

# There is Power in Coalition: A framework for assessing how and when union-community coalitions are effective and enhance union power

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## *Abstract*

*Proposals for union revitalisation suggest the importance of unions reaching out to the community and the formation of union-community coalitions. Yet, how this process of 'reaching out' can be most effective for building union power and advancing union renewal is little understood. This article presents a framework for assessing union-community coalitions, and how different types of coalitions offer varying possibilities for enhancing the power of unions. The framework extends from ad hoc coalitions to complex integrated 'deep coalition' forms. I identify a series of coalition features—common interest, structure, organisational buy-in and scale – and argue that they are key determinants of coalition variation and effectiveness. I also explore how these different coalition forms provide increasing possibilities for union power, and they promote possibilities for union renewal. I argue that the possibilities for union power and union transformation are increasingly likely when there is broader and deeper interconnection between unions and community organisations within the coalition form.*

## **Introduction**

Amongst the possible routes for union renewal is the suggestion that unions should reach out to the community to form union-community coalitions. Union-community coalitions are seen as a mechanism for advancing union power by developing powerful alliances in order to rebuild unions' political and economic influence. Yet coalitions are not homogenous creatures; some last and provide an ongoing source of change and power, while others are fleeting in their political influence. This article presents a framework of various coalition forms and breaks down their features, assessing what makes them work and how they contribute to union power and union renewal.

## **Coalitions and union renewal**

In *Unions@Work*, the ACTU recommended the formation of alliances between unions and community organisations to strengthen the voice of unions (ACTU 1999). This

strategy was part of a broader agenda for union renewal. Union density in Australia and many other industrialised countries has fallen dramatically over the last 20 years (Peetz 1998). *Unions@Work* argued for a program of union renewal, demanding that unions should change how they engage their membership, organise new members and relate to other organisations in civil society, in order to turn around declining density and rebuild their influence over job regulation and social policy.

Union-community coalitions are seen as an important element of union renewal. Indeed, within US union revitalisation literature it is often noted that union-community coalitions are vital to returning unions to their social movement origins (Moody 1997; Waterman 1998; Nissen 1999; Johnston 2002; Frege, Heery and Turner 2004). These scholars advocate for coalition practice to enhance a union's ability to bargain and to advocate for legislation and social policy, in a period of declining union density and influence with employers and the state.

In the Australian context, union-community coalitions have been used to increase the influence of unions in bargaining and to help build community support for union issues. The success of the 1998 Maritime Union of Australia's community pickets gave practical credence to the idea that community support can strengthen union power (Tattersall 2004). Working with the community is part of the spectrum of union tactics, used in a climate of union renewal. It has become, at least rhetorically, a part of union strategy. In a February 2005 survey of NSW unions affiliated to Unions NSW, two-thirds said 'yes' when asked 'has the state branch of your union in the past two years worked on a campaign which involved working with community organisations?' Later that year, the Australian union movement's campaign against a package of employer supported industrial reforms saw the mainstreaming of community days of action, partnerships with community organisations and community coalitions as key features of union campaign strategy.

Union revitalisation literature claims that coalitions provide three sources of power for unions. Firstly, union-community coalitions provide an instrumental form of power, complementing union capacity by increasing a union's financial and physical resources, providing expertise and influence, and enhancing the number of supporters for unions (Frege, Heery and Turner 2004). Secondly, union-community coalitions also provide a legitimising form of power, where union action is framed as a 'sword of justice', with broad community support, and not simply as the vested interest of unions (Flanders 1970). Finally, it is argued that union-community coalitions, by creating influential relationships between unions and community organisations and by mobilising union members on a variety of issues, can create change in unions themselves – union-community coalitions may be an agent of revitalisation (Moody 1997; Waterman 1998; Frege, Heery and Turner 2004).

It is clear in practice that not all coalitions are the same; they offer remarkably diverse possibilities or limitations for unions (Frege, Heery and Turner 2004). Yet, this variation in practice is not accompanied by theoretical frameworks that are able to explain how differences in coalition form or practice affect coalition effectiveness or union power. There is a large body of work focused on the study of union-community coalitions, from

the perspectives of industrial relations, social movement theory, union revitalisation and labour geography. Yet despite the growing number of labels to describe these coalitions – social movement unionism, union-community coalitions, social unionism, community unionism, social justice unionism or citizenship movement unionism – there is still significant ambiguity about what makes a coalition effective or powerful for unions. The literature on coalitions tends to be empirically driven, focused on best-practice case studies rather than drawing out the elements of coalition practice that affect coalition effectiveness or union power. As Ellem and Shields describe with reference to the theory of peak union councils, there is a need to understand how and when a union-community coalition's power varies rather than simply hope that a 'will to unity' will create powerful alliances (Ellem and Shields 2004). Even more importantly for the purpose of union renewal, it is necessary to understand when and how union-community coalitions enhance union power and create change in unions.

This article aims to open up analysis of the viability of union-community coalitions by presenting a framework on how union-community coalitions vary in their practice and how that variation in practice contributes to union power. This article develops four labels to describe different types of union-community coalitions – ad hoc, mutual-support and deep coalitions. These four coalition types are analysed as increasingly integrated and powerful forms. Each is discussed with reference to four factors - the coalition's common interest, its structure, the organisational buy-in and the geographic space in which it acts. I then consider the implications of these different union forms for the possibilities of union power. I argue that a union's ability to enhance the instrumental, legitimising and renewal opportunities available from coalition practice is affected by the extent to which coalitions deeply and broadly interconnect. Union power is increased if and when unions connect their coalition engagement to deeply engaging union members, and if and when they establish reciprocal interdependent interconnection with community organisations.

This article draws on literature and a series of structured interviews. These interviews are a selection of over 80 interviews undertaken in the context of case-study work on long term coalitions in Sydney, Toronto and Chicago during 2005. These case studies aim to establish how and when coalitions, as strategic agents, are most effective.

### **Ad hoc coalitions**

The most common form of union-community coalition that unions engage in is an ad hoc, episodic coalition. These relationships involve one-off requests for support, such as invitations to participate in events (such as a picket line or a rally) or provisions of financial assistance. The coalition formed is a temporary one, lasting for the specific action at the heart of the relationship. Ad hoc coalitions often occur in reaction to a crisis, where a crisis is translated into a political opportunity to reach out to like-minded organisations and ask for support (Tarrow 1994).

These short alliances are coloured by the party who initiates them – being dominated in form and strategy by the initiating community organisation or union (Fine 2003;

Fine 2005). Common examples of union-initiated ad hoc coalitions are the (often last minute) requests for a community organisation to speak at a rally or come to a picket. Common examples of community-initiated ad hoc coalitions are requests for funding or endorsement that regularly pass across the desks of union leaders.

Ad hoc coalitions are limited by the simple and distant nature of their interaction. As Lipsig-Mummé notes, these relationships can be instrumental (Lipsig-Mummé 2003), where one organisation requests transactional support from another organisation on its own terms. These relationships do not involve joint decision-making, merely a request to support a pre-existing strategy. The distant nature of ad hoc interactions means that the relationship between union and community organisation is often very separate from the union membership, with the campaign often executed by union officials alone. If repeated and one-sided, the instrumental form of ad hoc relationships may create animosity between partners, where community organisations feel used rather than an equal partner. For instance, in the US the term ‘rent-a-collar’ has become a turn of phrase to describe ad hoc speaking requests from unions to the religious community (Anonymous author interview, Chicago, Sept 2005). Ad hoc relationships between the religious community and unions are increasingly common in Australia, particularly during the 2005 Industrial Relations campaign.

Ad hoc coalitions may create possibilities for further, stronger collaboration. They build relationships between different organisations, sustaining and feeding informal connections through one-off joint actions. The very existence of ad hoc coalitions signals the possibility of greater, longer, more powerful alignment between unions and community organisations. They are regularly a first step towards stronger collaboration. This was the case for the NSW Teachers Federation, where a long standing ad hoc alliance called ‘Three Federations’ between parents and teachers later developed into the Public Education Alliance (Author interview, Maree O’Halloran, President, NSW Teachers Federation, May 2005).

For unions, ad hoc coalitions provide a valuable tactical resource for power while not creating long-term relationships. Ad hoc coalitions keep community organisations at arms length. They are not brought into campaign formulation nor treated as partners; they are often ‘told’ what to do (Anonymous author interview, Chicago Sept 2005). In the event of an immediate crisis, such as a lock-out or strike, a union-initiated ad hoc coalition often provides a powerful route to victory. Community support at critical times supplies legitimacy, providing a morale boost for union members and supportive media. Yet, ad hoc coalitions do not of themselves create powerful strategic relationships. Rather, ad hoc coalitions create relationships between organisations which contain the possibility for greater connection, sharing and power.

## **Support Coalitions**

Support coalitions operate as short-term, structured coalitions between unions and community organisations. They transform the ‘temporary’ ad hoc coalition to a formal meeting space as a site for event and campaign planning<sup>1</sup>.

Support coalitions allow for a closer integration of common interest and organisational buy-in through a more cohesive structure. In terms of common interest, support coalitions share features with ad hoc coalitions, as the issues and interests at the heart of the coalition tend to derive from a single organisation's agenda rather than be shared between the groups (Frege, Heery and Turner 2004). In addition, support coalitions tend to be organised around single issues and continue only while that issue is in contention (Banks 1992). Examples vary widely and include NSW-based coalitions such as the Save Medicare Alliance and the Walk against the War Coalition, each being defined by a specific issue as a common concern.

Support coalitions are categorised by a formal structure, which allows organisations to connect and share strategy. Features such as face-to-face meetings and ongoing communication (through email lists, telephone trees or fax streams) allow for shared decision making between the partners (Banks 1992). Although support coalitions are short-term, joint decision-making processes, they allow for some sharing of the planning process. However, this formal joint ownership is often mitigated by the informal dominance of decision making by the initiating organisation (Fine 2003). If the coalition is union-initiated it will often be dominated by unions, with unions exercising both formal and informal influence over the type of action taken (Waterman 1991; Munck and Waterman eds. 1999). If the coalition is community-initiated, it will probably struggle to get significant participation from unions, with unions often sending junior staff as coalition participants (Clawson 2003). This was certainly the case with the Walk against the War Coalition in NSW in 2003. While it had strong representation from over 15 unions, the representatives tended to be mid-ranking staff members rather than elected or executive officials.

Short-term, reactive support coalitions tend to limit their operation to the scale of decision makers (Lipsig-Mummé 2003). For instance, if a campaign is organised against a State Government, the coalition will concentrate on shifting the Government as a whole at the scale of the state, not acting at a more local or regional level. Limiting a coalition to a single scale makes it difficult for support coalitions to deeply engage the members of participant organisations. Union and community organisation members tend to be used 'as a force of defiance, such as through centrally organised rallies, rather than having meaningful ownership over locally led campaigns. Support coalitions use participant organisations to mobilise support for short-term goals, rather than working with those organisations to sustain campaigns that achieve long-term shifts in power relations.

Consequently, support coalitions struggle to build deep organisational participation – participation remains one-sided, dominated by the initiating organisation. While union involvement in community-initiated support coalitions usefully provides coalition campaigns with greater financial resources, leverage or influence (Tattersall 2004), they often incompletely engage the resources or capacity of unions. Conversely, a union-initiated support coalition often makes demands on community organisations that these organisations are less able to satisfy, for instance demanding mass turn-outs for demonstrations, when they are more capable of delivering supportive media or information distribution (Anonymous author interview with union official, Sydney, May 2005).

Support coalitions are staged on any issue, and consequently there is little regard to the types of issues that more readily politicise union members. Often a support coalition will not directly engage union members, as the issue may be disconnected from union members' lives, experiences or concerns. Furthermore, reliance on a coalition structure limits decision making to officials, tending to exclude union delegates or members from meaningful involvement (Clawson 2003). The narrowness of participation makes it difficult to spark locally based organising amongst union members inside unions on community issues.

Support coalitions are effective at co-ordinating organisations around a reactive, single-issue campaign, but they struggle to sustain mass-based engagement. Decision making is concentrated in the coalition form, which allows for co-ordination by an array of organisations. However the issue specificity and narrow organisational dominance of decision-making often limit the longevity and effectiveness of simple coalition.

The Walk against the War Coalition in Sydney provides a useful example. This coalition was formed reactively in October 2002 in response to the possibilities of war in Iraq. The coalition was very broad, with over 90 organisations participating at its peak. Yet the frame of common interest and the type of action (repertoires of contention) that were undertaken by the group were relatively narrow (Tarrow 1994; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). The diversity of the participants, from establishment organisations like unions and churches to more anti-systemic, radical groups, made it difficult for the group to make decisions on issues outside organising the tactic of choice – street marches against the war. Union participation was focused on coalition decision making and financial and personnel support, rather than deep engagement of union members and delegates (Clawson 2003; Tattersall 2004). While the marches were large, the coalition was limited to a narrow set of tactics (the rally) and was unable to effectively balance the diverse interests of the groups – disbanding in May 2003.

For unions, support coalitions may provide a source of power, but they can also operate as a relatively superficial form of solidarity. Union-centred support coalitions allow partner community organisations to take ownership over union struggles. The formal organisational proximity of community-centred support coalitions creates a space where community organisations are more likely to harness the resources of unions. Yet because there is an insufficient commitment to the coalition's common interest (by either unions or community), organisation involvement, sustained mobilisation and coalition effectiveness are lessened. Union-centred support coalitions insufficiently engage community organisation support and resources, and community-centred support coalitions do not deeply engage unions.

### **Mutual-Support Coalitions**

A deeper form of engagement by unions and community organisations occurs when the common interest between organisations is mutual – in mutual-support coalitions. A mutual-support coalition (or common-cause coalition) expands the capacity of support

coalitions by extending the frame of common interest and deepening the form of decision making and union engagement within the coalition (Frege, Heery and Turner 2004).

Mutual-support coalitions deepen the common interest of a support coalition, so the issue at the heart of the campaign is in the mutual self-interest of the participating organisations and is not simply the direct concern of one of the parties. This complementary base of support makes it more likely that each of the participating groups has a direct interest in the success of the coalition, because the coalition's success supports its direct organisational and political aims. The need for joint direct interest means that the 'issue' at the heart of the coalition is often drawn broadly. For example, rather than the aim of the coalition being to 'demand a salary rise for childcare workers' it may be to demand 'better quality of childcare'. This expanded issue frame allows different organisations to see their distinct interest within the coalition's common interest.

The mutual common interest of these coalitions flows over to create a close knit structure and strategy, generating stronger bonds of trust between coalition partners. The mutuality of interest becomes a vehicle for sharing decision making between the groups. The coalition becomes a space for negotiating demands to ensure each group has their specific concerns addressed. While the issue at the heart of the campaign may be drawn broadly, negotiation between coalition partners allows for the specific organisational concerns of each group to be incorporated into the coalition's activities (Brecher and Costello 1990). Trust is more easily exchanged between partners with common goals (Tuffs 1998; Nissen 1999; Nissen 2003). Trust can also be expanded through the participation of individual bridge-builders who have experiences in both community organisations and unions and who can help translate contrasting cultural practices (Estabrook, Siqueira and Machado 2000; Rose 2000). A flat coalitional structure is able to effectively harness the contrasting power sources of community organisations and unions (Fine 2003). For instance, a mutual-support coalition may harness a union's capacity to mobilise, a community organisation's relationship with Government and another community organisation's voice in the media. Sharing decision making and strategy allows mutual-support coalitions to share power.

The power and resource-sharing capacities of a mutual-support coalition were evident in the NSW Public Education Alliance in 2003. The NSW Teachers Federation played a primary role mobilising attendance at public events and providing financial support for an advertising campaign around public education. The principals' and parents' groups played an important role in lobbying the Department and the Minister (Anonymous interview, Principal Representative, February 2005). Together, the Public Education Alliance was able to meet directly with the Premier about its demands, something that none of the groups had recently achieved on their own. These diverse 'insider and outsider' strategies led to significant policy shifts around professional development and class sizes in the 2003 State Election.

The deeper bonds between partners in a mutual-support coalition may narrow the terms of organisational participation. Mutual-support coalitions may be exclusive, because a higher threshold of trust is required (Lipsig-Mummé 2003). Mutual support

coalitions are more likely to develop between organisations with long preceding informal relationships or organisations with similar cultural practices, where predictability and reciprocity are more likely to be achieved. Rather than hoping organisations will 'buy-in', a mutual-support coalition is more likely to evolve by hand-picking partner organisations that satisfy a standard of trust, commitment to the issue or capacity to mobilise people. This was the case with the NSW Public Education Alliance. The alliance was a relatively narrow alliance of 'parents, principals and teachers', only including groups that were directly connected to schools. This tight connection was an advantage, as the depth of engagement in the issue deeply connected to each organisation's strategic interest (Author interviews, anonymous interview, representatives Public Education Alliance, March-April 2005)

A mutual-support coalition places specific demands on unions. The broadening of common interest within a mutual-support coalition requires a union's leadership to consciously transform how it frames its issues, connecting the union to a community movement. There is a need for the union leadership to recognise the union as a social actor and not just a bargaining agent. This transition may be easier for unions already connected to the 'community' through the kind of work performed by their members, such as public sector unions (Johnston 1994), or in service delivery, where the work of union members directly affects members of the general public (Walsh 2000). In general, a mutual-support coalition compels union leaders to open up a union's vision in order to express its demands as community concerns, beyond the 'pure and simple' language of wages and conditions (Rose 2000). Indeed, the Public Education Alliance was preceded by significant organisational change within the Teachers Federation. Before embarking on the Alliance, the union committed to a long-range campaign for 'Public Education' and began collecting a levy of members for that purpose. The decision to shift the frame of the union's campaign and to resource that campaign were important for the later success of the Public Education Alliance.

Indeed, mutual-support coalitions may require unions to exercise more discretion before committing to a campaign, and they may not be a viable strategy for all unions. The threshold of direct common interest requires more than an altruistic concern for an issue. It demands that an issue directly connect to the material concerns and needs of the union's membership, such as when teachers campaign for public education funding. If there is not an easy connection between the issue and the union's members, it may be difficult for a union to effectively engage in this deeper form of coalition partnership. This threshold may be achieved more easily if there is a high level of union education (Anonymous author interview, Toronto Nov 2004), or a history of militancy or radicalism in the union, but it will overwhelmingly be affected by the concerns and needs of the union members and how they connect to the issue. For instance, while the NSW Teachers Federation has an intensive union education apparatus and a history of militant social justice unionism, the community union campaign that has most significantly mobilised union members has been the public education campaigns (Multiple anonymous author interviews, Sydney Dec 2004-April 2005).

A consequence of the engagement of union members' direct interests means that it is easier to activate and mobilise union members in a mutual-support coalition. The direct connection between coalition campaign and member concern provides a greater incentive to see an outcome on the issue. This increased capacity for union mobilisation increases the strength of the coalition, providing it with greater movement power (Clawson 2003; Nissen 2003).

## **Deep Coalitions**

There is a further level of coalition practice that opens up the levels of member participation, increasing the capacity of a coalition to achieve power at different scales of decision making. I call these deep coalitions.

Coalitions are usually defined by their breadth – breadth of common interest and breadth of organisational diversity. A deep coalition supplements breadth with a depth of organisational support. This depth creates an increased capacity to mobilise union/community organisation members. Deep coalitions are a powerful coalition form and also a site of union renewal. To achieve deep participation, unions must open up spaces for member participation and engagement, enhancing the union's movement capacity.

Deep coalitions increase participation by supporting a more complex organisational structure that can operate at a variety of scales. Scale is a concept used by labour geographers to understand how power is constituted and created by the place in which it operates (Sadler and Fagan 2004). Political power and corporate power are constituted by place. Political power operates at both the scale of Government and the scale of local electorates, having both state and local dimensions. Corporate power, while often categorised by capital mobility can often be constrained by the local, such as in human service work or mining, where there is a capital-fix that ties capital to a specific local place (Walsh 2000; Ellem 2003a; Ellem 2003b). Furthermore, the local can be a site of resistance for unions and community-union coalitions (Jonas 1998); the local is where people live and work and can directly participate in decisions and action (Wills and Simms 2004).

Deep coalitions move beyond mutual-support coalitions by opening up decision-making structures; instead of relying on only one coalition structure, they facilitate action at a variety of scales. While a coalition may operate as the key decision-maker between organisations, deep coalitions also resource, support and encourage action and connection between unions and community groups at the membership level. This decentralised structure is critical for allowing individual union and community organisation members to participate in decision making (De Martino 1999; Clawson 2003). Local decision-making structures may include internal union structures, such as regional delegate councils, or local union-community structures such as electorate-wide or regionally based lobby groups. This opening up process deepens the connection between the union-community campaign and union members, creating possibilities for enhanced campaign power and also for union change. Coalitions are often limited by the narrow engagement of union

and community organisation leaders, not members (Clawson 2003). Effective, deep coalitions occur when unions move away from relying only on hierarchically based decision making and instead begin to meaningfully engage their membership in coalition activity (Moody 1997; Nissen 1999).

Before the Public Education Alliance was launched, the NSW Teachers Federation initiated a series of local Public Education Lobbies in Sydney and around the State. These groups were run by local parents, principals and teachers and were designed to facilitate local lobbying and public protests. The Lobbies successfully organised a series of local forums, including a forum in South West Sydney attended by over 600 people. This was one of the largest public meetings the union had hosted on public education (Anonymous Author Interview, March 2005 Teachers Federation organiser).

Deep coalitions require unions to create spaces for membership participation. This may occur as a result of unions engaging their members in social questions through education programs, increasing the ability of members to take action through skill development, or supporting union delegates taking autonomous action through local decision-making structures (Waterman and Wills 2001). To organise local power, unions may supplement union member participation with locally-based union-community coalitions (Jonas 1998). The effect is that a deep coalition builds the capacity to mobilise large numbers of rank-and-file members at the same time as building the connection between the union and local communities.

For example, membership participation was expanded during the Public Education campaign in 2002, when the NSW Teachers Federation and the Parents and Citizens' Federation organised an Inquiry into Public Education called the Vinson Inquiry. That Inquiry included over 30 local hearings with parents and principals around the State. Maree O'Halloran, the President of the Teachers Federation recognised that this form of action assisted membership participation. The hearings 'touched the middle teachers that doesn't get involved in the union ... they came to the meetings, with parents, everyone' (Author Interview, O'Halloran December 2004). By taking union action into the local school community, the union achieved a level of participation that is difficult to achieve at centrally organised union marches or meetings.

Deep coalitions are also categorised by a deeper union engagement in the central coalition. Nissen argues that union participation in a coalition is a central determinant of its success (Nissen 1999; 2003; 2004). He argues that buy-in is evidenced by a union's willingness to mobilise in support of the campaign, the seniority and number of members or officials it gets involved in the coalitions decision-making structure and its willingness to provide financial resources. This was certainly the case with the Teachers Federations' participation in the Vinson Inquiry. The union provided most of the Inquiry's budget, employing a research team and establishing a separate office for its operation. The union also directed its organisers to assist in organising local hearings. The Inquiry was the 'main business' of the union – deeply engaging the union at all levels (Anonymous interview, March 2005, NSW Teachers Federation Organiser).

Deep coalitions are a powerful form of coalition practice. They facilitate long-term relationships between unions and community organisations, where the breadth of activity between groups is complemented by a depth of activity by participating organisations.

Deep coalitions are also powerful for the impact they have on unions. They not only create powerful strategic relationships that enhance union power but require a process of union renewal to occur. To act with depth, unions must shift decision-making power from union leaders to union organisers and delegates in order to be able to act at a variety of scales. A coalition can only be deep if unions firstly, commit their leadership to reaching out to external organisations, secondly shift their frame of vision to community-wide concerns, and thirdly empower their own delegates and members to meaningfully engage in the campaign. Deep coalition practice seeks to return trade unionism to its movement origins (Nissen 2003).

## **Conclusion**

This article argues that union-community coalitions vary in structure and thus effectiveness, and that these variations have flow-on effects for union power. The different coalition categories developed in the paper are reviewed in Table One. While these categories are distinct, they must not be seen as prescriptive. One coalition is not ‘bad’ and another ‘good’. Instead they explain how the coalition form is variable, and that a deeper engagement between unions and community organisations creates more effective, long term, powerful alliances for lasting social change and enhanced union power.

Union-community coalitions are a feature of union practice. Yet, coalition types vary. This framework seeks to draw out some key features of coalitions and to see how variations in those features vary coalition practice. Thus, the paper notes that factors such as increasing levels of shared common interest, increasing interdependence between unions and community organisations and increasing levels of buy-in of unions into coalition strategy will not only increase the effectiveness of coalition campaigns but also provide a mechanism to increase union power. This framework seeks to draw out different forms of coalition practice and explain how those variations affect the power of particular coalitions. This is critically important for reflections on the significance of this tactic for union renewal. An implication of the argument is that while the practice of union-community coalitions is an indicator of renewal, not all coalitions are equal in how they affect change, build social power or create power for unions.

It is argued that coalitions provide three key resources for unions. Firstly, they provide instrumental power – resources, influence and support. All the coalition forms demonstrate that unions can gain influence in bargaining and politics with the support of community partners. Yet, the ability of a coalition to gain that support depends on how the coalition not only engages the interests of the union but also engages the interests of the community organisation. Mutual self-interest is a key ingredient for increasing the power of coalitions and the power they provide unions. Secondly, coalitions provide legitimacy for union action by creating a broad community of support for union concerns. While this may be assisted by an ad hoc coalition bringing a community speaker to a

rally, legitimacy is enhanced when the issues campaigned on are framed as a ‘community’ concern, for instance using a demand like public education rather than a narrower union-centric frame. Finally, coalitions can also assist the process of union renewal. They can help engage new levels of membership participation and build the capacity of the union to act at different scales – at the local scale as well as at the scale of decision makers. This enhances union power both in the short-term and in the long-term.

**Table 1: A framework of union-community coalitions**

	<b>Ad hoc Coalition</b>	<b>Support Coalition</b>	<b>Mutual-support Coalition</b>	<b>Deep Coalition</b>
<b>Common interest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific group’s agenda/ issue/event</li> <li>- Can be initiated by union or community organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific group’s agenda/ issue/event</li> <li>- Issue indiscriminate, no necessary connection to union members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mutual direct interest of participating organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issue framed as social vision for working people</li> </ul>
<b>Structure and strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Episodic engagement</li> <li>- Tactical not strategic engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Short-term coalition</li> <li>- Some formal shared decision making</li> <li>- Informal union dominance OR limited union engagement</li> <li>- Hasty, reactive engagement</li> <li>- Between organisations with different or similar political practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coalition includes leadership and officials</li> <li>- Joint decision making structure, trust</li> <li>- Mid-term focus and planning</li> <li>- Participating organisations have trust, similar culture/political practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decentralised structure, connections between union and community groups at membership level</li> <li>- Long term strategic plan to build power</li> </ul>
<b>Organisation/ Union participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instrumental engagement</li> <li>- Campaign distant from members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Union officials, campaign distant from union members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Union vision framed as ‘community’ issues</li> <li>- Some mobilisations of members through union</li> <li>- Greater buy-in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Union actively engaging rank and file</li> <li>- Significant buy-in, financial resources</li> </ul>

<b>Scale</b>	- Any place	- Coalition operating at same scale as decision makers	- Effective longer term scale at site of decision maker	- Mobilising capacity at several levels, including local
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Before unions are able to engage in deep coalitions and truly harness the capacity of union-community coalitions they must engage in a process of internal change. Deep coalitions require unions to commit to shared decision making and sharing power with community partners, shifting their frame of vision, and increasing the capacity for membership engagement and involvement. Coalitions are not of themselves a silver bullet for a successful campaign.

This article has attempted to build a conceptual framework to help explain how union-community coalitions provide a mechanism to create both powerful campaigns and powerful unions, and to deepen our understanding of how union engagement with union-community coalitions can create both powerful social change and more powerful unions.

## Notes

1. A similar type of coalition form is described by Frege, Heery et al as a ‘Vanguard Coalition’ (Frege, Heery and Turner 2004).

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## **Primary Research**

### **Survey**

Survey of union branches affiliated to Unions NSW distributed in February 2005. The survey population was 53 union branches, and 24 responses were collected. The response rate was 46 percent. Surveys were completed either by a Union Secretary or by an appointed senior member of staff. Question 28 asked 'has the state branch of your union in the past two years worked on a campaign which involved working with community organisations?' Of 24 respondents, 16 responded 'yes'.

### **Interviews**

Anonymous author interview, Toronto Nov 2004.

Multiple anonymous author interviews, Sydney Dec 2004-May 2005.

Author interview, Maree O'Halloran, President, Teachers Federation, May 2005.

Anonymous author interview, Sydney May 2005.

Anonymous interview, Principal Representative, February 2005.

Anonymous author interview, Teachers Federation Organiser, March 2005.

Anonymous author interview, Chicago Sept 2005.

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# Labour History

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