

## **Unionising the low paid in London: the Justice for Cleaners campaign: a case study**

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Data presented here has been collected over a number of years since 2001 from interviews with organisers and members in the East London Communities Organisation (Telco) and their parent organisation, London Citizens, and from attendance at assemblies, meetings, demonstrations and training sessions. Interviews have also been held with trade union officials and organisers in London. Many of the interviews have been anonymised in order to encourage participants to speak openly and without restraint.

### **Summary**

This case study looks at organising low paid cleaners in London – the vast majority of whom are migrant workers. It begins with a historical overview of union organising of cleaners in London and then moves on to look more specifically at a few linked campaigns. The first is the organising of migrant cleaners led by London Citizens, a broad-based community coalition affiliated to the Industrial Areas Foundation. This group began the London Living Wage campaign and then this was taken up by Unite the union, the UK's largest private sector union, which has been organising cleaners across the city of London since 2004. The campaign has resulted in other groups of workers from other unions taking up the campaign – with a great deal of success. The case study also looks at the extent to which the migrant workers organised have been integrated into their respective unions.

### **Organising cleaners in London – a brief look back**

During the early 1970s feminists from the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK became involved in a campaign to organise cleaners in the city of London. Following a number of meetings with night cleaners the 'Cleaners Action Group' was formed. With more determination than strategy, a small group of feminists set off into London's financial district armed with leaflets, urging their sisters to get unionised to improve their terms and conditions. Shelia Rowbotham, now academic, but then active in the campaign, described the women cleaners they were attempting to organise:

*Some were from the unskilled working class which had known poverty for generations and others were Irish, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Greek or Spanish immigrants. Though a few were in their twenties and a few over 60, most were in their thirties and forties with husbands who were low-wages workers, ill or disabled. The women looked older than their age, for they hardly slept at all, snatching a few hours after the children went to school. The accumulative exhaustion was etched on their faces. They had no time for the meetings and demonstrations which for we young activists in Women's Liberation had become a way of life. (Rowbotham 2006: 179)*

The subcontracting of cleaning labour meant workers were hired by agencies, whose managers were told to move workers to other sites when attempts were made to unionise the women. Considered 'unorganisable',

this group of workers were largely ignored by trades unions and where they did manage to join a union the women cleaners struggled to negotiate union structures – ‘the byzantine rules of the T&G were double Dutch to us’ (Rowbotham 2006: 118). Despite several years of hard work and determination, the campaign faltered due to sheer exhaustion and lack of support from the trade unions.

It is interesting to contrast the campaign of the early 1970s to that at the start of the new millennium. In the 1970s, many of cleaners were migrant workers, often working several jobs struggling to make ends meet. They worked in corporate headquarters employed by subcontractors, were moved around as their agencies saw fit and were considered by trade unions as marginal workers, too difficult to organise and not really worth the effort. Wind forward thirty years and Shelia Rowbotham’s description of cleaning workers in the city has changed little. Today, however, cleaners are more likely to originate from different countries – Africa, South America and Eastern Europe – but their terms and conditions and employment status remain much the same (see Aguiar and Herod 2006 for examples from around the world). As then, cleaning is precarious work, subcontracting is still the norm (Savage 2006) and until recently these workers have not had the protection of trade union membership, as the UK’s general unions focus remained within the male dominated manufacturing and transport sectors.

More than thirty years later, another attempt to organise cleaners in the City of London began when The East London Communities Organisation (Telco) – a broad based community organisation – initiated the London Living Wage Campaign. In December 2001, campaigners occupied a branch of the HSBC bank in Oxford Street, London to protest at the low pay and poor conditions of cleaners at Canary Wharf. Between December 2001 and February 2004, Telco kept up the campaign with public protests (including marches, demonstrations, public assemblies), as well as lobbying of politicians and employers (see Holgate 2009; Holgate and Wills 2007; Wills 2004: for more details). As a result, in February 2004 Barclays Bank agreed to new terms and conditions for cleaners employed at the company’s HQ at Canary Wharf, raising pay from the minimum wage (then £4.50) to £6 per hour, as well as granting fifteen days sick pay and eight extra holidays per year. Although a relatively small victory<sup>1</sup> following 2 years of intense campaigning, the impact was much wider as the London Living Wage campaign became high profile, with support from the Mayor of London and other bodies and had even begun to attract the attention of trade unions.

As a result, in early 2004 the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU, now Unite), allocated two full-time organisers to work on the campaign to unionise cleaners at Canary Wharf. Working closely with

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<sup>1</sup> Although a small victory in terms of the labour market for cleaners in London, the increased pay and conditions for those individual workers affected should not be underestimated.

colleagues from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in the US, who were seconded to the TGWU for 2 years, an intense campaign was launched to map and organise the cleaning sector in the City of London. Prior to this, the cleaners campaign had been organised by Telco (part of the broader community coalition London Citizens), although from around 2003 there had been contact with the TGWU who had begun co-operating with the campaign; ‘over a number of months [we] had attempted to persuade the T&G that it was fertile ground for organising’ (Interview with Telco, organiser). However, the two organisations were culturally very different: Telco was bottom up, community based, member led and loosely structured; the TGWU was more hierarchical, top down and had rigid structures. Not surprisingly, both organisations found it difficult to understand each other’s different ways of working, which led to confusion and mistrust on occasions, which is why the campaign as been off and on at different times in both organisations, when they found it difficult to work together. As one staffer from the TGWU remarked:

*I think trade unions are, as you know, conservative and centrist and general unions - and the T&G particularly - which is kind of left of centre, doesn't like getting out and working in partnership with groups it doesn't understand or control. (TGWU full-time officer, Interview 2007)*

The issue of which organisation was ‘in control’ was problematic and confusing for those taking part in the campaign. Press releases were sent out from both organisations claiming victory for a particular action or win creating antagonism on both sides. A Telco organiser described how the problem manifested itself at one bank that was being jointly organised – but where the workers had originated from the community based living wage campaign:

*There were attempts in the negotiation period [at Deutsche Bank] between us and the TGWU, because we have 60 workers organised, wanting to campaign and wanting to join the trade union. But they didn't want to join a trade union where they'd just get slung in the back with the Canary Wharf group. They wanted their own organisation and their own campaign and wanted to work with us still. (Telco organiser, interview 2007)*

The union had developed a strategy for the cleaners campaign which involved building up membership until there were enough workers to vote for/or be granted union recognition and in the meantime, wanted members recruited to be placed into a union branch. But often this mean that workers felt that they were not really involved in the campaign and that they did not understand why it was taking so long to progress the campaign and that they did not understand the process of gaining union recognition:

*So actually I suppose when [the relationship] got more difficult was when the T&G were campaigning very hard for recognition and there was a lull in the relationship then because our members had only ever really consented to a Living Wage campaign and although by and large they could see recognition as important and that unions are important, no question about that, but campaigning outside buildings that pay a living wage, because they did offer recognition was*

*not... So there was a slight diversion of the interest in the campaign. But the T&G basically won the recognition deal, we did help to a certain extent with that, but we weren't there all the time. And now we're pushing for money again the relationship is back on track, The Barclays recent victory was very much a joint one. And yes, it's working quite well.* (London Citizens organiser, interview 2007)

For many of these newly recruited members, most of whom were migrant workers, the structure and method of campaigning was very different to that they were used to in the living wage campaign. The community-based campaign led by Telco was premised on one-to-one relationships with communities meeting regularly to build support, to develop tactics and agree actions by consensus. The union campaign, however, was officer led, where members were 'brought out' on actions when needed for publicity and pressure on employers. Although not mutually exclusive, the different approaches to campaigning needed to be reconciled to maximise effectiveness and put pressure on employers to meet demands. This was worked through in 2004 as an organiser from London Citizens explained:

*Anyway, it was good, it was tense, but there was negotiation. The workers got what they wanted, we got what we wanted, the T&G got what they wanted and that was the beginning of a new period of cooperation. And so we worked together at Deutsche Bank, worked together at Royal Bank of Scotland, we then got involved again together at Canary Wharf. And since then it's been good. I mean there's differences of culture and we've got differences over some issues such as press release and whose name's at the top, whose name's not at the top! But that's just a normal relationship, but basically it's functioning.* (London Citizens organiser, interview 2007)

Despite the co-operation on this particular campaign, London Citizens' relationship with unions remains problematic – particularly as the Justice for Cleaners campaign has spread to other unions. Before looking at this issue in more detail it is important to document the TGWU's (now Unite) sector-based organising strategy and campaign for a zonal agreement for cleaners across the City of London.

### **Unite's zonal campaign: organising cleaners across the city of London**

Following the election of a new general secretary in 2003, the TGWU adopted a 'strategy for growth' which involved an organising approach with three central elements: committed leadership, allocation of substantial financial resource and the establishment of a central organising department. The organising department was established in June 2005 with the aim of recruiting 100 full-time staff organisers over the next couple of years. Central to the Unite organising approach is the need to organise on a sector by sector basis – not workplace by workplace: 'companies do not operate on a site by site or even individual basis, they have a broader context and so much we...if we are to improve the standard of living for the workers in the company, then we must look at the whole industry' (Graham 2007: 5). The union's strategy involved four key targets, one of which was

the Justice for Cleaners campaign where cleaning contractors in the City of London and Canary Wharf were targeted to sign zonal agreements. As the director of organising at Unite explained the approach:

*We have done this by putting at stake the reputation of key clients. Well-organised daily demonstrations against clients who would prefer to accept the possibility of paying a marginal increase in cost rather than have their reputation tarnished has proved hugely successful. The clients have used their clout with the contractors to force them to the table and sign agreements with the union. All agreements are zonal based agreements locking contractors into what in effect becomes one bargaining unit. (Graham 2007: 11)*

The TGWU chose this as one of their main campaigns partly as a result of the successful work that had already been done by London Citizens, but also because of the close developing relationship with the SEIU who wanted to roll out their Justice for Janitors campaign across Europe. As noted earlier, the majority of cleaners employed in the city of London are migrant workers. UK Labour Force Survey statistics show that there are around 30,000 cleaners working in central London, the majority of them (78%) working in the private sector. Of these, over 70 per cent are from minority ethnic groups – mainly from the Caribbean, Columbia, Portugal, Ghana, South America and Nigeria. The TGWU's deputy general secretary, in an address to the TUC Congress in 2004, outlined the union's commitment to organising migrant workers:

*Our task is not to fear migrant workers, but instead to welcome them to our shores. Our task is not to allow migrant workers to be scapegoated for taking jobs or driving down terms and conditions, but instead to argue that it is bad bosses who drive down wages and conditions... Our task, therefore is to not to exclude but, instead to organise. That is why the T&G is now organising the African and South American cleaners at Canary Wharf, the veritable citadel of capitalist. We are determined to end the shameful contrast between fabulous wealth and the forgotten twilight workers who clean the buildings whilst the bosses sip champagne. (Jack Dromey, TGWU Deputy General Secretary, address to TUC Congress 2004)*

As part of this strategy, the union made a concerted effort to recruit staff organisers from the cleaners themselves to work on the campaign. From a union that had only a handful of minority ethnic groups staff before the implementation of the national organising strategy, Unite now has recruited a number of migrant workers to run organising campaigns, which is a significant development for unions in the UK, who traditionally have recruited from 'within' thereby replicating the unions' predominantly white, male culture. Publicity from the Justice for Cleaners campaign has been striking as the images of what are generally considered 'traditional' trade unionists have been replaced with people of colour, speaking for themselves and highlighting the often appalling terms and conditions for migrant workers. The union action, where cleaners and their supporters picketed a play at the prestigious Young Vic theatre (which Morgan Stanley sponsored for £500k), highlighted to the Bank the effect on low paid cleaner of subcontracting their cleaning work. At the

protest, one migrant worker described how she worked three cleaning jobs to make ends meet – only managing to get a full night’s sleep on Friday and Saturdays. Other protests, like the one at the House of Commons in 2005, where the UK’s parliamentarians sit and debate, was remarkable because of the ethnic make up of MPs compared to those that clean their offices. Cleaners at the Houses of Parliament won their campaign for a living wage of £6.70 an hour, sick pay and 28 days holidays following two one-day strikes – the first strikes ever seen at the Houses of Parliament. During the campaign, Evrard Ouale, a migrant worker from Africa and newly recruited union shop steward said, ‘Cleaners stood up and demanded respect, and now we have it. Parliament is a different place to work in now we are more valued. The campaign showed that cleaners have the power to change their conditions when they stand together.’

### **Integrating migrant workers into union structures**

Since the Justice for Cleaners campaign began, the TGWU/Unite have recruited thousands of migrant workers into the union as part of the campaign to organise the City of London and Canary Wharf. However, the sector has a high turnover of workers necessitating continuous recruitment and organising and it was problematic to organise the workers into their own branch until they had built up a critical mass and the union had provided education and training for the new members. In June 2009, there were around 3,000 cleaning members in London and at the beginning of that year they were formally organised into a specific branch for cleaners, which has been meeting once a month on a Friday. With a focus of building and supporting activists, the union has spent a long time developing members into leaders to become organisers themselves. While the campaign began with ‘outside’ organisers – staffers from the TGWU and SEIU – as the campaign has developed cleaners from the campaign have been recruited as staff organisers and have been running the campaign. Jose, who has worked on the campaign for 4 years, came to the UK from Columbia and knows how difficult it is for many migrant workers to establish themselves in work:

*I have been a migrant worker from my first day here, I can tell you, they suffer, they are suffering they same way that I suffered in the past. When I am going to negotiate with the companies, the managers, do not want to understand that this man is from Colombia or that he is speaking to human beings that deserve to get the London Living Wage. Sometimes it's difficult for them to accept that we are just as human beings... They are human beings, as simple as that. They have same needs, they have the same dreams, they have the same problems. They have been living for a long time under pressure and under exploitation and they suffer all of them, the same. So when I am going to spread my message for them, it's not just a message for Latinos, for the African people, for the Eastern European people, it's for all of them. As human beings they assume the problem of the migrant workers around the world. (Jose, Unite organiser, interview 2007)*

Through the establishment of the new branch the cleaners have the opportunity to come together to determine the priorities for their members and the provision of education and training has proved key to the ability of the union to organise. Unite applied to the government's Union Modernisation Fund for money to establish a national migrant workers project – designed to provide key services to migrant worker members. As a consequence, the Migrant Workers Support Unit was established offering services such as translation, advice on employment rights, and signposting to community support services. The MWSU has also built links with other support services where migrant workers go for help and advice such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Polish Workers Association, the Latin American Workers Association, etc. In addition, the union has received money from the UnionLearn project – again government money designed for unions to use to provide education and skills for workers who do not have recognised qualifications. The Director of Unite's Migrant Workers Support Unit explained how they had wanted to test out, or more rightly prove, to union organisers that union learning could be used as an organising tool – particularly among migrant workers. He said that by providing English language training and computer training, the union has convinced 100s of migrant workers that the union has more to offer than improving terms and conditions at the work place – it also provides the opportunity for self-development, allowing workers to gain promotion, or to move on to better work. The MWSU also employs a roving UnionLearn rep that is able to go from workplace to workplace explaining to migrant workers the benefits of signing up to the union and taking education courses. From Latin American himself, Carlos was a journalist for a Latin American newspaper, but worked as a cleaner when he came to London so he is in a good position to explain the benefits of cleaning workers becoming organised.

In 2009 the Unite cleaners' branch had a committee of 21 members representing the many different backgrounds and countries of origin of the cleaners. Branch meetings are organised as lively events - often ending up as a social with music and dance, with food and drink brought by members. The living wage campaign is still central to the cleaners organising approach and members from the cleaners' branch are affiliated to London Citizens and attend the actions and take part in campaigns organised by this broad-based community campaign. As Jose, explained:

*I think the relationship with London Citizens is good, especially because we are now working together. One campaign [we work together on] is the London Living Wage for all the cleaners around the UK and in that case we are really, really strong linking with London Citizens and unite with them. And another is the London Citizens' regularisation of the migrant workers campaign. The message we have for the migrant workers is slightly different though because of course, London Citizens is more political than Unite. And they want to have regularisation as soon as possible [for those who have worked in the UK for 4 years or more], whereas we want to get a good regularisation as soon as possible, of course for all migrant workers.*



The union aimed to build the membership up to 5,000 by the end of 2009, by which stage they hoped the campaign would be self-sustaining. Whilst these figures have not been reached – figures as of January 2010 show around 2,000 fee paying members – there is a lively branch and a good number of active shop stewards who are much more self-sufficient than previously. The organising plan was to have a shop stewards committee in each workplace so that the need for support from union staff was limited and this goal has largely been achieved. In addition to the workplace reps, union organisers have also managed to recruit and train health and safety and union learn reps in order to involve as many members in activity as possible.

Many of the migrant cleaners are also members of a variety of community organisations and there are attempts taking place to link these organisations with the union. Unite’s education department is currently running a project with young workers providing English, art, painting, journalism, music, dance and theatre in an attempt to get them to positively identify with the union. One organiser explained; ‘when somebody is educated by the union – they are members of the union forever’. Increasingly links are being made with community organisations outside of the workplace in order to broaden the campaign:

*We are working now with a lot of communities, black organisations, Polish organisations, Portuguese organisations, Spanish-speaking organisations. It is really, really important and also we are involved now in different campaigns like ‘Papers, Please!’ and ‘No-one is illegal’. It is important the links that we are developing with all the society. Initially or usually when we organise people in our union we are going to organise the people in a factory. In the factory we have 500 workers, or 1000 workers and we can organise a lot of members in the same place with the same managers. However, the cleaners are spread all across the city and all around the country. When we go to involve with these people in the campaign, it’s easier that they are involved with their families, with all of them. If you check some pictures of the campaign you can see my 5-year old son is on demonstrations, and he started to go to demonstrations since he was 6 months old! So it is a lot of people involved with our campaign. It’s a lot of families involved with our campaign, Bolivian and Equadorian organisations, etc. (Jose, Unite organiser, interview 2007)*

Although the Unite cleaners’ branch was only 6 months old in June 2009, members from the campaign have spoken on various platforms and to various committees throughout the union over the last 5 years of the campaign. Organisers report the rapturous welcome they have received when talking about their struggle for union rights and the difficulties they face as migrant workers. They, acknowledge that integration into the wider union was difficult at the start due to lack of understanding of union culture – but as one organiser explained other members of the union ‘have learned to love the Justice for Cleaners campaign!’ The campaign has also had an impact on the staffing of the union. Like many UK unions, staff have generally been recruited from within the organisation therefore replicating the culture that has been predominantly white and male.

Since the TGWU initiated in new organising approach in 2004 it has seen a considerable change to its staffing profile. Organisers recruited over the last five years are more likely to be young, female and from minority ethnic groups than was the case previously and in the cleaners campaign specifically four cleaners have become staff organisers and one has become a regional industrial officers - a post that was once only achieved after a long apprentice as a lay activist.

### **Justice for Cleaners campaign spreads to other unions**

One of the most interesting aspects of the Justice for Cleaners campaign is the way it has spread across London and been picked up by activists from other unions. The first of the campaigns outside of Unite began at Queen Mary, University of London, in October 2005 (Wills et al. 2009). Staff at the university had been involved in conducting research for the Living Wage campaign into low paid workers in the city and thus it seemed inevitable that a campaign would be launched when it was found out that university cleaners, who were contracted out to a large company, were being paid very low wages and had much inferior terms and conditions to other (directly employed) staff at the university. Along with the local academic, administrative staffs and student union branches (Association of University Teachers – now the University Colleges Union, Unison and the National Union of Students), London Citizens organised numerous local east London community organisations to voice their concerns about the employment situation of migrant workers cleaning the campus to Queen Mary’s governing body. Leaders from various faith communities spoke on a ‘talking heads letter’ to the governors about their moral obligation to provide workers at the university with a living wage to support themselves and their families. After a short campaign, the cleaning workers were recruited into Union membership and the university agreed to the campaign’s demands. Contracted out workers were brought back ‘in house’, given much improved university terms and conditions – including the living wage, 28 days holidays and sick pay, and thus became the first living wage campus in the UK.

Following quickly behind was the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and other University of London colleges based around Bloomsbury in central London. London Citizens and student activists largely ran the first two campaigns, although a few Unison branch activists were also involved. But, in the other university campaigns that followed, there was little involvement from London Citizens as the campaign developed a life of its own. In October 2008, the School of African and Oriental Studies’ (SOAS) Justice for Cleaners campaign won the London Living Wage (£7.45), which amounted to a 35 per cent increase for all cleaning staff. The cleaners were also granted union recognition, time off for training and English classes, and improved holiday and sick leave. However, the campaign has not been without difficulties and individual union activists have faced disciplinaries and dismissal as a result of their campaigns (see London Student 2009 for attacks on union activists).

In the same month, management at Birkbeck College also agreed to pay the Living wage following a recommendation from the Master of the College. Unlike Queen Mary, the other colleges continued to contract out their cleaning services to the large multinational corporations operating across London – companies that felt less morally obligated to improving terms and conditions for the most vulnerable in society. Companies in the UK are obligated to check the immigration status of their workers before employing them and are subject to fines should they be shown to be wilfully employing undocumented workers. Nevertheless, many of these large companies appear to have undocumented workers in their employ and, in what might seem a coincidence, some cleaners who have become leading union activists have been picked up and deported by UK immigration officials. In a raid, at 6.30am on 12th June 2009, ISS, the large multinational that holds the contract for cleaning at SOAS called a meeting for all cleaners. Within minutes the meeting was raided by approximately 45-50 Immigration and Border police who entered the building in riot gear – clearly designed to intimidate. Following document checks, nine cleaners, including five Unison members, were taken into detention; eight were deported within days and one was sent to a UK detention centre to await her fate. A Unison activist at SOAS commented: ‘it is not a coincidence that SOAS cleaners were one of the first university cleaners to fight for Union representation and a decent wage. The events on Friday appear to be aimed at sending a clear message to other agency workers in London not to fight for union representation, such levels of intimidation cannot be tolerated.’ This incident follows several others where cleaning contractors’ clients have pressed for activists dismissals for being involved in organising campaigns (Rajan 2008; Stewart 2008).

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) are another union that became involved in a campaign to organise cleaners and has written a ‘cleaners charter’ which sets out its strategy for organising (RMT 2010). A union with a strong industrial focus, the RMT believes that everyone working on the railways should be a member of the same union and therefore even though cleaners on the railways are subcontracted to large multinationals like OCS, ISS and Ocean, they should be in the same union along with drivers, engineers and ticket inspectors. A militant union, the RMT has been one of the few unions to use strike action (successfully) to force cleaning contractors to implement the living wage for its low paid members. Solidarity from other union members who have the industrial muscle to force employers to the bargaining table, has led to a growth of migrant members working for cleaning companies on the London Underground and the union claims they have around 700 cleaners since the campaign began in 2007. They have however, also been subjected to raids by immigration police, when employers have tried to intimidate cleaners into ending their trade union organising (LCAP 2009). Initially, the union organised their cleaning members into one general branch in north London along with other rail workers – primarily because it was that branch that initiated the organising campaign. Since then, cleaners have joined their own local branches near to where they work or live and have been integrated into these branches. There are now around 30 cleaners reps that have undergone

TUC training courses on union representation, health and safety and handling disciplinaries and grievances. These are standard TUC training courses available to all union reps throughout the union movement.<sup>2</sup>

Unite's strategy has resulted in a change to the demographics of its union membership in London in relation to ethnic make up and its campaigning approach amongst migrant workers has not only raised their profile in the union, but has also helped to challenge and change some of the concerns of some union members about migrant workers and the benefits of organising migrants. It is expected that some union members will reflect some of the held negative views held about migrants by wider society and Unite's campaigns, not just in cleaning, but in other workplace sectors where migrants are concentrated (like food processing and agriculture) have helped to dispel a lot of the myths about migrant workers. Unite officers involved in organising work have reported how there is now little debate within the union about the merits of organising among migrant workers because 'we have proved we can do this in a sustainable way...and there is no significant opposition'.

### **Concluding remarks**

While there is little academic research into the recruitment, organisation and inclusion of migrant workers in UK trade unions, there has been an increase in the work done by unions amongst this group of workers over the last few years - most of it not recorded – even by unions themselves. It is also important to consider the extent to which the organisation of migrant workers was or is a conscious decision based on them being migrant workers. Might it not be that the unions, in particular, are primarily concerned with organising them as workers due to their position in the labour market and their majority status in some sectors, rather than a primary concern to organise migrant workers per se because of their particular vulnerabilities? Certainly it is easier to make an argument with current union members about the former rather than the latter.

While the initiative to organise cleaning workers in London - who are predominantly migrant workers - began with the community-based organising work of Telco (part of London Citizens) in an attempt to ensure that the lowest paid workers had a living wage, the campaign has spread and has been picked up by a number of unions. While there has been some tension as to the 'ownership' of the campaign, this issue appears largely resolved as each union has taken up the Justice for Cleaners campaign in its own way. The style of campaigning and organising and including workers into the structure of unions has varied according to the

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<sup>2</sup> The TUC tends not to get involved in specific organising campaigns and prefers to leave this to individual unions. It does however provide bespoke training on organising for unions if requested. The TUC has produced literature on aspects of migrants and organising migrant workers in an attempt to encourage unions into this activity (TUC (2002) *Migrant workers - A TUC guide* TUC (2004) 'Migrant workers - overworked, underpaid and over here'. London: Trades Union Congress.) but overall its role is supportive rather than directive.

culture and priorities of each union. However as a 'brand' the Justice for Cleaners campaign has had the call for a London Living Wage at the centre of each of the campaigns. Although, in the main, unions have worked independently of London Citizens they have benefited enormously from the work that this broad-based community organisation has done since 2001 to get the notion of a living wage accepted as a benchmark for low paid workers in London. Without the work of London Citizens, unions would have been much slower to take up the cause of low paid migrant workers – it is only over the last few years that UK unions have put serious organising resource into bringing in this vulnerable group of workers into union membership. Indeed there is still debate among the membership in some unions about the level of resource being spent on this area – with individuals arguing that perhaps the resources would be better spent elsewhere given the transitory work patterns of many new migrant workers. Unite have invested considerable resources since they began their campaign in 2004 and although the union now has 2,000 dues paying cleaners in membership (and more who are committed to joining but are not yet paying dues), they have recruited many more than this who have left the union once they have changed jobs. There is a considerable high turnover of staff in this sector, meaning that there is considerable constant organising work needed to keep membership density high. This coupled with the continual changing of contracts and transfer of workers between employers makes it very difficult for the union to keep track of its membership. Yet, despite this membership is relatively constant around the 2,000 figure.

Although not covered in this case study, there has been a degree of rivalry between some unions about jurisdiction and who has the 'right' to organise different groups of cleaners and also between unions and London Citizens particularly over the university campaigns. UK unions have over the last 10 years been much more strategic in their campaign and have moved away from responding to 'hot shops'. However, London Citizens, as a community campaign, is more concerned with attempting to resolve injustice where they see it and have been bemused by union annoyance at being 'dumped' with new groups of members where there are not local branch/regional support networks in place.

As previous writings have noted, there is a difference between organising *in* communities and organising *with* communities and it is the latter that is the more challenging (see Holgate 2009 for details on this). When unions have felt it necessary, for example during strikes or industrial action, they have often requested support from communities, but have tended not to develop long lasting *reciprocal* relationships, effectively jumping into communities when support is needed and leaving when that support is no-longer required. London Citizens have shown that it is possible to engage marginal workers in political campaigns that not only benefit themselves but the wider community. The imaginative campaigns around the living wage have brought considerable material benefits to a growing number of low-paid workers in London, but have also taught participants that they can change things by working with their local communities and building sustainable

organisation. Many of those involved with London Citizens – schoolchildren, students, migrants, residents, workers, etc – would not have become ‘leaders’, or understood they were able to effect change without the training they received in the ‘art of politics’. The challenge for trade unions is how to engage in the new opportunities that are available from organising migrant workers in communities by widening out their focus so that it spreads beyond the workplace. Evidence suggests that trade unions may however be poorly equipped to take on this challenge. They are sometimes held back by inflexible and bureaucratic structures, and are wedded to traditional ways of working that make little allowance for the changes to work and working lives which have occurred over the last couple of decades. The difficulties that have been observed in London between London Citizens and trade unions have been around three main issues; territory, working in coalition with faith organisations, and structures. In terms of territory, unions have argued that community organisations should not be involved in organising workers – this is the jurisdiction of trade unions. This issue of ‘boundaries’ is one that has been repeated many times by trade unionists who feel that Telco has ‘over stepped the mark’ by organising workers and that this was exacerbated when London Citizens announced they were establishing a Workers’ Association. This was perceived as an attempt to set up a rival union although this is denied by London Citizens who argued they were attempting to fill a gap left by unions and that it was in any case a ‘pre-union’ body where workers were directed toward the most appropriate union. The second main issue relates to the secular nature of trade unions and the reluctance of some trade unionists to work alongside faith organisations that do not share the same radical agenda as unions and where some are concerned about the damaging attitudes of some religious leaders towards women’s reproductive rights, issues of sexuality and the upholding of patriarchal values (see Jamoul and Wills 2008; Wills 2008 for on discussion about religion and community organising). Thirdly, unions often have fairly tight organisational structures and fixed ways of operating and these sometimes do not ‘fit’ with the more relaxed and informal methods of community organising. Unions have expressed concern that community organisations do not understand that decisions made have to be agreed and accountable to a number of layers within the union before they can be approved making it difficult for them to operate as quickly or spontaneously as community organisations. On occasions they have felt left behind or left out of decision making as a consequence and then become critical of what they feel is an ‘undemocratic’ way of operating. In a number of cases both London Citizens and trade unions have shown a lack of understanding and on some occasions, a lack of concern for each other’s way of working. London Citizens do not have the same experience or expertise in industrial relations or collective (and individual) bargaining issues and this has led to some severe disagreements with unions. This is acknowledged by London Citizens and could perhaps be overcome if unions were prepared to have greater involvement in the organisation. On the other hand, trade unions have little experience and understanding of broad-based organising, lay-led organising which expands beyond the workplace and to do this requires some relinquishing of power and control over their activists and activity. This may prove a major cultural challenge for unions that have such hierarchical structures. It seems that there is little in the aims and objectives of the

two organisations that necessarily prevents them working together – indeed by recognising their different strengths and weaknesses the trade union movement combined with community organisations could be a really effective force for change in the lives of many workers and their communities.

The RMT have also had disagreements with Unite who have been trying to gain a zonal agreement across London for cleaners working in the big contract cleaning companies. Yet the RMT, which believes in industrial unionism – one union for all rail workers – objected to Unite trying to organise on its ‘patch’. These arguments between unions are familiar to anyone with even a brief knowledge of trade union organising and they continue to cause problems on the ground. Just taking the example of the disagreement with Unite and the RMT we are able to see how contemporary capitalism and the integration of labour markets influences the way both unions think – both are able to make a valid argument as to why the cleaners fall within their organising remit. The RMT’s argument for one union, makes perfect sense to an industrial union organising on the railways, but then, so too does Unite’s attempt to have just one zonal-based agreement with the multinational cleaning companies operating in London rather than allow them to pay different rates to cleaners depending on where they work. While both unions believe their campaigns to be successful and in a sense there is little to differentiate between the campaigns in this regard, union officials from both Unite and the RMT say that their key factors accounting for their success relate to having a clearly defined strategy and sticking with it even through difficult times. So, while both unions have taken a different approach – industrial unionism and zonal agreements – both are actually organising workers on the ground and equipping them with the skills to organise and represent workers in their workplaces. However, it is notable that these campaigns are based in London and there remains a question as to whether or not the unions have the capability/resources to transfer these campaigns to other parts of the UK. That the campaigns are so labour intensive is a factor as is the critical mass of migrant workers in the capital. Union leaders are not sure that they have proven to the rest of the union that such campaigns would be sustainable in other parts of the UK. London Citizens has also attempted to organise outside of the capital and found it much more difficult to adjust to the different geographies of other UK cities where the live/work patterns are different which affect the way ‘communities’ coalesce.

While there are some attempts by some unions to integrate workers into their branch and wider union structures, there is much less evidence of union support to help migrant workers integrate into wider society. The work of London Citizens has been much more successful in this regard, particularly through its training programmes for community ‘leaders’ and the involvement of people in activities beyond the work arena. Much of the research in this area is still very much in its infancy and would benefit from greater participant observation on the part of researchers.

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