

## **Cooperation and Resistance between Trade Unions and Students' Unions from 1970 Onwards**

### **Introduction**

I will analyse the relationships between Trade Unions (TUs) and Students' Unions (SUs) in the UK, to identify potential opposition or reinforcement to the marketisation of education, which many in the unions feel will impact negatively on the quality and sense of social responsibility within the UK Education system. This feeling has been particularly prevalent since the Browne Report (2010), and subsequent changes in quality management and funding, which many saw as making Higher Education an adjunct of corporate values and interests. This original piece of work dissects current understandings of the strengths and weaknesses of these potentially powerful partners, and their speculative futures. There is a deficit of academic research on this topic, this is particularly noticeable from 1970 onwards after the National Union of Students (NUS) dropped their 'No Politics Clause' at their 1969 conference, and became active in trying to engage with the TU movement. By developing a new approach in critical discourse analysis, I will be able to shed new light on the past, present and the future of workers' and students' intersected unionisations. This work will be interdisciplinary in nature and impact on policy and practice in both movements.

### **Research Background and Questions**

- How have the development and direction of these movements been shaped by legislative changes?
- Can we locate a sense of ethical agency in the relationships between Trade Unions and Students' Unions, both nationally and locally, and how will this impact on the education sector?
- How can Critical Discourse Analysis based on radical temporalities contribute to an unpicking of the tensions and gaps between Trade Unions and Students' Unions, and does it reveal the potential of joint working?

Despite differences in structure, origin and class affiliations, these movements have come together to support shared causes, historically working against legislative proposals by government they have perceived as restricting their powers. The current Green Paper on Higher Education places TUs and SUs side by side, situating a question around the transparency and accountability of SUs in the context of the recently proposed reforms to TUs. This research is timely not just because of the impending legislative changes, but also as the recently renewed agreement between the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) states that they will jointly campaign under a "shared vision of a society based on the principles of social justice where all people have access to quality education, decent jobs and individual and collective rights at work." (2015) This research will have impact at a strategic level, informing how leading bodies of these movements are drawing a shared horizon, in a time where workers' rights are viewed as being eroded and education submitted to market forces.

There is much research on the history of the TU movement, but research on the SUs is thin on the ground, work on the interaction between them virtually non-existent. Books on the History of TUs in the UK do not document interaction with SUs (Pelling; Wrigley; Fraser; Taylor). There is only one book on the History of the NUS up to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Day). NUS archives have received little academic interest so far. There is emergent work by Burkitt on student activism and race, and a European Network has been set up to look at Students volunteering and activism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Journal articles emerging document the changing role of SUs, noting how this has remained largely unexplained and the lack of academic work in this area has led them rely on related bodies of work for contextual arguments (Brooks). Others note scholarship on SUs in the UK was sparse, highlighting the potential to mine the vast amount of practitioner data (Guan).

This research will be disseminated at sector conferences as well as through academic journals. Opportunities at NUS, Unison, UCU and TUC conferences will be sought, where they develop and decide policy, here impact can be directly monitored. Actions of both TUs and SUs are linked with academic quality in institutions, a greater understanding of their relationships will be important for the education sector, and the voices of workers and students therein. This research will be published at a key point where people will be responding to legislative change, providing the contemporary perspective necessary to inform action.

I have worked in the SU movement for 8 years and am now undertaking a six month funded research project as an independent researcher, looking at the relationship between SUs and TUs. TUC and NUS are keen for research to progress beyond this short project, recognising a commitment to encourage joint working between unions at a strategic level but a lack of understanding and resources around the current interactions and issues.

## Methods

This project falls under the CHASE category of *History, Thought and Systems of Belief* drawing on discourses found in historical archives, based in and around legislative changes, as well as political rhetoric and policy. This interdisciplinary project will marry radical temporalities and critical utopianism with a historically based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The lack of current research in this field calls for a flexible methodological analysis that will allow for the integration of new ideas and concepts. CDA allows for the integration of multiple theoreticians into an analytical framework and is iterative in nature, therefore not closing down avenues of interpretation. CDA highlights ideology, power, hierarchy and gender as important considerations for the interpretation of discourse. The utopian and radically temporal concepts of Bloch, Rancière, Meillassoux and Derrida are understood as productive and creative, utopian horizons are formulated and developed against a backdrop of critical reflection in this context.

There will be a review of the literature with regards to CDA and SUs and TUs. I will review the statute, case law, and policy surrounding Trade Unions and Students' Unions, focusing on education legislation brought in from 1970 onwards, and changes to funding following the Browne Report. I will examine policy work by organisations such as the Quality Assurance Agency and changing approaches to monitoring and evaluation, as well as changes being proposed currently.

I have permission from NUS Historian to access the archives in Warwick, Edinburgh and recent material at NUS London office. Other archives include the TUC and those at UCU and Unison. Challenges include the volume of materials available, the lack of organisation of some material, and the financial cost incurred to travel and stay near while researching.

I plan to do a comparative case study of Brighton and Sussex SUs and how they interact with trade unions at a local level. Although being geographically close they are very different unions. Sussex Students' Union has a long history, while Brighton Students' Union have a fractured history as the University involved a merging of many different institutions. Both have reacted differently to recent strike actions by UCU and Unison, however, they also have similarities such as histories of student occupations in the last five years.

Semi-Structured Interviews will be conducted with TUC, UCU, NUS, Unison, Brighton Students' Union, and Sussex Students' Unions. Specific methods include Participatory Action Research sessions that allow participants to freely share ideas and speculate about the future. The process of this research will stimulate discussion and interest, as well as Symposiums and Conference which will be outward facing to the sectors being researched. The research to be owned by the sectors that it reflects. Generating activities and conversations that provoke interaction between the unions as well as documenting them. Participants will be fully informed of how the research will be used, the project will pass through the research ethics panel.

## Schedule

### **Year 1 – developing methodology and archives of policy and law, symposium on new approaches to CDA**

**1. Developing CDA of Radical Temporality:** Critically outline a methodological framework of CDA, using a radical temporalities approach focussed on both identifying and proposing democratic forms of opposition and cooperation exemplified in the coming together of workers' and students' unions.

**2. Historical Context - Policy and Law:** Will place the relationship between Trade Unions and Students' Unions in historical context by considering similarities and differences in terms of how successive legislative changes have impacted on their power and operation.

### **Year 2 – Archival Research relating to NUS, TUC and individual unions – interviews & focus groups, conference on relationships between TU/SU open to sector and academics**

**3. Relationship between NUS and TUC:** Potential resistance in the interactions since 1970, joint direct actions and current work. Researching shared campaigns, successes and failures, reflections from within and external commentary. Provide analysis of current activities at a national level considering barriers and benefits.

**4. Comparative Study of Brighton and Sussex Students' Unions:** Looking at resistance in context of top down discourses of NUS and TUC, and at institutions. Use of student societies to legitimise radical politics that may cross between TUs and SUs. Consideration of how people from movements come together outside of existing structures (i.e. Free Education Movement) and other overlaps (students who are unionised such as nurses/doctors/teachers, workers who are students, students in employment as 'trade-unionisable').

### **Year 3 – Analysis of how this impacts overall on changes in HE and future**

**5. Relationship between Changes in HE and discourses within the movements:** How these movements tried to resist, or reinforced the changes made in higher education, how relationships, or lack of have been part of these discourses, and explore their vision for the future. This will reach beyond contemporary discourses and speculate on the future relationships, how these will stand up against legislative changes, and whether there is any hope for resistance.

**6. Horizons:** Present potential utopian horizons, hoping to provide well researched recommendations and inspirational narratives from the sector that will help motivate joint working practice.

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