

**The Hotel Workers Campaign in London:
'community unionism' and the challenges of organizing transient labor**

by

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The Hotel Workers Campaign undertaken by a union and a civil society organization in London is explored in relation to the issue of migrant workers’ integration into trade unions. The case study also highlights the challenges involved in building coalitions between different actors campaigning for the rights of migrants and low-paid workers. This paper concentrates on one particular phase of a campaign led between 2007 and 2009 by the Hotel Workers branch of the union Unite and the civic organization London Citizens. It explores their joint attempt to organize two large hotels belonging to the same international chain, the Hyatt, and briefly compares it to a subsequent attempt at organizing a different hotel, part of the Hilton chain. The case reflects on the ways in which new coalitions between unions and civil society groups contribute to re-shaping the ‘scale’ of union organizing and the extent to which their collaboration facilitates and/or hinders the civil integration and political engagement of low-paid immigrant service workers. The data was collected during the author’s doctoral research conducted between 2007 and 2010. The research methodology followed ‘participant observation’ (Burawoy et al. 2000) including the collection of field notes and in depth-qualitative interviews with workers, union, and civil society activists, whose identities have been kept anonymous.

1. The hospitality industry in London

1.1 The migrant composition of the hospitality workforce in London

The hospitality sector in London is one of the lowest paid sectors of London’s service economy and one with highly precarious conditions of employment. It is characterized by temporary and atypical contracts, high labor turnover and low levels of unionization (Dutton et al. 2008, McDowell et al. 2008, TUC 2007; Wills et al. 2009). According to recent research on migrants’ low-paid service jobs in London, workers in the hotels and restaurants sector earned the *lowest pay* when compared to the other sectors and some earned below the minimum wage (TUC 2007: 21).¹

¹ Even worse, between 2001 and 2005 catering assistants lost £ 1.66 of their earnings per hour as compared to those working in the same occupations outside London (Wills et al 2010: 36).

Migrant workers have historically constituted an important component of the hospitality industry in London. In 2006 the 'hotel and catering' sector was the fourth largest category of employment, of which foreign born accounted for 21% across the country (McDowell et al. 2008: 756). A more recent and fine-grained analysis of the Labour Force Survey by Wills et al. (2009), shows that between 2004 and 2005 foreign-born workers constituted 76% of the workforce among chefs and cooks, 62% among catering assistants and 69% among cleaners (Table 2.4.Wills et al. 2009: 42). The Labour Force Survey reports that in 2009 22 % of the workforce in the sector was born overseas.

East European migrants currently seem to be the regional group mostly concentrated in the sector. This is a consequence of the large influx of immigrants from the 'Accession countries' (i.e. Czech Republic, Estonia Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia), following the Enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and the decision of the UK government to open the labor market to workers from the new member states². With regard to the other migrant groups employed in the sector, the 'old core' of the migrant workforce is constituted by early immigrants from Southern European countries (especially Spain, Portugal and Italy). There is also a consistent number of those who came from colonies or Commonwealth countries (mostly in the Caribbean and South Asia) since the 1950s and 1960s (Vertovec 2007: 5) as well as from more recent waves of economic or asylum immigration from overseas, especially from African and Latin American countries (Wills et al. 2009)³.

The changing patterns of labor migration into the UK (and London in particular) contributed to a shift in the population from 'multi-cultural-' to 'super- diversity' (Vertovec 2007), adding further divisions among an already *highly segmented workforce*. Especially after the Enlargement of the European Union (EU), processes of 'racialization' with employers selecting workers on the basis of ethnic and racial stereotypes attached to various national groups, have further fragmented the hospitality workforce and weakened their already limited bargaining power (McDowell et. al 2007, Matthews and Ruhs 2007).

In this regard the spread of *subcontracting* of labor recruitment in the sector and its coincidence with the increased supply of 'transnational migrants' recruited through temporary staffing *agencies* is considered a key element allowing employers to keep wages down and impede workers to organize and raise their voices (Evans et al. 2009, McDowell et al. 2008). Differences in terms and conditions between 'in-house' and subcontracted (agency) workers are multiple; agencies do

² The Accession Monitoring 2006 report recorded that, of the 500,000 workers from A8 countries the majority were Polish (61,5%) and that, during the first year after accession, of the 50,000 Poles entering only the London labour market, 29% found jobs in the hospitality sector (Home Office 2006).

not provide sick pay, holiday pay and readily impose paid or un-paid over-time work (TUC 2007). Another major difference between agency and in-house workers lies in the differentiation between the ‘employee’ and ‘worker’ statuses: agency workers are excluded from the protection granted to employees against unfair dismissal, redundancy protection, and minimum notice period (TUC 2007: 6)⁴, although the new EU Agency regulations recently included into UK law introduced some more guarantees of equal treatment for agency workers (see TUC 2011). What are the regulatory and labor market factors that create of the connection between migrant workers and agency labor in this section of London’s service economy?

1.2 UK migration policies: impact on low-paid industries

The rise in low-paid jobs *parallels* a dramatic increase in the foreign born population, resulting in these jobs filled by foreign-born migrants, has been recently described in the literature as the ‘new London migrant division of labor’ (Spence 2005, Wills et al 2009). To understand the ways in which the spread of labor subcontracting in this industry is interlinked with new migration patterns in the capital, it is worth considering how *migration regulation* contributes to shape the local labor market.

Among the 10,000 work permits for overseas migrants introduced under the ‘sector-based scheme’ to respond to the shortages of low-skilled jobs in the UK (Flynn 2005), about three quarters were approved for the hospitality and catering sector in 2004 (Salt and Millar 2006). This may be interpreted also as a response to the increase in arrivals from outside the EU since the 1990’s where migrants under a variety of statuses, with or without the work-permit, found employment in service jobs (Wills et al. 2009). Employers in the hospitality industry have traditionally lobbied the government to obtain work-permits in the sector as they lamented *structural shortages* and the unwillingness of domestic workers to be employed in these jobs (The Caterer 2011). However, in 2005 the hospitality sector *was excluded* from the system of the work-permit scheme for labor migration from outside the EU. Various authors and commentators agreed that this exclusion reflected the intention of the government to *fill* the sector with the expanding numbers of migrant workers coming into the UK from the new East European Accession countries (see Dutton et al. 2008).

Since 2008 the new ‘Points-Based System for immigration’ in the UK formalised the restrictions imposed on the overseas migrants. The government decided not to activate the ‘tier three’ which represents in fact *the only possible channel* for ‘low-skilled’ non-EU workers to apply and be legally

⁴ The general employment rights that apply to all workers independently from their contractual status are limited to the right to the National Minimum Wage and Working Time Regulation time (TUC 2007: 6).

recruited for a job in hotels, restaurants and other sections of the UK service economy (Dutton et al 2008). On this basis the ‘new London migrant division of labor’ thesis has emphasised the function of the *juridical status* in hindering migrants’ access to work, social and civil rights and in fragmenting and *weakening* the capacity of migrant workers to resist poor condition of employment. The gendered dimension of these divisions is also relevant considering that waiting and housekeeping are not only historically *racialized* but often also highly *feminized* and *sexualized* (Adkins 1999; Adib and Guerrier 2003; McDowell et al. 2007). It is not by chance that a disproportional number of women are employed in the industry representing up to 59% of all hotel workers in the UK (People 1st 2006). The current gendered segmentation and ‘re-racialization’ of migrant labor in London’s hospitality industry can be also understood as an effect of the interaction of migration law with labor market liberalisation. How to engage such a diverse and fragmented workforce is one of the challenges for the trade unions who try to organize migrants in London hotels.

2. Unions and migrant workers in the hospitality industry: a difficult trade-off between community and industrial organizing

The T&G section of the trade union Unite (former TGWU, since 2007 ‘Unite the Union’) has been at the forefront in the attempt to organize migrant workers in the hospitality industry since 1972, when the ‘International Catering Workers Branch’ was founded. As highlighted by one trade union officer active in the hospitality branches of T&G Unite, at that time the union did not have a ‘forward looking strategy’ to establish a branch with the specific task of organizing migrant workers. Rather, the International Catering Workers branch originated from the *relatively spontaneous initiative* of a group of migrant activists from the Portuguese Educational and Cultural League in London and TGWU’s regional administration (Interview with trade union officer, September 2008). The immediate antecedent of the international branch was in fact ‘The Portuguese Workers Branch’, whose objective was to recruit workers exclusively from the Portuguese community. It soon became apparent that, if there were to be a real chance to organize hospitality workers from other countries such as Spain, Italy, Cyprus or the Philippines, as well as ‘internal migrants’ from many parts of the UK, the branch needed to be re-launched as the ‘International Catering Workers branch’ (Turnbull 2005: 13).

Therefore, from the outset, the union had some difficulties in dealing with the different communities of migrants employed in the sector, with *ethnic divisions* and *occupational segregation by nationality* creating tensions among the employees in single workplaces. Moreover, the tendency of certain communities to approach the union with the objective of establishing a separate union

branch with an organizer dedicated to the *individual* provision of *services* to workers ‘of their own community’ was soon rejected by the overall politics of the union (Interview with trade union officer, July 2008). The union branch rather endorsed the view that

(...) while support from the community groups can be a crucial factor in organising drives it is the workplaces and companies employing workers from the community that are the targets and not the community itself (Turnbull 2005: 14).

The new ‘Union Central London Hotel Workers’ branch’ of T&G was established in the mid 1990s in only two workplaces (the Carlton Tower and the Selfridges hotels), and since then it has increased its membership five-fold (LC and UNITE 2009). However, in 2005 *less than 10% of the hotel and restaurant* workforce in London was covered by a union agreement (Turnbull 2005). For these reasons, and considering the hostility of hotel management, the main activities of the branch have concentrated on *individual grievances* in single workplaces (ibid.).

In the last decade the branch became one of the founding members of ‘West London Citizens’, an alliance of 36 civil society organizations and community groups across four London boroughs. Since 2005 Unite and London Citizens (LC) have campaigned for the Living Wage and employment rights of hotel workers in collaboration with other civil society groups. Despite the returning emphasis on the collaboration with community groups, thirty years later after its foundation, the new Hotel Workers branch passed a resolution that re-affirmed the principle that, while welcoming support and involvement of groups from migrant and refugee communities, the branch unites workers on an industrial and workplace level (Turnbull 2005).

The ‘historical genealogy’ of the hotel workers branch thus already contained the seeds of the problems that the union has to face today in its attempt to organize migrant workers. These include the controversial relationship between the industrial basis of the branch and the different ‘ethnic’ backgrounds of its members reflected in the uneasy relationship between ‘industrial and community objectives’. More specifically, since the initial attempts of migrant workers organizing in the sector, the union is presented with a series of key questions: the level or ‘scale’ at which migrant service workers are most successfully organized (e.g. workplace, industry, community, city-wide level, local/global), the kind of coalitions to build with community and civil society groups, and finally the complex question of the common *issues and identities* around which workers can be *united* in traditionally fragmented sectors of the labor market, i.e. whether to organize migrant workers as migrant, as members of certain ethnic communities, or as workers of certain industries (Alberti et al. 2013).

Was there a particular *approach of the union* towards *organizing migrant* workers when the hotel campaign started? In what ways did Unite deal with the 'specific needs' of this part of the precarious workforce across different industrial sector? In this regard it is worth considering how the difficult trade-off between (migrant) 'community' and 'industrial organizing' played out within the 'Migrant Workers Support Unit', a programme set up by the union with the specific task of promoting the involvement of migrant workers.

2.1 The Migrant Workers Support Unit

The Migrant Workers Support Unit (MWSU) was a two year-long project established in 2007 and part of the T&G Unite's Organizing Department. The support worker from the Migrant Unit interviewed in October 2008, outlined the main outcomes of the project. These included: providing training sessions on a regional basis to shop-stewards and union activists on *how to organize migrant* workers, setting up a 'help line' with *interpreters* for migrant union members with language difficulties, organizing a programme for *improving liaising* with communities and civil society organizations on migrants rights issues; developing 'advocacy activities' and further influencing the government's *immigration policy* (Interview with support worker, Migrant Workers Unit, October 2008).

The main concern of the MWSU was to offer services and educational training *tailored to* migrant members' requirements, rather than tackling issues strictly related to work. These services would take into account migrants' language barriers, issues emerging from agency employment and gangmasters, access to social services for non-citizens, and so on. However, the support worker also stressed that the MWSU adopted Unite's general principle:

the whole point of a union is to have freedom of association and to bargain collectively *no matter where you are from* (Interview with support worker, MWSU, October 2008).

It appears that the politics of the MWSU *oscillated* between a 'service oriented' and a more traditional 'industry-based' union model. On the one hand it raised the question of migrants' *specific problems as migrants*, yet on the other it did so within the union's overall 'universalistic' philosophy of *treating all workers as workers*. It also attempted to improve *representation at work on the basis of the principle of 'like with like'*, that is, members of a certain 'ethnic community' recruiting and representing workers from their own national group (Interview with support worker, MWSU, October 2008).

As part of the union's Organizing Department the Unit also collaborated with the ongoing campaigns to unionise sectors with high levels of migrant workers such as food processing, supermarket chains and campaigns such as the 'Justice for Cleaners', where workers from South American and African communities in particular were involved. However, the most striking element emerging from the interview with the migrants support worker was that *no proper and sustained relationship existed* between the Unit and the hospitality branches. Despite the fact that the vast majority of the hotels restaurants and bars branches were made up of people with a relatively recent migration background and by so called new migrants from EU Accession countries, *migration-related aspects* were largely left *unspoken* in branch meetings (Ethnographic diary, February 2008). It is contradictory that the very issues researched by the Unit, such as the effects of policy and migration regulation on the labor market, the free movement for migrant workers from the Accession countries, and the implications of migrants' juridical status on their working conditions, were *generally not discussed* in the industry- based collectives.

At the same time it was felt that rather than improving the collaboration with the branches and involving more migrant activists, the work of the Unit was becoming 'too academic' engaging mainly with charities and policy circles and trying to influence government policy (Interview with support worker, MWSU, October 2008). However there was an attempt to engage with migrants' communities directly:

In the past two years we have been trying to work with different community groups and, in a way, the work has just begun... I mean those we collaborate with are quite different organizations: for instance, the union can collaborate with a *charity* and advocacy group like Migrant Rights Network, *or a group of Hungarian workers who need the support of the union to start their own self-help group...* and here is where we have to decide if we want to be 'dedicated', if we want to help these workers to build *their own community organization...* (Interview with support worker, Migrant Workers Unit, October 2008).

This description of the activity of the Migrant Workers Unit within the broader institutional context of the union branches highlights the contradictions in the overall policy of the union where *migrant* workers issues are addressed as relatively separate matters from issues of workplace representation and bargaining. At the same time it highlights how differently the various union actors understood the collaboration with 'migrant community groups' (and its controversial implications).

The Hotel Workers Campaign launched in a sector with a substantial migrant composition. Throwing the union into closer contact with both *local* non-union and *community actors* as well as other *unions from overseas*, could have been considered an attempt (and an opportunity) for the branch to move beyond *its workplace focus*, *empower its migrant constituency* and *counter the overwhelming individual* representation activities. To what extent did the development of the campaign and the unfolding of the relationships between the union and the civil society actors allow for the *active integration* of migrant hotel workers and the improvement of their working conditions?

3. The hotel workers campaign: overall strategy, main phases and key actors

In October 2007 the union was considering an *investment* in order to start recruitment in some key hotels in Central London, tackling in particular the Hyatt hotel chain. Due to the high labor turnover and the intrinsic precarity of jobs in hotels and restaurants, Unite hospitality branches have recorded historically very *low levels of unionisation and received few resources* from the union's top hierarchies. Why then did the 'Hotel Workers' and the 'Restaurants and Bars' branches decide to renew their organizing effort at that time and how did they manage to obtain, however limited, the support from the union to launch the campaign?

The case for the unionisation effort was considered because of an opportunity to receive support from London Citizens (LC) and the US-based union UNITE HERE. These organizations were already involved in campaigning for improved pay and conditions for workers in the industry. LC with support from the North American UNITE HERE had already launched the Living Wage Campaign (LWC) for the hotel sector in London during summer 2006 at a demonstration outside the Hilton Metropole Hotel (Evans et al. 2007). New possibilities also arose for the collaboration between the T&G Unite and LC because one of the union officers acted as a 'personal mediator' between the Hotel workers branch and the community organization, playing an active role in both. This helped to strengthen the link between the two institutions and exerted some pressure for the union to fund a second organizer.

A critical consideration, which encouraged the union to organize the hotel industry in collaboration with other civil society groups, was that basing all activities around the workplace and on individual servicing *had proved ineffective* in advancing hotel workers' conditions. In the eyes of the union, a 'themed campaign' conducted with other organizations and focused on collective grievances was a good way to re-launch *collective* organizing (Ethnographic diary, joint meeting of the hospitality branches, October 2007).

Furthermore, the times were particularly profitable as the Olympics were due to come to London in 2012. This presented an opportunity to spotlight a normally invisible part of the service workforce and provided some leverage to pressure politicians and entrepreneurs in this key industry of the capital's tourism sector. Pressure could be exerted using the argument that improving working conditions in the industry would prepare London to be in the best position to welcome the World Games (Ethnographic diary, Hotel Workers branch, November 2007). In collaboration with LC, the union decided to focus on the hotels where a consistent basis of membership was already in place.⁵ The Churchill hotel (part of the Hyatt international chain) offered relatively preferable conditions to pursue union recognition claims.

3.1 Strategic issues: the Living Wage and subcontracting

Announced at a branch meeting in the summer of the previous year, the 'hotel workers pay claim 2009' included strategies to improve pay and conditions while also increasing membership levels. In each workplace, 'Hotel organizing teams' were created and asked to put forward a petition focused on wage increases. After the claims had been submitted, bargaining procedures would have started in recognized hotels and grievance procedures in those non-recognized (Ethnographic diary, July 2008). The pay claim became the 'theme' for the campaign in the framework of the overall demand for a Living Wage *across London's hotels*⁶.

Supporters of the Living Wage understand it as a strategic demand in the industry because it covers all the workers irrespective of their employment status. This is particularly important in sectors with high level of labor subcontracting such as hospitality (Evans et al. 2007). Since the battles in Baltimore (US) where LWCs were firstly initiated, the strategy served to make 'governments, corporations, and universities responsible not only for the treatment of the

⁵ The only recognized hotels at that time were the Sheraton, Thistle and Renaissance. The other (non-recognized) hotels mentioned as targets were the Churchill, Radisson Edwardian, Kensington Close, Hilton, Dorchester and Claridges.

⁶ The Campaign for the London Living Wage was first launched by an assembly of community leaders in East London in 2001, who stood alongside a range of trade unions united in the effort to organize outsourced staff employed in East London's public service and in large corporations based in Canary Wharf and the City of London (Howarth 2005: 40). Since 2005, as a response to pressure for the Living Wage campaigners, the mayor of London has taken the responsibility for the publication of the annually updated Living Wage figure for London that takes into account the higher costs of living in London (from housing to transport etc.) According to the most recent calculation report, the LLW is defined by the Family Budget Unit as a 'wage that achieves an adequate level of warmth and shelter, a healthy palatable diet, social integration and avoidance of chronic stress for earners and their dependents' (GLA 2009). Some of the limitations recognized also by the authors supportive of this demand are related to the 'problems of implementation (Luce 2004), the relative small numbers of workers covered (Freeman 2005) and the limited impact on overall poverty rates' (Neumark and Adams 2003, cit. in Evans et al 2007: 87)

workers in their direct employment but also for the behaviour of the subcontractors they hire' (Silver 2003: 110). As the pay claim was included in a broader strategy for the hotel organizing campaign, together with the focus on wages, it emphasised also the 'reduction of agency work' (LC and Unite 2009). High levels of agency employment were indeed a direct implication of *increasing subcontracting practices*, and considered a factor weakening unionisation in the sector and making overall working conditions more precarious (Ethnographic diary, LC and Unite joint meeting, November 2008).

The subcontracting of work recruitment in services such as cleaning in buildings and hospitality has expanded as a consequence of the internationalization of these industries. As documented by recent comparative research between the US and Europe, while low-skilled and low-wage work are long-standing features of the hotel sector, industry *consolidation* (i.e. merging and acquisition) and corporatization are leading to an ever more competitive product market, resulting in management strategies that further degrade the working conditions of many employees (Appelbaum et al. 2003, Vanselow et al. 2010, Scully-Russ 2005, Seifert and Messing 2006). In particular, research conducted in the housekeeping departments argue that the process of outsourcing of work-recruitment serves a double objective: it offers the opportunity to improve staffing with fluctuations in demand, and it is an effective method to *cut wages* in the face of increasing competition (Vanselow et al. 2010). On the positive side, these processes of merging and internationalization of the industry provided new grounds for *global cooperation between unions*.

3.2 Global and local alliances in the hotel industry

At the joint meeting of Unite and LC in July 2008 it was made clear that London Citizens, thanks to the funding provided by the US union UNITE HERE, was ready to appoint one *organizer* for the campaign in London hotels:

...The US union wanted to have a *transatlantic link* between London and NY..they were planning to have a joint action at some point (...) The conditions were: they provide the funding, we find the organizer who will work with T&G Unite, which *will later provide another organizer*...(Interview with LC organizer, November 2010)

Meanwhile the 'student organizing academy', arranged by London Citizens over the summer 2008 as a first preparatory stage of the campaign, gathered young practitioners, students from overseas and local union activists in London for about a month. Their tasks were to conduct research in the industry, map the different market shares, register the presence of unionised

workers across workplaces and, eventually, identify the hotels which could become the main target of the campaign.

The final decision of the LC Summer Academy was to target two large hotels, namely the ANDAZ in the East and the Churchill in the West side of city. The fact that both hotels were part of the Hyatt chain reflected the connection with UNITE HERE, which was campaigning against the same international hotel chain on the other side of the Atlantic. The decision also signalled a major shift from the strategy followed by T&G in the past, for example when it attempted to organize the Dorchester hotel in 1999. At that time the hotel was selected on the basis that it was a stand-alone hotel. A reason for that choice was that the establishment constituted a 'single bargaining unit' under the terms of the Employment Relations Act and was therefore thought to offer greater margins to win union recognition (Wills 2005).⁷ The failure to secure ballots for union recognition in the Dorchester hotel may have contributed to the union's awareness of the limits of an organizing campaign based on a *single workplace*. The new organizing attempt, selecting the two hotels that they were part of an international chain, appeared as a conscious strategy to create *solidarity across workplaces* and against a *global common enemy*. The 'non-mobility' of service jobs such as those in hospitality and cleaning actually renders *global cooperation* between workers less problematic, because they cannot be relocated and *do not compete* on price between each others (Anderson et al 2010: 387).

A meeting with unionists from UNITE HERE's hotel local in Los Angeles and the newly appointed organizer from LC acted as a catalyst in the development of the campaign and *triggered enthusiasm* among the workers. The workers appeared energized by the idea that colleagues in the US, with very similar working conditions, were successfully organizing against the same 'global employer'. In the following weeks, the London and US officers together with the LC organizer collected a series of video-interviews with the lay activists from the two hotels (mainly women with migrant backgrounds employed in the housekeeping departments) with the message that their testimonies would be shown to the North American co-workers. The aim was to highlight the many *issues in common* and convince workers on both sides of the Atlantic that they had a *realistic chance of winning* their struggles.

However, as soon as tensions among the workers and pressure by the management increased in the Churchill, and the attempt to set up 'Hotel Organizing Teams' did not consolidate in the

⁷ According to then new legislation introduced by the Labour Party Government in 1999 if employers refuse union recognition the union can resort to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) to adjudicate over the case. While this offers an opportunity for recognition despite the anti-union laws introduced by the previous conservative government, the strategy followed by T&G at that time reproduced the idea that campaign are won or lost in the workplace (see Wills 2005).

ANDAZ, the workers started to look with increased *scepticism* at the possibility of building a union as their co-workers overseas had done. The US colleagues suddenly appeared very distant from the concrete issues that the migrant women workers in London hotels were facing. The price to pay for exposure to management's retaliation on the workers participating in the union grievance at the Churchill hotel had seemed to be too high.

3.3 'Pressure for recognition': the developments of the grievance at the Churchill hotel

Four years before the beginning of the campaign, the Churchill hotel had been sold to the chain Hyatt. Since then working conditions and staff morale had deteriorated significantly. Permanent and in-house workers were concerned in particular with the *new handbook*, which was meant to introduce new terms and conditions threatening their consolidated entitlements to bonuses and pensions (Ethnographic diary, July 2008). The new situation was a result of changes in the governance of the hotel and the *fragmentation of the workforce* in different contractual positions.

The primary aim of the organizing campaign in the Hyatt was to *obtain union recognition* building on the existing membership, the level of which offered some hope that ballots could be won (Ethnographic diary, Hotel branch Meeting, April 2008). However, the management responded with classic 'divide and rule' tactics to disrupt the group that was gathering around the demands put forward by some union members to resist the changes in terms and conditions included in the new handbook. The management reacted by 'inviting' workers to ask for *individual grievances*. Managers accused a group of more active Portuguese workers of acting like a 'mafia', forcing colleagues to participate in the collective grievance (Ethnographic diary, Hotel workers branch meeting, November 2008). This appeared to be a clear attempt to block the process of recruitment and union organizing by trying to isolate the key activists. Both the union and LC initially emphasised the importance of remaining united and the right to collective action, and they offered support and encouragement to the women most exposed. However, further victimization by the managers in the form of punishing individual workers by calling them to disciplinary hearings or suddenly changing their schedule, provoked extreme *stress and anxiety* among the workers mostly involved (Ethnographic diary, July 2008)

In December 2008 an *anomalous picket* was organized at the Churchill in response to the management's victimization of the union members. Participants in the pickets composed a multifarious group of activists, members of other hotels, a journalist from a migrant community group, students and concerned citizens from the neighbourhood members of faith groups affiliated to LC. Some of the workers felt empowered by the initiative, which combined a mixture

of 'in your face' and 'direct action' strategies as well as 'soft tactics' to persuade the management to engage in further negotiations. The *diverse composition* of the group of protesters that gathered outside the Churchill that night might be seen as an initial step towards drawing from *alternative power sources from coalitions from civil society* to support low-paid migrant workers.

Direct action tactics for LC are essentially based on the idea of *increasing visibility* and transforming an internal, *workplace-based* issue into a *public* one, whereas the whole community and not only the workers should get involved (Ethnographic diary, LC meeting, October 2008). However sometimes members of the community are mobilised *instead of* the workers themselves, exactly on the basis of the need to *protect the* workers against damaging exposure. In a previous action held in front of the hotel in the East End in the summer, the contradictory aspects of these kind of demonstrations excluding exactly those who are directly concerned emerged in an interview with a lay organizer:

...That demonstration has been called with *the consent* of the workers inside but at the action it self *there was only the community organization* and other activists and no one from the hotel, and not even workers from other hotels... (Interview with short-term organizer, February 2009)

While the picket at the Churchill also did not see the presence of workers from the inside, it seemed to raise the morale of the hotel maids as it was able to *break their invisibility* by denouncing their poor working conditions *while protecting* them from direct exposure. However, bullying and harassment by the management continued. Meanwhile the workers felt *pressured* by the union itself, which had not abandoned the main objective of reaching the numbers needed for union recognition. At the meeting with the lay activists the organizer recognized that the women workers were being put too much under stress:

I was looking at their faces....after a long day at work where they are bullied, having someone else shouting at you (...) I do not want them to feel stressed or disappointed or *let down*...but at the same time we have to find a way to *get our message across*... (Interview with LC organizer, November 2008).

Recent research on union organizing in London hotels also highlights the risk of putting too much pressure on the workers, actually increasing the burden for those who are already paying the cost of hard and/or insecure employment by urging them to 'produce activists' who can lead organizing campaigns (Wills 2005: 149).

However, beside the exaggerated pressure on the workers, further elements need to be taken into account to explain the blockade to the organizing effort in the Churchill.

3.4 Tensions between agency and in-house workers

In the Churchill the strategic demand around pay and the Living Wage were soon overshadowed by *more urgent issues* that started to affect workers in the housekeeping department. These included issues related to promotion, pensions, health and safety, bullying and harassment. These issues almost completely *absorbed* the energy of the organizer and were further aggravated as new *tensions* emerged among the workforce. The individualizing tactics used by the managers to disrupt the organizing process found a rich terrain in the growing *divisions* emerging in the workforce along the lines of different nationalities, *migration status* and especially the workers' *contractual category of employment*.

This happened despite the strategies adopted by the campaigners that were meant to overcome at least some of these divisions. It has already been mentioned that the 'pay claim 2009' was chosen as part of the Living Wage Campaign because this is considered a particularly suitable strategy for organizing workplaces with high levels of *subcontracted work*. In this sense, the Living Wage Campaign can be considered a form of 'community unionism' in that its aim is to exert pressure on employers to win a Living Wage *for all sub-contracted* as well as in-house staff (Holgate and Wills 2007). It appeared however, during the course of the campaign in the Hyatt, that the focus on the Living Wage was *not* sufficient to *bridge* the distances and tensions *between the different categories of workers*, namely those employed through a 'third party agency' and those directly employed by the hotel.

In the Churchill in particular, the very issues involved in the collective grievance were a symptom of the growing *frictions* between in-house employees and so called 'newcomers'. The recent restructuring in the governance and ownership of the hotel generated a *proliferation of employment contracts* among the workforce according to the year of employment in the hotel and a new management policy favouring contract work. The existence of multiple contractual statuses triggered *anxiety* among the 'in-house' workers (often corresponding with the 'old guard' of settled migrant minorities). They were essentially fearful of seeing their conditions 'pushed down to the level of those who just came':

...they are trying to put *us* in the same position as the '*newcomers*' (...) they tried to take away the bonus given to us by the Intercontinental...They are trying to *break the group* to destroy us...(Interview with Churchill housekeeper, October 2008).

In the words of the Portuguese long-term housekeeper the label ‘newcomers’ was invariably associated with the agency workers and with the workers employed through the overtaking management company (the ‘Hyatt employees’). The testimony of the housekeeper shows the complexity of *layers of segmentation* dividing the workforce according to the different forms and phases of restructuring and outsourcing practices.

How did the union and the LC organizer position themselves on this matter? How did their understanding of these divisions contribute to determine the development of the campaign? The underlining assumption that agency workers were ‘detrimental’, or at best indifferent, to the fate of the organizing effort in both the hotels, was indeed maintained by many of the union officers, and partly by the organizer and the other members of LC. The emphasis of the union was specifically to *defend* the conditions of ‘core workforce’ *against* the downward pressure brought about by the introduction of subcontracted work:

The general pattern consists in the hotel trying to reduce the core personnel of *established migrants*, relying more on *contract work*. The point is to *defend the previous contract* and working conditions (Interview with trade union officer, March 2008).

More generally, ‘casualization’ of employment through subcontracting is considered in the trade union and industrial relations literature as a major obstacle to unionisation, both because ‘contract’, ‘agency’ and ‘non-standard’ workers more generally are believed to ‘undercut’ the pay and conditions of employees and because high labor *turnover* make it difficult to retain shop stewards and sustain workplace organization (Dutton et al. 2008, TUC 2007).

Therefore the point about ‘reducing’ the numbers of agency workers was officially included in the political demands of the campaign run by the union and LC:

We try to attack hotels at the business end, to *reduce agency labor* because as a union we find very difficult...you can understand...It is impossible to organize. With 39% turnover, even if you had a 100% of unionised members would be impossible to keep high levels of membership (...) They are *buying* waitresses like baked potato... *you cannot organize baked potato*: ‘I am here only for three months what shall I do in the union and what shall the union do for me anyway?’ (Interview with trade union officer, December 2007)

In the case of the Hyatt hotel, the discourse and strategies of the trade union leaders seemed therefore to reinforce the tendency of ‘playing agency against in-house workers’. Another tendency of the trade unionists was that of associating in-house with settled migrant workers on the one hand, and agency workers with ‘new migrants’ (mainly from Accession countries) on the other:

(...) the hotels...they want to destroy the terms and conditions that the long-term service workers have because with the attack on *work standards* that have been in the last 15-20 years... you can *replace* these people with people from Poland or Lithuania! I mean, *nothing against them but*: if I employ these new (agency) ones, I can save £ 5,000 a year (Interview with trade union officer, December 2007).

If the idea of ‘building a union’ is inextricably linked with a long-term investment strategy, where engaging with workers is based on their ‘vested interests’ in the union and their willingness to ‘fight for their jobs’ (Interview with trade union officer, October 2008), organizing workplaces with high levels of turnover and subcontracting appears simply to be ruled out.

In the first months of the new year, the low morale of the workers led to the *exhaustion of forces* for the campaign to be continued in both the ANDAZ and the Churchill. Especially in the Churchill, some of the workers felt let down by the union, others said that the grievance took too long (Informal interview with Churchill worker, January 2009) so that the attempt to run ballots for recognition was abandoned in both hotels. Eventually, some workers left the union, or else threatened to leave and join the other union also present in the same hotel.

3.5. The ‘return’ of organizing efforts to the Hilton: ‘Room(s) for change?’

Ironically, the campaign regained momentum in another hotel, the Hilton, where a group of *migrant agency workers* managed to take the lead with a series of grievances (Ethnographic diary, February 2009). Some *Polish* agency workers employed in the Hilton Paddington appealed to the union against the unfair working arrangements imposed by the management: they were supposed to clean a *greater numbers of rooms per shift* as compared to the workers directly employed by the hotel.

Why did the organizing effort move to Hilton after failure at Churchill/Hyatt in the first place? Were there fewer obstacles at the Hilton or better chances for success? Was this a reasonable strategic shift for T&G/Unite and LC?

The Hilton was indeed the workplace where most efforts had been originally concentrated by LC:

Actually before the campaign started in the Hyatt, in the Hilton...there was this guy, a Polish worker, who was leading and that could have been succesful *but then* the union, after the US bid *decided quite abritrarily to switch the focus to the Hyatt* (...) However you know, everything that is done with LC *is done by the leaders* ...they *felt very passionate about the Hilton because this is how they started* and the workers *owned this campaign*... while with the Hyatt it was imposed ... (Interview with LC organizer, November 2010)

There was a further positive circumstance for the active involvement of migrant agency workers and the re-launch of the campaign in the Hilton. In this particular case, the subcontracting of a whole department such as housekeeping provided a series of *common issues* as a key condition for starting the organizing process. Furthermore, it was facilitated by the fact that the organizer, herself from Poland, could approach the migrants in their own language. This must have played a crucial role in encouraging ‘vulnerable workers’ to start their grievance:

-Is there any chance to involve casual or agency workers’ realistically?

I think there is! For example in the Hilton hotel I am getting them organized, but this is a *long teaching process*... this is just developing *relationships*...because most of them are Polish and they do not speak English... I invited them to the meeting in LC and only one came, I had to do some training for them about power, collective action...but *in Polish!* (Interview with LC organizer, January 2009)

Thus, the case of the Hilton disproves the fact that agency migrant workers are in themselves ‘unorganizable’. The hard work of the female organizer to involve workers from a specific national community through training and educational activities constituted one important factor adding to the positive circumstances under which migrant agency workers found a voice.

As the researcher interviewed the LC organizer again a year later, it emerged that the process of involvement of workers in the Hilton from the bottom-up facilitated the expansion of the campaign into other hotels:

...When we decided to go back to the Hilton then *workers were bringing other workers* from other hotel chains... I remember in that period we had *buzzing meetings*...we had many different people from Hilton, Plaza, the Ibis..and it was more *organizing them as a whole group*... that was brilliant because that gave them the feeling: ‘whatever it is happenig to me it is happening *across the sector*, it is not only about my hotel it is about the whole sector’ (Interview with LC organizer, November 2010)

Why was it then, that the new favourable conditions in the Hilton did not suffice to give the union success and expand the campaign across the sector? What were the reasons for the failure of the unionisation efforts in this ‘second phase’ of the campaign? The organizer interviewed some time later explained:

In my opinion the reason why the campaign failed, I mean *from the union angle*, was mainly because ‘they’ (i.e the union top hierarchies) *did not believe in the workers*, they did not believe they could get organized, which was a shame because at some point we got a very good moment when *the strategy paper was published*, it was endorsed by the union and they decided to give one organizer but, to be honest, she was someone coming from a long break and she was not motivated enough...She *dropped after two months* ... (Interview with LC organizer, November 2010).

In fact, after few months the union organizer appointed by the union resigned from her position in the campaign and T&G Unite decided *not to renew the funding for the campaign in the hotels* (apparently not because of not wanting to invest in the sector, but as an outcome of relatively unrelated *internal divisions* and conflicting power interests within the union bureaucracy).

In the face of shrinking opportunities to organize workers on the ground, the two organizations soon turned the attention to other key actors in the wider ‘community’. Indeed the campaigners switched their focus *to those hotel employers* who appeared *willing to pay a Living Wage* to their employees and become a ‘beacon’ by encouraging other companies to cooperate and start paying the LW (Interview with LC organizer, November 2010). More specifically, the official strategy endorsed by the union and LC for the hotel sector in ‘Rooms for Change’ (March 2009) proposed to set up a certification system in collaboration with the Mayor’s Office and ‘Visit London’. This would mean *crediting* those hotels that achieved the best standards of treatment for their employees (including the Living Wage and ballots for Trade Union recognition). Only those hotels receiving accreditation would be recommended for visitors to London during the 2012 Olympics.

At that point, the efforts to unionize the Hyatt and the other major luxury hotels in Central London and to improve the precarious conditions of their largely migrant workforce appeared to have reached a standstill.

4. Key lessons of the hotel workers campaign

4.1 *The advantages and pitfalls of 'community unionism'*

Overall, multiple factors seem to have contributed to the failed attempt at workers' unionisation in the Hyatt and later in the Hilton. These factors demonstrate the weaknesses at the core of union structures. They also highlight contradictory patterns in the relationship between the *issues concerned*, the *coalitions* built and the *scale of organizing* throughout the Hotel Workers Campaign in London. The combination of these three factors eventually *limited workers' active engagement* in the organizing campaign.

It has been highlighted that one of the reasons for the failure of unionisation in the Churchill can be found in the *pressure* put on already over-stretched workers to recruit new union members. The fact was that winning the *legal case for recognition* remained a priority for both the unionists and the LC organizer during the whole period of the London campaign. Especially the union believed that only an unionised workplace could provide workers the *leverage* to gain bargaining power *vis á vis* management.

The 'obsession with recruitment' may be understood as a direct implication of the union branch's *attachment to a workplace-based model of organizing*. In this regard, despite the emergence of new alliances with civil society groups, the *historical legacy* of the branch based on industrial union strategy, sector by sector, must have impacted on the development of the campaign. 'Workplace-based unionism' appears therefore not suitable to organize vulnerable workers who are already under pressure and relatively mobile and rather seek forms of 'hidden membership' in protest and organizing activities, where they can become active but remaining protected from exposure to management.

The tension created by the insistence on obtaining *union recognition* may reflect a broader contradiction that can be found also in recent models of union organizing. While their primary intention is to empower 'rank and file workers' the fact that this aim is often tied to the achievement of union recognition within a certain time frame can foster workers' reaction against 'opportunistic recruitment'. On the contrary the union needs time to build trust by demonstrating that their presence will be in that workplace for the long term (Heery and Simms 2008: 35). The very spirit of 'investment', which characterizes organizing campaigns where efforts are

concentrated on the ‘strongest hotels’ in order to deliver *quick victories*, indeed makes it more difficult to involve workers on the ground.

Research comparing recent experiments of union organizing in the UK with those in the US showed how even if traditional recognition agreements *are not secured*, by involving allies in *social movements* for change and workers from across the sector, political pressure can successfully be put on employers (Heery and Simms 2008). The experience of Justice for Janitors in LA has shown for instance that Living Wage ordinances can be won *without union recognition* (Wills 2005: 156; see also Milkman 2006).

The expansion of the struggle to the ‘broader community’ did not guarantee the empowerment of vulnerable workers in London, nor did it eventually achieve the improvement of their conditions. In this regard, a limitation of the Living Wage Campaign as a form of ‘community unionism’, lies in its idea that *workers in vulnerable positions* (such as migrant and agency workers) *cannot* make their claims *by themselves*. Hence, while community campaigns try to overcome the tendency of workplace-based organizing *to expose* workers to exaggerated pressure (Wills 2005), their opposite risk is to employ ‘extra-workplace’ sources of power to the point of completely *bypassing the workers themselves*, whose specific demands and needs may remain in the shadows. This trend is made worse by the recent focus in the campaigners’ strategy on the ‘certification and award scheme’ for those hotel employers willing to pay a Living Wage. Indeed, this may contribute to shifting the attention from the workers to the employers, especially as the main objective of the campaign becomes ‘naming and congratulating the first Living Wage hotel employer’ (LC and UNITE 2009).

This point brings up questions about the *nature and scale of the coalitions* needed to build support for migrant workers’ rights in low paid jobs. *Who* and *where* exactly are the *social and political allies* in the community and civil society at large?

During the initial period of the campaign the union seemed to reach a fruitful balance in building *alliances at the local and at global scale*, but both of these seemed to lose their potential as the campaign unfolded. With regard to the transnational link, the enthusiasm among the workers in the Hyatt, initially triggered by the successful examples of their co-workers *overseas*, seemed to wither away as soon as the struggle at the workplace level appeared unsustainable because of local management retaliation and the delay in the grievance. With regard the local community strategy, although the LC was indeed an umbrella organization including various migrant communities, faith groups, NGOs and members of civil society organizations, these organizations did not appear to play an active role during the phase of the campaign examined

here. The question therefore arises whether one can define the hotel workers campaign as an experiment of ‘community unionism’ at all.

Eventually the ‘expansion’ of the campaign to civil society actors was limited as the coalition process restricted itself to the involvement of institutional partners in the local administration and at the industry level. More broadly, while campaigns to improve migrant workers’ rights aim to hold politicians accountable and educate the ‘general public’ about migrants’ poor conditions of employment, there are still strategic as well as *political choices* to be made in the process of creating alliances and selecting among potential partners. For instance, if there can be strategic reasons for engaging with ‘the Mayor’s office, Greater London Authority, the British Hospitality Association, London hotels and the Olympic Delivery Authority’ (LC and Unite 2009), there are also *other actors* in civil society and urban social movements that could have been pulled into the campaign to increase the pressure on employers and political representatives.

Here the experiences of ‘social unionism’ or ‘social movement unionism’ (Turner et al. 2006) in the US, where the unions’ attempt to build larger alliances with groups *directly involved with migrants* as well as *activist groups* mobilizing around *migrant rights*, provide alternative examples of how to build forms of community unionism *more rooted* in the social realities of migrant workers. The story of the London Hotel Workers campaign contrasts with the combined effort between local unions and community-based ‘workers centres’ flourishing in the 1980s and 1990s in the US, to directly engage migrants and their ethnic organizations on the basis of their work and *non-work* related claims (Fine 2006). The Civil Society Organization under examination in London preferred to concentrate its effort in lobbying the local government and industrial actors according to its style of intervention in the capital. This in turn reflects a soft regulatory approach to work issues identified by scholars in IR as substantially different from unions’ traditional bargaining activity (see Heery et al. 2012).

Overall, the lack of active participation on the part of migrant workers and their communities during the organizing process may be identified as the main reason for the failed attempt to unionize the Hyatt initially, and later the other hotels. The low level of workers’ protagonism was in turn the outcome of political and strategic choices made within both the union and LC. In addition, there is a further dimension of organizing that should be considered to improve unions’ strategies of migrants’ integration. This further level or ‘scale’ of organizing involves the very issues at stake, and therefore the subjective needs of the workers involved and their peculiar social characteristics. In order to disclose the deep causes of the failure of the Hotel Workers Campaign and trace possible ways forward, these subjective elements must be considered within the wider context of the *politics of the union*. The specific role played by the aforementioned

Migrant Workers Support Unit within T&G Unite provides crucial lenses to look into the union's contradictory policy on migrant workers and migration issues.

4.2 The lacking connection between the industrial branches and migrant support structures

Ironically, the specific migrant composition of the hotel workforce was never really considered to be a potential advantage during the organizing campaign. The original principle of the branch, that 'migrants are the solution, not the problem' (Turnbull 2005: 13) seemed to be neglected. That principle should have been at least updated in the face of new tensions and divisions caused by different contractual and juridical migration categories that arose so strikingly in the Churchill. Indeed this contradiction reflects a broader pattern in the union's approach to migrants' organizing, as clearly emerged in the interview with the worker from the Migrant Workers Support Unit.

First of all it is worth noting that despite the official involvement of the Migrant Workers Unit within the Organizing Department, the Unit itself did not seem to have much influence over the union's overall 'organizing strategy' and did not have any influence in the attempt to unionise the hotel workers.. The interview with the support worker indirectly highlighted a paradox internal to the hospitality branches themselves: the specific questions emerging for migrant workers as migrants within the branches were not, or only partly, considered. Indeed with regard to the hospitality branches migrant workers are considered 'just as workers' and their specificities 'bypassed' under the flattening of their identities on the basis of the fact of 'belonging' to the same industry or occupation. In contrast, the MWSU became a matter for specialists and migration policy experts rather than strengthening the relationship with the workers through the branches. This trend has accelerated now that migration became a highly 'politicised' issue and that the related questions around migrant workers are reduced to problems of migration controls, increasing 'illegal migration' and wage dumping for the 'indigenous' workforce⁸. As a result, the spheres of 'policy' and of 'everyday issues at work' seemed to remain essentially separated in the everyday business of the union.

⁸ An instance of the controversial argument about wage depression 'by' migrants and the need to 'protect' British workers' standards can be found in the tensions that burst between unions such as Unite and GMB and foreign contractors with the protests in the Lindsey refineries, in Lincolnshire in January 2009. The struggle concentrated on the rights of contractors to use non-local labour according to the European Directive on Posted Workers as a subcontracted Italian company was accused to be paying the migrant workers employed less than the British. Although the protests by British workers 'cannot readily be interpreted solely as either narrow-minded economic nationalism (...) nor xenophobia' (Rogers et al. 2009: 50), yet they exposed the contradictory position of national unions regarding issues of 'social dumping' and labour subcontracting exactly at the beginning of the recession in the UK.

The present study shows that the complex social composition of the workforce in a sector such as hotels and catering requires *bringing together migration and work-related issues* in the processes of workers organizing. This is because workers' needs are continuously shaped by their multiple positions, as migrants, as workers, as recently arrived or settled, as members of certain communities, as Londoners', as women workers, as sexual minorities and so on. Overcoming the division between the supposedly specialised issues of migration policy on the one hand, and workplace bargaining and representation on the other, may be a first step towards realizing a positive integration of migrants into trade unions.

4.3 The challenge of organizing migrant labor as transient labor

A major shortcoming of the campaign can be identified with the missing attempt of the leaders from the union and LC to deal effectively with the controversial issue of *migrants' work as agency and contingent labor*. In this regard, a complicating factor in the campaign, was certainly that the majority of union members did not consider themselves 'migrants', being mainly part of the settled 'postcolonial' migrant population who have historically comprised a large proportion of the service workforce in London. The 'settled workers' in the Churchill rather distanced themselves from the 'newcomers', i.e. mainly migrants coming from Accession countries but also recent non-EU migrants. Taking account of the specific problems and differences existing among workers with migration backgrounds, involves resisting the temptation to collapse all migrant workers into a supposedly homogenous 'migrant identity'.

However, in the context of the campaign, the union and LC ended up *reinforcing the divisions perceived among the workers* creating two distinct categories- agency workers corresponding with the 'newcomers' on the one hand, and in-house workers with the 'settled minorities' on the other, which inadvertently contributed to disrupt the organizing effort in the Churchill. The association drawn by the unionists included the idea that long term immigrants would feel more attached to their workplace and *therefore, because of their stronger 'occupational identity'*, more keen to be involved in trade unions. These perceptions of the workforce introduced further impediments to the active engagement of migrants into their workplaces.

Undoubtedly agency or temporary workers have often less interest in participating in long-term trade union struggles in the workplace than long-term workers, and employers can purposely use subcontracting as a strategy to weaken unionisation. Nonetheless, the social actors and groups interested in the advancement of low-paid migrant workers' rights need to develop *creative ways to engage* and organize the *ever-increasing* numbers of migrant and contingent workers. An alternative

approach involves starting to acknowledge their *specific needs* beyond a vision that considers migrants as ‘peripheral labor’ pushing down the conditions of *the ‘core’*.

The local strategy embraced by London Citizens and Unite eventually emphasised the reduction of agency work, which can be considered an element of a ‘high road strategy’ for improving conditions in the sector. The underlying assumption of the high road approach is that improvements of ‘value and service’ constitute the basis for competition and ‘overall growth’ in the sector, and that by paying better wages and *reducing labor turnover*, there would be more possibilities for staff training and career development in London hotels. This would improve *productivity* and the *quality of the services* provided so that ‘the industry as a whole’ will benefit from these policies (LC and Unite 2009).

However, this strategy would have unpredictable and maybe negative consequences on the sector of the migrant workforce that is somehow *forced to* follow a non-standard pattern of employment, e.g. because of their immigration status, like those who are on a student visa and cannot work except as temporary staff. The point about ‘reducing labor turnover’ rather overlooks the *structural* patterns of fluctuation in demand in the hotel industry as well as the increasingly systematic character of the reliance of employers on agencies and migrant labor in low-paid services (McDowell et al. 2008). As highlighted by recent research, agency work cannot be simply ‘reduced’ neither can it be automatically erased by *incorporating* ‘marginal’ workers into the canon of the ‘Standard Employment Relationship’. Research by Vosko (2010) research on the growth of precarious work across Europe, the US and Canada, developed a fascinating account of the genealogy and erosion of the Standard Employment Relationship (‘SER’) highlighting how a major aspect of current state policies on immigration in these countries is exactly that of *limiting ‘non-nationals’ to temporary employment*. This is achieved either by differentiating immigrants by their entry category or through policies hindering migrants’ access to features of the SER, such as permanency and particular employment rights and protections (Vosko 2010: 11) This trend is evident in the effects of the recently introduced migration legislation in the UK under the ‘Points Based System’, according to which migrants are required to continuously renew their work permit and their right to stay according to their job contract, and will probably be increasingly ‘trapped’ in temporary and precarious employment.

Thus, for unions and other organizations willing to involve migrant workers in the struggle for social justice and better conditions for all poorly paid workers, one crucial direction should be to ‘take more seriously’ the reality of temporary, *‘non-standard’* and *transient* forms of employment, by starting to understand their increasingly ‘normal’ and *generalized character* (and especially in

correspondence with new patterns of labor migration into the country and the liberalization of the EU labor market).

More broadly the agenda on migrants' 'integration' into labor unions and society cannot be separated from the acknowledgment of the changes taking place in the very composition of labor. This is a consequence of the changing drivers and patterns of migration and the growth of 'lifestyle oriented' migration flows (Rogers et al. 2009: 36). It is necessary to go beyond the simplistic view that 'economic migrants' are always ready to accept lower conditions of employment and rather recognize that merely economic choices by individuals on the basis of wage differentials are not the only factor shaping the temporality and composition of today's movement of labor across borders. Other important factors related to families and household choices are involved, with great consequences for labor organization. This ultimately leads to deconstructing a victimising view of migrants as always the most vulnerable, ready to be exploited, or at best, to be simply 'incorporated' into trade unions. Against a view of the workforce as divided in two 'tiers' between agency and in-house, or 'standard' and 'non standard' workers, Rogers and colleagues (2009) argue that the labor market, especially in time of recession is so segmented that the very distinction between a 'primary' and 'secondary' labor market becomes blurred. On the contrary, out of increased fragmentation there is an opportunity for unity, exactly by acknowledging that, 'by creating a group of workers who are particularly constrained, vulnerable and dependent on employers, this undermines the position of the workforce more generally' (Rogers et. al 2009: 22).

The advancement of rights and conditions at work for migrants, minorities and low-paid workers cannot be accomplished without a genuine transformation of labor and civic organizations, their internal structures, political strategies and coalition making. In turn, any true organizational renewal can be realized without the acknowledgment of the specific and subjective demands brought about by ever-increasing forms of *transient labor*. These kinds of transformations require a great deal of engagement, time and internal political struggle within the trade union movement. However, there are some positive lessons to be learned and more concrete directions for unions and community organizations to follow, in order to enhance their organizing strategies and empower migrant low-paid workers on the ground.

4.4 Practical directions for migrants' organizing

To start with, enhancing some of the strategies and tactics already experimented with in the Hotel Workers Campaign may offer alternative routes to move forward.

For instance, building solidarity between different workplaces and across the sector, rather than focusing on one workplace or a few organizing units may be a useful strategy to guarantee a certain level of protection for those ‘vulnerable’ employees who do not want to be exposed to management’s retaliation. Reaching a ‘trade-off between exposure and protection’ also entails building unity and solidarity with other migrant low-paid workers in organizing campaigns across different cleaning services (from hotels, to universities and banks), thus going beyond a strict understanding of the ‘borders of the industry’. Cross-workplace organizing would still allow the involvement of workers on the ground, reinforcing a sense of collectivity on the basis of *common issues* at the occupational and industry levels, but also beyond problems strictly related to work (i.e. including migration and regularization issues, social and health-care, gender specific issues for women hotel workers and impediment to their active participation in the union activities, etc.).

In this regard the *issues* around which to unite workers despite their transiency and precarious employment, and the corresponding organizing formats needed, are central questions. As it emerged from this study, part of their solution involves overcoming the false division between migration and work issues (see also Alberti et al. 2013). Indeed, providing tools for migrants to fulfil their specific needs (such as English skills) can be understood as a direct strategy to make their voice louder and more powerful in workplace struggles. In this regard it could be useful to invest more resources in setting up alternative educational and social spaces such as ‘critical’ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, where migrant workers can improve their language skills while developing awareness of their rights at work. Positive examples can be already found in London in the activities promoted by the Latin American Workers Association and in other projects such as ‘English for Action’ (which was the spontaneous initiative of some of the activists involved at the beginning of the campaign at the Hilton). These kinds of activities would increase the opportunities for migrants to share information and experiences, and develop forms of self-help and self-organization. Thus, it is necessary to expand both the organizing structures and the *informal spaces* for migrants to meet *and socialise*, and where their specificity as migrants *and* workers, and their cultural diversity are actually valorised rather than considered mere obstacles to collective struggles.

Finally, expanding the ‘agenda’ and the list of claims at the core of the organizing campaign would be helped by broadening the spectrum of political affiliations in London involving grass root social movements for migrant rights. Indeed, with regard to the political and social *coalitions* that need to be built beyond the workplace towards forms of ‘community’ or ‘social movement unionism’, a certain degree of ‘cross-pollination’ between the union and non-union organizations, although limited, emerged as a positive factor in the campaign. Exchanging

different political traditions, strategies and cultures may generate some useful spin-offs for migrant workers' integration. Some of the trade unionists in the course of the campaign increased their appreciation and adoption of 'one to one' and 'relational' tactics for involving migrant workers, as practiced by London Citizens. Another example of 'positive contamination' can be found in the mixing of the union's confrontational and LC's 'softer' tactics when staging public direct actions as happened in some cases during the campaign against the Hyatt.

In sum, strengthening solidarity on a city-wide scale involves engaging with migrants across cleaning and hospitality jobs, and uniting them around common concerns such as subcontracting, low wages, management's harassment and migrant rights' issues, thus overcoming the existing divisions along the lines of migration and employment status. This may offer alternative routes to progress beyond the narrow borders of 'occupational' or 'industry-based' organizing and build successful campaigns to improve migrants' precarious working lives.

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