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Different rooms, different voices

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Multi-channels of representation and Double-Breasting

- Increased focus on multi-channels
 - Focus generally on parallel systems
- Double-breasting
 - Companies running unionised and non-unionised representation across different plants
- Focus has been on identifying incidence rather than dynamics
- Need to understand dynamics of the phenomenon through case research

Existing literature

- Initially US “Dual-shops” in construction
- Identified in Canada (Verma and Kochan, 1985); UK (Beaumont and Harris, 1992) and Ireland (Gunnigle et al, 2009; Collings et al, 2005)
- 3 rationales (Gunnigle et al, 2009)
 - Union free attractive to HQ
 - Easily achieved under voluntarism
 - Less demand for unionisation
- In outworkings DB may involve more than just union avoidance

Case and method

- **BritCo Ireland**
 - Privatised former UK public utility with TU recognition and high levels of union density in NI
 - 1990s entered ROI market in a joint venture
 - 2000: bought out non-union ROI company and separated NI off from UK to form “BritCo Ireland”
 - Also bought “FriendlyCo”
- **Methodology**
 - Case emerged under wider I&C project
 - Critical case (Yin, 1994)
 - Interviews at all levels of organisation
 - CEO right through to operative staff

Voice structures-NI

- Part of UK HR regime
 - T&C negotiated at UK level
 - JCC and Ad-Hoc meetings for NI issues
 - Two recognised unions
 - Managerial union
 - Operative union
- Delivering voice
 - Interviews indicated low level of impact of voice
 - “Hollow shell” unionism?

Voice structures-ROI

- Non-union ideology outside the UK
- Recognition drive
 - Focussed on different treatments on either side of border
 - I&C body rejuvenated as “Vocal”
- Creation of two separate forums below “Vocal”
 - South Works Committee in the “People’s Republic”
 - Non-union
 - Friendly Group
 - unionised

Delivering voice in ROI?

- Perception that (unionised) NI workers “have it better”
 - Vigorous union recognition campaign
- Through “Vocal” changes made to redundancy procedure
 - Improved but inferior to NI
- Non-disclosure of salary scales
 - NI had the same issue
- SWC
 - Perceived as mechanism to remove contentious issues from Vocal
 - Withered away after two years

Conclusions

- Far from being a deliberate strategy to create structures to “Double-breast”, management action was highly reactive and incremental in basis
 - Union avoidance was important in shaping the regimes, despite rather hollow voice in NI
- Evidence of neo-functional type “spillover” which helped to gain some improvements for workers even in context of “hollow shell”