Rethinking Trade Unionism: Questions of Citizenship

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What challenges do unions face?

1. Declining membership
2. Narrowing of coverage
3. Changing balance of power
4. Rise of transnational concerns
5. Redefinition of employment arrangements – dual labour markets/rise of precarity/work intensification
6. Extended labour mobility – EU and Visa 457
7. Australia – toxic anti-union rhetoric
8. Australia and elsewhere – the collapse of union democracy and the rise of unaccountable leaderships.
What are unions today?

1. Business unions/Political unionism
2. Public and Private ‘interests
3. Social movements
What are unions?

1. Collective

2. Work and employment

3. Class

4. Power and inequality: politics
Debates

1. Increasing marginalisation

2. Organisation and membership

3. Organisation and capacity

4. Global unionism

5. But what about gender, racialization, the casual and poor?
Do unions matter?

1. Defend jobs

2. Changing employment

3. The proposition here is that we are seeing the beginning of a particular type of workforce, with implications for the ways that unions organise and represent them.

4. Unions are in transition
The Question of Union Citizenship: a rethinking

- Unions as actors
  - Environmental
  - Industrial
  - Political
- Notions of citizenship
  - Rights
  - Terms and conditions
  - Politics
- Struggle and contestation
Unions as Citizenship actors

• Changing work and employment
  – Precarity
  – Production and consumption
  – Local and Global

• Unions
  – Old forms, new? (confederations/community)
  – Social change agenda – minimal
  – Confusion Politics and politics
How should we think of unions?

1. Two stark possibilities:
   a. Defensive sectional organisations – Germany
   b. Open inclusive social movement unions – elements within unions such as Unite

2. Consider
   a. Organisation
   b. Capacity
   c. Purpose

3. In relation to place and time

4. Theme: In a process of transition? Not renewal?
The ‘real’ challenge

1. Internal: Union democracy

2. External: Power relations

3. Purpose: inclusive in composition and policy focused

4. Practice: Transnational