**How do unions maintain forward momentum?**

Thanks to PPTA for invite to speak, congratulations on your recent success with BOTB.

For an engaged academic – with unions as the preferred audience and user group for one’s research, this is particularly welcome invite

From my experiences, I find that audiences can now be powerpointed to death – giving them something to look at rather than to listen to, where they spend more time taking notes than listening, even when have the overheads, so going to go ‘old school’ if you’ll excuse the pun.

I shall make the same point in different ways and conclude so hopefully you will come away with the main points in a succinct abridged form. Indeed, you can request from Adele Towgood, your Deputy General Secretary Membership, these notes I’ll be speaking from

In the light of BOTB, question asked to address:

How do unions maintain forward momentum?

And not

How do they stop themselves from being pushed backwards?

Let me put this in some context:

Despite many decades of being on the backfoot or in retreat for the last thirty years or more, a number of unions have, nonetheless, scored significant successes in their campaigning work. Success, unfortunately, brings with it its own problems as a result of, for example, rising expectations, with the main challenge being: we want and expect to replicate the success so how do we do this? Another might be: how can we do even better next time?

So, is it a case of doing it better by just doing more of the same, doing it faster, doing it more broadly and deeply – essentially quantitative questions or is a step change needed in thinking – approach and perspective – so the strategy is different – a more qualitative change?

The aim of the talk is to help stimulate thinking and discussion with a view to the PPTA engaging in a deeper process of self-reflection in order to assist forward planning and success in future activities. It is about helping to build capacity

What I’m going to do is give a broad overview – and raise salient questions rather than provide concentrate answers to these questions as the ‘correct’ answers can only be worked out when applied to a specific situation and at a specific time.

Conscious not to offer trite platitudes of ‘they did it, so can you’ or ‘it worked there so it can work here’

I can, therefore, only provide an outline of what the answer to a question might look like.

More importantly and the way to do this is that I can help you construct the ‘right’ questions – that is the first essential step in getting to the ‘right’ answers that make up answering the big question of ‘How do unions maintain forward momentum?’ with regard to the PPTA

This is done on the basis of acknowledging the work done by Catherine Delahunty in her ‘DID WE BRING OUT THE BEST?’ report. It raises some key issues to be addressed that are relatively simple, amounting to not insurmountable acts of fine tuning and in terms of issues that are within the ambit of the PPTA to change and control

PPTA to be commended for commissioning it

It shows the belief that BOTB is not to be a one-off or even once-off campaign/exercise – evidence of strategic thinking –

Here strategy nec but not sufficient – contrast the success of the Blitzkreig tactic in the fall of France – 6 weeks of the Fall Rot (Case Red) - to that of Operation Barbarossa – two years and a disaster

I want to stress that what I’m going to cover is not a technical or admin approach of ‘how to’ but more one about the political economy and social dynamics of campaigning for a union and union movement

Apropos of the BOTB, let me start with campaign narratives – slogans, demands and connections

It is often said that the political campaigns which have had the most positive impact for their advocates and originators are those whose aims, demands and key messages are encapsulated in three or so words. Not just against but for. And this involves deliberate framing but more than just that as requires attribution and action.

In recognition of the 4 words of BOTB - historically, we can think of

No taxation without representation in the American war of independence – Boston Tea Party (the original Tea Party)

Bread, land peace for the October revolution and not ‘All Power to the Soviets’ (raised from Feb to Oct 1917 period with smaller political circles)

More recently

From the US

2008 Change We Can Believe In/Yes We Can

2016 Make American Great Again

From Britain:

Take back control – for 2016 referendum

Get Brexit done – Boris Johnson – Tory leadership and general election

Point of all this – these represent a combination of speaking to a manifest and deep-seated grievance and the provision of an organising principle and axis – reminder of distinction of where just one not enough - necessary and sufficient

And as if to emphasise the point, let me cite some other cases which have not connected in the same way, to the same extent and with the same positive outcome and effect:

Black Lives Matter cf civil rights, gay rights, women’s rights in 1960s/1970s

Planet Before Profit

System change not climate change (No jobs on a dead planet)

People before Profit

One solution, revolution

2012 Obama Forward

2020 Keep America Great???

These are more abstract per se and, in relative terms, they don’t make a connection, don’t combine articulation of a deeply held grievance and organising focus

So sense of not just catching the Zeitgeist but creating, influencing and using it where defined as ‘the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time’. Sometimes also called a new ‘common sense’.

If we then turn to union orientated matters

From Britain

Early 1970s Kill the Bill – Industrial Relations Act 1971 – around Pentonville 5 and class struggle and nearly general strike

Drive for 35 in engineering in 1989-90 then won back - strikes, levy, gate meetings

Britain deserves a pay rise - austerity/pay rises by TUC after 2010 – 750k demos then declining

Protect the right to strike - 2016 TUA right to strike didn’t strike right chord – defend right to strike when meant little to workers – activists concern not members

Across the Tasman Sea, made work and employment a political hot potato:

‘Your Rights at Work’: 2007 federal election, the ACTU campaigned actively against the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation, which included an advertising campaign and public rallies -

FWAct 2009 – success?

Slightly closer to home for you and me is the EIS called ‘Value Education Value Teachers’

EIS pay fell but then 13.5% over 3 years without even strike ballot, 30,000 demo (has 52,000 membership),

EIS 2018 into 2019 campaign of 14 months – ballot called off, no strike etc but mobil, consultative ballots, ballots on offers etc slow burn, patient build up

workload now – called ‘Time to Tackle Workload’

17,000 responses to our just-closed Workload survey; more than 5,000 better than a similar study in middle of pay campaign (which was at the time a record return)

This is a better parallel to BOTB compared to the 2019 Chicago and Los Angeles Public Schools Strike – involving 8 and 6 consecutive days of strike action, mass pickets and mass demonstrations

So to recap here – these slogans are the headlines, the top lines, about deliberate framing of an issue that represents and articulates grievances as well as attribution and action. The slogans or phrases embody something bigger as they contain the key messages

In addition to point about a number of slogans don’t make a connection/don’t combine articulation of a deeply held grievance and organising focus, it is also easier to be against than for etc so that if want to be for something and successful need to combine articulation of a deeply held grievance and organising focus with an understanding of the terrain you operate on – influence new govt etc

Clearly see parallels with BOTB on pay, supply and workload –

Now let’s move on – to the matter of building (internal and external) capacity to campaign successfully again, to exert leverage and exercise influence and here mobilisation of support (internal/external) is key as it is the critical resource

Constituency of support: teachers, parents, school students, other unions, political parties, representative professional bodies, other interested parties

Key that have support – ie not criticism undermining morale and unity and not attacks that are counter-mobilisations but need/want more than that as rather passive

Danger of merely repeating what done before – ‘put the band back together’ again – shock of new no longer there, opponents’ learning curve, sameyness, uninspiring, become routinised, lacks spontaneity, excitement etc

Dangers of success – demobilisation – it’s done, we’ve done our bit, let the union get on with it - and raised expectations of what union can do (especially if members don’t see themselves as union), issue of implementation and checking on

Can add to this burn out, old guard pushed aside by newbies, newbies not given their head/place/recognition

But that doesn’t mean that should shirk away from trying to understand why had a success and what generic and specific in that

What did it happen – assumed or actually known?

In case of BOTB, to state obvious but important aspects - Ppta took strike action which was able to make a political impact, crystalised the campaign and pushed it forward, did alliance of providers and users where prof and policy role too

Worked with NZEI too

Indeed, what is success? What does it look like – these are not entirely objective issues as include the more political and subjective elements of choice of criteria

That said, need to establish robust criteria by which judge issues – order of priority of aims, and in short, medium and long terms

For example, mobilisation yes but strategy and tactics too so not just that mobilised as need to know the how, when and where to apply the leverage generated -

An aside: Here necessary that understanding of the place of education in an advanced and civil society – political resource and thus what a teachers’ strike represents – political and not economic strike – who employer is, not trying to hurt in pocket

Get a sense of this: How long would it take to actually hurt school education via an economic impact?

Were somethings useful by-products or positive unintended consequences?

Talking here not just about whether action highlighted gaps in organisation, developed new activists but also what is the consciousness of members - is it at an advanced state, is it advanced from where it was previously, is it differentially distributed and on what basis (gender, age, ethnicity, space (rural/urban, North/South islands)?

Critically, talking here about participation - especially but not only that of members - as consciousness will be the prime determinant and driver of participation

Here, consciousness is about awareness of own interests and how they align with others and what is needed to be done to prosecute them

What were the participation rates – in what and by who (teachers, parents, school students, interested parties, representative bodies)?

Are rallies a good measure of participation as actually low level – more active than social media but what about canvassing etc?

What was the experience of participation? Was it empowering or disempowering? Grand Old Duke of York - marched up hill and back down

Now move on to make some other observations and raise some further questions

What does public support count for if gov majority and no coming election? You will be in this situation after Sept 2020 so short window of opportunity and there may be a National Party government.

Should the union have a political affiliation?

What would be gained and lost?

Can political independence be guaranteed by giving critical but not unconditional support

Are your structures and processes ‘fit for purpose’ – yes ask the question but what does this really mean?

Are there natural rhythms to the activity of campaigning of unions ie ups and downs, peaks and troughs, can be in a semi-permanent state of mobilisation?

How soon to do big push again? – can become to ritualistic – do you always need a big campaign? Danger of creating a fake campaign cos feel need to have one

What does maintaining momentum mean? Same again every 2 years etc?

Some issues cannot be fully addressed in campaign like place/value of education in society or what type of education – Freire – so unfinished business – importance of bedrock support etc

How does the union establish its own hegemony on education and the place of teachers in it and make its view the new ‘common sense’? This is what Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, called a ‘war of position’. It would lead to a situation where the PPTA (and NZEI) would need to strike or even threat to strike as the ideas underlying BOTB would be already dominant. This is would necessitate a ‘long war’ comprising a ‘long march through the institutions’ as Rudi Dutschke a German Marxist, sociologist and a political activist, put it.

Will there be retribution for past successes? Employers and government less inclined to compromise as want take back? Head up change of government in Sept ie return of National Party?

If Labour is returned as a minority coalition government, will this reduce its ability to act? Will it stiffen its resolve not to act?

**Conclusion**

What to take away – more than anything a series of questions by which to construct a framework for analysing your future union activity and your place in it – showing that there is a level of depth needed to understand means and ends, your agency and the environment you operate in - and their inter-relationships

In this, doesn’t matter in particular if start with slogan and work back or work forwards towards creating the slogan in constructing this framework for analysis – point is it must include certain components.

This is not an exercise for atomised individual members but for on-going collective discussion …

Not easy as routine of representational function and union administration can take over …. Plus work, families and life

So deliberate conscious steps must be taken to allow this process of self-reflection to happen

Hope you will come to my workshop as there is a critical link to workshop from what I have just talked about – going to explore what the role of the individual activist and lay officer is in this process. So this talk is about what needs to be done and the next one is about how to do it.

In all, I hope yourselves will be able to see and understand the bigger picture by using a wide-angle, panoramic lens – gives breadth and depth

**We are all leaders and followers – your roles, rights and responsibilities**

Introduction – then split into groups and do report backs from rapporteurs

It often believed that leaders are nothing without followers and followers are nothing without leaders. While there may be some truth in this, it portrays a rather a rather simplistic way of thinking – somewhat binary, hierarchical and static.

The reality is more complex because leaders and followers can and do exist in different ways, on different things, and at different levels.

Neither the case of ‘You are the union’ nor ‘What is the union doing about this?’

Indeed, leaders need to be followers and followers also need to be leaders. So, the relationship is dynamic and changing. Above all, what exists has been made and can be unmade.

For example, grassroots members can be leaders – forcing ‘leaders’ hands – but equally when membership passive and not engaged up to leaders to take initiatives to move forward and get them involved.

The right to lead also comes with the responsibility to follow.

This makes it a bit more complicated to work out what our roles, rights and responsibilities are. Don’t mean this in the sense of a job spec or job description but more in terms of understanding the social and political dimensions and inter-relationship.

If for example, you are a school rep, do you just do what has already been done by your predecessor or fellow reps. Do you do what is says in the union guidance? Or do you re-imagine the role and the way it is carried out?

Is the role just about representation, organising and union admin or it is also about policy and the way things are done – about policy and organisational culture concerning how representation, organising and union admin are done?

Skills lead to traits in terms of ability to carry out organising – convincing, inspiring, public speaking, making a case, seeing opportunities with political antennae then people skills (empathy, listening as much as speaking), self-confidence and self-belief

Where do these traits come from and how does the union fit in here? Are there organic or inorganic processes that create and develop then, are there formal and informal sources? Family, peer group, significant relations, vocation/calling.

There is no one right style of leadership across time and space, especially as people have different skills and traits. But there are probably wrong styles of leadership:

transactional/transformational

centralised/distributed

bureaucratic/charismatic

Often the more effective forms of leadership are the more demanding ones – like distributed and participative

The key parts of being a leader – at whatever level – are skills in argumentation and agenda setting, mobilising, public speaking, caucusing etc. But these are only of any worth when set in the wider context of both leadership and followership.

What are the tasks of leadership as they pertain to you at your level in the union? Do they shade into followership? Up, level and down

Why would anyone want to be a leader (lay not full-time, employed)?

What get out of it – personal and political satisfaction – takes up your time and energy – sitting here on a Sat, hundreds of miles from home

So about enjoyment/satisfaction, personal development, self-actualisation, meaning – but as you already have a vocation is this another work or has teaching become more like any other job?

Future leaders do not yet know that they will become future leaders, begging the question: can we hasten this, and if so, how?

Questions:

Why would anyone want to be a leader? Isn’t following just easier?

So think about why do you do what you do? What motivates you to be a rep/activist? How does this explain how the PPTA could go about generating more reps/activists? Or are you so ‘weird’ that nothing can be learnt from you?

Think about how you operate – what informs the way you do this? Is it conscious or unconscious? Have you planned out how to be a leader? Do you evaluate and review the way you operate? Do you need appraising in your union role?

What do you need have to do things ‘better’ (however defined) and where would you get the resources to do this from – national union training, self-help book, local community, own epiphany etc?