposition and critique of postmodern theory of social movements. It proceeds through three stages. First, it seeks to demonstrate the validity and contemporary relevance of Kelly's *exposition* by showing that subsequent work, continues to claim that new social movements pursue distinctive interests, employ distinctive methods and are displacing the labour movement as the primary engine of progressive social change. While the postmodern label has fallen out of fashion the substantive arguments identified by Kelly retain currency. Second, it seeks to demonstrate the validity of Kelly's *critique* of postmodernism but also notes how the counter-arguments he makes can be updated and expanded on the basis of new evidence, including more recent research on the role of civil society organizations. Third, it demonstrates the continued validity of Kelly's fusion thesis and uses later research on the relationship between unions, civil society and community organizations to highlight the variety of ways in which labour has formed a relationship with new social movements.

## **1. Continued relevance of Kelly's exposition of post-modernism**

In developing his exposition of postmodern theory Kelly relied primarily upon the work of sociologists from beyond the bounds of IR scholarship. In the period since he wrote it is notable that IR researchers have developed a keen interest in social movements and in the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) and in doing so have sometimes reproduced core features of postmodern argument, albeit without identifying as postmodernists as such. Within IR, it is possible to identify scholars who suggest that the new social movements that have emerged since the 1960s form a single category, are united by the pursuit of certain types of interest, rely upon distinctive organizational forms and methods and are fundamentally altering the nature of industrial relations.

To provide one example, Piore and Safford (2006) argue that the period since 1980 has seen a fundamental change in the 'regime of workplace governance', the defining features of which are the collapse of union representation and collective bargaining and the emergence of a new regime, 'of substantive employment rights specified in law, judicial opinions, and administrative rulings, supplemented by mechanisms at the enterprise level that are responsive to these new rules and regulations...'. The origin of this new regime, they further argue lies in an equally fundamental shift in the axes of social mobilization, 'from mobilization around economic identities associated with

class, industry, occupation, and enterprise to mobilization around identities rooted outside the workplace: sex, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and sexual orientation' (p.300). The social movements that express these non-work identities, Piore and Safford claim, have targeted the state and through lobbying have created a network of rights that protect the interests of their various constituents. To comply with this network, employers have adopted formal human resource management practices that give effect to rights within the workplace, reinforced by identity-group mobilization within employing organizations (see also Briscoe and Safford, 2008). This argument encapsulates the postmodern position as described by Kelly: new social movements have displaced the old movement of labour and by using distinctive methods have created a new form of industrial relations, a regime of workplace governance grounded in substantive employment rights.

### ***Interests pursued by 'new' social movements***

The distinctive quality of the interests pursued by new social movements in Piore and Safford's account is that they emerge from non-work identities, such as gender, race and sexual orientation. Another postmodern theme that is echoed within contemporary IR is that of the fragmentation of interests. This can be seen most clearly in the literature on intersectionality, a concept that has become pivotal to radical discussion of identity politics in recent years. Whereas the postmodern scholarship discussed by Kelly counter-posed the 'fragmentary' identities of gender, race and sexuality to the allegedly unifying identity of class, theorists of intersectionality identify further fragmentation within the former categories. There is no single gender identity, it is asserted for example, but rather a multiplicity of identities and associated interests that form at the intersections of gender and race, sexuality, age, disability, faith, and indeed class (Mercer et al, 2015). Sometimes there is an accusatory charge to this writing, targeted at those who are 'otherwise privileged' within equity-seeking groups and emphasising the separate and opposing interests of middle-class and working-class women, ethnic minority men and ethnic minority women and so on (McBride et al, 2015). It is also possible within this framework, however, to identify scope for shared interests at points of intersection, linking the agenda of the women's movement to that of the labour movement for instance, in a manner that echoes Kelly's own argument that multiple identities overlap, thereby providing the basis for cross-movement solidarity.

In addition to identifying fragmentation of interests, some contemporary writers on new social movements also tend to stress the distinctive character of these interests. It is suggested that new movements differ from labour with its focus on redistribution by prioritising the qualitative or post-material interests of those they represent. Identity groups, it is argued, seek recognition, validation and endorsement, an agenda that gives rise to the celebration of identity through LGBT Pride events,

the marking of minority religious festivals and Black History Month. Thus, Piore and Safford (2006: 314) observe that, 'identity groups in the new system seem to be motivated as much by the desire for social integration as by economic gain, and the pressures they exert seem to be largely moral and symbolic rather than economic'. With a slightly different emphasis, Hunt and Bielski Boris (2007: 97) note that the 'postmaterialist concerns' advanced first by the feminist and then by the lesbian and gay movement have often focused on 'harassment and violence', a preoccupation that is reflected today in the demand that the workplace must be a 'safe space' for women and minorities. Whether the emphasis is on celebration or protection, however, the focus on qualitative workplace interests is seen to be distinctive.

### ***Methods of social movement organizations***

The belief that new social movements rely upon distinctive methods to organize and represent their constituencies can also be found within contemporary writing. Piore and Safford (2006: 305-7) again provide an example. They state that at local and at workplace levels the organizations of identity groups tend to be informal and participative, networks rather than formally constituted organizations, with fluid boundaries that allow participants to easily join, leave and take part in multiple networks at once. At national level, formal organizations representing identity groups are the norm but often are not membership organizations that are formally accountable to the constituency they aspire to represent. As a consequence, they are dominated by professional activists and often rely on grants or public contracts to fund their activities, which typically focus on public campaigning, lobbying and strategic litigation. The relationship between the centre and local groups, moreover, may be loose and non-hierarchical. All of these characteristics, Piore and Safford note, sharply differentiate the organizations of new social movements from the labour movement, with its formality, governance through elected representatives, reliance on income from a dues-paying membership, and hierarchical structure.

Other writers have made similar claims and have also drawn a contrast between the methods of new social movements and those of organized labour. Tapia (2013), in a comparative study of the community organization, London Citizens, and the union, Connect, notes that the former was more successful in mobilizing its supporter-base in the campaign for a living wage than was the latter in its attempts at union organizing. The difference in mobilizing capacity she attributes to the contrasting organizational cultures and forms of member commitment in the two organizations. The ability of community organizations to develop 'sustained member mobilization', Tapia states, is due to their reliance on 'social commitment' and a 'relational culture', whereas, 'trade unions are more likely to

develop instrumental commitment and engage in a service-driven culture, making sustained member mobilization difficult to achieve' (p.668).

Identification of the differential capacities of new social movements and unions is also a feature of recent work by Heckscher and McCarthy (2014). Their focus is on solidarity. They note that traditional forms of labour solidarity are in long term decline but argue that that new forms of solidarity are emerging and have been deployed in effective protest by a range of single issue movements that include Occupy, the Mozilla movement for a free internet and student campaigns for labour standards. The 'collaborative solidarity' that Heckscher and McCarthy believe lies at the heart of these movements is based on 'weak ties', often established via internet platforms, and rests on shared values and empathy rather than a common experience of work within an occupation or industrial enterprise. While seemingly fragile, ties of this kind can nevertheless support collective action, which they say often takes the form of 'swarming', multiple actions organized independently by groups of movement supporters though in pursuit of a common goal and perhaps making use of common resources made available through an internet platform. Collective action of this kind, Heckscher and McCarthy make clear, is the wave of the future, attuned to the internet age, and they suggest that the future of the labour movement may depend on its ability to learn these methods and embrace the seemingly weak, collaborative solidarity on which they rest.

### ***Replacement of labour with 'new' social movements***

The final component of the postmodern argument, which continues to find an echo is the claim that new social movements are replacing the labour movement. This claim is an especially noteworthy feature of Piore and Safford's work, with its argument that new social movements have created a novel form of workplace governance that is replacing the old, union-based form of industrial relations. The thesis that new movements are replacing labour is also present, however, in the other contributions described above. It can be seen in the suggestion that new movements can be more effective than unions in mobilizing work-related protest and that they are more fully attuned to long-run changes in economy and society. The thesis can also have a strong normative dimension, seen for example in the work of feminist writers who regard unions as irremediably flawed institutions of women's representation, which must give way to alternative organizations that are fully controlled by women and work unambiguously their interests (e.g. Crain and Matheny, 1999). Whatever the ground on which the replacement thesis rests, however, the key thing is its persistence and the fact that it continues to shape discussion of the relationship between labour and the new social movements.

## **2. Continued relevance of Kelly's critique of postmodernism**

At the core of Kelly's response to the postmodern account of industrial relations is the proffering of an alternative to the claim that new social movements are replacing labour: a fusion thesis based on the belief that labour unions can and often do work in fruitful collaboration with non-labour organizations. The validity of this fusion thesis is reviewed in the next section. In this section, other aspects of Kelly's critique of postmodernism are considered. These aspects consist of three themes: 1) a disputing of the postmodern claim that new social movements form a discrete class that have shared characteristics and which differ fundamentally from the old social movements of the 'modernist' era; 2) an argument that the interests pursued by labour and other movements are often complementary rather than opposed, thereby providing a basis for joint work; 3) a rejection of the claim that social movement organizations are invariably more dynamic than the labour movement or that they rely on a common set of methods and forms of organizing that prioritize mobilization, informality and participation. In what follows, each of these criticisms of postmodernist argument are assessed in the light of new evidence. In the period since Kelly was writing there has been a growth of research on 'new actors' in employment relations that has often focused on CSOs: voluntary, campaigning and charitable organizations that have come to play an increasingly visible part in worker representation (Heery and Frege, 2006). This fresh evidence is used to validate but also extend Kelly's critique.

### ***Variation in types of social movement***

In seeking to disprove the claim that new social movements form a discrete class, Kelly references the diverse histories of those movements which he says are most usually placed under the new social movement banner: the peace, environmental and women's movements. The first and third of these movements, he states, have long histories that pre-date the 1960s and have often grown alongside and experienced frequent contact with the labour movement. The crude temporal distinction between new and old, modern and postmodern, which underpins the replacement thesis, Kelly argues is unwarranted.

Kelly's point here is surely valid. While some of the most active CSOs within the sphere of work and employment, such as those representing the LGBT community, are relatively novel formations, many others are of much older provenance. Anti-Slavery International, the main campaigning organization on modern slavery, first emerged in the early nineteenth century in the campaign against chattel slavery. It is the world's oldest human rights organization. Many of the UK's most significant disability charities also have long histories stretching back to the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. These organizations have often changed under the impulse of contemporary disability activism, and have shed their paternalist past to become representative and campaigning



organizations, but they nevertheless remain expressions of a very old movement. Finally, Citizens UK, the organization behind the campaign for the living wage, is an offshoot of American community organizing, which first emerged in the 1930s; part of the wave of mobilization that also generated the contemporary American labour movement, not something that has emerged within the post-labour era (Walls, 2015). This point about the variable histories of non-labour movements is important: if other movements are contemporaneous with labour, and not its successors, then it is wrong to view them as a threat, replacing labour's function within postmodern societies. On the contrary, organizations with a long shared history may retain the capacity for collaboration.

Another point concerning the variation within non-labour movements, which is not made by Kelly, concerns their diverse purposes. It is common to characterize new social movements in terms of the politics of identity and there are many CSOs which represent equity-seeking groups, including women, ethnic, sexual and other minorities. Many active non-labour organizations, however, do not define themselves primarily in terms of representing identity groups of this kind. Many are issue-based, focusing on the protection of human rights, the alleviation of poverty, promoting worker and citizen safety, or securing improved work-life balance (Heery et al, 2012). The pursuit of issues of this kind may lead organizations to act on behalf of equity-seeking identity groups: human rights organizations, for instance have become more concerned over time with the rights of lesbian and gay people and other sexual minorities. But advancing the interests of groups of this type is not the exclusive concern of many such organizations and they aspire to speak on behalf of majority as well as minority constituencies.

Another type of non-labour organization consists of advisory and advocacy organizations that provide a general service to citizens. The most striking example in the UK is Citizens Advice, which defines its constituency extremely broadly to encompass all who need guidance and support in enforcing their rights as consumers, tenants, debtors, workers and in other capacities (Abbott, 1998). Citizens Advice, which originated in the popular mobilization of the Second World War, defines its constituency in the broadest possible terms. While members of equity-seeking groups may frequently use its services, the latter are not themselves defined in terms of a politics of identity. Civil society contains a rich array of groups, movements and institutions, serving constituencies defined in a variety of ways and pursuing multiple objectives. Within this mix there is seemingly plentiful scope for joint working with the labour movement.

### ***Interests pursued by civil society organizations***

Kelly's main point with regard to interests concerns the complementary nature of interests that emerge in the fields of production and consumption. He observes that production and consumption

are intimately linked by the employee's wage or salary' and notes that 'even the most consumption-oriented employee is concerned with his/her level of earnings' (1998: 120). It is this complementarity of interests that, for Kelly, can provide the basis of joint campaigning between labour and other social movements.

Subsequent research on CSOs indicates that not only might unions and social movements have complementary interests but that the interests they pursue often overlap. Many CSOs are concerned to advance the interests of their members, clients or constituents as much in the sphere of production as in the sphere of consumption. Thus, a survey of UK-based CSOs in the mid-2000s by Heery et al (2012) found that while very few reported that work and employment was their exclusive or primary field of activity, most stated that they had a significant interest in this field and that their involvement in issues related to employment had grown in the recent past. The same research, moreover, identified cases in which policy had developed from an initial focus on consumption to encompass matters of production. Public Concern at Work, for instance, the UK's main whistleblowing charity, emerged from the consumer protection movement but has lobbied for changes to employment law to protect whistle-blowers and advises both companies and unions on public interest disclosure procedures within the workplace. A concern to protect the consumer from corrupt or unsafe business practices, therefore, has led to a campaign to regulate public interest disclosure within the sphere of employment.

Another example can be seen amongst carers' organizations, such as Carers UK, Counsel and Care and Working Families, which exist to protect the interests of parents and other caregivers. A major preoccupation of these organizations has been work-life integration and the ability of carers to combine their caring responsibilities with paid employment. Reflecting this concern, they have lobbied government for stronger legal entitlements to flexible working and have advised employers on the introduction of family-friendly practices (Williams et al, 2011). On occasion, carers' organizations have joined with the union movement to campaign for higher pay and improved conditions for workers in the care industry in order to improve quality of service. In these cases, not only is there a complementarity of interests between unions and other movements, in the manner identified by Kelly, but there is also a coincidence of interests within the sphere of employment.

It can also be noted that the interests pursued by many CSOs are often emphatically material. While campaigning organizations may seek recognition and respect for their constituents, action of this kind rarely defines their behaviour and is typically coupled with a desire to secure tangible, material gains on behalf of those they represent. This blending of the material and the postmaterial can be seen in the actions of LGBT organizations, which seek to promote a safe and

welcoming work environment while also helping lesbian and gay people find work, gain access to training and secure promotion (Williams et al, 2011). In the USA, perhaps the main concrete achievement of LGBT activism within the sphere of work has been winning same-sex partner benefits across much of corporate America, an enhancement of the compensation package for LGBT employees (Briscoe and Safford, 2008). The continuing concern of feminist organizations with equal pay and equal pension entitlement provides another, similar example.

Other CSOs have targeted in-work poverty and have promoted an explicitly redistributive agenda. A notable example is the international campaign for the living wage, which originated in the USA and has spread to other countries, including the UK where Citizens UK and its sister organization, the Living Wage Foundation, encourage employers voluntarily to adopt the Living Wage and ensure that it is paid to both direct employees and the employees of contractors working on their premises (Heery et al, 2017). Oxfam and other anti-poverty organizations have backed this campaign, while organizations like the Equality Trust and the High Pay Centre focus on the broader question of inequality in income and wealth. This interest amongst non-labour organizations in the material and the redistributive, further underlines Kelly's point about scope for joint work and it can be noted that unions are part of the coalition of forces campaigning for a living wage and have worked jointly with bodies like the High Pay Centre to highlight income inequality. A point not considered by Kelly, however, is that this very coincidence of interests might provide the basis for rivalry and conflict between unions and CSOs, as the two sides compete for influence and credit. Studies of the living wage campaign have identified rivalry of this kind (Holgate, 2009, 2015a) and it may be that, on occasion, pursuing a shared agenda makes the kind of fusion that Kelly advocates, difficult to sustain in practice.

### ***Methods of civil society organizations***

Kelly's primary point with regard to the methods used by new social movements, is that postmodern claims with regard to their dynamism, participative nature and mobilizing capacity mistake the characteristics of newly created social movement organizations for essential features of the movements themselves. It can be inferred from this point that the methods used by non-labour organizations will vary depending on their level of maturity. Subsequent research has underscored this point about variation, indicating both that individual social movement organizations make use of a variety methods and that in many cases supporter mobilization is not the sole or even the primary method that is used to pursue their objectives (Heery et al, 2012). It has been noted of the living wage campaign, for example, that although Citizens UK has used 'agitational' methods, mobilizing civil society to pressure employers to adopt the living wage standard, it has also appealed to

employers' sense of social responsibility and made the business case for higher wages (Bunyan, 2016). The campaign has sought to 'organize the employer' not simply apply external pressure through supporter mobilization.

Seeking to work in cooperation with employers is not confined to the living wage campaign; it is a central tactic of many non-labour organizations. It is often associated with attempts at 'civil regulation'; that is the development of unilateral standards or norms of good practice by CSOs that they seek to have adopted by employers (Williams et al, 2011). The methods used to achieve this aim include accreditation of compliant employers on a fee-paying basis, which is the main function of the Living Wage Foundation. Other methods include providing consultancy and advice to employers, identifying and promoting best practice in conjunction with exemplary corporate 'partners', operating employer membership schemes, and running joint campaigns with major businesses and with employer or management organizations (Heery et al, 2012; Williams et al, 2011). Indeed, there are some CSOs, such as the Business Disability Forum and the Employers' Network for Equality and Inclusion, whose membership is confined to employers and who engage solely in activity of this kind (Goberman et al, 2017).

The use by CSOs of these pro-business methods features neither in postmodern accounts of new social movements nor in Kelly's critique. Their prevalence may be a function of the ossification of these movements and their withdrawal from more 'agitational' methods as they mature, as Kelly suggests. Criticism of CSOs on these lines certainly exists and in its tone echoes that of left critics of moderate unionism (e.g. Dauvergne and Lebaron, 2014). Whatever their provenance, however, the use of methods that seek to draw employers into joint work is another feature of non-labour organizations that has clear parallels with the labour movement. Just as labour unions have sought an accommodation with employers through recognition procedures and collective bargaining that allows them to advance their members' interests, so CSOs have sought an accommodation with 'corporate stakeholders' that allows them to diffuse labour standards and generate civil regulation of the labour market. The implications of this shared impulse to engage with employers are, once again, ambivalent. The shared impulse may lead to joint activity, as when unions join with community organizations to encourage employers with whom they have recognition agreements to pay the living wage (Lopes and Hall, 2015). It may also lead to rivalry, however, as both unions and CSOs present themselves to employers as potential 'partners' in regulating the employment relationship. Employer compliance with civil regulation promoted by non-labour organizations might undermine the role of unions or come to be regarded as an alternative to collective bargaining.

### **3. Kelly's 'fusion thesis' and its elaboration in later work**

At the heart of Kelly's response to the postmodernist account of new social movements is the claim that the latter can work collaboratively with the labour movement in a coalition that advances the interests of both parties. This fusion thesis views new social movements as the natural partners of organized labour, not its replacement. The scope for partnership, as we have seen, is believed to lie in the overlapping interests of production and consumption-based movements, which provide the material basis for joint working. Kelly's concern in making this argument is, on the one hand, to defend the central position of the labour movement in progressive politics while, on the other, acknowledging the rise of non-labour movements and accepting the legitimacy and significance of the substantive interests they seek to advance. He advocates the integration of the politics of identity-based movements with class politics and seeks neither to privilege the latter nor to accept that its relevance has come to an end.

In the period since *Rethinking Industrial Relations* was published others have made similar arguments and, as a consequence, the relationship between unions and other social movements has emerged as a topic within IR research. In what follows, this body of work is used to reflect on the validity of Kelly's thesis. The main conclusion is that there is substantial evidence of the fusion of labour with other social movements but that this has also been accompanied by tension and rivalry and has assumed a number of different forms that were not anticipated in Kelly's book. Kelly provides a single example in support of the notion of fusion, the backing of the LGBT community for the miners in the 1980s. While this is a celebrated example there are many others and cross-movement collaboration has assumed more enduring forms than the relatively short-term expression of solidarity during a particular dispute.

### ***Union-social movement coalitions***

One focus of subsequent research has been the formation of alliances between unions and other types of social movement organization; what Rose (2000) calls 'coalitions across the class divide'. Arrangements of this kind bring labour and other movements together, perhaps within an umbrella organization, often to campaign for a particular issue and to express mutual support and solidarity. Research on coalitions of this kind has pursued two avenues that are relevant to Kelly's fusion thesis. On the one hand, there has been an attempt to map the different forms of coalition that unions and CSOs have formed, while on the other there is an attempt to identify the conditions under which coalitions emerge. The latter concern is particularly significant given the ambivalent implications for joint working that flow from overlapping interests and a common desire to engage with employers noted above. Given this ambivalence, coalitions have to be deliberately constructed and so the

factors that facilitate joint working, rather than rivalry or indifference, are central to Kelly's argument about fusion.

Kelly's example of LGBT support for the miners is a case of a relatively short-lived coalition, in which non-labour activists offered solidarity and practical support to workers engaged in conflict. While support of this kind has become relatively common within major industrial disputes (e.g. Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 1999), research on coalitions has tended to focus on other types of joint work (e.g. Holgate, 2014). An indicative example is provided by Tattersall's (2009) Australian study of the Public Education Coalition forged between the New South Wales Teachers' Federation and a variety of parents and school-principals' organizations in the early 2000s. Tattersall notes the longevity of this coalition, which lasted several years, the range of methods used, which included commissioning an independent review of the education service and joint campaigning in parliamentary elections, and the shared policy agenda that drew the coalition partners together, which particularly emphasised the issue of class-size within schools. The Public Education Coalition is an example of what Frege et al (2006: 142) term a 'common-cause coalition'. The distinguishing feature of coalitions of this kind is that they 'attempt to identify separate but associated interests behind which a coalition can form', a characteristic that distinguishes them from 'vanguard coalitions', like that between the miners and LGBT groups, in which the union determines campaign objectives which are then supported by other groups offering solidarity.

Another distinction that is drawn by Frege et al is that between 'coalitions of protest' and 'coalitions of influence'. The former are characterized by a focus on mobilization and the use of 'agitational' tactics to pressure either public authorities or individual employers. The support of civil society groups that emerged during the British miners' strike is an example of a coalition of this type. Coalitions of influence, in contrast, operate differently and typically bring together unions and CSOs in a united front to use their legitimacy and expertise to shape public policy. The commissioning of an independent review of the school education system by the teachers' federation and a parents' organization in the first phase of the Public Education Coalition provides an example; an attempt to frame policy debate through an authoritative, research-based intervention. This distinction between coalitions formed to protest and those formed to influence, draws further attention to the range of methods used by CSOs and emphasises, again, the fact that they are not confined to the mobilization of supporters in the manner stressed so frequently in the postmodern account of new social movements.

Union coalitions with non-Labour organizations are often difficult to forge, fraught with tension, and liable to collapse. The Public Education Coalition ultimately suffered the latter fate,

albeit after several years of successful operation. Collaboration between unions and CSOs has to be actively constructed and for this reason, researchers have attempted to identify the conditions that allow successful coalitions to form. In Rose's (2000) American work emphasis is placed on the role of 'bridge builders', activists with a foot in both labour and other movements, whose cross-movement knowledge and contacts facilitate the building of a coalition. In another American study of 'blue-green coalitions' between the labour and environmental movements, Mayer (2009) stresses the importance of framing campaign issues in a manner that is relevant to all coalition partners and provides a basis for collaborative work. In the coalitions described within the research health was used as a 'master frame' that allowed the interest of workers in a safe work environment to be fused with that of environmentalists seeking to protect residents from toxins released by industrial processes. Finally, Tattersall (2009) stresses the importance of issue-selection. The Public Education Coalition could function, she argues, because it focused on issues, like class-size, on which workers and parents had a shared interest and eschewed other, distributional matters, such as teachers' wages, on which it was not possible to develop a joint position. Whatever the precise mechanism that is identified, however, the more general point is that coalition-building is a contingent and often difficult process; cross movement collaboration does not appear of itself but has to be worked for.

### ***Affiliation of unions to social movement organizations***

While coalition-building has attracted research attention, it is only one of a number of ways in which 'fusion' between labour and other social movements can occur. A second method, which is largely neglected in the research literature, is affiliation. Under this arrangement unions affiliate to other social movement organizations, becoming corporate members in order to offer practical and symbolic support to whatever mission these organizations are pursuing. Affiliation of this kind, to campaigning and charitable organizations, is very common amongst unions, a way in which unions play a wider social role at one-stage removed from the immediate representation of member interests.

An organization with a long history of union affiliation is the British section of Amnesty International, the human rights organization. Unions form a distinct membership category within Amnesty and have their own network, to which most UK unions and many union branches are affiliated (Heery, 2009). Through the network, unions have provided funding to Amnesty and contributed to its governance and policy-making. Perhaps the main activity to which it has given rise, however, is union involvement in supporting and campaigning on behalf of prisoners of conscience, with a particular emphasis on labour unionists who have suffered persecution. There has also been support for Amnesty's wider human rights campaigns; for example on the death penalty, the export

of arms and surveillance and torture equipment to oppressive regimes, and violence against women. A feature of union involvement in these campaigns has been the promotion of these issues to union members and an attempt to raise their profile within the wider labour movement.

A notable aspect of union involvement in Amnesty is reliance on Amnesty's own repertoire of activism. This repertoire includes letter writing to protest against persecution, sending greeting cards and other expressions of support to those who are imprisoned, participating in delegations to meet representatives of governments infringing human rights, lobbying politicians and government departments for action against oppressive governments, and researching and publicising cases of human rights abuse. Unions typically have not used their own classic repertoire of collective action in advancing Amnesty's agenda and Heery's (2009) study of the network discovered very few cases of feedback, of the issues, language or methods used within an Amnesty context being incorporated within the more quotidian, representative work of unions. Through the network, unions have offered tangible and significant support to Amnesty rather in the same way that other movements have supported unions within 'vanguard coalitions'. One suspects that many other cases of union affiliation assume the same form, a means of expressing support for worthwhile causes that is discrete and relatively isolated from core union business.

### ***Union imitation of social movement practices***

Another way in which unions can develop a relationship with other social movement organizations is by adopting the latter's forms of organization and methods of campaigning. There is no discussion of union imitation of other movements in Kelly's work but this is a theme that has emerged in both prescriptive and research writing on the labour movement in recent years. It can be seen at its most general in the call for 'social movement unionism', the claim that labour can undergo renewal if it recreates itself as a social movement (Luce 2014: 152-3). It can also be seen in contributions, such as those of Tapia (2013) and Heckscher and McCarthy (2014), with their call for unions to adopt the seemingly more dynamic methods of community organizations and single-issue campaigns. In an influential project on the revitalization of American unions, Voss and Sherman (2000) have reported that a key part was played by activists with experience of non-labour movements who assumed positions of union leadership and used their wider experience to drive through change.

Further examples of unions attempting to learn from non-labour actors can be found in the literature on community unionism. While the latter term can be defined in a number of ways (Tattersall 2009), one current stresses the refashioning of unions so that they resemble and behave in a manner similar to that of community organizations. Holgate's (2014, 2015a, 2015b) work on community unionism is particularly significant in this regard. In part, her research examines the



often-difficult relations between unions and community organizations in case studies of coalition-building in London, Seattle and Sydney. In addition, however, her work describes attempts by unions to adopt the methods of community organizations. One way in which this has been attempted is by redefining the locus of union activity from the workplace to the local community. To this end, unions have participated in citywide coalitions, London Citizens, the Sydney Alliance and the Sound Alliance, cooperating with community organizations to influence politics and run campaigns within a particular geographical area. In some cases, unions have also developed membership amongst non-workers (retirees and the unemployed), established spatially-defined community branches and developed local campaigns on issues that are of broad community concern, such as cuts to public services. Along this route there has been a dual expansion of union method, extending organization from the workplace to the community and extending the focus of union activity from employment to consumption.

A second approach has been to use the methods of community organizing, developed by the American Industrial Areas Foundation and its international offshoots. These methods include using listening campaigns to identify issues of community concern that can form a policy agenda, using one-to-one interviews to identify community leaders and form relationships between them, reliance on testimony from those suffering oppression to provide an emotional charge to campaigning, and leadership training for activists and officers. In Holgate's research, attempts to apply these approaches to unions are described, with mixed results, in London, Seattle and Sydney. While she identifies a 'community turn' within unionism in the three countries studied, the scale of the learning attempted and the degree of change achieved remain modest. Unions have attempted to learn from other movements, therefore, but Holgate (2015b: 17) identifies strong barriers to change and states that 'institutional sclerosis' often imposes a drag on innovation.

### ***Union absorption of new social movements***

The final way in which fusion of the labour and other social movements is through absorption; that is the expression of these movements through labour unionism which becomes a site upon which they organize and seek to achieve their goals. The union movement is not alone in absorbing other movements in this manner. The women's, LGBT, disability and other equity-seeking movements operate broadly across the social spectrum, campaigning within and through the institutional fields of politics, business, the military, the media, public services and, indeed, civil society. Social movements of this kind are protean, adapting to and shaping social institutions, bending them, however imperfectly, to their purpose. This process can be seen within the labour movement and has been one of the most powerful pressures shaping unionism over the past fifty years. Arguably

absorption of other movements within unionism has been the most significant and effective way in which the fusion Kelly advocates has been achieved.

One way in which fusion of this kind has been developed is through the 'internal representation' of women's and minority interests within unions. This process has developed furthest for women's representation and can be seen in a range of innovations in union government systems that have been adopted widely from the 1970s onwards. These changes include: setting up women's committees and conferences and establishing women's networks within unions; reserving seats for women on union decision-making bodies and delegations; appointing women's officers and other equality representatives who can prioritize the representation of women's interests; and using women-only training courses and other measures to help women secure leadership and paid officer positions within unions (Kirton, 2015). Similar forms of internal representation have been adopted for other equity-seeking groups: Hunt and Bielski Boris (2007), for example, describe measures taken to provide voice to LGBT interests within unions in the USA. The multiplication of representative channels in this way has led some unions to establish general equality forums, in which women and minority interests can identify shared policy objectives. Briskin (2008) has characterized the latter process as one of internal coalition-building, a way of uniting separate identity groups at the points at which their interests intersect.

Internal representation of women and minorities within unions has often given rise to 'external representation'; that is, the pursuit of their interests in political campaigning and lobbying, in litigation, and in collective bargaining (Colling and Dickens, 2001; Dean and Liff, 2010). Heery and Conley's (2007) study of the development of UK union policy on part-time work describes the use of all of these methods: unions lobbying for stronger legal rights for part-time workers at UK and European levels, sponsoring test cases to challenge discrimination against part-timers and spreading the results of successful legal cases to other workers through collective bargaining. The purpose of these initiatives was to establish the principle of equal treatment *pro rata* for (mainly women) part-time workers in pay and other conditions of employment and the research highlights the link between these initiatives and prior changes in union government that brought women activists into positions of power within unions. Other research has pointed to the part played by unions in broadening the agenda of collective bargaining to embrace issues of equality and diversity - for example through negotiations on work-life balance (O'Brien Smith and Rigby, 2010) and domestic violence (Baird et al, 2014) – and the role of specialist equality representatives in ensuring rights in law are honoured in practice (Bacon and Hoque, 2012). The accumulated research on the external representation of women's and minority interests by unions demonstrates that they have helped

create the 'workplace regime' grounded in substantive equality rights, identified by Piore and Safford (2006). They are as much its architect as its displaced victim.

The long shift towards the internal and external representation of equity-seeking groups within unions has often been contested. Ledwith and Colgan (2002: 16) describe it as a process of 'usurpation', involving mobilization against male and majority interests within unions in order to build power and obtain positions of influence and authority. Commentators have also noted that the process is incomplete and have identified limitations in systems of gender and minority democracy and the limited take-up of equality bargaining by unions. A theme in recent work in this regard is the negative impact of the global financial crisis on the representation of women's and minority interests within unions; imposing a significant constraint on further gains and throwing some initiatives into reverse (Briskin, 2014; Milner and Gregory, 2014). Despite these qualifications, however, the expression of new social movements through unions has been of major significance for the labour movement. The women's movement and the movements of other equity-seeking groups have changed the way unions are governed and the agenda that they seek to advance. These changes, moreover, have accumulated over a long period of time, in most cases are enduring, have affected virtually all sections of the labour movement and have led to major substantive gains for women workers and members of minorities represented by unions. It is through this slow, cumulative and contested process of change within unions that the fusion of labour and the new social movements is most apparent.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This article has sought to demonstrate the continuing relevance of Kelly's critique of postmodernism and to both validate and extend his arguments with regard to new social movements. The relevance of Kelly's critique resides, in the first instance, in the fact that the substantive arguments associated with the postmodern theory of industrial relations continue to be made today and, indeed, have migrated from other social sciences to secure a place within IR itself. These arguments consist of claims that: new social movements reflect the fragmentation of identity; pursue interests that are post-material and which emerge primarily from the sphere of consumption; use particular methods that are informal and participative and which are particularly effective at mobilising protest; and have displaced the 'old' movement of labour as the primary progressive force within post-industrial societies. In its most developed form, the postmodern argument proposes a 'replacement thesis'; that the 'new' social movements of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, environmentalism and the like are displacing the labour movement.

Kelly's response to these claims is, firstly, to argue that new social movements do not form a coherent category and to point out that the histories of at least some are coterminous with that of the labour movement. He also suggests that their focus on consumption is complementary to the labour movement's focus on production and that this complementarity furnishes the material basis for joint work and cross-movement collaboration. Finally, Kelly questions whether new social movements are characterised by the use of a single method or set of organizational characteristics and suggests that they are as vulnerable to the processes of formalization and bureaucratization that can be seen within unions.

Each of these criticisms is valid but each can also be extended. Non-labour movements and organizations are highly variable both in the objectives they pursue and the methods they use. Their objectives are often firmly material and there has been a recent trend for CSOs to prioritise issues within the realm of production, seeking to obtain improvements in pay, conditions of employment and improved career prospects, as well as respect and recognition, for the identity groups or issue-based constituencies that they represent. Pursuit of these objectives has often involved attempts to shape employer practice through the process of 'civil regulation' and non-labour movements, like unions, often display a pronounced concern to form institutional relationships with employers. Their labour market behaviour is not defined by or restricted to the mobilization of supporters against employers or the state. These concerns with shaping employment practice and developing relations with employers can provide a material basis for joint work between new social movements and unions in precisely the manner Kelly suggests. Overlapping interests, however, can also lead to institutional rivalry and empirical studies of the relationship between unions and social movement organizations in the period since Kelly was writing have often revealed tension and conflict. Partly for this reason, researchers have tried to establish the conditions that support cooperation across the social movement divide; that allow the potential of shared or complementary interests to be realised in actual collaboration.

The final stage of Kelly's response to postmodernism is to advocate fusion, to claim that the relationship between labour and the new social movements can and often is characterised by joint working. Again, this is a valid claim but one that can be extended. Joint-working between labour and other movements can assume a variety of forms that extend beyond the kind of vanguard coalition Kelly identifies, in which community and identity groups lend support to unionised workers engaged in struggle. Subsequent research has identified different types of labour-community coalition and has pointed to affiliation and union imitation of social movement organizations as additional ways in which fusion can occur. The primary way in which labour and new social movements have come together, however, is through 'absorption': the labour movement has provided an institutional field

upon which other movements can organize and campaign and the concrete expression of this process can be seen in the internal and external representation of women's and minority interests within unions that has developed strongly since the 1970s. New social movements have colonised labour and it is in this activity that fusion, of the new with the old, has been most fully achieved.

## References

- Abbott B (1998) The emergence of a new industrial relations actor – the role of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. *Industrial Relations Journal* 29 (4): 257—269.
- Bacon N and Hoque K (2012) The role and impact of trade union equality representatives in Britain', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50 (2): 239—262.
- Baird M, McFerran L and Wright I (2014) An equality bargaining breakthrough: paid domestic violence leave. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (2): 190—207.
- Briskin L (2008) Cross-constituency organizing in Canadian unions. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 46 (2): 221—247.
- Briskin L (2014) Austerity, union policy and gender equality bargaining', *Transfer* 20 (1): 115—133.
- Briscoe F and Safford S (2008) The Nixon-in-China effect: activism, imitation and the institutionalization of contentious practices. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53: 460—491.
- Bunyan P (2016) The role of civil society in reducing poverty and inequality: a case study of the living wage campaign in the UK. *Local Economy* 31 (4): 489-501.
- Colling T and Dickens L (2001) Gender equality and trade unions: a new basis for mobilization? In Noon M and Ogbonna E (eds), *Equality, Diversity and Disadvantage in Employment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 136—155.
- Crain M and Matheny K (1999) Labor's divided ranks: privilege and the united front ideology. *Cornell Law Review* 81: 1542—1626.
- Dauvergne P and Lebaron G (2014) *Protest Inc: The Corporatization of Activism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dean D and Liff S (2010) Equality and diversity: the ultimate industrial relations concern. In Colling T and Terry M (eds) *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 422—446.
- Edwards P (2015) Industrial relations, critical social science and reform: 1, principles of engagement. *Industrial Relations Journal* 46 (3): 173—186.
- Frege C, Heery E and Turner L (2004) The new solidarity? Trade union coalition building in five countries. In Frege C and Kelly J (eds), *Varieties of Unionism: Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 137—158.

- Goberman L, Hauptmeier M and Heery E (2017) A typology of employers' organizations in the United Kingdom. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* (forthcoming).
- Heckscher C and McCarthy J (2014) Transient solidarities: commitment and collective action in postindustrial societies. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 52 (4): 627—657.
- Heery E (2009) *Amnesty International and Trade unions in Britain: Thirty Years of Solidarity for Human Rights*. London: Amnesty International.
- Heery E, Abbott B and Williams S (2012) The involvement of civil society organizations in British industrial relations: extent, origins and significance. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. 50 (1): 47—72.
- Heery E and Conley H (2007) Frame extension in a mature social movement: British trade unions and part-time work, 1967-2002. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 49 (1): 5—29.
- Heery E and Frege C (2006) 'New actors in industrial relations', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44 (4): 601—604.
- Heery E., Hann D and Nash D (2017) The living wage campaign in the United Kingdom. *Employee Relations* 39 (60): 800—814.
- Holgate J (2009) Contested terrain: London's living wage campaign and the tension between union and community organizing. In McBride J and Greenwood I (eds) *The Complexity of Community Unionism*. Basingtoke: Palgrave MacMillan, pp.49—74.
- Holgate J (2014) An international study of trade union involvement in community organizing: same model, different outcomes. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. doi: 10.1111/bjir.12098
- Holgate J (2015a) Community organizing in the UK: a 'new' approach for trade unions? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 36 (3): 431—455.
- Holgate J (2015b) The Sydney Alliance: a broad-based community organizing potential for trade union transformation? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*. DOI: 10.1177/0143831X15618451
- Hunt G and Bielski Boris M (2007) The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender challenge to American labor. In D S Cobble (ed) *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, pp.81—98.
- Johnstone S (2015) The case for workplace partnership. In Johnstone S and Ackers P (eds) *Finding a Voice at Work? New Perspectives on Employment Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 153—174.

Juravich T and Bronfenbrenner K (1999) *Ravenswood: The Steelworkers' Victory and the Revival of American Labor*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press.

Kelly J (1999) *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*. London: Routledge.

Kirton G (2015) Progress towards gender democracy in UK unions 1987-2012. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 53 (3): 484—507.

Ledwith S and Colgan F (2002) Tackling gender, diversity and trade union democracy: a worldwide project? In F Colgan and S Ledwith (eds) *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, pp. 1—17.

Lopes A and Hall T (2015) Organising migrant workers: the living wage campaign at the University of East London. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 46 (3): 208—221.

Luce S (2014) *Labor Movements: Global Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mayer B (2009) *Blue-Green Coalitions: Fighting for Safe Workplaces and Healthy Communities*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press.

McBride J, Hebson G and Holgate J (2015) Intersectionality: are we taking enough notice in the field of work and employment relations? *Work, Employment and Society* 29 (2): 331—341.

Mercer D, Paludi M I, Mills J H and Mills A J (2015) Intersectionality at the intersection. In Bendl R, Bleijenbergh I, Hentotten E and Mills A J (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Diversity in Organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 435—453.

Milner S and Gregory A (2014) Gender equality bargaining in France and the UK: an uphill struggle? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 56 (2): 246—263.

O'Brien Smith F and Rigby M (2010) The work-life balance strategies of USDAW: mobilizing collective voice. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 41 (3): 206—217.

Piore M and Safford S (2006) Changing regimes of workplace governance, shifting axes of social mobilization and the challenge to industrial relations theory. *Industrial Relations* 45 (3): 299—325.

Rose F (2000) *Coalitions across the Class Divide: Lessons from the Labor, Peace, and Environmental Movements*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Sayer A (1992) *Method in Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge.



Tapia M (2013) Marching to different tunes: commitment and culture as mobilizing mechanisms of trade unions and community organizations. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 51 (4): pp.666—688.

Tattersall A (2009) Using their sword of justice: The NSW Teachers' Federation and its campaigns for public education between 2001 and 2004. McBride J and Greenwood I (eds) *Community Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of Concepts and Contexts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, pp.161—186.

Upchurch M (2009) Partnership: New Labour's Third Way? In Daniels G and McIlroy J (eds) *Trade unions in a Neoliberal World*. London: Routledge, pp. 230—253.

Voss K and Sherman R (2000) Breaking the iron law of oligarchy: union revitalization in the American labor movement. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106: 303—349.

Walls D (2015) *Community Organizing*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Williams S, Heery E and Abbott B (2011) The emerging regime of civil regulation in work and employment relations. *Human Relations* 64 (7): 951—970.