

The Role of the Full-Time Union Officer*

N. ROBERTSON

University of Reading

K. I. SAMS

The Queen's University of Belfast

I INTRODUCTION

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Many commentators on industrial relations postulate a more ambitious and elaborate role for the trade unions. Leading figures within the movement itself hold similar views. Such developments might be expected to place additional burdens on the professional administrators of unions, the full-time officers. Yet the full-time officer has been a relatively neglected figure in the study of industrial relations.¹ The main purpose of the present study has been to investigate the role of the full-time officer, and the extent to which his capacities seem suited to that role both now and as it may develop. It will be argued that the nature of the job and the personal characteristics of the officer have increasingly diverged. The consequences for the organisation and administration of unions, and for public policy relating to industrial relations, are explored.

2. METHOD OF SURVEY

The survey concerned full-time trade union officers employed in Northern Ireland. The generality of the results must therefore be qualified to some extent, for the local structure both of industry and of trade unionism has special features. Thus certain important industries, and the unions which customarily organise within them, are missing (e.g., mining, iron and steel manufacture). Certain classes of employee (e.g., railwaymen, agricultural workers) are not organised

*We wish to express our grateful thanks to the Social Science Research Council who financed the survey on which this paper is based, to the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (and in particular to the former Northern Ireland Officer Mr W. J. Blease) who facilitated the conduct of the survey in many ways, to our colleague Mr P. C. O'Kane who gave us much useful advice, to Mrs Geraldine Magennis who acted as research assistant while the project was being designed, and to Mr D. A. McGrath who as research assistant during the survey and the analysis of results rendered invaluable assistance. We are also immensely grateful, of course, to the many trade union officers who gave so willingly of their time and patience in interviews.

1. For the most comprehensive treatment of his role in Britain, see Clegg *et al.* (1961). Useful information is contained in Roberts (1956), the Government Social Survey (1968) and Parker (1974). The position in the Republic of Ireland is described exhaustively in Hillery *et al.* (1975). Differences in purposes, samples and methods preclude detailed statistical comparisons amongst these studies and between them and our own; however, on many major issues substantial agreement is registered.

by the traditional British union; in consequence, general unions, and in particular the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (as it is known in Northern Ireland), account for a disproportionately high percentage of total union membership. Of 87 unions operating in the Province, the headquarters of 17 are in Northern Ireland, and those of 5 are in the Irish Republic. The most senior status enjoyed by any officer of an "outside" union is that of regional officer. Such officers generally have a considerably greater degree of autonomy than their equivalents in the country of origin; they also have greater responsibilities, for example, representing their unions' interests in relation to the Northern Ireland Administration. It must also be remembered that trade union officers in Northern Ireland have for some seven years operated in a unique situation of acute social and political stress.

However, the system of industrial relations has many similarities to that of Great Britain. Many unions, federations of unions and employers' associations are common to both; the pattern of labour law and social services is modelled on the British counterpart; and, of course, the Northern Ireland economy is closely integrated with that of Great Britain (see also Review Body on Industrial Relations (1974), Part I). And a constrained sample does have certain operational advantages. Thus coverage of all full-time officers was feasible; the officers were of largely similar background; there were no wide differences of union rank; and the authors had been able to develop good personal relationships with many of the officers included in the survey.

Attention was confined to officers employed on direct union activities: specialist staff, and those concerned solely with the internal administration of organisations were excluded, as were full-time branch secretaries. The number of officers so defined as at 1 January 1973 was 92.

On agreeing to participate, each respondent was sent a questionnaire containing 23 mainly factual questions. At a subsequent interview, these answers were checked and a further 40 questions asked; factual questions of a more confidential nature were reserved for this stage. The procedure was completed for 81 officers over the period March-September 1973; the officers interviewed were drawn from unions representing approximately 88 per cent of the total trade union membership in Northern Ireland.

3. PRESENTATION

The main results are summarised in the following four sections²; a final section contains some discussion and conclusions. A variety of relationships between particular results and such variables as age of officers, method of appointment, size and financial status of union, and type of union were explored. The last relationship was found to be the most interesting, and, with a few exceptions, it is the only one drawn upon in presenting the summary results. For this purpose,

2. The full results of the survey have been deposited with the Social Science Research Council Survey Archive, University of Essex.

unions were allocated into one of four groups: (1) General Manual, (2) Other Manual A (unions which were, or which at one time had been, mainly representative of skilled workers), (3) Other Manual B (unions which, though not "open" in the manner of the General Manual unions, similarly contained predominantly semi-skilled or unskilled workers), (4) White Collar. The Appendix shows the allocation of each union, also its membership and number of officers. The findings are presented in four major categories: the nature of the job; factors influencing performance; motivation; the impact of change.

II THE NATURE OF THE JOB

I. DIRECT UNION ACTIVITIES

(a) Trade Union Objectives

Table 1 shows what officers ranked as the three most important of six possible union aims.³ The securing of improved terms and conditions of employment was accorded pride of place; little importance was attached to more general aims.⁴

Table 1: *Ranking of union aims by relative importance*

Union aims	Relative ranking ¹		
	By full-time officers	Imputed to members by full-time officers	
		Members believed to differ	All members
To secure improved terms and conditions of employment	40	48	46
To increase members' security ²	19	24	23
To improve members' status ³	13	18	16
To promote continuity and development of union	14	5	8
To advance workers' interests in relation to other groups	6	5	4
To promote general economic advance	9	1	4

1. Rankings of 1, 2, 3 were given scores of 3, 2, 1 respectively; aggregate scores in each column were converted to percentages to facilitate comparisons (due to rounding, totals do not equal 100).

2. For example, in their jobs, when unemployed or sick.

3. For example, regarding physical working conditions, victimisation, consultation rights.

3. The process of constructing any list necessarily introduces the risk of bias—some aims may simply be excluded; however, the list here used was based on replies to open-ended questions at the pilot stage. Similar qualifications apply to the discussions of work allocation and work methods below.

4. Clegg *et al.* (1961, p. 262) found that the officers in their sample attached first priority to "100 per cent organisation". However, "Higher wages and better conditions" came a very good second; it was given first priority by shop stewards.

Of 66 officers who were prepared to offer an opinion, 37 believed that their members' ranking would be different. In fact, the objectives imputed to such members confirmed, for the most part, the overall ranking of the officers themselves, as did the imputed aims of *all* members, whether considered to hold the same or different views; however, members in general were believed to accord considerably less importance to promoting the advance either of the unions or of the general economic well-being.

(b) *Trade Union Functions*

Table 2 shows how officers rated the calls made upon their time by four of their major activities. It would appear that they were able to allocate most of their working time to negotiation of changes in terms and conditions of employment, which they—and, it was believed, their members—considered to be the prime purpose of trade unionism. A direct question provided further evidence on this point, 81 per cent of officers believing that their current working patterns did in fact make the best use of their energies; the remainder revealed that, with free choice, they would re-allocate their time in favour of negotiation at the expense of dealing with individual problems.

As many as 94 per cent of the officers felt that the scope of trade union functions had increased since their appointments, mainly because of the wider content of collective bargaining which had evolved. Almost 90 per cent of officers also believed that their basic tasks had become more complex; the main reason was apparently the need to understand and implement an increased volume of relevant legislation (see also Brown and Lawson (1973), pp. 439–40).

Table 2: *Ranking of union work by time occupied*

	<i>Union work</i>	<i>Relative ranking</i> ¹
Recruitment and organisation (including branch work)		23
Negotiation of changes in terms and conditions of employment		31
Participating in grievance procedure		24
Dealing with individuals' personal problems		23

1. Rankings of 1, 2, 3, 4 were given scores of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively; aggregate scores were converted to percentages to facilitate comparisons (due to rounding, the total does not equal 100).

In spite of these difficulties, a fair measure of success had been achieved in a field where success may be quantified. Thus 47 per cent of officers claimed 100 per cent organisation in enterprises for which they were responsible, the proportion ranging from 29 per cent in White Collar unions to 52 per cent in General Manual unions. The position had been reached without any great success in the matter of introducing check-off systems, only 38 per cent of officers having achieved this in respect of 75 per cent or more of their members.

2. "OUTSIDE" COMMITMENTS

Eighty-three per cent of the officers were involved, because of their office, in serving on bodies not connected with normal union or union/employer activities, the proportion rising to 92 per cent in General Manual unions. The commitment was most commonly (62 of 112 instances quoted) in respect of "industrial bodies" such as industrial tribunals and wages councils; other examples were public administration (29 instances) and local and national government (8 instances); one officer had just been appointed Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (see also Hillery *et al* (1975), pp. 19-21, 77).

3. THE VOLUME OF WORK

Some indication of the volume of work falling on officers may be inferred from a consideration of their organisational responsibilities. Constituency sizes are shown in Table 3. The heaviest responsibility lay on officers of General Manual

Table 3: Constituency sizes

Membership range	Officers in range									
	All officers		General Manual		Other Manual A		Other Manual B		White Collar	
	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent. ¹
0- 99	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
100- 499	3	.4	—	—	1	5	—	—	2	14
500-1,999	18	22	7	19	4	20	5	45	2	14
2,000-9,999	51	63	27	75	10	50	6	55	8	57
10,000 and over	9	11	2	6	5	25	—	—	2	14

1. Due to rounding, the total does not equal 100.

unions, the lightest on officers of Other Manual B unions.⁵ For 64 per cent of officers the constituency ranged over the whole of Northern Ireland. As regards branch administration, 47 per cent of officers were responsible for 4 or fewer, 12 per cent for 20 or more.⁶ Branches were in most cases (64 per cent of officers) based both on geographical area and on particular places of work; only 12 per cent of officers were responsible solely for factory-based branches, although the figure rose to 27 per cent for officers of Other Manual B unions.

5. The mean ratio, calculated from aggregate figures for union membership and numbers of officers in Northern Ireland, was approximately 1:2,917. For all unions in the survey the ratio was 1:2,647; for the various union groups it was:—General Manual 1:2,821, Other Manual A 1:2,790, Other Manual B 1:1,840, White Collar 1:2,610.

6. The mean ratio of officers to branches was 1:14; this is low in comparison with figures quoted for Britain of 1:17 (Clegg *et al.*, 1961, p. 125) and 1:32 (Government Social Survey, 1968, p. 57).

Table 4: *Hours worked per week*¹

<i>Hours range</i>	<i>Officers in range</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i> ²
Under 40	1	1
40-49	20	25
50-59	35	43
60-69	19	23
70-79	2	2
80 and over	1	1

1. On direct union activity and including evening and weekend working.
2. Three officers responded with "Don't know"; the percentages are based on the total sample of 81 officers and therefore do not sum to 100.

Actual work-loads, as shown in Table 4, were heavy. Saturday working was common, 33 per cent of officers having worked 7 or more Saturdays in the previous three months; the Northern Ireland "troubles" were partly responsible, evening activity being made difficult. As many as 78 per cent of officers were convinced that, since they were appointed, their jobs had become more demanding in terms of hours worked.

4. WORK METHODS

Table 5 shows how officers ranked four methods of performing union work in terms of time spent on them. There was an appreciable emphasis on "office work" and attending meetings with employers' representatives.

Seventy-four per cent of officers spent 50 per cent or more of their working time outside their offices, the proportion reaching 83 per cent for officers of General Manual unions.

Table 5: *Ranking of work methods by time occupied*

<i>Work methods</i>	<i>Relative ranking</i> ¹
Attending union meetings	22
Attending meetings with employers' representatives	27
Office work ²	30
Attending informal meetings with individuals or groups	22

1. Rankings of 1, 2, 3, 4 were given scores of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively; aggregate scores were converted to percentages to facilitate comparisons (due to rounding, the total does not equal 100).
2. For example, correspondence, reports, preparing briefs.

III FACTORS INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE

I. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

(a) Age

Table 6 shows the age distribution of officers included in the survey. The typical officer appeared as somewhat elderly. Officers who had been appointed by election were found on average to be slightly older (76 per cent over 50) than those selected (61 per cent over 50).

Table 6: Age distribution of officers

Age range	Officers in range									
	All officers		General manual		Other manual A		Other manual B		White collar	
	Number	Per- cent. ¹	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent. ¹	Number	Per- cent.
20-29	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	14
30-39	8	10	1	3	2	10	2	18	3	21
40-49	17	21	12	33	1	5	3	27	1	7
50-59	40	49	16	44	15	75	5	45	4	29
60 and over	14	17	7	19	2	10	1	9	4	29

1. Due to rounding, the total does not equal 100.

Not only was average age high; most officers had also been appointed fairly late in life. Thus 53 per cent had been at least 40 years of age at appointment, 12 per cent at least 50. Average age at appointment was lowest in White Collar unions, highest in Other Manual A unions.

(b) Education

Summary data on officers' educational backgrounds are shown in Table 7. Few had enjoyed extended full-time education, although a majority had undertaken part-time studies after school. As might be expected, officers of White Collar unions displayed the highest educational attainment. Thus 57 per cent had obtained formal school qualifications, they included 6 of the 7 officers who had engaged in full-time further education, and provided all of the 8 cases (5 from teachers' unions) of officers acquiring a university level qualification by full-time or part-time study.⁷

7. Hillery *et al.* (1975, pp. 10-12, 67-8) found decidedly more impressive educational experience and qualifications to be common in the Republic of Ireland.

Table 7: *Educational background of officers*

Level of education	Officers attaining level	
	Number	Percentage
School leaving age 14 years or under	51	63
School leaving age 17 years or over	9	11
Attendance at elementary school only	49	60
Attendance at grammar school	13	16
Formal school qualifications obtained	20	25
Full-time further education undertaken	7	9
Part-time further education undertaken ¹	48	59

1. Continuous periods of 12 weeks or more.

(c) *Relevant Experience*

(i) Residential

Most officers had local backgrounds, 72 (89 per cent) being of Northern Irish origin; 4 others were born in the Republic of Ireland.

(ii) Employment

As many as 86 per cent of the officers had worked in occupations covered by the unions of which they eventually became officers.

(iii) Union

Seventy-two per cent of officers had had experience of no other union than that currently employing them, and 78 per cent had been members for 20 years or more (90 per cent in Other Manual A unions). However, average length of service as an officer was not great, average age at appointment, as already mentioned, having been high. Thus 53 per cent of officers had been in posts less than 10 years (82 per cent in Other Manual B unions). For 80 per cent of officers, experience had been confined to their present posts; the remainder had moved from other full-time posts with the same unions.⁸

Eighty-nine per cent of officers had held lay office in their unions prior to appointment, the proportion being highest (100 per cent) in Other Manual A unions, lowest (64 per cent) in White Collar unions; elected officers were marginally more likely to have had lay experience. However, only 44 per cent of

8. Hillery *et al.* (1975, pp. 4-5, 62-3) found in contrast that a considerable degree of movement between unions is evidenced in the Republic of Ireland. Taken in conjunction with a superior educational background (see footnote 7), this would lend weight to their suggestion (p. 5) that in the Republic trade union office is seen by the "up-and-coming man" as a profession.

officers had served as shop stewards or equivalent representatives, and only 13 per cent—and none in White Collar unions—had been branch secretaries.⁹

(d) *Relevant Training*

Seventy-nine per cent of officers had access to training facilities within their own unions; all officers of General Manual unions were covered, but only 36 per cent of those of White Collar unions. After appointment, 65 per cent had attended such courses, or courses run by other trade union organisations; the proportion was lowest (43 per cent) in White Collar unions, highest (78 per cent) in General Manual unions, in the largest of which—the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union—some induction training is mandatory. It appeared that a rising proportion of new officers were attending such courses, 76 per cent of those in the age group 40–49 having done so as compared with 57 per cent of those aged 60 and over. Ninety-one per cent of officers felt that attendance had improved their job performance. However, 63 per cent believed themselves to be lacking in some particular form of training; management techniques (including work study), statistics, and “general education” were most frequently mentioned.

2. COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN THE UNION

Seventy-six per cent of officers in the survey were content that “upwards” channels of communication between themselves and higher levels in their unions were satisfactory. The most common reason for an apparently favourable situation (39 of 112 explanations offered) was a satisfactory formal communications structure, a result undoubtedly influenced by some unions having Northern Ireland headquarters, and the senior officers of the others having considerable autonomy.

Similarly, 74 per cent of officers were satisfied that their “downwards” channels of communication with members were effective; however, only 57 per cent of officers of White Collar unions were in this position. The explanation most frequently offered (in 41 out of 84 cases) as to why any break-down in communications had been avoided related to the “easy accessibility” of the officer himself.

3. LAY ASSISTANCE

Only 8 of the officers in the survey did not have some responsibility for workplace representatives; 27 had 100 or more, and 7 had 400 or more stewards in

9. In comparison with the other surveys mentioned, experience as branch secretary appears decidedly low. Thus Clegg *et al.* (1961, p. 51) found that 38 per cent of their sample had held this office; Brown and Lawson (1973, p. 433) quote a figure of 50 per cent, and the Government Social Survey (1968, p. 54) one of 40 per cent. The explanation probably lies in there being fewer branches in relation to total membership in Northern Ireland than is the case in the rest of the United Kingdom.

their constituencies. Only 3 officers, however, acknowledged the existence of one or more *full-time* stewards.¹⁰

Sixty-eight per cent of officers agreed that shop stewards rendered them valuable assistance in the performance of their duties, mainly by discharging union business at shop floor level (45 of 80 instances quoted); the proportion ranged from 50 per cent in White Collar unions to 80 per cent in Other Manual A unions. The 26 officers who were disappointed with their stewards were asked how they thought improvement might be secured; of 32 suggestions made, 18 related to more training and 11 to more rigorous selection procedures. Only 21 of the officers were concerned by high turnover amongst their stewards.

4. SUPPORTING FACILITIES

As will be seen from Table 8, officers on the whole appeared to be well provided for; however, only 14 were given a home telephone, and only 5, all from one White Collar union based in Northern Ireland, had access to a local research department.

Table 8: *Facilities available*

Facility	Officers having facility	
	Number	Percentage
Own office	62	77
Secretarial assistance	75	93
Office telephone	79	98
Home telephone	14	17
Union car and running costs	53	65
Running costs of own car	13	16
Local research department	5	6
National research department	63	78

Nonetheless, in spite of general satisfaction, 69 per cent of officers regretted the absence of some facility or another; of 84 reported deficiencies, the most commonly mentioned were: *personal* secretarial/clerical assistance (21 instances), various items of office equipment (16 instances) and research facilities (10 instances). Not unexpectedly, only 3 officers regretted not having a home telephone provided by their unions. The reason most frequently quoted in explanation of deficiencies (33 of 72 reasons given) was shortage of union funds.

10. This quite certainly understates the position. There seemed to be a reluctance amongst certain officers to admit that so much union work was done at workshop level as to justify stewards giving all their working time to the task. Clegg *et al.* (1961, p. 179) concluded that unions were much more ready to accept full-time shop steward convenors *de facto* than to recognise them *de jure*.

5. EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

(a) *Relationships with Employers*

Seventy-one per cent of officers found the managers with whom they had contact to be "fairly co-operative", and 22 per cent found them to be "very co-operative"; only one officer claimed that managers were "uncooperative".

There were, however, particular reservations. Thus of 61 officers who gave an opinion, 20 considered that personnel officers lacked competence in their jobs and of 64 officers who responded to the question 48 claimed that personnel officers were given insufficient authority when representing their firms in negotiation. Again, of 105 reasons offered as to the most common single cause of industrial disputes, 17 related to "bad management", and of 107 remedies proposed, 13 were concerned with "better management training".¹¹ Finally, 65 per cent of officers reckoned that, while engaging in negotiation, they did not have access to sufficient information from firms, especially financial information.

One particular source of potential conflict with employers was more closely investigated. Sixty-three per cent of officers agreed with the Donovan Commission finding that managers, other things being equal, preferred to deal with shop stewards (see Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, 1965-1968 (1968), p. 28 para. 107, and Clegg *et al* (1961), p. 175). However, of 65 reasons offered for this preference, only 10 were in any way critical of its occurring.

(b) *Government Policy*

As already mentioned, the need to understand and implement a greater volume of relevant legislation was considered to be a prime cause of the increasing complexity of the trade union officer's job. More direct questioning revealed that 84 per cent of officers believed that periods of incomes policy added to the difficulties of their jobs, mainly (48 out of 87 reasons offered) by adding to the problem of satisfying members' requirements in collective bargaining. It should be noted that the Industrial Relations Act 1971, the source of many problems in Britain, did not apply in Northern Ireland.

(c) *Relationships with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions*

Only four officers were associated with unions not affiliated to the ICTU; the remaining 77 were divided 36:41 as to whether the operations of the Northern Ireland Committee of Congress did or did not facilitate their work. Those who felt that advantages accrued were asked to give examples; of 62 quoted, the most common were the provision of information (23 instances) and of training and technical services such as work study (11 instances of each).

11. The most common causes were believed to be "bad communications" (33 instances) and "terms and conditions of employment" (29 instances); the most favoured remedy was "closer consultation" (30 instances).

(d) The Northern Ireland "Troubles"

One impact of "the troubles" on the trade union officer's job has already been considered in the discussion of his working hours; they had contributed towards a shift from evenings towards weekends for the holding of meetings. Direct questioning confirmed that 95 per cent of officers believed that "the troubles" had added to the difficulties of their jobs. The most obvious problem (38 of 141 examples given) arose in connection with organising activity; of considerable importance also were transport difficulties and the introduction of "sectarian strife" to the workplace (31 instances of each).

IV MOTIVATION

The considerations discussed in the previous section relate to *potential* performance in the job; *actual* performance clearly involves motivation. A broad distinction may be made between "non-economic" and "economic" motivating factors.

I. NON-ECONOMIC MOTIVATION

The basic motivation to engage in full-time trade union work seems generally to have been non-economic. Thus of 141 reasons given, 61 referred to a "natural extension of lay union work" and 52 to some form of "idealism"; only five related to expected economic benefits. Thirty-six per cent of officers had had to face an election in order to achieve their objective, the proportion varying from seven per cent in White Collar unions to 95 per cent in Other Manual A unions.¹²

2. ECONOMIC MOTIVATION

Only 10 (12 per cent) of officers had stated weekly working hours, the highest incidence (28 per cent) arising in White Collar unions; none of the General Manual union officers were in this position. Stated hours for those concerned ranged from 32½ to 40 per week.

Basic salaries varied from £1,460 to £5,000 per annum. As will be seen from Table 9, most officers received salaries ranging from £2,000 to £3,000; Other Manual B unions offered by far the lowest salaries.¹³ A slight majority (56 per cent) of officers felt that their salaries were "too low", the remainder believing that they were "about right".

12. Hillery *et al.* (1975, pp. 5-6) found that in the Republic of Ireland as many as 92 per cent of full-time officers below national level were selected; this would substantiate their tentative conclusion regarding a greater degree of "professionalism" amongst officers than is the case in the United Kingdom (see footnote 8 above).

13. In the United Kingdom, average weekly earnings for adult male manual workers in manufacturing industry were £36.20 (approximately £1,900 per annum) in October 1972 and £41.52 (approximately £2,200 per annum) in October 1973; average weekly hours worked were 44.1 and 44.7 in the two years (*Department of Employment Gazette*, 1973, p. 148 and 1974, p. 140).

Table 9: Salary distribution of officers

Salary range	Officers in range									
	All officers		General manual		Other manual A		Other manual B		White collar	
	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent. ¹	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.	Number	Per- cent.
Less than £2,000	13	16	1	3	3	15	6	55	3	21
£2,000-£2,499	35	43	27	75	4	20	3	27	1	7
£2,500-£2,999	24	30	6	17	12	60	2	18	4	29
£3,000-£3,499	4	5	2	6	—	—	—	—	2	14
£3,500 and over	5	6	—	—	1	5	—	—	4	29

1. Due to rounding, the total does not equal 100.

As regards ancillary terms and condition, 98 per cent of officers were entitled to retirement pensions from their unions; pension schemes were contributory in 85 per cent of cases. As is shown in Table 8, 81 per cent of officers were either provided with a car or with the running costs of a car. Only 27 per cent of officers considered it likely that they would ever secure promotion. However, of the 27 officers interviewed who were under 50 years of age, 16 expected promotion.

Finally, in spite of various reservations expressed regarding economic motivation, 89 per cent of officers claimed that, if they could live their lives over again, they would still choose careers in the trade union movement.

V IMPACT OF CHANGE

I. STRUCTURE

Only one officer did not agree with the view that a reduction in the number of unions currently operating would increase overall efficiency. Of 124 benefits suggested as likely to result, 34 related to diminishing inter-union conflict and 33 to avoiding duplication of resources.

It has frequently been suggested that more effective performance might attend an increased use of the workplace, rather than place of residence, as the basis of branch organisation. Thirty-six officers (44 per cent) claimed that such a development was simply "not applicable to the circumstances of their union". Of the remaining 45, 38 (84 per cent) agreed with the proposition; of 52 advantages quoted, 18 were concerned with more effective use of the branch as an agency for communication and control, while 16 related to the benefit to be derived from greater "common interest" amongst branch members.

2. ORGANISATION

A majority (57 per cent) of those interviewed believed that their unions were sufficiently well staffed, the proportion ranging from 36 per cent in White Collar unions to 72 per cent in General Manual unions. Where deficiencies were held to exist, the most common explanation (16 out of 34 reasons offered) was inadequate union funds.

Sixty-seven per cent of officers were satisfied with standards of entrants, a proportion rising to 80 per cent in Other Manual A unions; however, only 58 per cent of officers of General Manual unions were content. In unions which elected their officers, 76 per cent were satisfied as compared with 62 per cent in unions using selection. A slight majority (52 per cent) of officers believed that new recruits did not receive enough training and guidance; as many as 64 per cent in White Collar unions were uneasy as to the situation.

Officers were equally divided as to whether salaries were sufficient to attract good recruits, the proportion of those satisfied ranging from 30 per cent in Other Manual A unions to 71 per cent in White Collar unions. Where there were believed to be shortcomings, the reason most frequently offered (in 28 out of 51 responses) was again shortage of union finance.

3. METHODS

Associated with the identification of a trend towards greater delegation of trade union work to the shop floor has been the argument that the process should be "formalised"; only then would the load on full-time officers be likely to decrease. At least in the matter of collective bargaining, the officers' main function, the trend was confirmed by the survey. Whilst in their particular circumstances the question was inapplicable for nine officers, 81 per cent of the remainder agreed that they had experienced an extension of localised negotiation. However, only 65 per cent of those concerned believed that industrial relations would be improved—and their own tasks facilitated—were this made more "formal".¹⁴

VI DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey revealed many differences between individuals and organisations. However, certain generalisations seem justified.

I. PROBLEMS OF THE OFFICER'S ROLE

Comparing the nature of the job and the personal characteristics of the officer,

14. Greater formality in workshop industrial relations was an important recommendation of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965-1968 (1968, pp. 262-3, paras. 1019-22). In the Republic of Ireland, Hillery *et al.* (1975, pp. 53-4, 118-9) found a decided preference for national or industrial agreements.

an undoubted divergence appears. Exacting tasks are being tackled by an ageing work-force. A wider and more complex range of duties is being required of people who themselves are prepared to stress the limitations of their education and training. The officer's main method of working—"office work"—is that for which he is probably least well-prepared.

Projecting present trends, this divergence is likely to increase. The general calibre of officers, given their own views on inducements offered to recruits, may well decline. The work will become more varied and more exacting. The need to administer more elaborate forms of collective bargaining, and to understand and apply an increasing volume of relevant legislation, is already causing strain, and these developments are likely to continue. In the near future will lie the need to comprehend a large volume of information required of companies and to handle the consequences of union participation on boards of management. Should more power be vested in shop stewards, the officer's "overlooking" and servicing function must become more onerous. His narrow experience may well aggravate other limitations in respect of his achieving the flexibility of mind and skill which is of such vital importance in a situation of change.

For a variety of reasons, therefore, the present type of trade union officer may become progressively less well-matched to the requirements of his job. Implications for efficiency of performance will be obvious. Any deterioration will be accentuated if the officer's morale should suffer.

In somewhat similar manner, doubts arise regarding relationships between full-time trade union officers and shop stewards; again, any gap which exists at present may be expected to widen. A surprisingly high proportion of officers have no first-hand experience of stewards' duties. "Generation gaps", resulting from the high average age of officers, must reproduce some of the strains which they generate in many other areas of social life. Greater power vested in stewards must make the officer's intervention even less welcome than, in certain areas, it is at present.¹⁵

Relationships between full-time officers and rank-and-file membership may also be put under increasing strain. A fair proportion of officers believe that their members hold different views of trade union objectives from themselves, and a difference in relative emphasis at least seems likely. There are again problems deriving from "generation gaps". Increasingly powerful shop stewards are certain to compete more strongly for members' loyalties.¹⁶ The net consequence may well

15. There is already evidence to suggest that the full-time officer's confidence in the satisfactory state of his relationships with stewards is not entirely reciprocated; see, for example, Government Social Survey (1968, pp. 21-2) for stewards' views on incidence of contact with, and general importance of, officers. That substantial differences in attitude on important questions of industrial relations exist has been amply demonstrated; see Blumler and Ewbank (1970, pp. 44-7).

16. Blumler and Ewbank (1970, p. 54) demonstrate that members' loyalties lie much more strongly with shop stewards than with full-time officers. A similar view is developed in McCarthy and Parker (1968, pp. 57-8).

be a decline in the officer's capacity to communicate with his membership and, more seriously, to represent accurately their views.¹⁷

Should these eventualities occur, and their efficiency, morale, and capacity to communicate with members and stewards be impaired, then doubts must arise regarding the officers' ability to preserve the satisfactory relationships at present claimed with management. A diminished capacity in this respect could in turn aggravate many of the problems already discussed.

The role which the full-time officer has to perform places him under a strain which is considerable and which is likely to increase. In the face of this development, and given that a majority of officers consider their salaries insufficient, their non-economic motivation may progressively prove less of an offset. The consequences for the efficient operation of unions must be serious.

2. GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

The survey results, bearing in mind the qualifications on generality mentioned in the Introduction, have certain wider implications. Thus incomes policies, adding as they do to the difficulties of the full-time officer's job, are unlikely, at least on this ground, to engage his genuine support; a similar lack of enthusiasm seems likely to attend attempts to introduce greater "formalisation" of the workplace industrial relations system. Elaborate schemes for union participation in the control of companies must encounter the problem that union talent is already thinly spread, and that those who would be most concerned with monitoring schemes lack the time, and probably also the appropriate skills. Finally, if more evidence were needed, those who see "national interest" and "union interest" as coincident in proposals for industrial relations reform¹⁸ probably under-estimate what little importance officers, in their union role, attach to such general objectives.

3. UNION ACTION

Clearly a basic problem facing the unions is that of achieving a closer match between the full-time officer's job specification and his capacities. The broad content of the officer's work, it has been suggested, does square well enough with his—and his members'—views as to priorities. The resulting workload, given the present complement and capacity of officers and the methods of working which

17. The Government Social Survey (1968, p. 122) investigated how union members got information about what is happening in their unions; the full-time officer was not mentioned as a source by any respondent, whereas the shop steward was quoted by 40 per cent. Blumler and Ewbank (1970, pp. 46-7) show that members, like shop stewards, hold very different views from full-time officers on many important industrial relations matters.

18. See, for example, the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965-1968 (1968, p. iii): "to consider relations between managements and employees and the role of trade unions and employers' associations in promoting the interests of their members and *in accelerating the social and economic advance of the nation*, (our italics) with particular reference to the Law affecting the activities of these bodies".

they employ, is, however, too heavy; adjustment must therefore be sought in these "given" areas.

Changes in the structure and organisation of unions might be expected to contribute towards improvement. Thus, many officers believed that a reduction in the number of unions would enable better use to be made of existing resources; however, one must wonder as to how readily they would reach agreement as to which unions should disappear. The survey suggests that, for many unions, increased use of the workplace-based branch as the locus of union activity is of limited applicability; furthermore, if more branch activity were generated, the officer's servicing duties might well increase. Attempts to delegate more union work to shop stewards would meet similar constraints and raise similar problems. More hope may attach to changes in organising methods, e.g., extension of the closed-shop agreement and of the check-off system; however, in the short period, considerable extra work would be involved for officers in achieving advance on these fronts.

Moving to matters more directly relating to personnel, it has frequently been argued that there are simply too few trade union officers; a substantial proportion (43 per cent) of those interviewed endorsed this view, and thus the need for the unions concerned to increase recruitment as a matter of urgency.

However, although some improvement in the situation may be achieved through adjustment in the methods of operation of unions, and in the numbers of officers which they employ, the crux of the matter must be in recruiting and retaining, in training and motivating personnel capable of discharging a role which is steadily widening in scope and increasing in complexity. Given the existing age distribution and educational background of officers in most unions, there are clearly limits on what can be achieved in respect of those already in office, although encouragement of attendance at carefully designed "refresher" courses may help. The main effort, however, must be concentrated upon recruitment. Little would be achieved by merely appointing additional staff of the traditional sort and by the traditional methods, especially if, as many officers clearly fear, a satisfactory standard of recruit is unlikely to be attracted; indeed, were more sophisticated methods of working concurrently introduced, the situation could worsen. A new policy may have to include more rigorous age and educational requirements, greater flexibility regarding conditions of prior membership, and more careful screening and interviewing of applicants. The most substantial modification of existing procedures would be required of those unions who elect their officers. More attention must be given to induction procedures, and to devising continuing programmes of education and training. Simulation methods may have to be used to inculcate "experience" and communication skills which the traditional officers acquired through long service, although many of these might themselves benefit from such programmes. In these and other related matters unions could clearly draw upon the experience and skills developed in connection with the education and training of managers; indeed, existing management courses could well be utilised.

Suitable recruits will only be attracted, retained and motivated by appropriate salaries and other terms and conditions of employment (e.g., reasonable working hours, attractive promotion prospects). For some unions this must involve a considerable revision of traditional practice; it will also involve the need to augment financial resources, and therefore to convince memberships that good trade unionism, like good business administration, can never be cheap.

The emphasis to be placed upon particular areas will clearly vary from union to union; the survey suggests what it might be in different types of union. Thus General Manual unions may have to give particular attention to improving the standard of recruits and, given the very large constituencies which are common, to staffing ratios. Other Manual A unions must offer more attractive starting salaries and seek to appoint younger officers; it is in this group that the problem of changing appointment from election to selection will most obviously arise. Other Manual B unions must give urgent attention to salary levels in general. The White Collar unions, in spite of enjoying a relatively satisfactory position as regards terms and conditions of employment and the educational qualifications of personnel, may face the greatest problems in evolving a truly professional class of officer. Thus staffing ratios should be improved and more training facilities provided. They face particular problems in inculcating relevant experience, in developing more effective workplace representation, and in improving internal communications.

Whatever the variations between unions may be, and allowing that there will certainly be found exceptions where the problems discussed have long been appreciated and adjusted to trade unions in general, in company with other social and economic organisations, are presented with the problem of developing a highly-skilled class of professional administrator.¹⁹ The "traditional" trade union officer—by his devotion, energy and patience in a frequently thankless job—has given impressive service to the movement; it is doubtful, however, whether the future effectiveness of trade unionism can be sustained on the same basis.

19. The advantages and disadvantages of "professionalism" are examined by Clegg *et al.* (1961, pp. 217-8). As already indicated, the tendency may be well under way in the Republic of Ireland (see footnotes 8 and 12).

REFERENCES

- BLUMLER, J. G. and ALISON EW BANK, 1970. "Trade unionists, the mass media, and unofficial strikes", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. VII, No. 1.
- BROWN, W. and MARGARET LAWSON, 1973. "The Training of Trade Union Officers", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. XI, No. 3.
- CLEGG, H. A., A. J. KILLICK and REX ADAMS, 1961. *Trade Union Officers*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Department of Employment Gazette*, 1973, Vol. LXXXI, No. 2 and 1974, Vol. LXXXII, No. 2. London: HMSO.
- GOVERNMENT SOCIAL SURVEY, 1968. *Workplace Industrial Relations*. London: HMSO.
- HILLERY, B., A. KELLY and A. I. MARSH, 1975. *Trade Union Organisation in Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Productivity Centre.

- MCCARTHY, W. E. J. and S. R. PARKER, 1968. *Shop Stewards and Industrial Relations*. London: HMSO.
- PARKER, S., 1974. *Workplace Industrial Relations* 1972. London: HMSO.
- REVIEW BODY ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, 1974. *Industrial Relations in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO.
- ROBERTS, B. C., 1956. *Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain*. London: G. Bell.
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON TRADE UNIONS AND EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS 1965-1968, 1968. *Report*. London: HMSO.

APPENDIX

The Nature of the Sample

<i>Union group</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Membership in Northern Ireland¹</i>	<i>No. of officers in Northern Ireland</i>	
			<i>Total</i>	<i>Interviewed</i>
General Manual	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union	84,197	27	26
	General and Municipal Workers' Union	13,796	5	3
	Irish Transport and General Workers' Union	7,344	5	5
	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers	7,500 (112,837)	3 (40)	2 (36)
Other Manual A	Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers	4,107	2	2
	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers	29,656	5	5
	Electrical, Electronics and Plumbing Trades Union	16,977	7	7
	National Graphical Association	1,854	2	2
	National Union of Sheet Metal Workers, Coppersmiths, Heating and Domestic Engineers	2,106	1	1
	Society of Graphical and Allied Trades	1,328	1	1
	Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians	8,137 (64,165)	5 (23)	2 (20)
	Confederation of Health Service Employees	6,472	2	1
Other Manual B	Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union	1,687	2	2
	National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers	11,385	5	5
	Northern Ireland Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers' Union	1,332	1	1
	National Union of Seamen	1,201 (22,077)	2 (12)	2 (11)
	Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs	3,927	2	2
White Collar	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs	4,638	1	1
	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	4,055	2	2
	Northern Ireland Musicians' Association	917	2	2
	Public Service Alliance	19,979	5	5
	Ulster Teachers' Union	3,018 (36,534)	2 (14)	2 (14)
		235,613	89	81

1. As at various dates between 1970 and 1973.