"Defiant communities"? The UK trade union community agenda in historical perspective

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In his seminal study of the concept of "community," Raymond Plant noted that the latter had been said to have "so many meanings as to be meaningless," to "serve more to confuse than to illuminate the situation in Britain today" or even to be a "non concept" (79-80). Rather than try and impose a singular definition of "community," the understanding of the concept is probably best served by accepting its plurality of meanings and definitions. When discussing the concept of "community" and its uses in relation to the history of the trade union and labour movement in the United Kingdom (UK), as this article sets out to do, one is indeed faced with a plurality of meanings, with three major definitions standing out: the community as a pre-capitalist or post-capitalist social unit based not on the market or on the logic of contract, but on a system of mutual obligations; the national community of modern nation-states, based on a shared yet exclusive citizenship; the community as a group of peers defined by relatively common interests, based on self-identification and mutual identification.

When poring over the archives of the trade union movement, one encounters only rare occurrences of the term, which goes on to suggest two things. The first one is that in spite of the positive connotation of the term "community" in the English-speaking world—in contrast with the anathema cast on it in liberal-republican France—"community" was rarely the level and shape through which trade unionists conceived of their politics: for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, class, movement, nation, state and empire were more central to the trade union conception of the world. Nonetheless, and this is the second dimension, the rareness of the explicit use of the notion of "community" by trade unionists does not mean that there was no community basis or no community motive to their action: one needs to distinguish between "community" as an explicit claim, and "community" as an analytical tool that social scientists may use to explore the dynamics of social structuring. The absence of "community" in discourse should not forbid any examination of community dynamics.

The organic community

The use of the concept of "community," or at least of its attributes, is not specific to the trade union and labour movement. Indeed, the conception of the organic community was counterposed to the emerging liberal industrial society by Conservative and socialist critics alike in the early nineteenth century. Against the abstraction and individualism—both political and methodological—of liberal thought, against the callousness and competition of industrial

society, the notion of community counterposed the concreteness of a collective body grounded in a place and bonded by social and moral relationships.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of intellectual and political flux, in which a young Conservative politician like Benjamin Disraeli could, in his novel *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, put in the mouth of a weaver searing denunciations of capitalism and of the degradation it wrought upon working men and women, and nostalgia for the pre-industrial order:

> I was born to labour, and I was ready to labour. I loved my loom and my loom loved me. It gave me a cottage in my native village, surrounded by a garden of whose claims on my solicitude it was not jealous. There was time for both. It gave me for a wife the maiden that I had ever loved; and it gathered my children round my hearth with plenteousness and peace. I was content: I sought no other lot. It is not adversity that makes me look back upon the past with tenderness. Then why am I here? Why am I, and six hundred thousand subjects of the Queen, honest, loyal, and industrious, why are we, after manfully struggling for years, and each year sinking lower in the scale, why are we driven from our innocent and happy homes, our country cottages that we loved, first to bide in close towns without comforts, and gradually to crouch into cellars, or find a squalid lair like this, without even the common necessaries of existence; first the ordinary conveniences of life, then raiment, and, at length, food, vanishing from us. (Disraeli 95)

Still, the appeals to a community ethos and projections of community politics were not the same when they came from Conservative and socialist ranks respectively. The community praised by the Conservative writers like Disraeli was oriented towards the past. Theirs was a lament of the passing of the medieval, manorial, pre-capitalist community united by a system of mutual obligations and forms of solidarity, yet also internally starkly differentiated between ranks and situations. The "young stranger" who revealed to the central character Egremont the truth about the divisions of modern industrial England began by voicing nostalgia for medieval, pre-Reformation England:

> "As for community," said a voice which proceeded neither from Egremont nor the stranger, "with the monasteries expired the only type that we ever had in England of such an intercourse. There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating, than an uniting, principle." [...]
> "Yes," resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."
> "You speak of—" said Egremont, hesitatingly.
> "THE RICH AND THE POOR." (Disraeli 54-56)

The community of the (often Christian) socialists, by contrast, was more oriented towards the future. Robert Owen's New Lanark aimed to reconcile modern industry with communal living, and as such serve as a prefiguration of the egalitarian, industrious, orderly, post-capitalist

socialist society. For this very reason, the word and notion of "community" also carried dangerous associations for the Conservative Disraeli, when associated with the sort of radical social reform advocated by the character of Morley in *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, whose vision of the future communistic society is caricatured repeatedly in the novel:

> "In the present state of civilization and with the scientific means of happiness at our command, the notion of home should be obsolete. Home is a barbarous idea; the method of a rude age; home is isolation; therefore anti-social. What we want is Community." [...] "He still preaches moral force, and believes that we shall all end in living in communities. But as the only community of which I have personal experience is a gaol, I am not much more inclined to his theory than heretofore." (Disraeli 157, 295)

Although the traditional, past-oriented communities of the Conservatives usually had a basis in place and history, it was a fictional recreation as much as the egalitarian, future-oriented community of the socialists was anticipatory. As such, both were condemned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, published initially in 1848 but widely distributed only later in the century, as futile, inadequate political reactions to the rapid, inexorable transformations brought about by capitalistic development.

> In this way arose Feudal Socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history. (Marx and Engels 43)

Instead of harking back to the past or counterposing concrete or fictional utopias to modern industrial society, socialists should take stock of the new conditions the latter created: whereas local communities grounded in place and a shared sense of morality were reactionary throwbacks to which the onward march of capitalism would eventually lay waste, the expanding logic of capitalism and its iron rules were leading to the emergence and continuous expansion of a proletarian class, which would ultimately displace the capitalistic ruling class and usher in communism.

The national community

Although they wrote and published much of their material from England, Marx and Engels had a relatively limited influence on the trade union and labour movement of the British Isles. Paradoxically, some of their followers in the UK were also some of the staunchest promoters of the communitarian ethos. In his anticipatory novel *News from Nowhere* published in 1890, William Morris imagined the post-revolutionary communist world as reprising and improving upon the communal living of a medieval merrie England:

> The railway having disappeared, and therewith the various level bridges over the streams of Thames, we were soon through Medley Lock and in the wide water that washes Port

> Meadow, with its numerous population of geese nowise diminished; and I thought with interest how its name and use had survived from the older imperfect communal period, through the time of the confused struggle and tyranny of the rights of property, into the present rest and happiness of complete Communism. (Morris 193-194)

The eclipse of the reference to "community" in trade union and labour movement thought for much of the twentieth century can therefore not be solely attributed to the relative clarification or narrowing down of socialist thought under Marxian influence in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the "community," understood as a social unit imbued with a sense of place and morality, had to contend with a whole range of concepts referring to larger units. Within the labour movement, it faced competition from the emerging concept of "class" pushed by the socialists, although the vaguer concept of "movement" was and remains central to trade union rhetoric and the labourist tradition.

Beyond the confines of the labour movement, its fortunes waned parallel to the growth of the concept of "nation," albeit in the specific form that it took in the multi-national United Kindgom of Great Britain from 1707, then of Great Britain and Ireland from 1801. As Linda Colley argued in her authoritative history of British loyalism from the union between the English and Scottish parliaments to the advent of Queen Victoria, "Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties" (Colley 5). This certainly means that the sense of nation did not disappear in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but it also says something about the strength of Britain as a nation that it "was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other" (Colley 6).

Through Britishness, nation coincided with another key concept in modern British history, that of "empire," which provided material for self-identification as "British" for populations across the empire well into the twentieth century. This was especially the case in the settlement colonies comprising a significant proportion of white British Europeans, as John Darwin argued in his study of the British World-System:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, it was no longer a pipe-dream that the main settlement colonies, with Canada in the van, might form the heart of an overseas 'British world,' a vast zone held together not by rule or coercion but by common political values, and cultural attraction as well as (in this case) by racial solidarity. Nor that a sense of shared 'Britannic' nationality, a collective insistence on a shared 'Britishness,' provincial but equal (or even superior), would induce spontaneous identification with the fortunes of Britain, and even a willingness, in a real emergency, to spend blood and treasure in the common British cause. (Darwin 177)

However, identification as "British" was not confined to white settler groups, as the subordinate peoples of the empire also found cause for taking up "Britishness":

> In other words, being British anywhere meant exercising full civil rights within a liberal, pluralistic polity, or at least aspiring to that status. 'Whiteness' was a dominant element. Nevertheless, this world was not exclusively white. People from many ethnic backgrounds (both white and non-white) eagerly adopted British identity and were accepted to varying degrees as part of the British world, within the white Dominions, elsewhere in the empire, and to some extent even outside it. (Bridge and Fedorowich 3)

The UK trade union and labour movement largely accepted the constitutional framework and institutions of the UK, largely bought into its patriotism and largely supported the imperial enterprise. Its stated aim was to build socialism in one country, said country being the UK. It should be no surprise then, that when references to "community" cropped up in the debates at the TUC Congress in the 1960s and 1970s, the period that I have researched extensively, they were practically always references to the "national community," namely the complex, modern industrial society of the capitalistic nation-state. An example among many is Alf Allen's speech to the TUC Congress of 1974, in which the general secretary of USDAW pushed for trade union moderation in the following terms:

> In this situation all of us, without exception, must be aware of the influence we collectively bring to bear on the major current political and economic issues confronting us, those we represent and the community generally. (*106th Annual Trades Union Congress* 335)

More often than not, the notion of "community" took on a moral dimension, as the term was used by trade unionists to project the trade unions and the actions they took as offering a defence of a larger body politic and its needs, especially relative to welfare. The interests of the community were at the core of the case against cuts in public expenditure made by a delegate of NALGO on behalf of the public sector trade unions at the TUC Congress of 1975.

> Cuts in public expenditure have a particularly damaging effect on the employment and career prospects of young people in decreasing opportunities for employment, education and training. Congress regards the defence of wages and conditions of those employed in these services as being in the interest of the whole community. (*107th Annual Trades Union Congress* 483)

The same argument was reprised by Campbell Christie, the general secretary of CPSA at the Scottish Trades Union Congress of 1978:

> Congress further recognizes that the use of cash limits and the general public expenditure cuts have resulted in a considerable reduction in the social wage for the community, particularly in the fields of education, housing and health care provision. (Scottish Trades Union Congress 519-520)

The theme of the defence of the "community" was also used by critics of the trade unions to impose limits on the action of trade unions because of the latter's duties and obligations towards the "community" and because their actions might harm the "community." The socialist

intellectual Raymond Williams argued that this constituted an especially perverted use of the term "community," when it was used to impose policies that were detrimental to actually existing communities:

> [T]here is another use of *community*, to mean not these actual places and people but an abstract aggregate with an arbitrary general interest. Any wider community—a people or a nation—has to include, if it is to be real, all its actual and diverse communities. To destroy actual communities in the name of 'community' or 'the public' is then evil as well as false. (Williams 124)

As with the "organic community" of nineteenth-century political thought, the "national community" of twentieth-century industrial debate was therefore appropriated both by Conservative defenders of the social order and by socialist advocates of a fairer society.

Community unionism

That the "national community," sometimes referred to simply as "the community," should have prevailed in political discourse in the UK over other understandings of the concept of "community" in the twentieth century does not mean that the analysis of the recent history of the trade union and labour movement in terms of "community" should stop there. Again, "community" is also an analytical concept that social scientists may use to explore the dynamics of social structuring, especially the role of locality, the grounds for solidarity and the mechanisms for collective identification which are at play in collective action.

Jane Wills, in her own work on the direction of UK trade unions in the 1990s and early 2000s as well as in conjunction with Melanie Simms, borrowed the concept of "community unionism" from the US context, where it describes the attempts by trade unions to break out of the traditional confines of trade unionism, out of the workplaces and into the local communities. Wills saw "community unionism" as an umbrella term referring to a variety of alliances that trade unions may create with social movements, campaigners, local groups. What all the scenarios of "community unionism" have in common is that they bridge the gap between the usually narrower economic concerns of the trade unions and the broader moral concerns of the communities.

> [C]ommunity unionism is about finding common cause between unions and those groups cemented around affiliations of religion, race, gender, disability and sexuality, with those providing a particular community service and with those fighting for a particular political cause. As such, community unionists are in a position to foster unity on the left, linking the struggle for redistribution with that over recognition, the universal with the particular, the economic with the cultural. (Wills 468-469)

If one turns to the history of the trade union movement in the 1970s, a number of episodes may also be described as instances of community mobilisation. In such instances, what is meant by

the “community” is a group of peers defined by relatively common interests. However, the diversity of the episodes that one may instantiate to delineate “community unionism” points to the necessity of distinguishing between different types of such communities as groups of peers.

The “community” of “community unionism” may be a majority community, referring to a white, presumably local community. Such was the case of the community mobilisation in support of work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1971-1972, when rather than going on strike against the liquidation of the shipyards which employed them, the workers decided to complete the shipbuilding work. John Foster and Charles Woolfson have detailed how the rhetoric used by the trade union leaders who pushed for the work-in was able to generate and gather support among the workers and even beyond their families, with the local businesses turning into supporters of the workers’ course of action:

> [The government’s] defeats over the previous two months were seen to have stemmed in large measure from the stewards’ ability to seize control of the terms ‘community’, ‘industry’, ‘Scotland’, and to represent the interests of the Conservative Party’s own natural constituencies among local business and the professions. (Foster and Woolfson 314)

Ultimately, even the Conservative-dominated Glasgow Council and the Scottish Conservative press threw their weight behind the UCS workers. The cross-class community mobilisation in support of the UCS workers piled pressure on the Conservative government, which ultimately had to renege on its commitment to free-market policies and step in to prevent the full liquidation of the shipyards.

The “community” of “community unionism” may also be a minority community, referring to a Black, presumably immigrant, community. Industrial action supported by minority community mobilisation was part of a larger development of Black people forming community organisations or joining existing ones, with the term “Black” being used in the post-war period by West Indian and South Asian activists alike to refer to their othered status and their claim for liberation. Indeed, a key organisation was the Indian Workers Association (IWA), which was formed in the 1930s with a dual mission to liberate India from British rule and provide support for Asian workers in the UK, and was influenced by the various strands of Indian communism in the post-war period. Powerful, structured organisations like the IWA existed alongside more informal groups and networks in West Indian and South Asian neighbourhoods, respectively in London and in the Midlands and the North of England. An instance of “community mobilisation,” in the sense of a Black community rallying behind a group of Black workers, was the Imperial Typewriters strike at Leicester in 1974, when 500 South Asian workers struck against the less favourable conditions that they enjoyed in

comparison with their white colleagues. Community mobilisation was essential to the continuation of strike action over several weeks:

> On this question of money, support came from the community and political organisations and meetings. For example, the Birmingham Sikh Temple contributed £125, the Southall IWA £50, the Birmingham Anti-Racist Committee £14, the European Immigrant Workers Action Committee £12 and the Edinburgh Women's Conference £40. [...] Furthermore, they called for a national solidarity committee, co-ordinated by *Race Today*, 'to collect money, to circulate information, to organise pickets on Litton's branches across the globe, to support the pickets and to involve Asian workers and all workers in active support for the struggle.' (Ramdin 278-279)

This coalescence of support from local South Asian groups, anti-racist groups and women's liberation groups reflects the coalitions that formed in the mid-1970s between community groups, liberation movements and political organisations around key sites of struggle. The strike by another group of South Asian workers at the Grunwick factory in North London was another.

One should not, however, idealise community mobilisation. The fight for trade union rights by the Grunwick strikers became a major cause for the left and the trade union movement, with mass demonstrations and pickets drawing thousands of trade unionists, some of them from faraway South Yorkshire, in solidarity with the mostly female, mostly South Asian Grunwick workers. However, as McDowell, Anitha and Pearson wrote in a re-evaluation of the Grunwick struggle, the mythologisation of the glorious fight for trade union rights obscured the ultimate defeat of the strikers who were not re-employed, as well as the strength that the strikers derived from their links in their local ethnic community:

> For these women, it seemed that solidarity with their compatriots rather than industrial grievances was the reason why they joined the strike: 'I walked out in solidarity (*saath den eke liye*) to give support, to be together'. Community links rather than, or perhaps as well as, dissatisfaction in their workplace was what persuaded these women to strike over that August weekend, little expecting that they would be on strike for almost two years and would become the heroines of the labour movement. (McDowell, Anitha and Pearson 600)

In the case of Imperial Typewriters, the reliance on community resources reflected the marginalisation of the South Asian workers within their own trade union, which refused to support their strike:

> [The Asian workers] were reminded by their union negotiator of the need to keep the company going as a concern. He wrote to the strikers: 'You are ill-led and have done nothing but harm to the company, the union and yourselves.' (Ramdin 273)

The limits of community

The history of trade union struggles in the second half of the 1970s suggests that the powerful mix of new trade union tactics and community mobilisation, as exemplified by the work-in at UCS, was no guarantee for success. The tactic of the work-in spread to the public sector, whose trade unions and their membership were becoming more militant under the impact of the austerity policies introduced by the Labour governments of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. The cuts led to school-building and hospital-building programmes being cancelled, and to the closure of numerous small hospitals being accelerated. As a response, groups of NHS workers began a series of occupations and work-ins over 1976 and 1977. These actions, which took place especially in the London area, could rely on the support of local residents or of larger social movements. The campaign against the closure of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (EGA) Hospital for Women in London, a highly symbolic hospital, was supported by women's liberation groups:

> The 107-bed EGA [Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Women's Hospital] was only one in three hospitals in the UK where women could be sure of a treatment by a woman doctor, while for women working in the male-dominated male profession, the hospital was seen as an important 'enclave' supporting their career development. These characteristics made the case of the EGA resonate strongly with the emerging women's movement, guaranteeing feminist support for the campaign through the long years of struggle. (Williams and Fryer 283)

The interviews conducted by Amanda Sebesteyn for her article published in *Spare Rib* in December 1978 about the campaign to save Bethnal Green Hospital highlighted the role played by local solidarities in the energy displayed by the campaign.

> For most of the elderly people around here, this *is* their hospital and without it they can't go anywhere for help. We hired a coach for a pensioners' club to come and protest at the Area Health Authority, and they were terrific, singing and dancing and they all had banners. Someone lifted one lady up to the office windows and she was banging on them and saying, 'Come out here, you miserable old gits.' [...] We've got 102 local GPs on our side; we have local residents picketing, and then the dustmen have been coming, and the brewers. [...] If it hadn't been the Green, if it had been somewhere up north, I don't think I'd have done anything about it. I'd have just said, 'Terrible, the cuts.' But because this is my local hospital, I've been surprised some of the things I've found myself doing. When we went up to Westminster, we were all militant. (Rowe 219, 222)

Although the high-profile campaign to save the EGA was relatively successful, the other campaigns in London and across the country were rarely so.

The 1980s proved to be an ambivalent decade for community mobilisation, with the Great Miners' Strike a high point for community mobilisation while deindustrialisation was pulling apart working-class communities. Indeed, the term "defiant communities" (Williams 124), which gives its title to this article, comes from "Mining the Meaning: Key Words in the Miners'

Strike," an essay published by the cultural theorist Raymond Williams in *New Socialist* in March 1985 and reprinted in the collection *Resources of Hope*, which also reflects Williams' understanding of "community" in the UK trade union and labour context:

> What the miners, like most of us, mean by their communities is the places where they have lived and want to go on living, where generations not only of economic but of social effort and human care have been invested, and which new generations will inherit. Without that kind of strong whole attachment, there can be no meaningful community. (Williams 124)

This very normative and very positive vision of "community" is not a mere product of the moment—of the deep-felt sympathies of a left-wing intellectual with the cause of the miners. It reflects Williams' broader originality in the Marxist school of thought, with his conception of working-class "communities" as the ground on which and level at which socialism was nurtured and strengthened, and which remained the bases for the building of socialism in one country. In his essay "The importance of community," originally a lecture given to the Welsh national party Plaid Cymru summer school in 1977 and later included in *Resources of Hope*, Williams argued:

> Out of some of the most bitter and brutal struggles came the intense sense of a community of a different kind: the notion of a much more collective community than any I'd been used to, which cast its institutions in collective forms and which did propose to change society radically but to change it in a very particular direction; to attempt to establish from these received and new notions of mutuality and brotherhood, a total society. (Williams 115)

This sense of community—an intense sense of an intensely collective community—was derived from Williams' experience and understanding of working-class life in the mining villages of South Wales, and from his methodological and theoretical refusal to move to a more abstract level of discussion of working-class politics. Williams was one of the foremost socialist thinkers of the twentieth century in the UK, but can also be regarded as the "organic intellectual" of the working-class community as the social and moral grounding for the socialist struggle. The belief in the power and strength of working-class communities was indeed held by the UK miners and their leaders, and powered the dynamics of the Great Miners' Strike: communities which were rock-solid behind the strike, as in Kent and South Wales, were used as bases for expanding the strike into other areas; the strike was not just a withdrawal of labour by workers, but a dispute which involved entire communities, with women involved not only in the logistics of the strike but also in militant action and in clashes with the police.

Nonetheless, the Great Miners' Strike also demonstrated the limits of "community unionism." The unity and solidarity demonstrated in many mining communities was not reflected throughout the entire trade union and labour movement, with many trade unions providing

relief to the miners but no direct assistance in the strike. This highlighted the uneasy move from the immediate solidarities of the concrete communities to the more abstract conception of class solidarity across "organised labour."

> [T]hat association between a specific understanding of community in terms of the extending obligations of neighbourhood, very much attached to a place, moving on through the sense of a community under stress, under attack, through conflict, finding its community and its collective institutions and attempting to move on from that to a political movement which should be the establishment of higher relations of this kind and which would be the total relations of a society [...]. But the difficult thing within it, and it had been the difficulty with the earlier term of society, is that because it had begun as local and affirmative, assuming an unproblematic extension from its local and community experience to a much larger movement, it was always insufficiently aware of the quite systematic obstacles which stood in the way. (Williams 115)

The absence of direct solidarity through massive strike action also demonstrated the role of "community unionism" as a fallback option, when groups of workers are unable to find the resources to defeat their opponent either in themselves or in the broader trade union and labour movement. Moreover, the divisions in many mining communities in the North of England weakened the strike, demonstrating that solidarity in working-class communities is not a given but a fragile construct. Finally, the mining communities' autonomy, which allowed them to be used as bases for expanding the strike and seemingly turned them into working-class citadels, proved to be a delusion when police forces began occupying and patrolling them in the Summer of 1984.

The Great Miners' Strike was also a rather belated apex of "community unionism," since working-class communities had already been decimated by decades of deindustrialisation in the North of England and the central belt of Scotland, and mining communities had been reduced in size by decades of pit closures. In a discussion of Raymond Williams' theses on the role of "community" in trade union action, the radical geographer David Harvey wondered: "Can the political and social identities forged under an oppressive industrial order of a certain sort operating in a certain place survive the collapse or radical transformation of that order?" (Harvey 91). His answer was "no," highlighting the space- and time-specific nature of working-class communities, and the need for left activists and left intellectuals to take a critical distance from the organic, Williamsian conception of trade union and labour activism so as to avoid the political dead-end of trying to revive the lost world of "traditional" working-class communities.

A community agenda

This quick history and overview warrants a few conclusions. Firstly, "community" unionism has not been a constant or dominant orientation in UK trade union and labour history, with the explicit motive of the "community" being used only sparsely and community resources

being tapped primarily as a fallback option. Indeed, community-oriented unionism had to compete with class-oriented and state- or empire-oriented trade unionism, by contrast with which the trade union community agenda was a minority trade union agenda. Historically, the preference of trade union leaderships has clearly gone to class-oriented trade unionism—that is to say the use of sheer industrial muscle—or state-oriented trade unionism—in the sense of making gains through the Labour Party—well over community trade unionism.

The trajectory of the trade union community agenda has been chequered. As it was associated with the experiments of the early utopian socialists in the nineteenth century, its fortune waned during the high point of the modern industrial nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at a time when the UK working class itself went national then international, before re-emerging in the second half of the twentieth century, as the UK working-class was battered by deindustrialisation and austerity.

This most recent coming of the trade union community agenda in the 1970s and 1980s sat at a historical juncture for labour and social movements, building on the residual resources of traditional, mostly white, industrial working-class communities and making bridges with the communes and communities emerging out of the liberation movements. The brutal repression of the trade union movement and of the liberation movements alike by the neoliberal regimes of the last four decades, the imperialism and militarism and racism which they have projected, have aimed precisely at preventing this historical juncture from nurturing a radical coalition of communities.

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