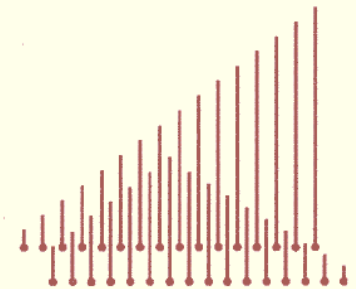


Innovative Responses to Recession

Alex Bryson

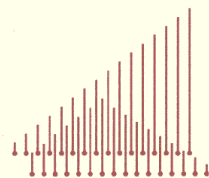
Unions21, TUC, 18TH March 2011



National Institute
of Economic and
Social Research

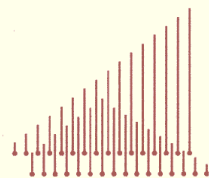
Challenge *and* Opportunity?

- Worst recession since 1930s; cuts deeper than 1980s
- Taking its toll on workers
 - Unemployment, job insecurity, pay freezes
- No return to business as usual
 - Bankers/financiers on the back foot
- Politicians' own reputation damaged
 - Need civil society – unions – to build consensus and make policy
- An historic opportunity for unions
 - Can unions capitalise on it?



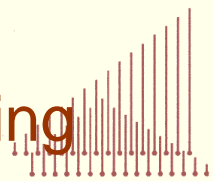
Challenge

- Unions as marginal
 - The union ‘brand’ among the young
- Union as a sectional interest
 - Fighting for the ‘haves’ not the ‘have nots’ eg pensions
- Union organizational strength
 - Difficulties maintaining union density/recruiting reps
 - No deep pockets for a ‘big fight’ (some exceptions)
- Public attitudes to public spending
 - Accepting the logic of deep, fast cuts in public expenditure
- Public attitudes to industrial action?



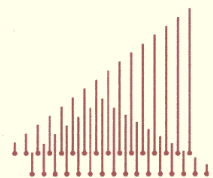
Are unions ready to grasp this opportunity?

- Worrying trends over the last 20-30 years
 - Declining membership, bargaining coverage
 - Financial difficulties facing many unions
 - Difficulty reaching out to new workers/new workplaces
- Much of this is common across Western industrialised world
- But unions still well positioned
 - One of the biggest voluntary movements in the country
 - Strong presence in public sector
 - Some unions are very effective and are prospering

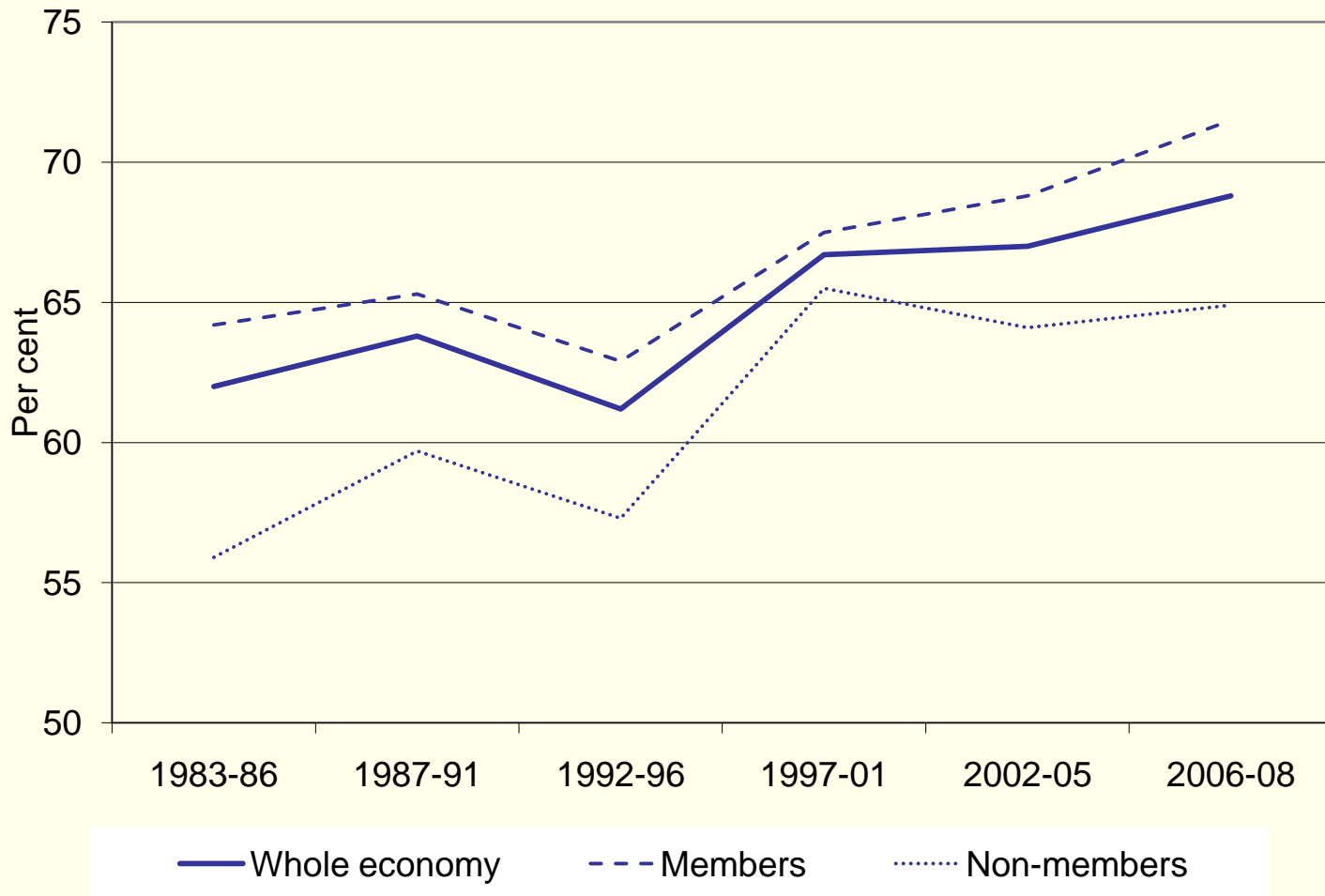


Opportunity

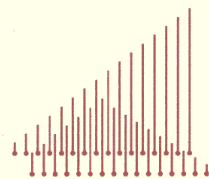
- Unions as the 'counterbalance'
 - Trust
 - Equity, fairness
 - Union popularity rises when too much power in hands of bosses and financiers
 - More 'union friendly' if experienced problems at work (YouGov)
- Union finances in reasonable shape
 - Balancing books in early 2000s
- Potential for increase in union density
 - Union relevance in the workplace (job security)
 - Union wage premium rises in recession
 - activism among young
- Perceptions of union effectiveness rising



Workplace union “doing its job well”

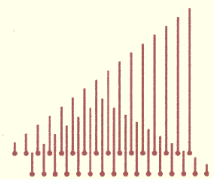


Source: British Social Attitudes Survey



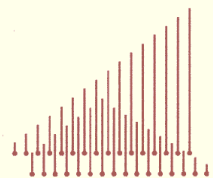
Complementary strategies

- Inside the workplace: bargaining with employers
- Innovative campaigns
- Worker control/corporate strategies



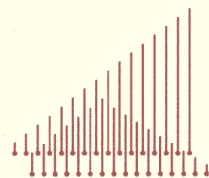
Inside the workplace

- Bedrock of UK union movement in absence of other institutions for worker representation
- Danger: insiders versus outsiders
 - Sectional interests
- Concession bargaining
 - Mutual gains
 - Job security in return for 'cuts' eg. Ireland
- Job security as bedrock for innovation
- Employee involvement must be union-based
 - mutual gains and worker wellbeing
- But how much room for manoeuvre left?



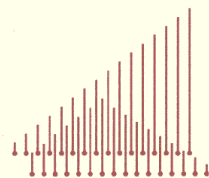
Innovative campaigns (1)

- Public awareness raising
- Creating/renewing coalitions of opposition
- Mobilising public opposition
- Mobilising support for specific campaigns
 - Within/outside union movement (eg. Australian unions “Your Rights at Work” in 2007 general election)
 - Woodlands campaign exploiting government weakness
- Bringing employer (back) to bargaining table
- Union as advocate of quality public services free at source
 - human rights
 - public good
 - equality/redistribution



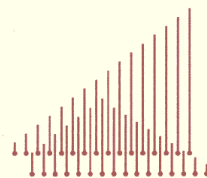
Innovative campaigns (2)

- Problem: maintaining public support
 - Avoid ‘sectional interest’ labelling
- Help public take ‘ownership’ of problem
 - H&s on railways
- Innovative forms of action
 - Purpose: max impact on employer; min impact on customer
 - Debated for 40 years
 - M. C. Bernstein “Alternatives to the Strike in Public Labor Relations”, Harvard Law Review, 1971, 85, 2, 459-475
 - Reverse strikes (Dolci, Scilly)
 - Gene Sharp’s strategic non-violent conflict
 - <http://www.aeinstein.org/selfLiberation.html>
 - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12522848>
 - Let commuters travel for free
 - NSW August 2010; Japan
 - Flash mob action
 - <http://www.gsmlaborcouncil.org/node/4181>



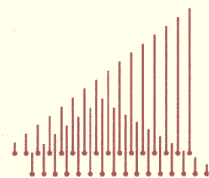
Labour control

- Public sector share plans, eg. Royal Mail.
 - Worker-directors?
- Wide-based employee share ownership
 - Cooperatives?
- Shareholder Activism
 - union-controlled pension funds
- Opportunities in contracting out of hospital management via union role as stakeholders



The 'Facebook generation' and community unionism?

- Signs of awakening political consciousness
 - EMA; tuition fees
 - Pay Your Taxes
 - UK Uncut using the web <http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/>
- The problem: union 'reach' among the young
 - Share union concerns but don't see union as the answer
 - Young are outside the workplace
 - Union brand?
- Unions using web tools of the new generation
 - <http://cyberunions.org/>
 - But still need union organization
- Unions renewing from within: Organizing Academy



Part of the solution not part of the problem

- Unions as advocates for quality public services free at source
- Unions as productivity-enhancing through voice
- Innovative protest to gain popular support
- Avoid labelling as 'sectional interest'
- Part of the community

