



The Future for Union Image

A Unions21 Debate

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Unions21



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Forward

Nigel Stanley
Head, TUC Campaigns
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Talking about the public and media perceptions of unions is tricky.

For a start there is not a single union image or single audience. We like to think of ourselves as a movement, but even our members can have a positive view of their own union - and most do - but have a different attitude to other unions or unions in general. Even those of us who stress that we are a movement must recognise that it is a diverse and pluralistic one. What works for a small specialist union with a clear identity derived from what their members do, may have no relevance for a big general union straddling a wide range of jobs, but much better resourced.

Unions may have a common interest in improving the image of unions, but if we are honest we all know that many are also in competition with other unions. This can be a straightforward competition for members - sometimes a spur to improvement but sometimes a waste of resources. On other occasions it is more subtle. Unions can be keen for their own members to see their union as more effective or more influential than others.

The TUC has its own issues. We are both an umbrella - and advocate - for trade unionism, but are also a distinct organisation with our own reputational issues. And if all of this is not complicated enough, the communications world we inhabit is ever more complex.

Gone are the days when Fleet Street and broadcasters had a squad of industrial correspondents who understood unions and were guaranteed space. Now unions have to fight much harder for coverage - and it is often based on lazy stereotypes. But the traditional media is now less important. Fewer people read newspapers, and the growth of multi-channel TV means that many simply skip the shared experience of the national news. Facebook, Twitter and blogs are ever more important sources of information - and as trust in government, public institutions and almost everything else declines, people increasingly rely on their friends or even celebrities for their news and opinions.

Personal experience of unions is also important. The union tradition is voluntary, collective and democratic. In many ways this is our greatest strength. Yet that culture does not always sit well with the modern expectation brought through universal phone ownership and the net that services are available directly 24 hours a day.

Yet we also have a tremendous opportunity to re-present unions as relevant and effective. The scale and the depth of the cuts is hitting both public services and the wider economy. The TUC has not had such a high media profile for years. YouGov found that 52 per cent of the population backed the aims of the March 26th March for the Alternative. The government has comprehensively lost the arguments that the cuts are fair, won't affect front-line services and are good for the economy.

While there is an ever-present danger that unions can look like a vested interest simply sticking up for public service workers, the determination to work with others and to stress the effect on services, fairness and social cohesion has fought off the attacks of our enemies. And only unions and the TUC could have brought together the wide coalition that marched together.

This Unions 21 collection is thus highly welcome. These varied contributions will all provoke discussion and deserve a wide circulation in the movement whether they spark controversy or seal a consensus.

Paul Richards

Union communications should be a bridge not a barrier

- Union communication is at its best when words and phrases are used skilfully to frame political debate, and shape the way policies and ideas are understood.
- Jargon excludes non-members and should be avoided.
- Union communications should never make any assumptions about the knowledge of the reader.

Tim Finch

Unions and the news media

- The financial crisis and the coalition response to it means unions have a once in a generation opportunity to shift the paradigm back in their favour.
- Unions need to consider the risk of any situation where winning a narrow argument in the media could cause a loss of sympathy with the wider public.
- Communications teams have to work hard to highlight the work unions do outside of industrial action.
- Unions can best achieve a modern image by showing they are part of a broad movement and setting out a positive vision for a new society and economy.

Michelle Stanistreet

Unions and the press

- Partial, subjective or inaccurate reporting of union activities is partly due to the chronic understaffing of newsrooms and the loss of industrial correspondents.
- Journalists often lack knowledge about unions and the limitations and restrictions of the law they are forced to operate in.
- The issues discussed and delegates present at union events need to reflect the image unions want to project.
- The job of journalists is to raise uncomfortable truths. To avoid becoming the subject of negative stories unions need to have high standards.
- Unions which understand the benefit of investing in their press office have been most successful in getting positive stories into the media.

Joe Goldberg

The union brand

- Unions are brands, because they stand for a distinct set of values which create recognisable goodwill.
- Union brand value needs reinvigorating, by stripping back and reinvention: Unions have to think about why they exist and communicate it effectively.
- Unions need to understand how their audience has changed, and make a new offer to the 'squeezed middle' and those working in sectors with low union density.

Summary

Dan Whittle

Bill Ivory

Unions and Drama

- Unions have become less visible in popular culture as they have become perceived as less relevant.
- There is a stereotype that union drama is only about the grimness of working class struggle.
- Unions must constantly surprise people about what they are capable of and create a narrative about their activities which brings them to life.

Mike Harris

Unions and social media

- Well crafted online 'asks' can be used to raise funds and membership.
- High profile supporters can be used to attract new interest online through social media.
- Unions should perform a social media audit and involve their most well networked members in delivering their communications.

“Image” and “brand” aren’t words that sit easily in the minds of many trade unionists.

Yet with union membership falling and an increasingly cynical media, the need to update the image of trade unions has arguably never been more pressing.

This new publication from Unions 21 brings together a range of contributions from people who work, or have worked, in the world of communications. All of them believe in the value of trade unions and want unions to be successful. But they are also united in believing that unions need to take a critical look at the image they project, both to their own members and the world beyond.

And these commentators are not alone. Unions 21 polling suggests that while there is an enduring belief in the benefits of the collective strength of unions, more than one-third of workers regard trade unions as old fashioned and negative. Among younger workers and students, this perception is even stronger.

Many companies would pay millions for the ‘brand’ values and recognition that unions (and the TUC) have, but they would also ensure that is brand is fully up-to-date and working effectively.

92% of trade unionists surveyed by Unions 21 think the British media is too cynical about unions, and that the bias is getting worse rather than better. This may well account for some of the perceptions current and future workers have about unions, but it also places even more responsibility on a union representative to use every second of a media interview (and members’ meeting?) to try to win over the audience.

Winning over an audience, according to the experts, means recognising that everyone listening to you will have multiple identities. They may be a trade union member, but they may also be a mum or dad, who picks up their kids from school, goes shopping, uses the tube to get around, likes and wants to get on at work. If trade unions are represented by people who “are not like me” there is less chance of the union message getting through.

What we say, and how we say it, are crucial. Trade union jargon and a call to the barricades is a turn off. To be most credible, suggests the polling, trade unions need to come over as well informed, calmly persuasive, focused on practical things, and realistic in our aims.

While “detoxification” might not be the phrase we would use for the process of updating the union image, there are plenty of ideas in this publication for “refreshing” the union offer.

We hope you enjoy it.

Introduction

Updating union image

Lesley Mercer
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Director at CSP
and a member of the
Unions21 steering
committee

and

Sue Ferns
Head of Research,
Prospect, and
Chair of Unions 21

Paul Richards

Union communications should be a bridge not a barrier

Paul Richards spoke at the Unions21 annual conference 18 March 2011 at TUC Congress House on the topic 'Union communications must be a bridge not a barrier'

The most important insight into communications and campaigning is contained in the simple truth 'it's not what you say that matters; it's what people hear.'

The US Republican strategist Frank Luntz - a kind of evil Peter Mandelson - anchors his book 'Words That Work' in this idea. The book is like peering behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz - you can see it's all done with levers, pulleys and coloured smoke. For example, in the right-wing lexicon 'inheritance tax' becomes the 'death tax'. 'Drilling for oil' becomes 'energy exploration'. Those opposed to legal abortion become 'pro-life'.

Words and phrases can frame a political debate, shape the way policies and ideas are understood. You might remember the ferocious political battles over the 'poll tax' 20 years ago. No-one, not even the Tories who invented it, would today call it by its proper name 'the community charge.' Community Charge (not 'tax', mark you) sounds vaguely benign. 'Poll tax' has echoes of the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt of the 1380s; it also fits neatly into newspaper headlines, unlike 'community charge'. Opposition to the poll tax was shaped by affixing a name to it which sounds so utterly malign. Consider how tainted and corrupted the phrase 'big society' has become. Soon it will be so toxic, you won't hear it without thinking 'Tory cuts'.

George Orwell is our guide to so much that is useful in understanding political language. He made the point that not only do we shape our language, but that our language shapes us. In Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948) Winston Smith's job was to remove words from the dictionary, to reduce the scope for revolutionary or seditious thought. In his seminal essay *Politics and the English Language* (1946) Orwell writes:

'A man might take to drink because he feels himself a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.'

Modern English is an amalgam of so many other languages - Latin, French, Anglo-Saxon, German, combined with words and phrases from across the Empire, and latterly, the United States. It contains many ways to say the same thing. For the writer, this allows endless variety and possibility for expression. Orwell told us to never write anything 'you are used to seeing in print.' With such a rich palette, there is never an excuse for blacks, whites and greys.

But it also opens the possibility for miscommunication and misunderstanding. If someone asks you to join them for 'dinner', at what time should you turn up? At 12.30pm north of the River Trent. At 7.30pm in London and the south of England. What of everyday sets of initials such as PC? It might be 'politically correct', or 'police constable', or even 'personal computer'. What about regional dialect words? In the English language there are dozens of words to describe the passage behind a row of terraced houses, or the passage between houses built close to together. You might hear 'ginnel' or 'jennel' or 'gennel' in Leeds or Sheffield, 'twitten' in Sussex, or 'gully' in the Black Country. The humble bread roll might be a 'barm cake' in Salford, a 'cob' in Leicester, a 'stottie' in Newcastle or a 'bap' in Scotland (or 'focaccia' in Islington).

To this potential confusion we can add the bane of modern life: jargon. Jargon is language developed by a particular group, trade, or profession to achieve two things. First, it unites the group, and allows speedy communication between people with the same understanding and interests. Dr Adam Fox of St Mary's, Paddington, makes an

annual survey of medical slang, used by medics to describe their patients. He has uncovered such gems as PAFO (pissed and fell over), GPO (good for parts only), NFN (normal for Norfolk), TEETH (tried everything else, try homeopathy) as well as 'the Freud Squad' for the psychiatry department and a 'code brown' for, well you can guess. This jargon, along with more serious examples of medical linguistic shortcuts, means that medics can communicate with one another in situations where speed matters

It is also an example of the second function of jargon: to exclude outsiders. Perhaps the best of example is cockney rhyming slang, originally devised to foil the listening ears of undercover police officers.

'Polari' is the slang originally used by fairground people, prostitutes and around the markets of London in the last century, which then was adopted by the then-illegal gay underground in the early and mid-twentieth century. This complex jargon was a mixture of Romany, naval slang, and gay slang, and allowed gay men and women to converse without fear of detection by 'straights' or the police. Words from polari which have entered the mainstream include 'naff', 'camp', 'khazi' (toilet), 'mince' (walk), 'ogle' (look) and 'slap' (make-up).

The 'exclusion of outsiders' is where this little canter around the marvels of the English language becomes directly relevant to trade unionists. Trade unionism, like every other walk of life, has developed its own slang, jargon and insiders-only language, every bit as impenetrable as polari, doctors' slang, cockney rhyming slang, computer hackers' slang or any of the rest. If the trade union movement is to reach out to a new generation of workers and enlist them as the next generation of trade union activists, it must not talk in a language which is obscure, off-putting and alienating. If what matters is not what you say, but what people hear, trade unions must focus their efforts on the latter not the former.

It's not merely the rich, historical vocabulary of the trade unions (my union, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), has 'Father of Chapel' and 'Mother of Chapel' to describe its workplace representatives). These terms stem from the days when printing was the sole preserve of the church, or later, when illegal trade union activity was given 'cover' by the nonconformist church.

Nor is it the unhelpful caricature of trade unionism in popular culture, (for example Fred Kite in *I'm All Right Jack* (1959): 'We do not and cannot accept the principle that incompetence justifies dismissal. That is victimisation.')

It is also the language of modern employment law and workplace regulations. See how many of these you can define in everyday language. (The TUC provides a handy jargon-buster to help you).

Certification officer

Collective bargaining

Constructive dismissal

COT3

EWC

Five statutory fair reasons

Grievance procedure

Health surveillance

Notice of termination

RIDDOR

Shop steward

Transfers of undertakings

Unauthorised deduction from wages

Victimisation

Zero hours contract

It is heartbreaking to see an enthusiastic, new trade union representative turn into a solicitor who's swallowed an employment law manual within a matter of months. The beauty of trade unionism is that it is democratic, and any member is as good as any other. The use of jargon only serves to create a cadre of cognoscenti within the union movement. It also bewilders anyone new to a union, or contemplating joining one. All of this talk of 'members', 'shop stewards', 'branches', 'minutes', 'workplaces' and 'resolutions' is another world. It creates the impression that a trade union, rather than being immediate, relevant and important, is in fact an odd sect-like activity, like train-spotting, real ale or nudism. As one participant in a recent Unions 21 event pointed out, it is only in the world of trade unionism that the word 'management' has wholly negative connotations. Anywhere else, it suggests either something to aspire to, or a perfectly sensible and desirable activity.

The recent findings of the Unions 21 and TUC research into young peoples' attitudes to trade unions showed that the young people surveyed had some positive word associations with trade unionism. Words such as 'campaigning', 'advice' and 'rights' were mentioned. Also, ideas such as 'fairness', 'togetherness', and 'protection' came up. On the downside, though, were the negative connotations which came to the young people's minds: 'trouble-makers', 'scaremongering', and a range of words associated with disputes: 'picket lines' 'strikes' 'walk-outs' and 'disagreements'. Disruption on London Underground during strikes was also cited by young workers in London.

The obvious conclusion is that if trade unions want to be relevant and open to new members, and if they want to turn members into activists, then the ways in which they use language must change.

I would offer up three points of advice:

First, obey the KISS principle: keep it short and simple. If it can't be said in 140 characters, the maximum length of a tweet on twitter, most young people aren't interested. In the frantic busy world most people live in, messages have to be succinct and direct. Lengthy policy documents or booklets do not get read, no matter how worthy. Brevity has always been the hallmark of effective writing. Orwell advised us 'never use a long word when a short one will do' and 'if it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.' Unions should talk in the language of the Mirror, not the Butterworths Employment Law Handbook or Citrine's ABC of Chairmanship.

Second, cut out the jargon. Orwell said 'never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you think of an everyday English equivalent.' If you mean 'the sack' then don't write 'dismissal'. If you mean 'bullying', don't write 'victimisation'. The best place

to start writing from is in the shoes of the reader, or as Harper Lee advised, the only way to understand someone is to 'climb into his skin and walk around in it'. Imagine their lives, their interests, their levels of knowledge and understanding. It's not hard. It's you, before you got involved with your union.

Third, once you've written your speech, leaflet, blog post, letter or email, 'stress test' every word and phrase. Journalists are sometimes trained to think of their reader as a 14-year old youth: someone with adequate intelligence, but low levels of knowledge. That means that union communications should never make any assumptions about the knowledge of the reader. You should assume they know nothing until you've explained it to them. Then, being intelligent, they can work out your meaning. If you happen to know any young people, you can ask them to read your work before it goes out into the world. Their advice will be invaluable. Edit and re-edit your work. There's no such thing as a good first draft, only a good re-draft.

If you want a handy couple of metaphors, think of a barrier and a bridge. Is what you've written a bridge to understanding, or a barrier? If a barrier, then knock it to the ground, as it is preventing the success of the trade union movement as surely as a union-busting law or strike-breaking boss.

Paul Richards

Freelance writer, trainer and political columnist

Tim Finch

Unions and the news media

Transcript of contribution to the Unions21 roundtable on Updating Union Image 27th January 2011'

"My contribution relates mainly to reflections from my time working for the BBC Political unit between 1996 and 2004. It seems a long time ago now, but lessons from that period are still relevant, because until recently not much had changed.

Now, however, the financial crisis, and the Coalition government's response to it, present opportunities to challenge the settled orthodoxies of the post Thatcher/Blair years. Indeed it could be said there is a potential paradigm shift going on which the unions - if they are smart - could take advantage of. But with opportunities come dangers, so I will highlight some of those points as well.

First, what was the view of the BBC staff working at 4 Millbank (the centre of Westminster broadcasting) during my time there?

Let me first put the conspiracy theories to bed: The BBC did not have an overt agenda on how to approach covering the unions or anything else. There was never any question of someone on high setting down an editorial line and saying to all staff: "This is our stance on the unions and all of you will toe that line". But it is the case that the BBC is clearly part of what might be called 'the liberal establishment', however you might define that. And it has to operate within the prevailing social and political ambience of the time. In that context I did sit in on editorial meetings where you had senior people saying "We are a bit adrift from the Daily Mail on this or that issue and we need to get a bit closer to this strand of public opinion." Personally, I think that is a shame and that the BBC then - and even more now - should have more confidence to plough its own furrow and not be swayed by the agendas of others. But this isn't really the place for me to say how the BBC got it wrong. I raise the issue because I think the BBC is a good exemplar of how the mainstream media works - and the unions and others achieve nothing very much by complaining about how they are treated. They have to play the game on the pitch provided.

And so what about this business about the ambience of the time? Sadly, I think it was one in which the unions were seen to be behind the curve of history and of declining relevance. And if you want to go to a point in time where this was set, it is of course the miners strike. That was clearly an absolute disaster for the image and standing of the union movement. The miners strike - and before that the Winter of Discontent - decisively helped to shape the Thatcherite world-view, which it has to be said was largely shared by New Labour, and which had a strong hold on the public imagination. This world view was all about strong individualism, the weakening of community, the idea of shareholder democracy, the aspiration to earn and to own, the right to choose, the idea of citizen as consumer - all of these notions were forged as reactions to union dominance in the 1970s, became stronger through the eighties and nineties, and this certainly was around in the atmosphere throughout the time I was at the BBC. The unions were decisively on the wrong side of this world view, and on the wrong side of history, as it were.

So, on the whole, unions were often just contemptuously ignored by most journalists. They were seen as a bit of a relic and an irrelevance. The two times when unions did get a look in during these years - and this made the problem worse still - were of course strikes and the union block vote. What is a shame for anyone who knows a bit about the union movement is that there was lots of good stuff going on. But all of that modernisation and new thinking, all of the moderate and thoughtful voices, all of the progressive initiatives, were just drowned out and or booted off the field whenever there was a strike - and there always was one sooner or later.

As I say, I think this is partly an indictment of the mainstream media, their herd mentality, but I don't want to concentrate on that. Rather, I want to maintain a focus, ruthlessly, on

what I think is the union movement's own culpability in not being willing, or indeed able, to understand or adapt to how poorly it was being portrayed.

At one level, the issue is simply the 'General Secretary problem'. The leaders are elected by their members - that's an important principle - so the unions can't just decide to ditch democracy and draft in a few smoother operators. Though it could be argued that both the Labour membership and the Conservative membership, recognising a big political problem for them, did just that in choosing Blair and Cameron. But there is such a thing as modern media training - and a lot of General Secretaries could do with some. Simple as that.

I am also conscious that General Secretaries and those high up in unions have to represent their union's interests and they have to represent their members, particularly at the sharp end of situations where they're being badly done to. But one of the areas that has been a problem and remains a problem is: How when you have the media spotlight on you - which is usually during moments of breakdown and tension - do you speak up for your members, but also portray the broader movement in a more positive light? It is a dilemma because at that point you're just fighting hard to win an individual battle and not thinking about how this will 'play' in the longer term. But victory in the narrow context - winning the industrial battle - can be defeat in the broader one - losing sympathy with the wider public.

Another thing I recall, looking back on that period, was that many annual conferences of individual unions were disastrous in PR terms. I don't think the answer would have been to resort to slick conference management, though some of those techniques are useful. But it was dismaying to hear journalist colleagues setting off to conferences with stories almost written in advance because they knew what they were going to get: A lot of stuff which portrayed union members in a very negative and aggressive light, a lot of stuff which seemed to show unions as more concerned about themselves than service users. This was like an open invitation to journalists to write the usual knocking copy. It was like handing someone a gun and inviting them to shoot you.

Obviously industrial action is a particularly important part of the power unions possess. Strikes are necessary even if you know that a strike will always be a story - and hardly ever a positive one. But I do think we need to reflect on the fact that, the vast majority of what union members are doing day to day is not striking, but working. And union officials too are not mainly using their time to plan strikes. I don't know what percentage of union activity revolves around preparations for, implementation of and reflections on, industrial action, but I suspect it would be a very small amount of what they do. However, the rest of it - all their other work - has been - and remains - very largely invisible to the public. Don't get me wrong: it is of course a lot harder to get the media interested in this other stuff. But union communications teams need to rise to that challenge.

Just to close: I think the financial crisis does offer a real opportunity for unions to get back into the game and to re-establish their relevance to the times. It offers a chance to reverse the paradigm shift of the 1980s. We've already seen that the things that triumphed through that decade and for the next twenty years - the selfish individualism, the rampant consumerism, the growing inequality - are being questioned. The great injustices which the neo-liberal economic model propagated, and more specifically how deficit reduction is being handled by the government, does offer the opportunity for the unions to be in the vanguard of a new social movement - if it's played right.

But it is important that unions pleasantly surprise the public, and for that matter the media, about how they approach this issue. Because the worst thing would be just to

conform to type. It could be a trap if unions behave in exactly the way that the people expect them to behave in this type of situation. So, there needs to be careful thinking about what responses are needed to build a broad based campaign around opposing the cuts and promoting fairer growth.

Generally, my reflections on my period in the media are rather gloomy in terms of how unions were perceived. But there may be a generational shift happening which offers brighter prospects. The journalists I worked with were largely children of the 80s, Thatcher's children. Even if they didn't like the Thatcherite world view very much they worked within it. It very often used to be the case that the political correspondents were former Labour correspondents. That wasn't generally a good thing because they tended to be rather hostile or cynical to trade unions as a result. The new generation of journalists coming through are not very often from that background and so there is an opportunity, I think, to influence them to think more positively about the good work that unions do. But I think a lot has to change within the movement.

The cuts will give the unions a profile that they haven't had for years, but the danger is that when you get this big stage, you will just get more coverage, not better coverage. Mass coverage for opposing the cuts through mass action is not the big prize. The unions need to be part of a broader movement setting out a vision for a new society and economy. And there needs to be a change of tone so that unions don't seem to relish confrontation so much. I don't underestimate how difficult it is sometimes to do, particularly when bosses are behaving outrageously and being seriously provocative. But union leaders in particular need to resist the temptation to always use fighting talk.

One idea to consider is whether the big strategic thinking that the union movement needs to do should start with the image and brand problem. Usually, of course, you start with strategic direction and then think: how can the brand be used to support this change. I just wonder in this case whether the strategic thinking could be driven by these issues of image and brand because I do think unions have some serious detoxifying to do. It is your 'nasty party' moment and you really need to seize it."

Tim Finch

Director of Communications at IPPR

“Is the British media cynical about unions? When it comes to the reporting of our movement, every union will have its horror stories, the tales of partial, subjective or plain inaccurate stories or articles that make it feel like cynicism is at the heart of the journalistic approach to trade unions.

I would argue that thankfully these incidents are more the exception to the rule, but it is also important to bear in mind that there are factors beyond cynicism that can impact on the approach the media takes on union-related stories.

Journalists don't operate in a vacuum, if a newspaper has a particular editorial slant, politically or otherwise, it will be reflected in the type of stories editors are interested in. That pressure can be hard for journalists to stave off.

Increasingly, this is happening in the context of newsrooms being chronically understaffed. Local and regional news has been particularly badly hit over the last couple of years and in the last 12 months the scale of cutbacks has been unprecedented. There have been budget cuts, staffing cuts - well over 100 titles have closed altogether leaving some towns without a local newspaper at all.

Inevitably local and national democracy suffers - 64% of editors now believe that they are not adequately scrutinising local councils; 80% of judges believe that courts are not subject to adequate scrutiny. These were once bread and butter functions of local news reporting. And there isn't always the time to properly research a story, to do the most basic of checks.

If media analysts are to be believed things are going to get worse. Over the next three years there are predictions that more than half of the UK's 1,300 local newspapers will close, destroying a further 20,000 jobs. It's in that context that specialist reporters become something of a dying breed and industrial correspondents have all but died out. If you compare this to the Seventies when media organisations had whole teams of specialists covering the trade unions - all with bulging contacts books and a genuine understanding of how trade unions operated - you can see the difference between then and where we are today.

This lack of knowledge and of experience has made coverage of unions more polarised. Take the issue of balance, which has been a big topic in recent months. There is a real lack of knowledge about the limitations and restrictions of the law unions are forced to operate in. All too often this is not presented in order to convey how the odds are weighted so heavily against ordinary people simply trying to exercise their democratic and their human right to withdraw their labour. How, if a company has the money to challenge a ballot, it has frankly become something of a walk in the park.

It's great that some unions have been able to robustly challenge in the courts - but we're not all super-unions and for a union the size of the NUJ risking the legal fees and the costs to defend repeated challenges is not always the best and most appropriate option. The nuances of these cases are often lost in the reporting - often the prevalent view remains that somehow a union and its members are chancing their arm and taking illegal action when in fact it might come down to a very minor mistake about who was balloted. Which in the face of an overwhelming decision to go on strike is irrelevant. Where the Unite ballot of BA is overturned by the court on a technicality that centred on on just 11 ballot papers, or when a similar fate befell the RMT in its dispute with Network Rail, transport journalists in the main covered the story, concentrating in the main on the implications for travel chaos, not the rise in vexatious legal action by employers. These stories would have been the domain of the experienced industrial correspondents in the past. This kind of media coverage is prompted I think more by

Michelle Stanistreet

Unions and the press

Transcript of Michelle Stanistreet's contribution to the event 'Is the British media too cynical about unions?' UK Parliament, 24th November 2010

lack of exposure and experience than cynicism yet it's dangerous as it prepares the ground for the kind of action we know the Tories are set on, making it harder for workers to get a successful ballot for industrial action, to stack the odds further again in the employers favour.

So in this context cuts - the toughest public spending cuts since the Thirties - have an inevitable impact on quality journalism. Media outlets haven't got the contacts and the links with the trade union movement and its 7 million members that they should. The prevailing public view is that somehow cuts are inevitable and in the process we've seen private workers pitted against their public sector counterparts.

We also need to look to ourselves as a movement rather simply criticise the media which after all isn't some homogenous lump - it's made up of a huge range of players, it covers all kinds of journalist and all types of media outlets with all manner of political persuasion. When it comes to garnering positive publicity we need to be punching above our weight, we need the resources of skilled and experienced public relations experts, and I think some of the results from the Unions21 survey reflected that.

Take the annual showcase of the movement, the TUC Congress, the rare occasion when the media comes out in force to cover a union wide event. My heart sinks when I read and hear the inevitable coverage about the gathering of the brothers, the lazy wheeling out of the old macho beer and sandwiches stereotype. But equally, my heart sinks sometime when I look around at Congress to see that the delegates are not always broadly representative of the cross section of ages, of gender, of race that our movement represents. It sinks even further when the only motions opposed are those on equality issues, or - as happened a few years ago - the only motion the TUC General Council saw fit to oppose was one from the TUC's own womens conference on the provision of childcare at TUC events. Because for me that is not what our movement is about in reality. If you go to other meetings and other union events then it's clear that our movement is diverse, it's made up of all ages, it's vibrant and creative and there are men and women in their thousands involved in excellent activism with their unions on a daily basis. I know how frustrating it is when members don't see their union experience reflected in the media coverage.

Then there are the easy traps that I think unions fall into. Journalists can hardly be blamed for some of the stories that probably do most to contribute to some of the negative coverage about individual unions. If you are a union general secretary living a lavish lifestyle then obviously at some point you are going to be the subject of a story when it's timely for a newspaper. As trade unionists we use the same journalistic techniques to ram it home when a boss is living the high life on the back of his employees yet won't deliver the goods when it comes to the annual pay claim. I don't think these stories or these facts do anything to sell the positives or the benefits of trade union membership to the wider public. At the end of the day, union leaders need to be responsible to their members - and of course the vast majority are. It is the job of journalists to raise uncomfortable truths. Members of the NUJ do this in the context of our own reporting guidelines and the NUJ Code of Conduct.

Then there's the need for us to sell our success. Some trade unions are better than others at generating their own good news stories. They've realised the benefits of journalists and press officers cultivating relationships and contacts with journalists, steering stories their way. As one example of many, PCS - in the face of considerable industrial pressures, and the usual kind of militant, hardline tags that they sometimes come up against in parts of the press - does a consistently good job and gets its message out, focusing on the key facts that give lie to the gold plated public sector pensions fallacy. More of that approach is what's needed.

In my experience of working for the Sunday Express where - yes - the editorial line had a penchant for Princess Diana conspiracy theories, anti-Europe rants, or more asylum seeker bashing - if there was a genuinely good story that also happened to put a trade union in a positive light, it certainly wouldn't have been disregarded. That is the way to combat the prevailing mode within the media about the trade union movement, whether that's motivated by cynicism, political opportunism, or sheer ignorance. And thankfully, that's something trade unions can work individually and as a movement to pro-actively combat."

Michelle Stanistreet
General Secretary of the NUJ

Joe Goldberg

The union “brand”

Transcript of contribution to the Unions21 roundtable on Updating Union Image 27th January 2011

Ideological purists will no doubt reject outright the notion that the union movement can learn anything from a discipline as market-driven as the world of branding. Others will fall into the trap of believing that the union promise is about something more honest, something of more substance than the shallow veneer of branding strategies used in the corporate sector.

However, this misses the whole point about what brands really are, the strength they give to those to whom they belong, the impact they have on our culture and society and the value they create for the people who use them.

In a purist sense, it would be easy to evaluate the strength of any one union's brand in terms of its equity - its literal commercial worth. While it would be possible to measure the strength of a Union's ability to generate revenue by the mere strength of its brand, above and beyond the value of the products and services they produce, there are far deeper lessons to be drawn from the discipline than this.

In fact unions and brands, have their core roots from the same moment of economic history - the industrial revolution - and their futures are being challenged and transformed by the same phenomena of globalisation and the digital age.

Just as unions became a necessity to protect organised labour that grew with the emergence of mass production, so brands thrived as a tool to protect the reputation, to identify and offer choice between the differing fruits of their labour. As anyone who has read Chris Anderson's Long Tail will appreciate, the digital age and the forces of globalisation, present the same challenge to which both brands and unions must respond. The infinite fragmentation of the market is driving an intense level of competition, which demands that for survival organisations and corporations need to work harder and dig deeper to create something of meaning - because that in short is what brands are today - meaning. It's no longer good enough to be the best, the biggest, the fastest, the smallest, the first, the latest and certainly not the cheapest - these things are impossible to protect, and certainly don't create the kind of bond with their users that commands loyalty. Today you have to be loved. Or to paraphrase Nordstrom and Ridderstrale - “if you can touch it, it probably isn't of any value.”

That's why a brand is about more than a logo, more than image, and more than a smart piece of advertising or PR. A brand isn't just what it says it is - a brand is what it does.

Or as Seth Godin - another 'marketing guru' writes rather more eloquently: “If you spend time and money (with skill) you can tell a story that spreads, that influences people, that changes actions. [You] can cause people to buy something that they wouldn't have bought without marketing, vote for someone they might not have considered and support an organisation that would have been invisible otherwise.”

The good news is that we as a movement are masters at this. We have been telling stories for decades if not centuries, and not just any story, but stories rich in values, rich in a sense of right and wrong, and rich in belief. And stories like these, stories about justice - stories like the Tolpuddle Martyrs or the Jarrow Marchers or Peterloo - speak to our emotional core. They make us feel a certain way, and in generating those feelings, they create that value - that brand strength we are seeking - because it is that part of our brain without which we literally cannot make decisions and cannot make choices.

So before assessing the union brand we need to identify what are the core ingredients of our story - is it still relevant, and if not what needs to change?

We have established that brand stories live and die off the strength of the emotion and

the feeling they create. Creating that emotion lies in identifying two things - a "belief" and a resultant "action." In other words, brands need to be able to answer the question "why they are here?" and "what are they doing about it?"

To illustrate the point take the case of the NHS - one of the most 'loved' institutions in the UK - and one of the biggest brands in the public sector. Why was it so important for David Cameron, albeit falsely, to reassure voters he would protect the NHS? Why is there so much concern about the NHS Reform Bill? And why is it that Dan Hannan provokes so much ire when he goes on US telly and talks down the NHS?

This could be explained functionally - in terms of the threat it might pose to quality and quantity of provision in our local area, or in terms of the fear of not being able to access the right treatment should we fall seriously ill, or even in terms of the concern about how affordable treatment might be should we need it and have to be able to pay for it.

Important and salient that these might be - the attacks on the NHS offend so many of us because they represent an attack on so much more. They represent an attack on the values and beliefs on which they were built. Because one of the most unsung brand consultants of our time was undoubtedly Nye Bevan - who understood well the power of policy built on values and belief.

When Nye Bevan created the NHS he said, "No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of a lack of means". That's a powerful belief - and one that still resonates today with vast swathes of the population. It makes the status of the NHS about more than anyone's means and directly links the health of the NHS to the health of our society. It means that when people are defending the NHS, they are not just defending their own personal access to treatment, and not just their local hospital, but the sense to which we feel our society is one that is civilised.

With such a belief it is unsurprising that the "action" of the NHS, as stated in the 1948 Act, is to "create a National Health Service based on need rather than ability to pay". This more familiar proposition might be one we may now take as given, but we should never forget how new, radical, and relevant it was for the time, and the extent to which it is still the for many a nation, the envy of the world.

That's why the feeling we have towards the NHS is probably something more than "I feel looked after, cared for and less afraid of what will happen to me and my family if I fall ill" and more like "When I think about the fact we have the NHS, makes me feel part of a more civilised society."

So what for the union brand? Well as mentioned earlier it would in theory be possible to measure in monetary value the strength of any one Union's brand. Many companies even record the value of that brand as an asset on their accounts. To understand how important this can be one only need look at the value of the Coca-Cola business - where without the brand "asset" the business would literally be only worth half of what it is. That is why when brand value starts to decline the investors and shareholders get nervous.

So what are the signs of declining brands? First and foremost it is a decline in customers - and it is here that we as a union movement should be most concerned. Since the late seventies union membership has been in steep decline and is now at best stagnant. The situation is such that even somewhere as organized as the local government sector, where the power of collective bargaining should be clear, on average only half of staff are members join their union.

The response of the union movement to date has been the same as the private sector - consolidation, amalgamation and mergers in the hope that cost efficiencies will improve both the impact and sustainability of their work. Between 2009-10 alone the union movement lost 165,000 members - which while we might attribute these to the economic conditions - the cold hard fact is the size of the union movement overall is almost half what it was in 1979.

As mentioned above, both brands and unions have their origins in the same point of economic history. The first brand trademark was registered on the 1st January 1876 - Bass beer for those that are interested - some eight years after the TUC was formed. In those days the brand (a mark literally burnt onto crates and barrels) was merely designed to identify the producer of the goods, and to signify the genuine nature and quality of the product. Meanwhile Trade Unions were formed to deal with the worst excesses of exploitation in the factory, mills and mines that were the powerhouse of the industrial revolution.

But times have changed, and some efforts to respond to the new economic order are to be commended. The work by Unite for example to collaborate with unions stateside seems an appropriate response to the global nature of the markets - though organizing in developing markets would ultimately have an even greater impact on protecting jobs and wages here.

The real elephant on the table though is that the workforce is becoming increasingly disorganized. Over 80% of all jobs in the UK economy are now in the small enterprise sector and increasingly people are being pushed into self-employment whom many unions wouldn't represent at all. And yet much of this move is about shifting costs and risk onto the individual, and issues such as non and late payment plague the livelihood of contractors.

In short unions are faced with an increased pressure on the cost of organisation and a shrinking pool of potential members. While the amalgamation of unions is sensible, it alone won't reverse the decline in membership, just as an advert alone, or a logo refresh won't change the fortunes for brands like Woolworths or HMV. We need to go back and re-examine fundamentally why we are here. What is the vision of working life and future conditions in Britain that we want to create and achieve? While I doubt the union promise needs fundamental redefinition, an uncomfortable re-assessment of why we are here might just change the way we seek to protect the workforce and assess what it is that we most value.

Too often we fall into the comfortable narratives - rich in class conflict - that appease our current base of fellow members, but we need to reach out to a wider audience if we want to grow - which we need to do if we want to increase our capacity and our legitimacy to negotiate collectively. A brief scan of the TUC TV advert competition shows how much we like to use the emotions of "anger" and "indignation" but this is not how the average worker wants to feel in their workplace or about their employer.

And here I feel there is a confluence between the challenges for the union movement and the challenges for the Labour Party. Whether its the 'squeezed middle' or the most vulnerable in the workforce - the stagnation and now decline in living standards gives us the opportunity to recapture hearts and minds of the workforce, to demonstrate our relevance and renew our offer.

Between 1997 and 2010, it was the C2s who Labour lost, and unsurprisingly it is also the socio-economic segment that have undergone the most dramatic changes to their working lives in the last 20 years. In many cases they've gone from secure employment

in a unionised workplace, to self-contracted labour with no protection from something as brutal as non-payment, to a reduced power to negotiate wage or contract values, with workers now set against each other as they bid for contracts. Meanwhile more vulnerable workers in an unrecognized workplace in an average SME have little support to help them fight any injustice they might face.

How do both these groups end up feeling towards unions? Sadly, envy. Envy that the few who still work in larger places of work have the protection, the pay, the holiday and the working conditions they think they should be entitled to, and most importantly that their folks had. This is a perverse situation in the least which no doubt the right-wing media and unscrupulous employers are happy to exploit where individuals feel more resentment towards those in similar working situations to themselves than those who are essentially driving profit from the very bait and switching of the workforce that is the true cause of their misery.

But the ability to change this is in our hands. We need to explore new ways of organising, of connecting workers in more disparate workplaces, and making it easier for members without on-site stewards to access the support and advice they need.

At the moment the challenge we face can be measured by asking non-members who a union is for? In too many cases the answer will come back as someone “not-like-them.” One thing we can do is to get across how it feels to be part of a union and to improve the availability and access to the very experiences that generate that feeling. This is especially important because there is great dissonance between the feeling we have as members of a union and the feeling non-members have about unions.

This is not an unusual situation - but ironically it is usual for luxury brands. To understand this consider the difference between (presuming you like driving or at all into cars) how you might feel towards a person you spot sat behind the wheel of a Porsche Boxster driving down the motorway with the roof down and how you might feel if you imagined yourself sat behind the very same wheel yourself. Different?

And as a union movement we have the same problem. We need to be more inviting, to provide more access to a greater proportion of the workforce - including the self-employed as the musicians’ union have done. We need to stop being a Porsche, and maybe just be a bit more of a Toyota.

Doing so will require re-stating our beliefs in a way that people recognise we understand how they feel about the conditions forced on them by the structure of the current economy. We need to show them we believe things can be different and once we have done this I suspect we will find we need to radically evolve our offer to show them how we can make it different. This more than any image makeover, will help turn the fortunes of our movement. It will be hard work, but at stake are issues far too important for us to ignore.

Remember the NHS was created on a belief that our society could be more civilised. The union movement should re-state its mission on exactly the same belief, and then rather than protecting a status quo - let us set about creating the conditions to realise it.

Joe Goldberg

Branding professional and trade union member.

Mike Harris

Unions and social media

Edited transcript of contribution to the Unions21 roundtable on Updating Union Image 27th January 2011

"I'll give a case study of a campaign I'm currently involved in. When Index on Censorship formed the Libel Reform Campaign alongside English PEN and Sense About Science we started by getting our existing social network, that is our friends and professional connections, to make our case. Libel law reform is a technical subject and not the sexiest campaign out there. But we mobilised our social networks to get nearly 60,000 people signed up to help our campaign. For instance, we got comedian Dara O Briain to attend our launch as he is also a scientist, so concerned about the effect of our libel laws on medicine and research. Ian Hislop, knows a thing or two about libel trials, so we got him on the radio and in print. We found people linked to one of the 3 partner organisations to get involved in the campaign. And then at the core of the project we had the libel reform website which had a petition. You typed in your details and a letter went to your MP with 10 clear asks. It took no more than 30 seconds to sign, but if you wanted more detail our campaign report was there with case studies about why the law needed to be reformed. We've had 220,000 unique visits, 55,591 signatures, and have raised £63,000 online, a fair amount for an online campaign on a niche issue. This has been reinforced by Twitter, Facebook and e-list. Each visit to our website is worth 29p, so if you're thinking about trade union activity and campaigning remember the internet isn't just for campaigns but income generation to sustain these campaigns. I've signed a-hundred-and-one trade union petitions and only very occasionally been asked to join the union, or make a donation. We said if you're willing to sign this then please support us - and that £63k has been very important to keeping our campaign going.

Where do our visits come from? Well a lot of our visits were powered through by people who were in our wider network. Lots of members of Trade Unions have blogs, but how many of them are asked to write about a trade union issue, or are asked to do a post about a trade union issue or campaign?

To name some individuals or groups in our wider network - Richard Dawkins, who's involved in our campaign, drove over 3,000 people to our site; the Guardian 7,000 people; Simon Singh 2,500 people; Left Foot Forward 1,000 people. And that was just through tiny links to the website saying "sign here". Only 3% of the people who eventually signed the petition did so via our partner organisations' websites - so 97% were a completely new constituency, and that's what unions should be aiming for. Not preaching to the converted, but getting your social media to engage with the vast majority of the population who may not even have considered joining a union. The reason we managed to speak to this new constituency was simply because we had high profile supporters, and we made a very complex issue very straight forward. Instead of just a few thousand letters to MPs there were over 60,000 letters to MPs. Then we tracked back on Twitter where tweets were coming from: of 4,819 we traced two thirds came from just 10 people. This shows it is worth recognising that there are a very small number of Twitter users who are incredibly influential in driving visits. I will give a concrete way unions can improve their social media work: often tweets come from a union, with the union logo - it's so impersonal no one is going to retweet it. It looks like a bureaucracy is pushing a message, people just switch off. If it came from the personal account of the General Secretary, or from a witty press officer who people follow because they're not just tweeting about union activity, it makes a massive difference. Each union only has to find ten people who will carry those tweets, and that leads to thousands of people signing petitions.

There are only 163 tweets that delivered more than two visits to our website. So you have a Pyramid, at the top are the 10 people who drive the most traffic, and from them there are a lot of retweets. So it's worth targeting those well connected twitter users. 55% of our tweets came from people who drove 100 plus visits to the website. We asked in all of our emails we sent to supporters and all of our Facebook updates

and all of the website messages: please tweet this. As a member of two unions, I've never had a message from either of those asking me to Tweet anything, if I did there would be traffic driven to their website. So we constantly ask people to Tweet it, because we knew when they re-tweeted it, it would cause traffic to the website and it would be another 29p per signature for our campaign.

My conclusion is that Google as a route for traffic isn't enough. To drive people to your website you need social media and the social element of that is important. Who is it that's connected with your union who will make your campaign work? I suggest unions need to perform an audit of their social media. You might be surprised, there could be members who have thousands of followers on Twitter, and they have no elected position in the union: They say interesting things, people like them, why not use them to spread your message? It is free of charge. Work out what you want from it - for example we wanted signatures and money. You might want people to spread the message about the benefits of joining a union. Also have very clear messages: we changed a complex issue into 10 asks which were very easy for MPs to understand and carry out."

Mike Harris

Social media, communications and public affairs consultant (mjrharris.co.uk) who is a consultant for the Libel Reform Campaign (www.libelreform.org), and a CWU and Unite member.

Billy Ivory

Unions in Drama

Transcript of Billy Ivory's
contribution to the event
'Is the British media too cynical
about unions?'
UK Parliament,
24th November 2010

"Unions are viewed by writers as less relevant today than they once were - ironic considering everything that is going on. They don't occupy the public imagination in the way they did when I was growing up in the 70s. Then, unions seemed to be active at all levels forcing a public debate. But after that period, with Thatcher, New Labour and the attack on the unions leading to them having their teeth pulled, they seem to have lost their ability to engage in the same way. To some extent unions also now lack the big personalities that make drama and that you can base stories around.

Because of all this if you go to a drama commissioner with an idea involving unions - and I have done it three times, the first time with *Common As Muck* when I was a bin man and the unions were fighting the privatisation of public services like refuse collection, and then with *Faith* which I wrote about the miners' strike and then *Made In Dagenham* which is about the 1968 Ford machinists' strike - more often than not, nowadays, you are met with a kind of weariness, as if to say: well what relevance does it have now? I think that is something I am fighting against all the time.

The second point is almost more dangerous: There is a sense that if the print media are reviewing drama that includes working class people being represented by unions, they want the people to behave like victims. There is a white collar, metropolitan, middle class which is very powerful in both forming opinion and creating the ongoing "rules" which drama must aspire to and these people demand their union dramas to concentrate on the iniquity and 'grimness' of working class life. Sometimes this is because they are on a guilt trip, treating their response as a cathartic release. Or sometimes it is because they want to show that they know what it's like, "on the front line." They are slumming it!

A lot of people have gone to see *Made In Dagenham* and I've received a positive response from most, but amongst some of the more serious press there has been a view that "this is fine as long as you want your politics to be feel-good and fairy tale". They don't appreciate that it is a story about what actually happened and that is still relevant despite the fact that the women involved in the strike are living in a functioning inspirational community - not a sink estate. You are fighting against that sort of stereotyping all the time.

When I wrote *Faith* that got more coverage than anything else I've written, it was about the failure of the NUM and it's supporters getting shredded - or so you would think if you read about it in the press. In fact it was about the success of the women's support groups around South Yorkshire, Wales, Kent and other places - I wanted to change the landscape to take note of their role. But for the media it fitted, again, into the stereotype of the glorious fallen which suited their personal agendas.

The representation of grass-roots women members is important to me. It's something I write about and it comes from my experience growing up in a family with strong women. Women bring something more imaginative to a problem than 'let's have a scrap'.

In terms of *An Enemy Of The People* and *The Crucible*, great drama that deals with big political issues, they succeed because they personalise the politics. All great drama pulls the rug from underneath peoples' feet - but clearly you have to get them onto the rug first. So, to combat the cynicism, or weariness there is about unions, you have to make some of those big issues flesh and blood in ways people can relate to. If you don't people will continue to withdraw from the concept of the union as a maker of drama and change.

It's about being really clever - surprising people about what unions are capable of."

Billy Ivory
Wrote *Made in Dagenham*

A frustrated national journalist of many years told me that some of the coverage of the London firefighters' dispute has been among the worst examples of anti-union, biased coverage he had ever had the misfortune to read. This had in his view followed hard on the heels of biased, factually incorrect coverage of the post dispute, unions' role in Labour leadership election, etc.

His view was that there is little point in trying to sharpen up the act of unions - which is already pretty sharp and getting sharper - when the media seems incredibly biased against them.

Trade unionists agree, a survey we conducted last week reveals: 9 in 10 (92 per cent) believe the British Media is too cynical against unions, and about the same proportion think the bias is getting worse.

None of the 100 members, lay reps and full time officials we surveyed believed there was a neutral or positive bias across the media. The Mirror was the only large circulation daily which a majority of those who answered the question believed was biased towards unions (60 per cent), while 43.7 per cent believe The Guardian is at least slightly biased against unions, and 53.2 per cent The Independent.

Almost a third of survey respondents gave journalists just 3-out-of-10 for their knowledge of unions. But on the other hand, survey respondents believe unions could do better in their communication with the media: 40 per cent gave unions marks 1-4 out of ten for their communications.

The frustration is clear: unions have over the past few years innovated, supported members (and businesses) through the recession, and sought to promote credible alternatives to cuts - while the press response has been characterised by a confrontational and macho portrayal reminiscent of the 70s.

You don't see twenty and thirtysomething journalists turning up to work in platform shoes and bell bottom jeans but they are more than happy to frame union matters using language as outdated as spandex trousers when talking of union "bosses" about to cause a "Winter/Summer/Autumn/Spring of discontent".

But journalists are under more pressure than ever - not only to follow an editorial line but in terms of time. They barely have time to do their job quite apart from educating themselves on the ins and outs of unions. With less industrial correspondents employed to provide the industry's expertise the task is getting more difficult. But as the cuts bite the importance of updating the image of unions is more pressing than ever.

Dan Whittle
Director of Unions21

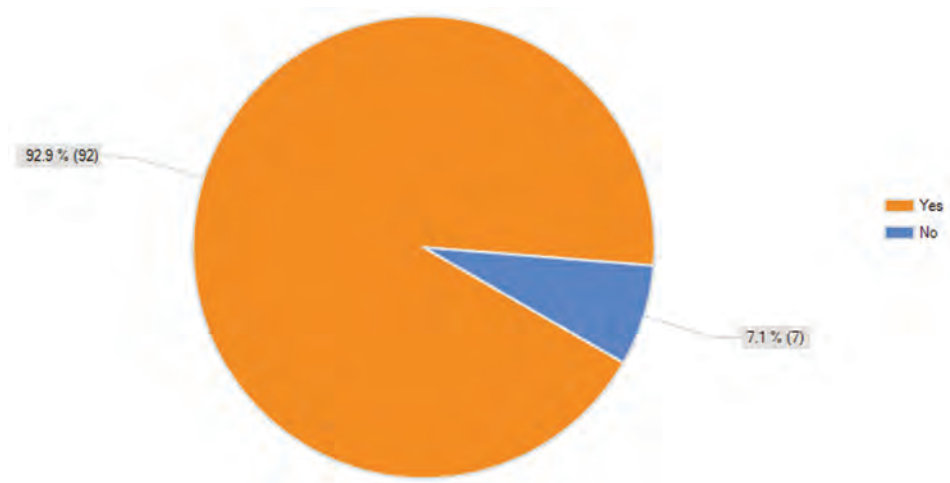
Appendix

Survey of 100 trade unionists, November 2010

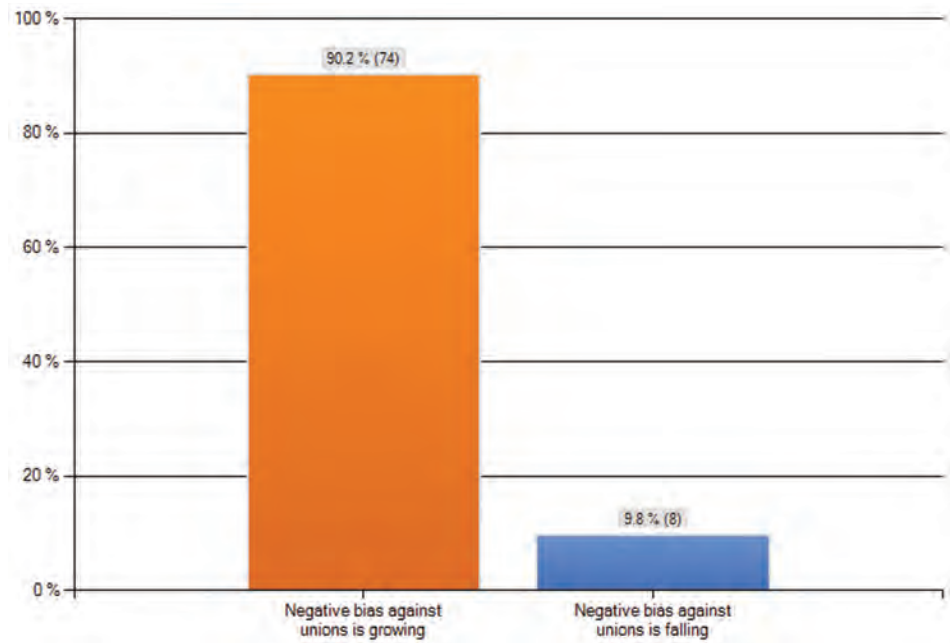
It's the press who are the dinosaurs, not us, say unions

Article published on the website Left Foot Forward
24th November 2010
Dan Whittle

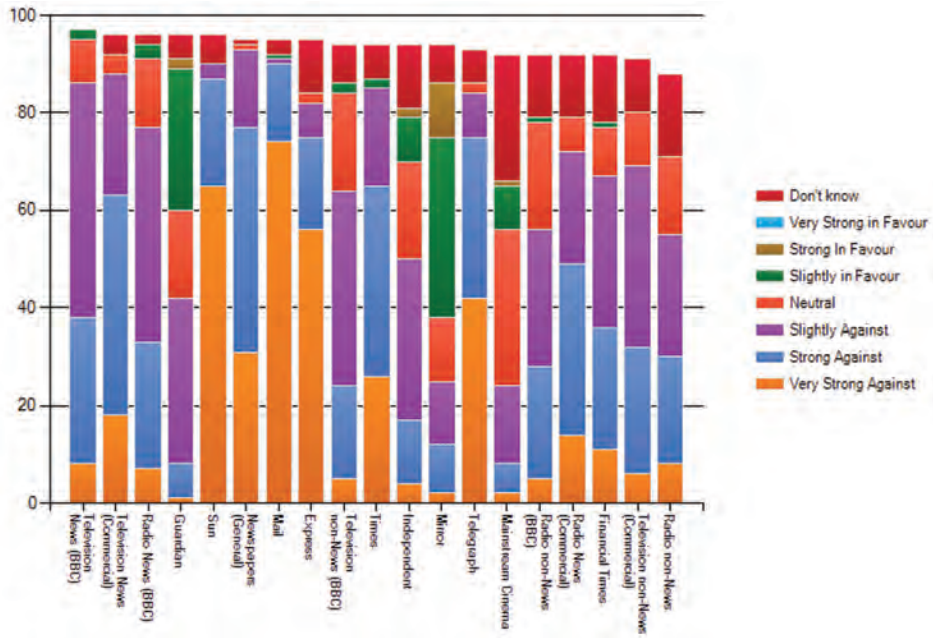
In your view is the British media too cynical about unions?



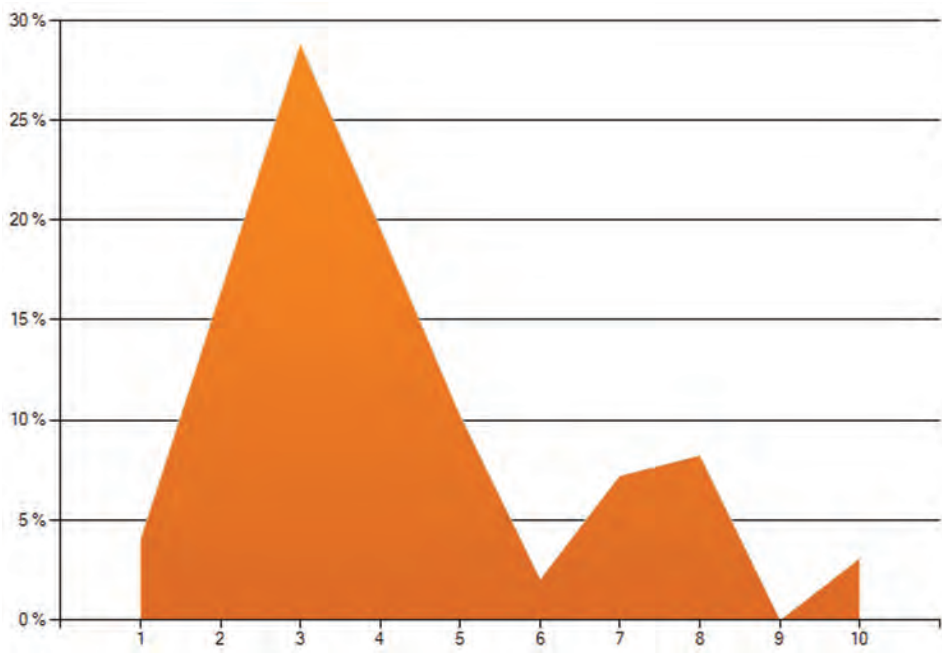
If you perceive a negative bias in the media do you think it is growing or falling over time?



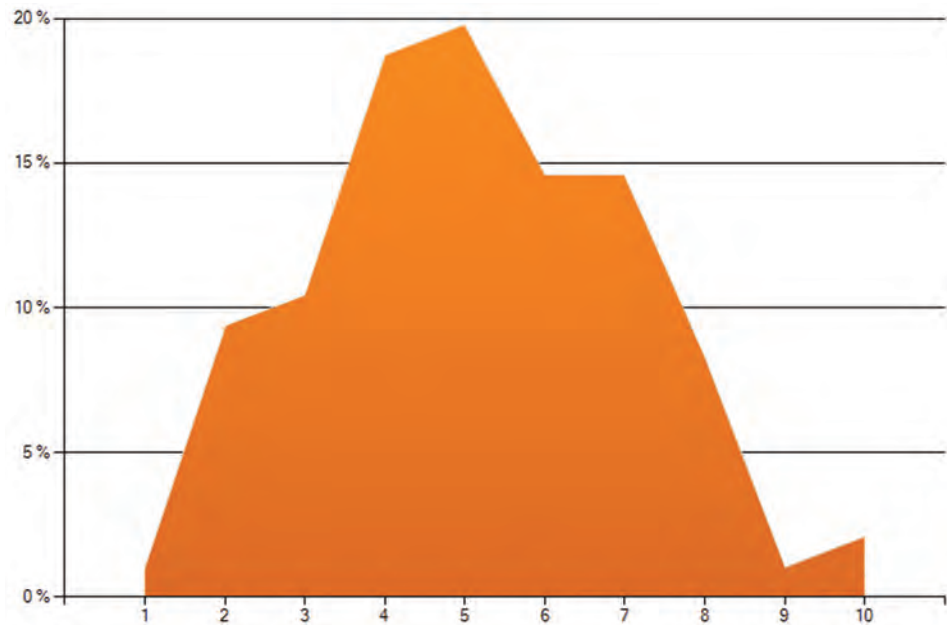
How strong a bias is there towards or against unions in different sections of the media?



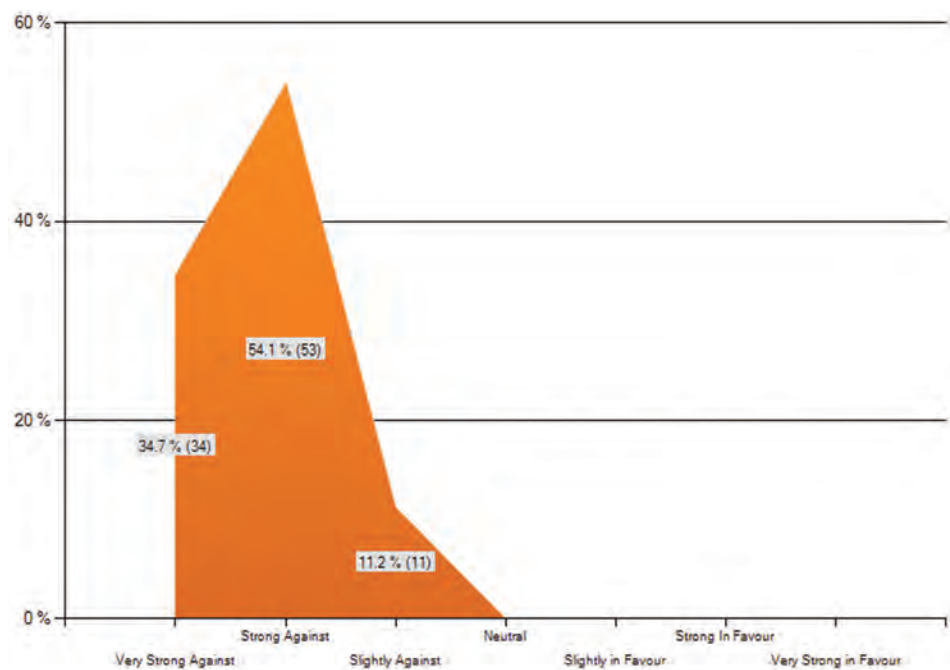
How well informed in your view is the British media about trade unions?
 1-10 (Where "1" means 'have no knowledge of unions' and "10" means 'have complete knowledge of unions')



How well do you think unions communicate with the media?
 1-10 (Where "1" means 'there is no merit in the way unions communicate with the media' and "10" means 'unions could not improve the way they communicate to the media')



How strong a bias is there towards or against unions across the media?



Sample comments from the November 2010 survey of 100 trade unionists

How strong a bias is there towards or against unions across the media?

- *“Very few media outlets have a balanced or neutral view of trade unions and they are more likely to report on negative aspects of trade union support than focus on positive aspects.”*
- *“A lack of understanding is perhaps the main problem - that and the pressures that time and the net place on journalists.”*
- *“Although coverage of strikes among low-paid workers tends to elevate the ‘plucky strikers’ approach, especially where women are involved, eg Gate Gourmet (now a few years old), this apparent ‘soft’ image of strikers rarely investigates below the surface. In national strikes, such as the recent BA stoppage, or the Post Office issues we still get an inaccurate and oversimplified analysis of why people feel forced to take strike action.”*

If you perceive a negative bias in the media do you think it is growing or falling over time?

- *“The perception has changed from a view that unions are too powerful and need to be curbed. To old fashioned and irrelevant.”*
- *“The trend to personalities (ie alleged misuse of power by a few) rather than the issues (ie pensions, pay, jobs) reflects the media rather than real life.”*

How well informed in your view is the British media about trade unions?

1-10 (Where “1” means ‘have no knowledge of unions’ and “10” means ‘have complete knowledge of unions’)

- *“A big change over time from the period in 60s-80s when knew too much thanks to industrial correspondents to one now when there is a limited knowledge.”*
- *“The trouble is they are trapped in their own stereotypes”*
- *“If people had more knowledge we would have more members...”*

How well do you think unions communicate with the media?

1-10 (Where “1” means ‘there is no merit in the way unions communicate with the media’ and “10” means ‘unions could not improve the way they communicate to the media’)

- *“Union communications with media is usually at times of conflict. Not the best time to communicate”*
- *“As a press officer for a trade union I think we communicate well. But an issue I think we have is that the union movement has yet to truly wake up to the very real need to invest in press offices and media operations properly! At the moment it is constant stream of firefighting. We need more time to plan properly or we will never be able to go on the attack and reach our goals.”*
- *“Still too much jargon and bingo phrases like ‘hard working families’. More input from ordinary members needed.”*

