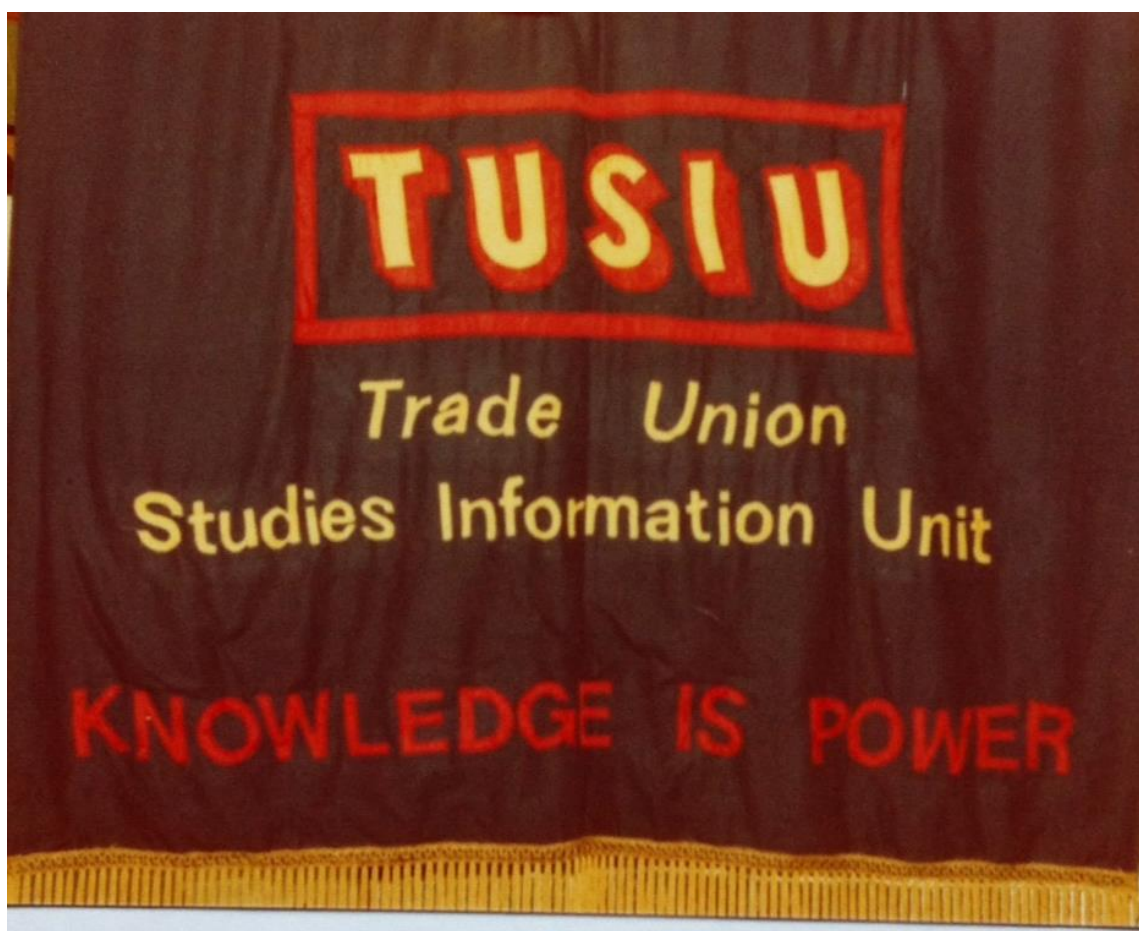


The Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU)

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The Trade Union Studies Information Unit original banner. Photo by Keith Hodgson

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This account was prepared by Keith Hodgson for *Imagine North East*, part of the Economic and Social Research Council funded project, *Imagine – connecting communities through research* (grant no. ES/K002686/2). *Imagine North East* explored aspects of civic participation in the former Community Development Project areas in Benwell (Newcastle) and North Shields. The views expressed are those of the author. Further reports and other materials can be found at <https://www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/imagine/>

About the author: Keith Hodgson Dip TP, M.Sc., PGCE, retired in 2014 as a UNISON official. Currently involved in the regional work of: WEA; Journey to Justice; and Friends of the Durham Miners' Gala. Worked as a union organiser for 35 years in the Northern Region, first for NUPE, and then UNISON, following merger in 1993. Active in many anti-privatisation campaigns, pay disputes and international project work in South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, Russia, Germany and Sierra Leone. Previously worked in establishing the Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU) - one of the first regional based research and education organisations supporting workers resisting de-industrialisation. Brought up in Prudhoe and educated in Hexham, Leeds and University College, London.

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CDP reports: some of the reports published by Benwell, North Tyneside and other CDPs can be purchased from St James' Heritage & Environment Group (see website: <http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com>). Some are available in digital form online at <http://ulib.iupui.edu/collections/CDP>

Early years: A radical idea

In the early 1970's, Community Development Projects (CDPs) explored radical ways to deal with community deprivation. North Tyneside and Benwell CDPs both recognised the serious consequences of rapid de-industrialisation taking place on Tyneside (Ref 1). They had engaged locally with trade unions and engineering and shipyard shop steward networks, and identified that well-organised unions and workers were essential to protect communities and jobs. They also identified the need to improve education and research support for workers facing threats of closure and redundancy.

The Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU) was formally established in April 1975, and became operational in early 1976 in offices on Newcastle Quayside, as a joint initiative between North Tyneside and Benwell CDPs. It was the first local trade union resource unit designed to provide long term support for workers.

Pump-priming funding for the first two years was provided by the CDPs. The initial TUSIU staff appointed were: Chris Green, a recent graduate of Ruskin College; Keith Hodgson, previously a university researcher attached to the Liverpool CDP; and Lorraine Bell, an experienced administrator. Affiliations were invited from local unions and an elected management committee was established, chaired by Terry Hammond, the Regional Organiser of the Agricultural Workers' Union.

Consolidation

The Regional TUC was initially suspicious of this new initiative but many of the smaller unions immediately recognised its value. Within two years, however, more than 140 organisations were affiliated, including the Northern Region Trades Union Congress and the Tyne and Blyth Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU). The first reports produced by TUSIU in 1976 were *"British Shipbuilding: a Trade Union Initiative"* for APEX (Ref 2), and *"Workers' Occupations and the North East Experience"* (Ref 3). A further report, *"British Shipbuilding – What Next"* (Ref 4), commissioned by the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers' National Executive, was produced with the assistance of local university academic Jim Cousins. Both shipbuilding reports received widespread national press coverage, including the Financial Times. The local manager of the Bank of England sent a driver down to purchase a number of copies as the Bank liked to "have its finger on the pulse of local industrial relations" and had not so far been aware of TUSIU's existence. By this stage TUSIU had established itself as a serious organisation with radical ideas for engaging workers and protecting shipyard jobs on Tyneside. Within three years the number of union affiliations had grown and TUSIU had attracted funding from a number of local councils, giving it some degree of financial security.

Historically, the area had been a major part of the industrial revolution with coal, steel and shipbuilding as core industries. Tyneside was also the industrial birthplace of the power engineering industry which provided the turbines, boilers and transmission equipment for modern electricity generation. Charles Parsons was the inventor of the steam turbine for ships and electricity generation and established his factory, CA Parsons, in East Newcastle. Other major power

engineering companies included Clarke Chapman, in Gateshead, and Reyrolle, in South Tyneside, all major industrial companies employing thousands of highly skilled workers.

The lack of new power station orders, and the risk of takeover by other multi-national companies, posed a serious threat to this long established industry on Tyneside. TUSIU worked closely with the Power Plant Combine Committee and produced a significant report *“The Crisis Facing the Power Plant Manufacturing Industry”* commissioned by the Divisional Committee of AUEW-TASS in December 1976 (Ref 5) which was sent to the Government to assert the workers’ case. When USA President Carter flew into Newcastle to meet Prime Minister Jim Callaghan in May 1977, the workers from Parsons marched out en masse, with apprentices at the front, and very effectively demonstrated their claim for a new power station order.

Education

Significant reports were produced for other industries under threat (Ref 6) as well as briefing papers for NUPE Northern Division on *“Regional Policy and Devolution”* and a briefing document for the Northern Region TUC in 1978 on *“Unemployment and Redundancy in the Northern Region”*, submitted by the TUC Officers to the Prime Minister. All of these reports were used as educational resources as well as campaign documents by the commissioning unions.

TUSIU was also quick to spot opportunities related to the new Employment Law, Equality, and Health and Safety Legislation, and produced simplified *“Workers Guides”* in ring binders that could be easily updated. This led to a demand for educational training by a number of regional trade unions, particularly NUPE Northern Division. This work was so valued that by the early 1980s NUPE offered premises on a reduced lease to TUSIU, which was based there until the merger of NUPE, COHSE and NALGO to form the new public service union UNISON in 1993.

Demonstrating the value of worker education in these shared premises contributed to NUPE establishing the specialist post of Regional Education Officer, which was piloted in the Northern Division and then extended to all regions, and is still in place in UNISON today. Other large unions such as the T&GWU and the GMB also soon followed this initiative and appointed their own Regional Education posts.

Alternative socially useful production and some individual “social mobility”

Other issues TUSIU became involved with included the threatened closure of the Vickers Armaments Factory, and the campaign for socially useful alternative production. In addition the closure proposals of the shipyards on the Wear in 1988 led to a further campaign to save shipbuilding, this time in Sunderland. By the mid 1980’s the TUSIU co-ordinator was Alan Milburn and another project worker was Darren Murphy. They were both able to capitalise on their “radical” union work with TUSIU. Milburn went on to secure the Darlington seat as Member of Parliament and both rose to become key figures in the Blair project for New Labour. Murphy worked as a special advisor in the Prime Minister’s office and Milburn eventually became Secretary of State for Health. After standing down from Parliament, Milburn was appointed by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, in July 2012, as Chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, while Murphy is now Chairman of consultants Bell Pottinger Geopolitical. Both former workers subsequently became

involved in a variety of private companies with interests in health service privatisation, political consultancies and pharmaceuticals (Ref.7). Milburn was also a key person in establishing the right of centre Labour Think Tank - Progress.

Following the departure of Milburn, TUSIU experienced a number of funding difficulties especially when local authorities withdrew financial support. For a short time it moved to Gateshead Old Town Hall and found its final home as part of the Newcastle and Gateshead TUC Centre against Unemployment in the Cloth Market in Newcastle city centre.

Conclusion

TUSIU was established by the two CDPs to provide research, information and education support for local workers, particularly those facing de-industrialisation. The unit lasted for just over 25 years and was involved in some key trade union campaigns within the region. The various reports and publications effectively articulated the case for workers facing huge change and helped to identify alternative strategies and encourage workers and their communities to resist the effects of de-industrialisation. TUSIU also demonstrated the value of worker education and led to local unions appointing their own Specialist Education Officer posts. For much of its existence it was a radical action research organisation which commanded widespread local support.

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