



When workers unionize

Trade union effects on management-worker conflict and attitudes towards immediate interests versus broader political agendas

Josef Ringqvist

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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For my mother

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- I. Ringqvist J (2021) How do union membership, union density and institutionalization affect perceptions of conflict between management and workers? *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27 (2), 131-148.
- II. Ringqvist J (2023) Integrating collective voice within job demands-resources theory. (*Manuscript, revised draft returned for minor corrections by an international journal*).
- III. Ringqvist J (2022) Union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60 (3), 662-682.
- IV. Ringqvist J (in press) A world systems analysis of union membership and support for government spending on environmental protection. *Journal of Industrial Relations*.

Abstract

Taking its point of departure in the questions of why workers unionize and what happens when they do, this dissertation studies trade union effects on public perceptions and attitudes through the lens of two overarching themes: conflict between management and workers, and tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. These themes are explored empirically through four research papers, studying (1) how union membership, union density, and institutionalization affect perceptions of conflict between management and workers; (2) the impact of trade unions at the workplace level as antecedents of job demands, job autonomy, job control, and training; (3) how union membership and collective bargaining coverage relate to workers' willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs, and; (4) whether and if so how the association between union membership and support for government spending on environmental protection varies internationally based on the level of economic development and environmental performance. Each study draws on extant data from largescale cross-national attitudinal surveys, using multi-level analysis (MLA) to study union effects at several analytical levels. While the studies are cross-sectional, limiting the ability to make strong causal claims, the empirical results indicate that trade unions ameliorate perceptions of management-worker conflict; augment perceptions of job autonomy and control, particularly where demands are high; and transcend immediate sectional interests in favour of broader long-term agendas related to environmental protection. The present overview locates the empirical studies in a broader theoretical context pertaining to the two overarching themes and elaborates on the causal mechanisms underpinning the research hypotheses.

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1 Introduction

Why do workers unionize and what happens when they do? This dissertation builds on a long line of research informed by these questions by studying union effects on attitudes and perceptions across a range of issues, asking whether union members hold attitudes and policy preferences that differ from their non-organized counterparts (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Kim and Margalit, 2017); whether workers' perceptions vary between unionized and non-unionized workplaces (Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013; Green et al., 2022); and across institutional settings where unionization and collective bargaining is more or less prevalent (Esser and Olsen, 2012; Hipp and Givan, 2015; Wright, 1985). A point of departure is thus that the study of perceptions and attitudes can provide indicators that are meaningful in relation to debates about 'what unions do' (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). This question is indeed one of longstanding interest, but it remains pertinent due to 'an essential plasticity to trade unionism' (Hampton, 2015: 33), fraught with inherent contradictions, or tensions (Hyman, 2001; Offe and Wiesensthal, 1980). Two overarching themes subject to such tensions constitute the lens through which the present dissertation – across four research papers – analyses trade unions: conflict between management and workers; and immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. The purpose of this overview is to locate the four papers within the broader theoretical context of the two themes, provide a review of the literature, and elaborate upon the causal mechanisms underpinning the research hypotheses.

With regards to the first overarching theme, relations between workers and management are situated in a complex interplay between cooperation and conflict in the employment relationship (Edwards, 1986; Hyman, 1989b; Wright, 2000). In this connection there is a persistent ambiguity regarding union effects on workers' perceptions and attitudes concerning class and employment relations (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Hyman, 1989b; Svallfors, 2006; Wright, 1985) – in relation to which the present dissertation examines perceptions of conflict between management and workers, an understudied issue as it pertains to union effects. In the wider literature trade unions have been

argued on the one hand to constitute important mediating mechanisms in workers' development of 'anti-capitalist class consciousness' (Wright, 1985, 1997), fostering what Svallfors refers to as 'partisan attitudes' among the workforce (Svallfors, 2006: 34). This dovetails with an argument advanced by some scholars as explanation to the widely established negative association between union membership and job satisfaction (Freeman and Medoff, 1984) – although, importantly, it is questionable whether such an association reflects a causal effect (Bessa et al., 2021; Laroche, 2016; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990) and the picture is more complex when considering findings beyond the most commonly examined cases of the US and UK (Donegani and McKay, 2012; Goerke and Huang, 2022; Hipp and Givan, 2015).

Conversely, in part by altering the social relations at the workplace and augmenting workers' autonomy and influence over organizational activities, as well as through the pursuance of various policies oriented towards the de-commodification of labour (Edlund and Lindh, 2015; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi, 2019), trade unions may contribute to the amelioration of perceptions of management-worker conflict. This last point relates to the second focal theme and the question of whether the interests that unions channel or even partake in defining are conceived in immediate sectional or broader political terms. Such tensions are of longstanding interest in the industrial relations literature and beyond but have gained prominence more recently in debates about the relationship between trade unions and the environment (Flanagan and Goods, 2022; Obach, 2004; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Snell and Fairbrother, 2010: 420; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). Contributing to these ongoing debates, the present dissertation offers a comparative analysis of the association between union membership and support for environmental protection, explicating a number of mechanisms that may underpin such an association, notably including considerations of immediate self-interest versus broader societal interests.

Samuel Gompers, then president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), when asked in the 1880s about the objectives of the AFL famously responded simply: 'more' (Hyman, 2001: 13). Although that answer may reflect a specific type of American 'business unionism', it could also be emblematic of what some construe as a broader 'productivist' tendency within organized labour to pursue redistributive issues

propelled by economic growth and full employment at the expense of other concerns, notably including those relating to environmental degradation (Gould et al., 2004; Obach, 2004; Offe, 1985a; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020; Tomassetti, 2020). While a growing literature attends to such questions, little is known about union members' attitudes towards environmental agendas, particularly from a quantitative perspective based on nationally representative samples (Chen, 2017; Kojola et al., 2014; and Vachon and Brecher, 2016 are rare exceptions based exclusively on US data). Extending the scope of analysis to cover a broad international context, the present dissertation contributes towards addressing this gap by examining union members' support for environmental protection.

Analysing 'trade union effects' across the themes outlined above, this dissertation highlights the value in considering methodologically the 'textured' phenomenon of collective organization (Streeck, 2016a: 208). It should be noted that the term 'union effect' is used throughout this overview in reference to a statistical association without implying a direct causal impact. In this respect however, aside from comparing the views of union members with their non-organized counterparts, and in order more expediently to capture some of the collective benefits of unions (Doucouliagos et al., 2018: 290; Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013), it is also useful to compare workers across organizations which differ in the degree of union influence, and across countries varying in levels of unionization and strength of industrial relations institutions. Interest thereby lies in probabilistic regularities (Goldthorpe, 2016: 8; Svallfors, 2006: 22; Swedberg, 2014: 117), i.e., systematic but not deterministic differences between union members and non-members, workplaces with and without significant union influence, and countries with varying rates of unionization and strength of industrial relations institutions.

Aim, research papers, and outline of the thesis

The present thesis takes its point of departure in the question of what happens when workers unionize. This in turn is an inquiry that should not be separated from why workers unionize in the first place. Informed by these longstanding questions, the dissertation studies trade union effects on perceptions and attitudes through the lens of two overarching themes: conflict between management and workers (Papers I and II); and tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas (Papers III and IV). The themes are explored empirically across four research papers.

Through a multi-level framework, Paper I asks how perceptions of conflict between management and workers relate to trade union membership, country-level union density, and the institutionalization of employment relations, the latter measured through collective bargaining coverage, collective bargaining centralization, and policy concertation. Two opposing hypotheses are put to empirical testing: one suggests that unions increase conflict perceptions whereas the other posits an inverse pattern.

Paper II shifts the level of analysis to look into what unions do at the workplace level, specifically by examining the impact of trade union influence at work on the prevalence of job demands, employee autonomy, control, and training. As an interdisciplinary contribution, the paper highlights the value in acknowledging the significance of collective voice mechanisms, such as union influence, within the widely influential job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001). The premise of the paper is that key conditions at work construed within JD-R theory respectively as job demands and job resources (such as employee autonomy) are subject of *contested terrain* concerning the social relations at work and control over the labour process (Edwards, 1979). Unionization is argued to offer a means for workers collectively to alter such social relations and thereby in turn reduce job demands and augment job resources. An empirical analysis is offered to substantiate the theoretical argument, examining the effects of trade union influence at the workplace level on employee perceptions of job demands, job resources, and the covariation of demands and resources.

Turning to the second overarching theme, Papers III and IV examine a set of questions pertaining to tensions between immediate

sectional interests versus broader political agendas by studying union members' support for environmental protection – in relation to which there is a striking shortage of empirical research based on the analysis of nationally representative samples. Contributing towards addressing this research gap, Paper III focuses on the European context and analyses how trade union membership and country-level collective bargaining coverage relate to workers' willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs. The paper develops and evaluates empirically the argument that union members will tend to be more likely than non-members to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs. This positive 'membership effect' is hypothesized to be mediated by ideological orientation. Underpinned by some of the insights relating to the first overarching theme, it is further argued that in countries with stronger unions and industrial relations institutions – proxied by trade union density and collective bargaining coverage – support for environmental protection will be higher among members and non-members alike.

Lastly, Paper IV builds on Paper III by extending the geographical scope beyond Europe and the economically more developed contexts covered in previous research, asking whether and if so how the association between union membership and support for government spending on environmental protection varies internationally based on macro-economic conditions and the distribution of environmental burdens. The baseline expectation reflected in a first hypothesis is for the positive membership effect to hold beyond the more affluent countries. However, a second hypothesis is also offered which proposes that beyond the advanced economies, higher levels of environmental degradation and stronger public support for environmental spending among members and non-members alike might imply less of a distinction between members and non-members.

In the concluding discussion, part of the contribution of this thesis is to look at the implications of the findings when taken together, advancing the argument that contemporary challenges posed to workers and unions in the ongoing climate crisis cannot be detached from fundamental questions of what unions do, be it within the context of conflict between management and workers or in the pursuance of various policies oriented towards the de-commodification of labour. In light of the empirical results of the research papers, the concluding

discussion considers the possibilities for the transformational capacity embodied in workers' collective action to be mobilized along conflicts over the implementation of more ambitious environmental agendas.

The remainder of this overview is organized as follows. The next chapter reviews the literature, first by considering some basic constituting features of trade unions, laying out the broad conceptual underpinnings that more or less implicitly inform the four empirical studies. Then follows a review of scholarly debates and empirical research concerning unions' impacts on perceptions and attitudes through the lens of the two overarching themes, guided by the research questions addressed in the four papers. Framed within a broader theoretical context, this outline sets out the logic and explicates upon the causal mechanisms of the research hypotheses. In this respect, although not always addressed explicitly in the papers, the research is informed by a number of reoccurring topics, including the issue of free-riding in the provision of collective goods, the distinction between selection and transformative mechanisms with regards to union effects, and workers' pursuit of interests in the industrial sphere versus the political sphere. Chapter 3 then lays out the analytical strategy as well as the data and methods used in the empirical studies. The results of the empirical research papers are summarized subsequently (Chapter 4), after which the findings are taken together in a concluding discussion (Chapter 5) that considers implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2 Unions and their members

While any more specific answer to the question of what trade unions do is likely to vary across contexts, relating in turn to such factors as membership composition, organizational structure and political identity (Cebolla-Boado and Ortiz, 2014; Ebbinghaus, 1995; Hyman, 1994a, 2001; Ibsen and Thelen, 2017; Jansson, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2022; Oude Nijhuis, 2009; Streeck, 2005: 269; Visser et al., 2009), it is nevertheless useful to begin with a brief conceptual discussion about some constituting features of a union. Even where less explicitly oppositional or more narrowly focused on sectional interests, unions are ultimately predicated on some shape of commonality of interest among a group of wage-earners in antagonism to their employer(s) (Banks and Metzgar, 2005: 30; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2015: 1; Hyman, 2001; Kelly, 1998; Nilsson, 1985: 70–1; Palm, 2017: 15; Wright, 1985, 2000). The section below offers a brief outline of these issues.

Conflict in the employment relationship: a structured antagonism

From an economic standpoint, a trade union represents the interests of one of the parties of the employment contract, and ‘as with all market relationships, the interests of buyers and sellers are antagonistic’ (Hyman, 1989b: 20). Trade unions therefore cannot ignore markets and are in some sense always at least economic actors (Hyman, 2001: 3). Beyond the sphere of exchange, the peculiarities inherent to the employment contract also introduce a broad set of tensions within the sphere of production pertaining to the right of the employer to manage the employees (Edwards, 1986), that is, relating to the question of ‘what goes on inside of firms once workers are hired and capital invested’ (Wright, 2000: 963). As is widely acknowledged, labour power is not like any other commodity, and in terms of vital importance to both parties the employment contract is open-ended, or indeterminate (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37; Fox, 1969; Hyman, 1989b: 20; Kaufman, 2008:

311; Korpi, 2019: 16; Marx, 1990; Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 70; Polanyi, 2001; Streeck, 2005: 261–2; Turnbull, 1988). From this follows a tension between employers' interest to control the organization of work and wage-earners' efforts to preserve or extend a range of conditions that are not necessarily compatible with the prerogatives of management (Dukes and Streeck, 2023: 3; Fox, 1969: 394; Hyman, 1989b; Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 73). This is a central insight particularly with regards to the first overarching theme, explored variously in Papers I and II.

Moreover, an important premise in this context is that any business, in the face of competition and the need to secure investment funds, needs to remain profitable (Edwards, 1986: 321).¹ The two parties of the employment contract are thus subject to the constraints of the accumulation process, resulting in what Edwards refers to as a 'structured antagonism', meaning 'basic contradictions or divisions that may not be reflected in overt disputes' (Edwards, 1986: 17), wherein 'each side depends on the other while also having diverging wants' (Edwards, 1986: 77). On this basis, trade unions function as 'intermediary' or 'secondary' organizations, conditioned in turn upon the existence and prosperity of a primary employing organization (Hyman, 2007; Müller-Jentsch, 1985). Such an interdependence offers conditions for various forms of 'mutual gains' or positive sum conflicts in the extent to which there are joint interests between workers and management in the survival of the firm and the reproduction of the employment relationship across time (Bélanger and Edwards, 2007; Edwards, 1986; Edwards et al., 2006; Fox, 1969; Hyman, 1997: 325; Kjellberg, 1983: 8–9; Korpi, 2006: 177; Müller-Jentsch, 1985: 12; Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 75; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1982; Wright, 2000). Tensions addressed throughout the four research papers, not least in Papers III and IV concerning the relationship between trade unions and the environment, may be understood partly through the lens of such an interdependence, whereby workers and management can form

¹ While the situation differs slightly within (particularly non-profit) public sector organizations, there remains an imperative under such contexts to yield balanced budgets, and due to the indeterminate nature of the employment contract similar tensions exist pertaining to control over the labour process, for example as arguably reflected in the proliferation of New Public Management (Furåker, 2005: 26, 68; Therborn, 2018: 144–50).

‘productivist’ coalitions over perceived shared interests, for example in opposition to environmental regulations (Hampton, 2015: 76; Offe, 1985a; Satheesh, 2021; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 394; Thomas and Pulignano, 2021). As Postone notes: ‘because labor is determined as a necessary means of individual reproduction in capitalist society, wage laborers remain dependent on capital’s “growth,” even when the consequences of their labor, ecological and otherwise, are detrimental to themselves and to others’ (Postone, 1993: 313).

Collective action

From the above follows that wage-earners, as sellers of labour power, share certain characteristics in a structured antagonism to employers. However, and crucially, on a capitalist labour market each individual wage-earner offers his or her labour power under conditions of competition with others who do the same, meaning that workers are also ‘atomized and divided by competition’ (Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 74). In this context, by coordinating collectively agreed claims concerning wages and wider working conditions, collective organization functions to alter a scenario wherein each individual has an interest in underbidding the other and hence reduces competition between workers (Hyman, 1989b: 25, 38; Lindberg, 2013: 97; Müller-Jentsch, 1985). Moreover, collective organization serves to coordinate the various sanctions imposed on employers if wage-earners’ claims are not met to a sufficient extent (Crouch, 1982: 75; Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 79). Ultimately underpinned by members’ willingness to act (Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980), union organization may hence be seen as a form of power resource of wage-earners vis-à-vis employers, meaning ‘characteristics which provide actors – individuals or collectivities – with the ability to punish or reward other actors’ (Korpi, 2019: 15).² Korpi

² This is not to suggest that unionization is the only relevant factor to understand the balance of power between wage-earners and employers. Among other things such a balance is also shaped by the strength of employers’ associations (Furåker, 2005: 86; Kjellberg, 1983; Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980; Refslund and Arnholtz, 2022); and while unions remain a dominant

submits: ‘In a capitalist democracy the major power resources of the wage-earners are their organizations for collective action. Through these organizations the individually small power resources of the wage-earners can be combined and their significance increased’ (Korpi, 2019: 26). Particularly in lack of individual bargaining power, such as possession of scarce skills or a structurally advantageous position in the production process (Furåker and Berglund, 2003; Silver, 2003; Wright, 2000), most wage-earners as individuals ‘can exert little meaningful control over their work environment; only by submitting to collective principles can they share in more significant influence over the conditions of their working lives’ (Hyman, 1989b: 39–40).

However, seen through the perspective of an individual wage-earner, unionization can still be subject of a tension between what one may construe as individualistic and collectivistic rationality, an issue that resonates particularly with the second overarching theme of this dissertation, as explored in Papers III and IV. Olson’s seminal *The Logic of Collective Action* (1971) serves as a useful starting point in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of some of the tensions in the collective logic of unionism. It may be noted at the outset that Olson’s basic premises are widely contested (Boudon, 2003: 10; Goldthorpe, 1967; Kelly, 1998; Kim and Bearman, 1997; Mansbridge, 1990; Palm, 2017: 39; Streeck, 2004: 427; Udéhn, 1993). However, as argued by Udéhn, while many consider it refuted as an explanatory theory, ‘Conceived as a heuristic device, it is one of the most fertile suggestions in the history of social science’ (Udéhn, 1993: 256). The basic premise underlying Olson’s (1971: 21) argument is that human behaviour can be understood as an outcome of a rational self-interest calculation of the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. Such a cost-benefit analysis, Olson submits, often implies for the individual that it appears irrational to cooperate with others in the

form there are other and less formal channels of worker collectivism. In addition is the issue of whether unions invariably do pursue their members’ interests, which raises questions about the role of leadership and the extent to which interests other than those of the membership inform union policies, as e.g., in the case of more encompassing unions, who may take into consideration broader societal dynamics (Furåker, 2005: 88–89). Yellow unions are examples of a form of unionism in which members’ interest are subordinate to those of the employers.

provision of a collective good, i.e., a good that is not exclusive to those who cooperate (Olson, 1971: 15). The problem can be formulated as follows:

If it is assumed that a group forms to provide, or to lobby for the provision of, a good that is collective to potential members, then the major conceptual problem to the formation of such a group is that individuals can enjoy the benefits of group action without incurring the costs. (Booth, 1985: 253)

In Olson's exposition trade unions are primary examples of this logic, as the goods which unions provide, such as wages and regulation of working time, tend to extend to non-members as well (Ebbinghaus et al., 2011: 109; Olson, 1971: 67). The result is a collective action problem, or 'social dilemma', which can be defined as 'a situation in which individuals' self-interested behaviours lead to collectively suboptimal outcomes' (Simpson and Willer, 2015: 44; see also Kollock, 1998; Elster, 1989: 126). This problem is argued further to be more extensive the larger the group (cf. Kelly, 1998: 78), and Olson posits that large groups solve the collective action problem either by stipulating cooperation (i.e. membership) to be compulsive, or by providing private goods and services only to those who cooperate (Olson, 1971: 2, 68), 'with ancillary provision of the collective good as a "byproduct"' (Booth, 1985: 253). Beyond compulsory membership, selective incentives may hence provide a rational explanation for participation in collective action which remains consistent with Olson's basic premises (Ebbinghaus et al., 2011; Rothstein, 2001: 222).

However, as noted above, the theory has been subject to extensive critique, in terms both of its internal logic and the underlying assumption about individuals being guided primarily by rational self-interest, or, notably, a lack of sensitivity with regard to the social processes in which interests are defined – and hence the meaning and determination of the 'costs' and 'benefits' of cooperation (Blyth, 2003; Bunge, 1996: 359–387; Casey et al., 2021; Kelly, 1998; Klandermans, 1984: 120; Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980: 96; Rothstein, 1998: 290; Sen, 1977; Streeck, 2004: 427; Turnbull, 1988). As Jackson and Muellenborn note, the idea of action as rooted exclusively in economic self-interest ultimately presents an 'undersocialized' view, in which 'actors' interests are defined too abstractly, apart from the social context that shapes their identities and perceptions' (Jackson and

Muellenborn, 2012: 473, 478; also see Granovetter, 1985). On the same note Kelly suggests: ‘Rather than assign theoretical privilege to individualism and treat departures from it as theoretically deviant we should treat individual and social actions as different forms of behaviour that emerge under different conditions’ (Kelly, 1998: 72). In this regard, beyond or at least as complement to rational choice-oriented explanations, a range of sociological perspectives highlight the importance for cooperation of such factors as ideological considerations, norms, values, social/collective identity, and social capital (Carstensen et al., 2022; Ebbinghaus et al., 2011: 109; Fiorito, 1992; Kelly, 1998; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Palm, 2017; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Rosetti, 2019; Rothstein, 2001: 223; Wright et al., 1992: 126). In this perspective, ideology and collective identity serve as *frames* through which individuals can become more likely to think of their interests in group rather than individual terms (Benford and Snow, 2000; Kelly, 1998; MacKenzie et al., 2006; Palm, 2020; Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 285; Snow and Benford, 1988).³

One may usefully in this regard conceive of trade unions as ‘complex historical configurations of both ideas and interests’, where interests are shaped by and infused with meaning through certain ideas, at the same time as ideas are guided by interests (Jackson and Muellenborn, 2012: 486). Focusing on a related distinction between norms and interests, Svallfors argues: ‘As explanatory mechanisms, interests and norms are not easily distinguished. Interest-based and norm-based explanations often overlap, since individuals and groups more readily cultivate and defend those norms from which they stand to gain’ (Svallfors, 2006: 22). Unions may thus cultivate and promulgate certain collectivistic norms and values – notably including commitment to a ‘moral economy as against the economy of the free market’ (Thompson, 2013: 73) – in order to mitigate collective action

³ Such an emphasis on subjective factors related to ideology and identity should not, however, detract from the influence also of structures and material interests (Blyth, 2003: 698; Carstensen et al., 2022: 17–8; Pierson, 1993: 598; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Wright, 1985). Polletta and Jasper note: ‘too often collective identity has been invoked simply to fill gaps left by structuralist, state-centered, or rational choice models, in the process reproducing the very dichotomies the concept is supposed to challenge. Specifically, we should not assume that identity is the opposite of interest [...] with self-regarding action contrasted to altruistic action’ (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 298).

problems (Korpi, 1998: 56). As Sánchez-Mosquera observes, in terms of unionization a classic cohesive factor overriding the lack of rational interest has often been a collective political left-wing identity (Sánchez-Mosquera, 2023: 6). Equally, the pursuit of ‘more’ associated with business unionism could also be considered as a collectivistic ideological frame, and one which is likely to hold different implications in terms of members’ attitudes and unions’ political agendas. With regards tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader social agendas, these questions resonate with the themes examined in Papers III and IV.

Consequently, beyond any exogenous form of instrumental rationality, a predetermined set of ‘fixed preferences’ to be maximized, and once the point is established that unionization can be shaped by group identification and social processes, ‘we have opened up a much bigger set of issues about the formation of interest’ (Kelly, 1998: 72).⁴ Indeed, the interests that unions serve to aggregate and represent are particularly difficult to determine due to lack of a ‘common denominator to which all these heterogeneous and often conflicting needs can be reduced so as to “optimize” demands and tactics’ (Offe and Wiesensthal, 1980: 75). There exists a vast range of tensions and strategic trade-offs, pertaining for example to the relative salience attributed to wages, employment security, working time, working conditions (including less tangible moral issues of self-respect or standards of craftsmanship), and – not least – the wider social and natural environment (Johnson et al., 1992; Rosa, 2019: 236; Thompson, 2013: 261; Turnbull, 1988: 112; Valizade et al., 2022). Ambiguities in the relationship between trade unions and the environment can be seen through such a lens. A line of reasoning pursued across Papers III and IV – which is looked at more closely further below – is that workers may be more likely to embrace agendas relating to the wider natural environment under contexts where conditions are more favourable pertaining to other union agendas, notably including conditions at work and the de-

⁴ As Blyth argues: ‘if one takes ideas seriously as causal elements, as “subjective mental models,” then one must see them as having an effect on the content of what agents want [...] otherwise, ideas would simply be the residue of preexisting interests and thus unimportant’ (Blyth, 2003: 697).

commodification of labour. Issues relating to the latter are addressed in various ways across Papers I and II, to which the following discussion turns.

Unions and management-worker conflict

Trade unions can thus be conceived of as organizational expressions of a structured antagonism between workers and employers. Wage-earners share certain commonalities around which they create institutions collectively to deliberate upon and in turn promote their interests in dispute with employers (Korpi, 2019: 17; Offe and Wiesensthal, 1980). In this context, embodying a form of resistance to and amelioration of power-imbalances in the employment relationship, trade unions' effects on perceptions and attitudes about class and employment relations – workers' 'class consciousness', to use a more loaded term – are notoriously ambiguous (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Hyman, 1989b; Lenin, 1973; Lipset, 1981; Lukács, 2018; Svallfors, 2006; Tronti, 2019; Wright, 1985). While effects may be heterogeneous across different unions, there is a general tension wherein unions channel and may even stimulate members' consciousness of conflict in the employment relationship while at the same time seeking 'to limit the expression of industrial conflict to forms over which they can exert control, and which do not jeopardise the arrangements and understandings developed with employers' (Hyman, 1989b: 40).⁵ These ambiguities raise a set of questions addressed in Paper I, resonating with some of the fundamental issues in the industrial relations literature and beyond: do unions tend to foster or reduce perceptions of conflict between management

⁵ Indeed, while beyond the scope of the empirical analyses pursued in this dissertation union effects on conflict perceptions may vary across different types of unions (Hyman, 2001). One may think of such variation along a continuum from radical revolutionary (e.g., syndicalist and communist) unions through encompassing and reformist unions to catholic or employer friendly 'yellow unions' (Furåker, 2005: 88–89). This is further not to reduce perceptions of management-worker conflict exclusively to an outcome of what unions do. Many other factors are likely to matter, including the behaviour and attitudes of employers (Freeman, 1986; Furåker, 2005: 159; Heery and Simms, 2010; Kelly, 1998; Western, 1997: 176–7).

and workers, provided indeed that they do affect such perceptions at all?

There is a notable shortage of research specifically examining union effects on conflict perceptions. The overview below therefore covers research on attitudes and perceptions concerning related although certainly distinct topics by reviewing some findings pertaining to the construct of class consciousness (Wright, 1985, 1997) and the extensive literature on unions and job satisfaction (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Laroche, 2016). While class consciousness and job satisfaction indeed are discrete constructs – across which union effects well may vary – the research into these issues can nevertheless offer some insights of use for understanding union effects on conflict perceptions and the underlying causal mechanisms. When considering ‘union effects’ in this regard, it is pertinent to distinguish between mechanisms relating to why workers unionize in the first place (Lewin, 2005: 216) – i.e. selection effects – and those whereby unions partake in shaping perceptions, which can be referred to as transformative effects (Bledow, 2021: 36; Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kim and Margalit, 2017; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017, 2022). Recent research provides some cause for caution against explanations for union effects based on cross-sectional data too one-sidedly foregrounding transformative mechanisms, such that attitudinal differences between union members and non-members are attributed causally to the experience of union membership (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Laroche, 2016). The overview below is therefore sensitive to the distinction between selection and transformation mechanisms.

Unions fanning the flames of discontent

The argument that unions foster perceptions of conflict between management and workers can be inferred from literatures with roots in diverse intellectual traditions. Union critics and certain conservative political elements portray unions as fundamentally disruptive institutions that incite conflict in an otherwise harmonious employment relationship (see Hyman, 1989b: 225; Lewin, 2005: 210). Portrayals of this sort are underpinned by a unitarist conception of the employment

relationship, wherein any expression of conflict is seen as ‘pathological’ (Fox, 1969; Lewin, 2001: 461; Van Buren et al., 2021: 181). Unitarism has been referred to as ‘management’s frame of reference’, holding to the view of the organization through the analogy of the sports team (Fox, 1969), and resonates with underlying ideas in (at least some branches of) the Human Resource Management literature (Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Kelly, 2018). As an example, Turner et al. observe: ‘Many firms prefer to exclude trade unions, believing that *unions interfere with the intrinsic harmony and common interests between employer and employees* and undermine management’s prerogative to manage’ (Turner et al., 2020: 282 emphasis added; see also Carstensen et al., 2022: 14).

Others maintain that trade unions do represent the genuine interests of their members (or labour more broadly) and that these interests often, although not invariably, conflict with those of the employers. While it must not necessarily follow from such a perspective that unions augment perceptions of conflict, there are a number of reasons – relating both to selection and transformative effects – for why they might. As it pertains to the latter, unions may seek to raise perceptions of management-worker conflict and ‘cast management as the enemy’ in order to motivate workers to unionize, to mobilize the current membership (Lincoln and Boothe, 1993: 160; Kelly, 1998), and to justify their own existence as vehicles of opposition (Lewin, 2005: 210). As Hyman notes, ‘a union which damps down workers’ discontents too far destroys its own reason for existence’ (Hyman, 1989a: 79). In other words, and relating back to the role of framing in collective action, trade unions may seek in various ways to characterize the nature of the employment relationship in terms of a conflict between a ‘them’ and an ‘us’ that can be conducive to collective mobilization (Benford and Snow, 2000; Gahan and Pekarek, 2013; Kelly, 1998; Korpi, 2001: 249; Lee, 2007: 587; Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 343). Palm suggests: ‘Because attribution is a crucial factor for collective mobilization, ideologies that promote conflicting interests between employers and employees [...] will enhance collective mobilization’ (Palm, 2017: 53).

Empirically, Wright (1985, 1997) finds evidence which he reads as support for a broadly similar line of reasoning, studying Sweden and the US and comparing the attitudes of union members with their non-organized counterparts. Across different class locations, i.e.,

independent of such factors as authority and skills, union members are demonstrated to be more likely than non-members to subscribe to various anticapitalist attitudes – what is referred to as anti-capitalist class consciousness.⁶ Wright interprets these findings as indication that unions have a causal impact on workers' attitudes towards class and employment relations (Wright, 1985: 270–4), arguing that 'Union membership is likely to be among the most important intervening factors in the consciousness formation process' (1985: 269). Moreover, this 'union effect' is demonstrated to be more sizeable in Sweden compared to the US, leading Wright to infer: 'This suggests that it is not simply the fact of unionization that acts as a mediating process in consciousness-formation, but the strength and social weight of the labour movement' (Wright, 1985: 274). Wright thus submits that stronger labour movements may reinforce rather than suppress critical attitudes towards class and employment relations (Wright, 1985: 278). Indeed, it is argued that the more widespread anticapitalist attitudes of Swedish workers is a result partially of 'the fact that Swedish union members are more anticapitalist than American union members' and partially of 'the fact that the Swedish working-class coalition has a much higher rate of unionization' (Wright, 1997: 434).

Somewhat similarly, Frangi et al. conclude a review of the literature by suggesting that union members have a 'higher exposure to union framing of labour conflict', which in their particular case is suggested to stimulate a higher willingness among members to mobilize against their employers (Frangi et al., 2022: 1240). Their research confirms this argument by revealing that union members are more inclined than non-members to join strike action and also, notably, that individuals in countries with stronger industrial relations institutions, regardless of their individual membership status, are more willing to do so. Svallfors (2006) also emphasizes the impact of unions contextually in terms of framing class and employment relations – what he refers to as the 'articulation' of class – by suggesting:

⁶ Class consciousness in Wright's usage does not encompass explicit perceptions of conflict. More generally in traditional frameworks of subjective class, a perception of conflict – or 'conflict consciousness' – does tend to be an element of class consciousness (Cigéhn et al., 2001; Giddens, 1973: 112–3; Mann, 1973).

All else remaining constant, we would expect that strong unions encourage more of a partisan mentality (whereby the interests of the management only partly coincide with those of the employees) among the employees than weak unions are able to do [...] [S]trong unions can actually contribute to a more negative image of the organization or company and stronger class antagonisms. (Svallfors, 2006: 34–5)

Empirically, Svallfors examines workers' views of their employing organization rather than the relations between workers and management as such, nevertheless demonstrating more negative views, or lower commitment, in Sweden compared to the US, in spite of Swedish wage-earners valuing the work itself higher than Americans. These 'partisan attitudes' are attributed to the stronger union base in Sweden (Svallfors, 2006: 51). Thus a hypothesis (H1) in Paper I extends the logic of the research covered above to conflict perceptions, proposing that union members may be more likely than non-members to perceive management-worker conflict and that such perceptions further may be more widely held among members and non-members alike in countries with higher unionization rates.

Moreover, the findings reported above also align with the widely established negative link between union membership and job satisfaction (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Laroche, 2016), the extensive and methodologically sophisticated literature on which may serve more comprehensively to elucidate some of the potential mechanisms involved. Indeed, several important contributions in the job satisfaction literature utilize high quality datasets and yield insights regarding causal mechanisms that are of value to research into union effects also beyond the specific issue of job satisfaction – within the context of this dissertation particularly concerning the themes of Papers I and II. There is thus good cause to survey the job satisfaction literature in some detail.

Although less consistently so outside the US and UK, a large body of research spanning across more than 40 years finds that union members tend to be less satisfied with their jobs than their non-organized counterparts (Bessa et al., 2021; Borjas, 1979; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Goerke and Huang, 2022; Green and Heywood, 2015; Laroche, 2016). This negative 'union effect' is described as a paradox as it seems to contradict the idea that unions function to improve the terms and conditions of work (e.g. Green and Heywood, 2015: 580). As Freeman and Medoff (1984: 136) ask in their seminal study: 'If unions "deliver

the goods” to the workers, why are the members dissatisfied?’. To answer the question, Freeman and Medoff apply the exit-voice theory developed by Hirschman (1970) and attribute union members’ dissatisfaction to the role of unions as voice institutions (see also Borjas, 1979).⁷ In this perspective, union members’ dissatisfaction springs from efforts by the union to galvanize workers by highlighting negative aspects of the work environment, an interpretation which hence resonates with the idea of a transformative effect underpinned by union framing. Particularly relevant to present purposes, when decomposing various aspects of the job, Freeman and Medoff (1984: 142) find that the ‘membership effect’ is most pronounced on perceived adversarial relations with management, members rating such relations as worse than non-members. In conclusion, they argue: ‘whereas exit removes an individual from the undesired condition, *voice operates by fanning discontent*’ (Freeman and Medoff, 1984: 148–9 emphasis added). The theory thus builds on the idea of a causal union impact on job satisfaction (Bessa et al., 2021: 252; Lincoln and Boothe, 1993: 162).

However, while some subsequent research corroborates the argument that unions have a causal effect on job dissatisfaction (e.g. Artz, 2010), the ‘voice thesis’ remains disputed, and others have proposed competing interpretations that involve various selection mechanisms (see Laroche, 2016 for a rigorous review and meta-analysis). One argument emphasizes working conditions, positing that when such conditions are controlled for adequately, much of the union effect disappears or even turns positive (Bessa et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2004; Lincoln and Boothe, 1993; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990). In an important contribution, Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990) submit that previous studies have not controlled adequately for (unfavourable) working conditions, notably including such issues as the degree of worker control over the job (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990: 263, 265). Consequently, the same authors reveal that union membership is associated negatively with factors such as autonomy (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990: 269) and conclude that this indicates that unionization is not independent from the conditions at work, suggesting rather that ‘unions are more likely

⁷ Hirschman defines voice as ‘any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs’ (Hirschman, 1970: 30).

to thrive when workers have some incentive to organize in order to improve working conditions' (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990: 264). These results might reflect a broader limitation of cross-sectional studies which can fail to isolate the causal impacts of membership from elements fostering unionization in the first place (Laroche, 2016), such that job dissatisfaction – due in turn to less favourable working conditions – can promote unionization and not the other way around (Charlwood, 2002: 481; Kochan, 1979: 26). This holds important consequences because 'if unions tend to organize undesirable jobs, unions might actually improve perceptions of these jobs. However, even after union improvement, perceptions of union jobs might remain more negative than perceptions of more desirable jobs in the nonunion sector' (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990: 280). Indeed, net of such working conditions, Pfeffer and Davis-Blake demonstrate a positive union effect on job satisfaction and conclude that 'when models explaining job satisfaction are correctly specified, unions in fact have a positive effect on job satisfaction and the apparent paradox disappears' (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990: 281). Other studies also emphasize the selection (or 'sorting') of certain individuals into membership but focus on such personal characteristics as values, attitudes, and personality traits (Green and Heywood, 2015; and see Barling et al., 1991; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012). In this perspective, people more predisposed to job dissatisfaction or at least less predisposed to job satisfaction may be more likely to unionize – hence another explanatory mechanism rivaling the notion of a causal impact of unions (Green and Heywood, 2015).

In sum, the literature on unions and job satisfaction – often utilizing panel and other high quality data sets – provides some cause for caution against too one-sided causal interpretations of union effects (Bryson et al., 2010; Hadziabdic, 2020; Laroche, 2016: 711). Laroche concludes a meta-study by proposing a number of potential endogeneity mechanisms underlying a negative union effect on job satisfaction that are of clear relevance also to the question of union effects on conflict perceptions, whereby unionization can be the result of workers' experience of workplace conflict, certain workers being intrinsically more dissatisfied and more prone to unionize, and certain unpleasant jobs being more conducive to unionization (Laroche, 2016: 731). In order more comprehensively to address union effects in this regard, one

analytical strategy is to go beyond micro-level measures of union membership and instead or simultaneously look at more aggregated measures, as such measures better may capture some of the collective benefits of unions (Esser and Olsen, 2012; Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013; Hoque et al., 2017; O’Brady and Doellgast, 2021). This is a fundamental analytical insight that is manifested throughout the approach of the papers constituting this dissertation.

As noted above, the majority of studies on unions and job satisfaction are based on data from the US and UK, and given the peculiarities of their industrial relations systems, the findings cannot immediately be generalized to other contexts (Goerke and Huang, 2022: 1; Laroche, 2016: 736; Sverke and Hellgren, 2001: 171). Recent research attends to this issue through comparative analyses that combine the micro- and the macro-level (Hipp and Givan, 2015). In a multi-level analysis, Hipp and Givan reveal that the membership effect on job satisfaction varies cross-nationally, and also – arguably in line with the logics advanced respectively by Wright (1985) and Svallfors (2006) – that union density is associated negatively with job satisfaction (Hipp and Givan, 2015: 364). Their findings are mixed, however, insofar as when decomposing job satisfaction and looking specifically at ratings of the material aspects of the job, such satisfaction is higher in countries with higher collective bargaining coverage (Hipp and Givan, 2015: 368). Furthermore, and in keeping with this latter finding, other research documents a positive correlation between job satisfaction union density (Donegani and McKay, 2012: 481–2). As it pertains to ‘union effects’ at the country-level, research is thus inconclusive but points to the value in considering several analytical levels in order to address potential selection mechanisms reflected in individual-level effects of union membership: while union members may be more prone than non-members to perceive management-worker conflicts, it does not necessarily follow that such conflicts are more widely perceived in countries with higher rates of unionization. A number of studies may in fact suggest the opposite (Edlund and Lindh, 2015; Esser and Olsen, 2012).

‘From class war to bureaucratic gamesmanship’: pluralism, radicalism, and the social integration of workers

As is the case with the notion that unions foster management-worker conflict, the idea that unions reduce conflict perceptions may be deduced from varying approaches to the employment relationship. One such approach is pluralism, a key frame of reference in the Anglo-American industrial relations literature (Fox, 1969; Frege, 2008: 40; Kaufman, 2008). With intellectual roots that can be traced back to Durkheim and Parsonian functionalism (Cullinane, 2014: 222–3; Hyman, 1989b: 70–1) but encapsulating a broad range of perspectives (Van Buren et al., 2021), the pluralist frame recognizes conflicts inherent to the employment contract upon which unions are structurally predicated, but holds that unions do not introduce or augment such conflicts: ‘They simply provide a highly organized and continuous form of expression for sectional interests which would exist anyway’ (Fox, 1969: 399). From a pluralist perspective it must not follow that trade unions reduce conflict perceptions.⁸ However, there are good reasons on basis of this approach to expect unions – and strong industrial relations institutions more broadly (e.g., collective bargaining) – to do so. Clegg (1975: 310) laid out a central tenet of industrial relations pluralism when he wrote that ‘[...] men [sic] associate together to further their common interests and desires; their associations exert pressure on each other and on the government; the concessions which follow help to bind society together [...]’. By and large, this is how many pluralists conceive of the institutionalization of class conflict, described by

⁸ Indeed, as Turner et al. argue: ‘[...] independent voice allows employees to “speak up” and legitimizes a culture of opposition that is central to a pluralist ethos. Trade union membership potentially socializes workers into the legitimacy of opposition [...]’ (Turner et al., 2020: 282 emphasis added). Or as Dukes and Streeck write with regards to what they refer to as ‘the mantra of industrial relations pluralism, or indeed pluralism generally [...] peace must be preceded by an unimpeded articulation of conflicting interests and their assignment to an arena where all parties have recourse to roughly similar political capacities’ (Dukes and Streeck, 2023: 131); ‘For a settlement under what has been called “pluralist” industrial relations, there is no requirement of normative integration; as collective agreements can be and usually are renegotiated every year, they can, as temporary compromises, be signed by both sides in spite of unreconciled values and, in principle, irreconcilable interests’ (Streeck, 2023: 13).

Kerr et al. (1960: 292) as a transition ‘from class war to bureaucratic gamesmanship’. For pluralists, such a ‘transition’ aligns with an often explicit normative agenda and concern with social integration and cohesion, striving towards ‘creating a *balance* between the competing interests in the employment relationship’ (Budd et al., 2004: 197 emphasis added; also see e.g. Fox and Flanders, 1969; Kaufman, 2008). As Lipset notes in a line of reasoning that reflects the general pluralist sentiment:

Cleavage—where it is legitimate—contributes to the integration of societies and organizations. Trade-unions, for example, help to integrate their members in the larger body politic and give them a basis for loyalty to the system. Marx’s focus on unions [...] as expeditors of revolutionary tension was incorrect. (Lipset, 1981: 1)

However, *pace* Lipset, outcomes analogous to those observed by pluralists are recognized also within a more radical perspective, including by Marx himself who remained ambivalent in this regard (Hyman, 2001; Kelly, 1988: 12). Many radical institutionalists and others rooted in Marxism see unions as forms of resistance to power-imbalances inherent to the employment relationship which tend to be limited to ameliorating the surface-level manifestations of such imbalances. In this perspective, unions’ lessening of the intensity of conflict is interpreted more critically as inhibiting the growth of radical forms of oppositional consciousness questioning the underlying social relations of capitalism (Crouch, 1982: 36; Hyman, 1989b; Lukács, 2018: 61; Tronti, 2019; Western, 1997: 6; Lenin, 1973). Consequently, the preferred terminology tends to be one where institutions such as unions organize and shape the expression of conflict, as distinguished from what Edwards refers to as ‘the old-fashioned distinction between the causation of conflict and its containment’ (Edwards, 1992: 372).⁹ Moreover, a radical approach situates the role of unions in a broader framework (see Horkheimer, 1972 for a more general exposition of some analogous themes), for example by emphasizing the historically specific conditions under which post-war labour relations tended to become stabilized, including a long era of economic growth extending the margins

⁹ Similarly, Hyman notes: ‘It is highly misleading to posit a simple dichotomy between industrial peace or order on the one hand, and conflict on the other’ (Hyman, 1989b: 101)

for compromise, and the privileged position of western capitalist nations (and hence the western working class) in a global economic system (Frege et al., 2011; Hyman, 1989b: 87, 1994a: 114; Kelly, 1998; Marsden, 1982; Offe, 1985a: 822; Silver, 2003; Wallerstein, 2004). From this perspective tends also to follow an emphasis on contradictions and instabilities inherent to a capitalist economy that undermine the long-term viability of equilibrium (Baccaro and Howell, 2017: 12–3; Calhoun, 2020: 152; Harvey, 1981; Silver, 2003; Streeck, 2011: 164, 2016a, 2016b). As Streeck argues:

capitalism as a social formation would appear to be torn by a fundamental contradiction between a ‘need’, functional as well as social, for stability on the one hand and, on the other, an internal restlessness that makes stability impossible to achieve for more than short breathing periods. (Streeck, 2011: 161)

Consequently, although unions can serve to lessen the intensity of conflict and hence might reduce conflict perceptions, the radical frame is cognizant of ‘limits to the way a political consensus can emerge between labour and capital in the current socio-economic context, such that it is always contingent and never fully embedded given the nature of power asymmetries’ (Dundon et al., 2020: 13–14).

Empirically, there are a number of previous studies that offer evidence – primarily in a country-comparative perspective – which suggest that unions may contribute towards reducing conflict perceptions (Donegani and McKay, 2012; Edlund and Lindh, 2015; Esser and Olsen, 2012). Of particular relevance in this connection is the distinction made by Edlund and Lindh (2015), drawing on Korpi (2001, 2006, 2019), between *social* and *political* manifestations of class conflict. Social class conflict concerns ‘tensions and antagonism between social categories located at different levels in the socio-economic hierarchy outside parliamentary politics’, notably including conflict played out ‘at the site of production’ (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 312). Political conflict in turn ‘refers to class struggles that are mainly institutionalized within parliamentary politics and resolved in a “peaceful” way through the implementation of redistributive welfare state policies’ (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 312). Edlund and Lindh demonstrate in a country-comparative analysis that these two manifestations of class conflict are correlated negatively: political class conflict, operationalized as the

magnitude of class differences in political preferences, is more pronounced in countries with lower social class conflict – measured as public perceptions of class-related social conflict, which while a broader construct encompasses conflict between management and workers. Edlund and Lindh argue further that the relative salience of political versus social manifestations of class conflict reflects the power of organized labour, as labour will tend to seek to transfer ‘distributive struggles from the labor market into parliamentary politics’ (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 324).¹⁰ The success of organized labour in this connection is held to be manifested in the size of the welfare state (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 313; cf. Baldwin, 1990) – an argument returned to further below in connection with the second overarching theme – which is demonstrated to correlate negatively with perceived social class conflict while positively with political class conflict. Hence, while Edlund and Lindh focus on perceptions of broader social class conflict as moderated by the size of the welfare state, the findings suggest that the strength of working class organization can hold implications for which particular aspect of class conflict is most salient (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 323). Building on their insights, a second hypothesis (H2) in Paper I proposes that management-worker conflict is less widely perceived in countries with more influential unions – partly due to lower levels of economic inequality and more encompassing social policies oriented towards the de-commodification of labour (also see Esping-Andersen, 1990; Huber and Stephens, 2014).

Beyond redistributive issues, and returning to the selection mechanisms raised above, a further reason for why management-worker conflict may be less widely perceived in countries with stronger

¹⁰ Edlund and Lindh suggest: ‘broad layers of the population have good reasons to prefer to locate societal bargaining in parliamentary politics rather than stay within a market relationship’ because of the principle of ‘one person – one vote’ (Edlund and Lindh, 2015: 313). This argument builds on an influential thesis about the ‘democratic class struggle’ advocated by Korpi, arguing that it is ‘in the interests of wage-earners to move the struggle for the distribution of the fruits of production into the political arena, where their numerical strength can be used more effectively [...]’ (Korpi, 2019: 170). Similar distinctions are also made in the industrial relations literature. Müller-Jentsch argues: ‘Collective bargaining is a central integrating mechanism of capitalist society in that it seeks to divorce economic from political struggles and to channel class conflict into class conflicts of interests with pragmatic outcomes’ (Müller-Jentsch, 1985: 9; see also Giddens, 1973: 202).

unions and industrial relations institutions pertains to the positive association between the strength of such institutions (e.g., as proxied by union density and collective bargaining coverage) on the one hand, and conditions at work such as employee autonomy, job security, and lower work intensity on the other (Adăscăliței et al., 2022; Berglund and Furåker, 2016; Dixon et al., 2013; Edlund and Grönlund, 2008; Esser and Olsen, 2012: 444; Gallie, 2007; Green and McIntosh, 2001; Kalleberg, 2018: 101). In a key contribution, Esser and Olsen demonstrate that there is a positive association between union density and job autonomy, also when controlling for the prevalence of firm-specific skills, the latter a key alternative explanatory mechanism derived from the Varieties of Capitalism literature.¹¹ They conclude:

The analyses provide evidence that unionization is an important determinant of job autonomy and is positively related to job security [...] The power of workers through unions may improve quality of working life by constraining the actions of employers and thereby provide workers with greater involvement in decision making and more control over work tasks. (Esser and Olsen, 2012: 452)

These country-level findings are hence notable as an inversion of the selection effects raised in the preceding section (e.g. Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990), speaking to the collective benefits of unions. Taken together, the research covered above might suggest that while a number of selection mechanisms can lead to union members being more likely than non-members to perceive management-worker conflict, such perceptions – particularly in the extent to which they are rooted in unfavourable working conditions – may nevertheless be less widely held in

¹¹ More broadly with regards to competing causal mechanisms in the comparative literature, there is a vibrant exchange between advocates of power resources theory and more employer centred perspectives, the latter including the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach (Baccaro and Howell, 2017; Bender, 2023; Edlund and Grönlund, 2010; Gordon, 2015; Hacker and Pierson, 2004; Hall and Soskice, 2001b; Kinderman, 2017; Korpi, 2006; Oude Nijhuis, 2009; Streeck, 2016b; Swenson, 1991, 2004). Scholars adhering respectively to the VoC (Hall and Soskice, 2001a) and the power resources approach (Korpi, 2006) agree that conditions such as worker autonomy and control are more prevalent in high union density-countries (e.g., Esser and Olsen, 2012; Lyness et al., 2012) – but differ in terms of the identification of underlying forces. VoC-scholars emphasise the actions of firms and the comparative advantages related to employee involvement in certain contexts – particularly Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs) where employee involvement and autonomy is argued to follow from higher degrees of employee-skill specificity. Power resources theory scholars and others put a heavier emphasis on conflicts and the relative bargaining position of employees vis-à-vis employers (Doellgast et al., 2009: 490–1; Edlund and Grönlund, 2010).

countries with higher rates of unionization and stronger industrial relations institutions. The cited mechanism, whereby strong unions ameliorate conflict perceptions partly through the provision of more favourable working conditions in terms of such factors as autonomy, lead on to the question of what unions do at the workplace level, which is explored in Paper II.

What unions do at the workplace

As noted further above, trade unions provide a means for workers collectively to alter the social relations at work and thereby potentially within certain parameters extend their influence over organizational activities (Ackroyd and Bolton, 1999; Adăscăliței et al., 2022; Beynon, 1973; Bryson et al., 2013: 1008; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Green et al., 2022; Simms, 2017). Paper II argues that such insights, regarding the role of unions as collective voice mechanisms in particular, and the social relations at work more generally, would be of value but tend not to be acknowledged in the influential job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), which has its roots in occupational psychology.

Building in part on the demand-control model (Karasek, 1979), JD-R theory divides characteristics of the work environment into two components: demands and resources. Job demands are efforts corresponding to physiological and/or psychological costs – which include elements of the job such as a high workload (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Job resources in turn are aspects of the work which are functional when it comes to achieving job goals, as well as in terms of reducing the costs – physiological or psychological – of job demands (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Llorens et al., 2006; Tims et al., 2013). Job resources cover such factors as employee autonomy, control, and development opportunities. Following the conceptual outline above, elements of the job construed within JD-R theory as job demands and job resources can be understood usefully through the lens of tensions or conflict between management and workers regarding the social relations at work and control over the labour process (Edwards, 1979). As noted, in the context of

such conflict trade unions represent a particular independent and collective form of employee voice, through which workers collectively can channel and seek to redress their concerns (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Wilkinson, Donaghey, et al., 2020; Wilkinson, Dundon, et al., 2020).

The significance of such voice mechanisms tends not to be acknowledged within the JD-R literature. While some JD-R studies do consider the impact of employee voice, focus is predominantly on direct and *individual* voice mechanisms (Conway et al., 2016; Holland et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021; and see Barry and Wilkinson, 2022 for a broader critique of the ‘psychologization’ and hence individualization of the employee voice construct). To advance the theory, there are strong reasons to consider collective voice as an important causal mechanism through which workers can reduce job demands and increase job resources (i.e., job autonomy, job control, and job training).

As it pertains to job demands, important insights concerning union effects can be derived from the literature on work intensification (Ackroyd and Bolton, 1999; Adăscăliței et al., 2022; Green et al., 2022; Green and McIntosh, 2001). Central accounts within this body of literature point to trade unionism and worker collectivism as principal countervailing forces against work pressure and intensification (Adăscăliței et al., 2022; Bacon, 1999; Green et al., 2022). Green et al., (2022: 475, 480), for example, observe a negative while weak association between union recognition and the intensity of work, concluding in a broader perspective that union decline during past decades in all likelihood has contributed to a trend of work intensification that is observed widely across Europe. Similarly, O’Brady and Doellgast argue:

unions are on the front lines of efforts to combat well-established causes of stress at work. [...] Union shop stewards enforce collective agreement provisions, engage in labor-management cooperation over key areas of mutual concern, and initiate campaigns designed to alleviate stress in the workplace. (O’Brady and Doellgast, 2021: 307)

In terms of some of the underlying mechanisms, Bacon (1999) offers a valuable case-based account by establishing a connection between the derecognition of unions and a management strategy focused on individualizing employment relations, the ultimate aim being work intensification, the latter in turn demonstrated to be deterred by the

collective employee voice of the union. Based on these insights, Paper II suggests the hypothesis (H1) that union influence at the workplace has a negative effect on job demands.

Turning to factors construed in JD-R theory as job resources – i.e., job autonomy, control, and training – there are good reasons to hypothesize a positive collective voice effect (Berton et al., 2023; Beynon, 1973; Heyes and Stuart, 1998; Hoque et al., 2017; O’Brady and Doellgast, 2021; Simms, 2017; Wang et al., 2023). With regards to union effects on autonomy, previous research has yielded some mixed findings (Boxall and Winterton, 2018; Gallie et al., 2004), in relation to which scholars highlight a set of analytical points which relate back to the previous outline of the job satisfaction literature. Most notably, one explanation offered for these ambiguous results points to the use of fairly blunt measures of collective voice such as union membership or union presence at work; measures which are argued not to be ‘well-equipped to capture the actual effectiveness of unions in providing representation or supporting workers’ (O’Brady and Doellgast, 2021: 311; see also Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013: 563). In line with this logic, Hoque et al. (2017) argue that unions as collective voice mechanisms serve as more than communication channels between workers and management, and consequently that the extent to which problems brought to management attention are addressed depends not only upon the presence of a union, but also upon the possibilities for the union to put pressure on employers. Consequently, the same research documents a positive effect of trade union representation at work on such conditions as worker influence and development opportunities, a positive effect which is mediated by the extent to which the union provides efficient voice (Hoque et al., 2017). These findings hold important analytical consequences in terms of how to measure trade union effects that are reflected in Paper II – suggesting that while collective voice is likely to have a positive effect on job resources (H2), it is prudent to proxy voice through measures that capture union influence as opposed to mere presence at the workplace, or indeed union membership at the individual level.

Lastly, Paper II also addresses a recently identified gap in the JD-R literature by developing an additional hypothesis concerning the covariation of job demands and job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). A central component to JD-R theory is that demands and

resources, aside from having independent effects, also interact. Studies have reported such interactions, for example demonstrating that job resources – notably autonomy – decrease the impact of job demands on burnout (Bakker et al., 2005). In other words, the extent to which job demands have negative consequences in terms of employee well-being often depends upon the extent to which demands are met with sufficient job resources. However, research into factors that affect the covariation of demands and resources is lacking; i.e., insights are scarce pertaining to the conditions under which high demands are met with job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Paper II suggests that collective voice may function as one such covariation element, representing a causal mechanism that moderates the demands-resources association. This line of reasoning builds on the notion that some jobs may be inherently demanding, and that under such contexts trade unions can seek to ensure that high workloads are met with job resources such as training and employee autonomy – thus possibly remedying dissatisfaction (Barry and Wilkinson, 2022) that can follow from work intensity. In other words, while collective voice is argued in the hypothesis advanced above to have a positive overall impact on job resources, an additional hypothesis (H3) in Paper II suggest that such an effect may be stronger under high demands, because employees might be more prone raise concerns for job resources to cope with the high demands, and because management under such conditions could be more amenable to the employees' case.

Thus, Paper II argues that trade unions provide a means for workers collectively to alter the social relations at work and extend their control over organizational activities, thereby potentially reducing job demands and increasing job resources. Accordingly, as noted in the discussion above concerning union effects on conflict perceptions (Paper I), comparative research demonstrates that in countries with stronger unions and industrial relations institutions, conditions tend to be more favourable in terms of such factors as workers' autonomy, job security, and work intensity (Adăscăliței et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2013; Edlund and Grönlund, 2008; Esser and Olsen, 2012: 444; Gallie, 2007; Green and McIntosh, 2001; Berglund and Furåker, 2016). Taken together these insights lead on to the next set of questions addressed under the theme of tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. A line of reasoning pursued particularly

in Paper III is that in contexts where conditions are more favourable pertaining to some of the issues considered above, notably including attainments in the political sphere relating to the de-commodification of labour, the scope may expand for unions and their members – and possibly wage-earners more broadly – to embrace broader political agendas (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Bledow and Busemeyer, 2021: 271). As Gordon argues:

higher union density will (other things being equal) provide union movements with a sense of institutional and/or labor market security and this is likely to encourage them to conceive of their interests and policy ambitions broadly. When density is low and/or declining, these transformative ambitions will be consequently weakened and such movements will focus on defending existing policy and contractual victories for their core memberships. (Gordon, 2015: 90)

The present dissertation examines an aspect of this issue by engaging with debates about the relationship between trade unions and the environment, specifically through the analysis of union members' support for environmental protection. Environmental degradation and the ongoing climate crisis (IPCC, 2021, 2022) may indeed represent a significant and pressing issue to which the logic suggested by Gordon (2015: 90) could be applied, not least as efforts to protect the environment can precipitate resistance due to concerns of a more immediate nature pertaining to economic and labour market security (Iskander and Lowe, 2020: 112; Panarello, 2021). Consequently, unionized workers are often portrayed through the lens of jobs versus the environment (Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 186), and similar tensions run through the level of union policy (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Thomas, 2021; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). Notwithstanding such tensions, there are reasons – notably involving political ideology and the propensity to consider broader collective issues (Iversen and Soskice, 2015; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Wright, 1997) – to expect union members to be more willing than non-members to support environmental protection. These are some of the key issues explored in Papers III and IV. The following section locates these studies in a broader theoretical context, outlines the literature and expands upon some of the causal mechanisms underpinning the research hypotheses.

Immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas: trade unions and the environment

Are unions nothing more than narrow self-interest groups which unite individual workers via their ability to improve the individual's well-being through collective action? (Fiorito, 1992: 20)

A longstanding theme in the industrial relations literature and beyond concerns tensions in unionism between immediate sectional interests versus broader social agendas (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Cohen, 2011; Fiorito, 1992; Flanders, 1970; Holgate, 2021: 158; Hyman, 2001; Simms, 2012). Such tensions are central to most if not all debates about the relationship between trade unions and the environment, as a sufficiently expeditious transition towards environmental sustainability is claimed to involve costs and trade-offs at least in the shorter term, be it through higher prices and/or taxes, loss of employment or even 'economic contraction', i.e., slower or no economic growth (Antal, 2014; Ciplet and Harrison, 2020: 446–50; Gough, 2010; Gould et al., 2004; Hampton, 2015: 57, 186, 2018; Hickel and Kallis, 2020; Newell et al., 2022; Obach, 2004; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2019: 133; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994). Consequently – regardless of the validity of the underlying assumptions – portrayals of unionized workers often highlight dilemmas of jobs versus the environment (Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 186), and the relationship between the labour movement and the environment has been characterized as 'tenuous, contradictory, and uneven' (Iskander and Lowe, 2020: 123). Snell and Fairbrother, for example, argue that unions are likely to continue to wrestle with tensions between job protection and respect for the natural environment, noting in conclusion: 'The danger is that job protection prevails above all else [...] After all, the union movement is a materialist movement representing those involved in production and related activity' (Snell and Fairbrother, 2010: 422).

While there is agreement that unions have integrated environmental issues on their agendas, in relation to which there is indeed a longstanding work-related health and safety component, assessments vary pertaining to the shape and extent of engagement beyond rhetoric (Barca, 2012; Bell, 2020; Hampton, 2015: 150; Obach, 2004; Räthzel et al., 2021; Silverman, 2004, 2006; Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 188). Analyses of such variation highlight the influence of such factors as

sectoral interests, the broader political and institutional environment, and – notably – unions’ political identities (Barca, 2019; Clarke and Lipsig-Mummé, 2020; Felli, 2014; Fredriksson and Gaston, 1999; Hampton, 2015; Keil and Kreinin, 2022; Lundström, 2018; Pichler et al., 2021; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). With regards to the latter, a distinction is often made between unions as economic actors, pursuing immediate workplace related or sectional interests primarily through collective bargaining, and a second approach where unions mobilize as social movements or ‘swords of justice’ based on workers’ interests beyond the immediate workplace (Behrens and Pekarek, 2021; Flanders, 1970; Hampton, 2015; Hardt and Negri, 2007: 168–9; Hyman, 2001). Within this distinction, more narrowly oriented unions are not unconcerned with political representation, but the agendas pursued politically revolve around more immediate economic or sectional issues such as job security, wages, working hours, and working conditions (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013: 12; Crouch, 2017: 51; Müller-Jentsch, 1985: 16). Conversely, a broader politically informed union identity is often argued to be more conducive to union engagement with environmental issues (Felli, 2014; Lundström et al., 2015; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Snell and Fairbrother, 2010: 420).

As an example, Thomas and Doerflinger (2020) analyse the position towards climate change mitigation strategies of European trade unions in the manufacturing sector, identifying three ideal-typical approaches: opposition, hedging, and support. Their research finds hedging to be the most common strategy, whereby unions accept the scientific consensus on climate change and in principle support necessary policy measures, but nevertheless ‘seek to minimize regulation, advocate incremental approaches and are reluctant to engage proactively with the transition-related employment implications’ (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 390). The same study concludes that while such an incremental approach to environmental protection, underpinned by a focus on job protection, is likely to prevail above environmental concerns, this is not predetermined but rather mediated by unions’ political identities:

the model of market-oriented or business unionism in which unions consider themselves primarily as labour market actors focused on their members’ interests, regardless of the interests of other groups of workers and broader socio-political projects, could be conducive to *hedging* and

opposition strategies. In particular, market-oriented unions can be expected to enter into coalitions with employers over perceived shared interests to preserve business interests and employment. (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 394)

Conversely, the same authors argue, more broadly oriented unions are more likely to favour pro-active approaches and hence go beyond hedging strategies.¹² Thus while union responses to environmental agendas are informed by sectoral location, for example such that manufacturing and transportation unions can be more reluctant towards environmental regulations (Thomas, 2021), unions' positions are also mediated by strategic choices and ideology (Stevis, 2023: 16–17). Previous case-based accounts hence provide useful insights pertaining to unions' positions in environmental debates that resonate with the notion of unions as complex configurations of ideas and interests (Jackson and Muellenborn, 2012: 486).

There is a need to add to these debates with the perspective of union rank-and-file, not least from a quantitative perspective based on representative samples of union members. For example, union leaders have cited membership opposition as a constraining factor when it comes to pursuing more ambitious environmental agendas (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2019: 133), which highlights the importance of systematic examinations into union members' attitudes towards environmental protection. Moreover, given the tensions outlined above between narrow sectional concerns and broader collective interests, an examination of union members' environmental attitudes is also pertinent in a broader theoretical context (e.g., Brady, 2007; Fiorito, 1992; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Rosetti, 2019; Snape and Redman, 2004). Studying trade union members' support for environmental protection and explicating a number of potentially mediating causal mechanisms, Papers III and IV contribute to these debates.

¹² As an example, using Hyman's (2001) famous tripolar typology of union identities between class, society, and market, they note that 'class-oriented unions have a strategic preference for independent action due to the inherent antagonism between labour and capital', and this is suggested to lead to more active engagement with and support for environmental issues (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 394–5).

Union membership and support for environmental protection

Turning thus to the micro-level and the subject of union members' environmental attitudes, one possibility, based on the prevalence of hedging and similar union approaches (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020), is a selection mechanism resulting in a negative membership effect. In the degree to which trade unions are perceived as pursuing growth and jobs above or even at the cost of environmental concerns, pro-environmentally inclined individuals, and particularly those that are critical towards the growth paradigm, may be less likely to join a union. It is indeed on basis of such questions that contrasts are drawn between trade unions (as 'traditional' movements) and 'new social movements', the latter purportedly pursuing 'post-material' issues at the expense of class based concerns for economic expansion, redistribution, and material security (Inglehart, 2018; Kelly, 1998: 115; Offe, 1985a; Snell and Fairbrother, 2010: 422; Wilkinson et al., 2014: 6). As Uzzell and Räthzel note: 'For environmental movements nature needs to be defended against uncontrolled and thoughtless industrialisation, and the "productivism" of capital and labour alike' (Uzzell and Räthzel, 2013: 2). Offe captures some of the central facets that are suggested to underpin the distinction between traditional and new social movements, and which potentially may be reflected at the micro-level in the member/non-member distinction:

Both in terms of individual value dispositions and in terms of collective action and collective actors, a new cross-cutting dimension must be added which depicts the contrast between the old paradigm centered on issues of economic growth and security, on the one side, and the new paradigm defined by its defensive struggles against the irrationalities of modernization, on the other. (Offe, 1985a: 857)

On basis of such a new value cleavage, Offe argues, calls for environmental protection tend to be 'confronted by the sphere of production from the outside, where they frequently encounter the unified resistance of *both* labour and capital' (Offe, 1985c: 149).¹³ As far as union

¹³ Indeed Offe submits that such conflict is 'not a conflict between the principal economic agents of the model of production but an alliance that includes virtually every element *but*

members are concerned, such resistance may be rooted partly in the defence of hard-fought victories in certain sectors. A challenge in decarbonizing the economy is indeed that ‘many of the jobs with large carbon footprints are in well-unionized sectors covered by comparatively advantageous collective agreements’ (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 386). Many unionized workers may thus risk being affected by job loss due to environmental policies and worry about finding an equivalent job in terms of pay, career development and occupational prestige (Sikwebu and Aroun, 2021: 75; Thomas and Pulignano, 2021; Vona, 2019: 527). As Thomas and Pulignano conclude: ‘If unions support ambitious climate mitigation policies, they risk alienating their core constituency in the unionised manufacturing industry; if, however, unions oppose climate action, they risk a confrontation with environmental movements and losing broader public support’ (Thomas and Pulignano, 2021: 521).

Moreover, and relating back to the themes of the preceding section, resistance towards environmental protection can go beyond immediate interests in job protection, as a growing economy can serve as vehicle for such broader labour agendas traditionally favoured by union members as economic redistribution and welfare state expansion (Ciplet and Harrison, 2020: 449; Koch and Fritz, 2014: 698; Korpi, 2006: 192–3; Korpi and Shalev, 1979; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2022; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994; Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 188). As Arndt and Rennwald suggest:

the greens find their origins in the criticism of the postwar Keynesian (productivist) class compromise advocated by both social democratic parties and unions [...] For the former, this economic model promoted employment and growth, while for the latter it posed a threat to natural resources. Over the years, the labour movement integrated issues related to sustainable development. Yet, this difference in origins might still have some impact,

these principal classes’ (Offe, 1985a: 835). As an example, Hyman notes with regards to the post-war German trade union movement: ‘Consensual productivism was widely regarded as the basis for a successful, high-skilled, high-quality, high-performance economy from which unionized workers could derive their share of the advantages. For many German trade unionists this was an explicit ideological point of reference; even those who articulated more oppositional views – counterposing class to social market – nevertheless seemed implicitly to embrace productivism. In effect, unions were both guarantors and beneficiaries of the German “economic miracle”’ (Hyman, 2001: 121).

particularly when issues of employment are in conflict with environmental issues. (Arndt and Rennwald, 2016: 704)

Not least when jobs and the predominance of economic growth preferences are questioned, unions and their members can thus be situated awkwardly in environmental debates (Felli, 2014; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994). Even so, however, there are strong reasons to expect members generally to be more pro-environmentally inclined than their non-organized counterparts, including evidence from a handful of US studies examining union members' environmental attitudes (Chen, 2017; Kojola et al., 2014; Vachon and Brecher, 2016).

While important to note that the particularities of US industrial relations may imply that the results do not extend to other contexts (but see Fiorito and Padavic, 2022a), Chen (2017) finds union members to be more likely than non-members to consider government spending on environmental protection as being too little – also when controlling for such factors as income and sector. Similarly, Vachon and Brecher demonstrate that US union members are more likely to display various pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, concluding that the findings 'go against the common sense understanding portrayed in the media that union members are solely concerned with their own economic interests at the expense of all others, including the environment' (Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 198). This latter line of reasoning is suggestive of a more extensive theoretical deliberation about union membership, self-interest, and pro-environmental attitudes. However, previous studies tend not to offer a theoretical rationale or seek to explain the positive membership effect empirically. Vachon and Brecher provide a valuable although descriptive account in which they note in conclusion that future research should conduct multivariate regression analyses with appropriate controls in order to uncover some of the underlying mechanisms (Vachon and Brecher, 2016: 191, 199). While contributing with a more comprehensive empirical analysis, Chen (2017) refers mainly to union policy when interpreting the results. Aside from extending the scope of analysis beyond the US there is thus cause to build on previous research also by considering some mechanisms that may underpin the association between union membership and support for environmental protection, notably including considerations of

narrow self-interest versus broader societal interests. These questions are addressed in Papers III and IV.

A first and potentially significant mechanism in this regard – which is examined empirically in Paper III – is ideological orientation. Although more so in the advanced capitalist economies (Lewis et al., 2019: 806; Nawrotzki, 2012) – an issue returned to further below and dealt with in Paper IV – left-wing ideological self-placement is linked strongly with pro-environmental attitudes (Birch, 2020; Cruz, 2017; Dunlap et al., 2001; Feygina et al., 2010; Haring et al., 2017; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2016; McCright et al., 2016; Mostafa, 2016; Panarello, 2021; Smith et al., 2017), and union members tend to be more left-leaning (Iversen and Soskice, 2015). Indeed, while sometimes argued to supplant more traditional value cleavages (Dolezal, 2010: 541), notably as discussed above to the detriment of ‘traditional movements’ such as unions (Offe, 1985a: 835, 857) – environmental issues often align with the left-right ideological dimension as they tend to raise conflicting views concerning the organization of production and the value of ‘free private enterprise’ (Hampton, 2015; Korpi, 2019: 158; Malm, 2014, 2018; McCright et al., 2016).¹⁴ Accordingly, right-wing views such as a free-market ideology are found repeatedly to be important determinants of climate change scepticism or denial (Heath and Gifford, 2006; Hornsey et al., 2016; Jylhä et al., 2020; Rossen et al., 2015), particularly among white men (Ballew et al., 2020; McCright and Dunlap, 2011). With regards to the association between conservatism and environmentalism, Dietz et al. note:

Such results may indicate that environmentalism is perceived as contradicting conservative values by suggesting a move away from traditional patterns of behavior, and it may also be that conservative value items tap a general value frame that favors the market over government intervention and thus is resistant to government regulation that usually accompanies environmental policy. (Dietz et al., 2005: 360)

Relatedly, research finds that ‘system justification’ – a willingness to protect the status quo underpinned by a perception of the current

¹⁴ Hoffarth and Hodson observe in a review: ‘associations between left-vs-right wing adherence and climate change [sic] represent moderate-to-large effects in psychological terms [...] with few psychological effects approaching this magnitude’ (Hoffarth and Hodson, 2016: 41).

system as fair, legitimate, beneficial, and stable – is associated with greater denial of environmental realities and less commitment to pro-environmental action (Feygina et al., 2010; Goldsmith et al., 2013; Jylhä and Akrami, 2015). One study concludes: ‘the motivation to see industrial corporations and market-based practices [...] as legitimate and purely benign may inhibit a realistic assessment of the seriousness of the impending disaster and the inadequacy of current reactions to this problem’ (Feygina et al., 2010: 327). This again relates to the question of union members’ attitudes towards class and employment relations. While varying across different types of unions (Arndt, 2018), there is a strong general tendency for union members to be more left-leaning and critical towards the idea of an unregulated market economy, or indeed capitalism as such (Charlwood, 2002; Ebbinghaus et al., 2011; Iversen and Soskice, 2015; Trentini, 2022; Wright, 1997; Rennwald and Pontusson, 2021; Sánchez-Mosquera, 2023).¹⁵ Paper III therefore hypothesizes a positive membership effect on support for environmental protection (H1a), an effect which further is proposed to be mediated by self-placement to the left of the ideological spectrum (H1b).

The tendency for union members to identify to the left of the political spectrum is often attributed to class-based mechanisms such as self-interest in economic redistribution (Iversen and Soskice, 2015) and social protection against various life-course or labour market-related risks (Engler and Voigt, 2023; Jensen, 2012a; Korpi, 2006) – more broadly representing a countermovement against the commodification of labour (Dukes and Streeck, 2023; Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37, 44; Polanyi, 2001).¹⁶ There may be commonalities or overlaps between such class-based claims for social protection on the one hand, and environmental concerns on the other (Fraser, 2014, 2017; Fritz and Koch, 2019: 13; Gough et al., 2008; Harring and Sohlberg, 2017: 291;

¹⁵ With regard to variation across unions and occupational groups, a Swedish study finds a declining ‘effect’ across time of union membership on left partisanship, which is related partly to structural/compositional labour market changes (Arundhati Ray and Pontusson, 2023).

¹⁶ Thus, in the extent to which union members’ political orientation stems from an interest in social protection, it may be rooted materially in ‘diverging socio-economic situations and interests following the class structure’ whereby people ‘in different class positions sympathize with policies that benefit them economically’ (Bengtsson et al., 2013: 710).

Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2016: 743). One study finds indeed that people who support expanded social policy are more likely also to support environmental protection (Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2016: 752). This, however, is not to overlook the complex tensions between the two broad policy domains (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023: 7; Jakobsson et al., 2018; Koch and Fritz, 2014; Otto and Gugushvili, 2020; Satheesh, 2021: 218; Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2016). Jakobsson et al. (2018: 316) conclude an extensive analysis:

Income redistribution is mainly a domestic issue and may yield a direct benefit to an individual whilst the benefits from paying for the environment such as carbon tax can extend beyond the national boundary and to future generations. Therefore, we cannot expect that positive attitudes towards income redistribution will enhance the willingness to pay for policies that benefit the environment. (Jakobsson et al., 2018: 328)

As efforts to address environmental degradation can impose costs in the short run for the realization of long-term benefits ‘decades and sometimes centuries later’ (Lazarus, 2008: 1153), the well-established link between ideological orientation and pro-environmentalism may thus go beyond immediate policy overlaps rooted in self-interest. Notably in this regard, self-identification to the left of the political spectrum tends also to be associated with a more general underlying value orientation that favours collective societal interests above what is referred to as ‘self-enhancement’ (Caprara et al., 2006; Haring et al., 2017: 6; Kilburn, 2009).¹⁷ The importance of such a value dimension is highlighted in an extensive literature demonstrating that self-transcendence, or collectivistic values, are associated positively with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour, whereas individualism and self-enhancement conversely tend to have a negative effect (Dietz et al., 2002, 2005: 358; Guy et al., 2014; Kahan et al., 2007; Liobikienė and Juknys, 2016; Schultz and Zelezny, 1998; Stern and Dietz, 1994).

¹⁷ Self-transcendence constitutes one pole (opposite to self-enhancement) in the interest facet in Schwartz’ (1992) theory of basic personal values, covering universalism and benevolence to capture ‘a desire to care for others, as opposed to a desire to control or to achieve superior social status over them’ (Kirmanoglu and Başlevent, 2012: 687). Such basic personal values refer to ‘(a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviors, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance’ (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987: 551). Values are thus distinct from attitudes, which are more specific (Dietz et al., 2005: 346).

Relating back to the previous discussion about the provision of collective goods and connecting with the themes of selection versus transformative effects, this is important in relation to present purposes, as there are reasons to expect union members generally to be more collectivistically inclined, or solidaristic, than their non-organized counterparts (Deery and Walsh, 1999; Fiorito, 1992; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017; Rosetti, 2019). A large literature suggest indeed that union members tend either to be predisposed to be, or can become more willing to, embrace policies that transcend their immediate or short-term self-interest (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Booth et al., 2017; Checchi et al., 2010; Crouch, 2017: 53; Donnelly, 2016; Fiorito, 1992; Fiorito et al., 2015; Fiorito and Padavic, 2022a, 2022b; Keyes et al., 2023; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017; Rosetti, 2019; Zullo, 2011).

In a notable contribution spanning across a large range of European countries, Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent (2012) find a significant and non-negligible positive association between union membership and values involving a sense of caring for others (‘self-transcendence’) (Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012: 698). Emphasizing a selection mechanism due to considerations of self-interest versus societal interests being involved in the decision to unionize – i.e., in relation to the possibility to free ride – the same study concludes: ‘the positive influence of self-transcendence is in line with the idea that societal interests also play a significant role in the membership decision’ (Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012: 700).¹⁸ Somewhat similarly, Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) demonstrate that union membership is associated positively with support for economic redistribution, and importantly that this effect is of greater magnitude among high-wage earners. Going beyond the selection mechanism invoked by Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent (2012), Mosimann and Pontusson argue that the fact that the membership effect on support for economic redistribution is more sizeable in the group for which such a policy conflicts with narrow self-interest indicates that unions (notably some more than others) promote ‘other-

¹⁸ Although fairly consistent, this tendency is likely to be less prevalent in contexts with stronger selective incentives to unionize and where membership thus to a higher extent can be driven by narrow self-interest (Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017: 457; Prytz and Berglund, 2023: 18; Vestin and Vulkan, 2022).

regarding support’, and that such norms are internalized by members – reflected in what is referred to as a ‘solidarity effect’ (Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017: 479). Elsewhere Pontusson argues in this connection that mechanisms of selection and transformation (in his terminology ‘socialization’) must not be mutually exclusive: ‘Assuming that individuals tend to conform to the attitudes of other members [...] one might plausibly argue that unions nurture egalitarianism precisely because they attract individuals with egalitarian attitudes’ (Pontusson, 2013: 818). Whether due to selection or transformative mechanisms, there is thus some cause to expect union members generally to be more willing than non-members to embrace policies that transcend their immediate short-term self-interests, and such a ‘solidarity logic’ may extend from traditional labour agendas such as economic redistribution to underpin a positive membership effect on support for environmental protection. This line of reasoning is pursued variously in Papers III and IV.

Beyond ideological orientation and collectivistic values, there is also a potential insider status associated with union membership, reflected in such factors as job security and stronger labour market attachment (Lindbeck and Snower, 1986; Palier and Thelen, 2010; Visser, 2002). While noting that a binary distinction between labour market insiders and outsiders may lack sufficient nuance, Gordon defines outsiders as labour market participants who are ‘excluded from stable, secure, full-time employment’, among which are included the currently unemployed and those working under fixed-term contracts or involuntarily part-time (Gordon, 2015: 80). Conversely, insiders are workers with protected jobs, sufficiently so as ‘not to feel significantly threatened by unemployment’ (Rueda et al., 2015: 91).

Although not certain, such an insider status could lead to members being more supportive than non-members of environmental protection, particularly in the extent to which environmental protection raises concerns for job loss, or is perceived by outsiders as a barrier to employment (Panarello, 2021; Rueda, 2005; Scruggs and Benegal, 2012; cf. Emmenegger, 2009). A growing literature demonstrates indeed that employment status and labour market risk tend to influence political preferences and voting (Bergman, 2022; Burgoon and Dekker, 2010; Emmenegger et al., 2015; Kweon, 2018; Marx, 2014; Mughan and Lacy, 2002; cf. Ahrens, 2023). While on balance supporting the premise of an insider status associated with union membership,

empirical evidence appears mixed, depending for example upon which output measure is used (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Arundhati Ray and Pontusson, 2023: 22; Bender and Sloane, 1999; Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013; Hassel, 2015; Hoque et al., 2017; Näswall and De Witte, 2003; Prytz and Berglund, 2023; Sánchez-Mosquera, 2023; Sverke and Hellgren, 2001). Neither Furåker and Bengtsson (2013) nor Sverke and Hellgren (2001: 174) find significant associations between union membership and job security, and Hoque et al., (2017: 45) identify no effect on job security of union voice at the workplace level. Anderson and Pontusson do find that union members feel more secure in their current job than non-members, while at the same time being more negative in terms of their prospects on the labour market in the case of job loss (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007: 220–1; see also Mughan and Lacy, 2002: 523). Moreover, and crucially; workers' perceptions of such prospects, as well as the anxieties associated with job loss, vary substantially cross-nationally (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Kalleberg, 2009: 15) in ways that are likely to relate partly to the strength of trade unions and industrial relations institutions (Bender, 2023; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Gordon, 2015; Kalleberg, 2018). Not least in the extent to which concerns for job loss and economic insecurity inform attitudes towards environmental protection, there are thus good reasons to consider union members' environmental attitudes on an international comparative basis.

Collective bargaining and a just transition

In a comparative perspective, strong trade unions contribute to a number of material conditions under which members – and potentially non-members as well – may be more likely to prioritize broader collective interests, such as environmental protection, above immediate sectional interests (Bender, 2023; Bledow and Busemeyer, 2021: 271; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Esser and Olsen, 2012; Gordon, 2015: 90;

Jensen, 2012b).¹⁹ This issue is pursued particularly in Paper III. As an illustrative example of the dynamics involved, Hampton finds reluctance among UK unions towards environmental regulations and observes:

These anxieties, articulated in sectional terms within the UK trade union movement, cannot be dismissed lightly, *not least because they are made in the context where the market dominates and where government safety nets for displaced workers are extremely limited or non-existent.* (Hampton, 2015: 64 emphasis added)

This conclusion resonates with the notion of a ‘just transition’, an umbrella term central to environmental union debates that brings together a diverse range of approaches highlighting the importance of a ‘fair’ distribution of the costs and benefits of environmental policies, such as through interventions that provide workers with social protection and opportunities for re-skilling (Bell, 2020; Hampton, 2015: 70–1; Stevis, 2023; Stevis and Felli, 2015; Tomassetti, 2020). The just transition concept has its roots in a neoliberal North American context which since the 1970s has seen the dismantling of an ‘already modest social welfare state’ (Stevis, 2023: 6; see also Hampton, 2015: 68–70). Consequently, while a neo-liberal trajectory is observed across most if not all so-called developed economies (Baccaro and Howell, 2017), Stevis notes that just transition policies in liberal market economies differ substantially from those in relatively more coordinated capitalist societies ‘in which many of the social welfare demands of explicit just transition are already policy [...]’ (Stevis, 2023: 6). A potentially fundamental factor in this connection is the level of de-commodification of labour, i.e., ‘the degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37).

¹⁹ The mechanisms underlying potential cross-national variation in the membership effect on support for environmental protection are likely to pertain to country-differences both in terms of membership composition (who selects into unions and why), and to whether and how unions in turn shape the policy preferences of their members (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Donnelly, 2016; Kim and Margalit, 2017; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2022; Rosetti, 2019). Acknowledging these complexities, the current account does not purport to be exhaustive, but focuses on a few potentially significant mechanisms when considering cross-national variation in the association between union membership and support for environmental protection.

Relating back to the previous discussion about political manifestations of class conflict, such de-commodifying policies, most notably unemployment compensation, tend to be promoted strongly by unions and consequently to be more extensive in contexts where unions are in a better position to implement their policy agendas, as proxied for example by union density and collective bargaining coverage (Bender, 2023; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Gordon, 2015; Jensen, 2012b; but see Cronert and Forsén, 2023). Esping-Andersen notes: ‘There are certain, albeit quite few, principles of social policy common to virtually all kinds of labor movements. One is clearly de-commodification from the whip of the market place’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 109; also see Streeck and Hassel, 2003: 356).

A principal reason for why unions advocate such policies has to do with an interest in overcoming downward pressures on wages and working conditions that follow from the atomization of workers when treated as ‘pure’ commodities (Dukes and Streeck, 2023: 92; Rothstein, 1998: 288).²⁰ Indeed, the de-commodification of labour has been referred to as ‘the alpha and omega of the unity and solidarity required for labour-movement development’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37). It is prudent to note in this context that many of the policies encompassed by the concept of de-commodification tend not completely to eliminate the commodity form of labour but to reduce the *degree* of market dependence by allowing individuals – if only temporarily – to withdraw from paid work in a way they would not otherwise have done (Furåker, 2005: 36, 99, 113).²¹ Moreover, and importantly in this context, de-commodification and employment tend to be pursued as complementarities rather than opposites, whereby high employment rates underpinned for example by active labour market policies (ALMPs) and life-

²⁰ ‘If unions abandon workers when the demand for their labor power declines, the workers, now deprived of their means of existence, will be liable to start underbidding the union-set price for labor power. This leads to a situation in which capitalists are able to get labor power at a price below that which the unions have decided upon, which is to say the unions no longer control the supply of labor power. There is simply no greater threat to union strength or working-class mobilization, than this’ (Rothstein, 1998: 288).

²¹ Unemployment benefits and other social protections are key components in this respect by raising the reservation wage, the result of which being that an unemployed worker – while still on the labour market and hence ultimately remaining ‘commodified’ – is less compelled to accept *any* job offer (Esping-Andersen, 2000: 354).

long learning institutions are combined with strong safety nets that include generous pension systems and high (while time-limited) unemployment replacement rates (Bender, 2023; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Esping-Andersen, 1990: 129–133; Huo et al., 2008: 17). There is hence a complex blend, or dialectic (Esping-Andersen, 2000: 356), of ‘productive’ social investment policies (Morel et al., 2011) aimed at activation on the one hand – which may indeed be regarded as forms of ‘re-commodification’ (De la Porte and Jacobsson, 2011: 142; Furåker, 2005: 113; Holden, 2003) – and more passive social protection policies on the other hand, which to varying extent and again at least for a shorter period of time can be seen as oriented towards the ‘de-commodification’ of labour. The implications of such policies on workers’ policy preferences and priorities can potentially be quite transformative, echoing the discussion further above regarding the transfer of distributive struggle from the market towards the political sphere. Under the context of weak or non-existent de-commodification, immediate economic interests may be more likely to prevail at the cost of longer-term agendas, including efforts to protect the environment: ‘With no recourse to property, and no state to which human needs can be directed, the market becomes to the worker a prison within which it is imperative to behave as a commodity in order to survive’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 36).

Empirically, Berglund et al. (2014) conclude an analysis that the negative feelings associated with fear of job loss ‘can be counteracted, especially by good opportunities in the labour market but also to some extent by income compensation in the case of unemployment’ (Berglund et al., 2014: 180). Relatedly, research shows that workers’ labour market security – i.e., the perceived prospects of finding an equivalent job in the case of job loss – is more prevalent in countries with stronger active labour market policies (ALMPs), and generous unemployment compensation is demonstrated to reduce workers’ worries about income loss associated with unemployment (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007: 221, 228). While ALMPs and similar life-long learning institutions, including re-training and other qualitative adjustment mechanisms (Bergström, 2019; Eurofound, 2018a), hence may offset the fear of job loss by augmenting the perceived possibilities of finding other equivalent employment opportunities, unemployment benefits can cushion against the risk of income loss (Berglund et al., 2014;

Kweon, 2018). Again, both sets of policies – that is, ALMPs and unemployment compensation – tend to be promoted by unions (Bender, 2023; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Gordon, 2015; Kalleberg, 2018: 58). Paper III thus suggests the hypothesis (H2) that workers in countries with stronger unions and industrial relations institutions may be more willing to embrace environmental protection, even – or perhaps particularly – when such measures threaten jobs and growth.

A further potentially significant comparative factor to consider in this connection – explored in Paper IV – is the level of economic development, or ‘affluence’ (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023: 4; Inglehart, 1995; Mejia, 2020; Parks and Timmons Roberts, 2006; Timmons Roberts et al., 2003; Valizade et al., 2023). Not least as left ideological orientation tends to be a stronger determinant of pro-environmentalism in more affluent countries (Lewis et al., 2019: 806; Nawrotzki, 2012), the question is whether the positive membership effect extends beyond the advanced capitalist economies.

Economic development, pro-environmentalism, and the membership effect

While demonstrated in a range of comprehensive analyses to be an important determinant of environmental attitudes and policy preferences, the impact of political orientation also varies across countries (Birch, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019; Nawrotzki, 2012). These findings can hold important consequences when considering contextual variation in the membership effect on support for environmental protection, as ideological orientation is a key mediating variable proposed above. In short, given that members’ higher probability for supporting environmental protection is argued partially to run through leftist ideological orientation, the question is whether the membership effect extends beyond contexts in which pro-environmentalism is driven less by such an orientation. As noted, one moderating contextual factor identified in this connection is the level economic development: the tendency is more prevalent in the so-called developed capitalist economies for left-leaning individuals to be more pro-environmentally inclined than those identifying to the right (Lewis et al., 2019; Nawrotzki, 2012). Also

more broadly, the level of ‘affluence’ is one of the most central comparative elements in macro-sociological debates concerning international variation in environmental attitudes (Dunlap and Mertig, 1995; Fairbrother, 2013; Franzen and Meyer, 2009; Givens and Jorgenson, 2011; Inglehart, 1995; Marquart-Pyatt, 2012; Summers and VanHeuvelen, 2017). There are thus good reasons briefly to survey such debates before returning to the issue of potential cross-national variation in the membership effect on support for environmental protection, as addressed in Paper IV.

Inglehart’s (1971, 1995, 2018) widely influential theory of post-material value change is a useful point of departure in this connection. The theory proposes that economic growth and modernization usher in an extensive cultural value shift wherein freedom and ‘quality of life’ – referred to as post-materialism – replaces an emphasis on material security and standard of living. While the implications of the theory for environmental attitudes are not unequivocal (Inglehart, 1995), pro-environmentalism tends to be construed as part of a set of post-materialist concerns, the salience of which is argued to increase as societies develop economically. Empirically, the proposition that more affluent societies see stronger concern and public support for the environment has been corroborated in some research (e.g., Franzen and Meyer, 2009). On balance however, while varying depending upon which specific output measure is utilized, evidence appears to be stronger in support for the opposite pattern: public concern and support for environmental protection tends to be higher in economically poorer countries (Dunlap and Mertig, 1995; Dunlap and York, 2008; Givens and Jorgenson, 2011; Jorgenson, 2009; Lo and Chow, 2015; Mostafa, 2016). Dunlap and York conclude an important contribution:

responses to the items that provide the most direct and unambiguous indicators of *personal* willingness to make economic sacrifices on behalf of environmental protection [...] are negatively related to national affluence, exactly the opposite of what both the theory of postmaterialist values and conventional wisdom predict. (Dunlap and York, 2008: 549)

A crucial and frequently invoked explanation for such a pattern has to do with the greater exposure of less economically developed countries to environmental degradation, including a higher vulnerability to climate change (Bush and Clayton, 2023; Givens et al., 2019; Givens and

Jorgenson, 2011; Inglehart, 1995; Iskander and Lowe, 2020: 123; Mejia, 2020; Parks and Timmons Roberts, 2006; Rice, 2007, 2009). Public support for environmental protection may thus be more prevalent in less developed economies, in part due to the severity of environmental threats and a more immediate connection between self-interest and environmental protection. Bush and Clayton (2023: 595) argue indeed that the perceived benefits of policies addressing climate change are higher in less developed economies, whereas the perceived costs conversely are lower. In line with these conclusions, the concept of an ‘environmentalism of the poor’ (Martínez-Alier, 1995) is advanced as an alternative to post-materialism and adjacent modernization theories, highlighting ‘the material and social interest in the environment as a livelihood source for marginalized groups in rural areas in the global South’ (Scheidel et al., 2020: 3).

Consequently, returning to the question of union membership and environmental policy support, one line of reasoning suggests that as such higher levels of environmental degradation tend also to characterize many work environments in less economically developed contexts, for example in terms of industrial pollution (Bell, 2020: 146), workers in such contexts have vested interests in ameliorating environmental conditions that may be addressed through unionization. Moreover, while contextually bound extant research tends consistently to demonstrate a positive membership effect on pro-environmental attitudes (Chen, 2017; Kojola et al., 2014; Vachon and Brecher, 2016), which motivates positing such an effect as a baseline hypothesis. The argument that the positive membership effect on environmental policy support extends beyond the advanced economies is hence evaluated empirically in a hypothesis (H1) in Paper IV.

However, an alternative line of reasoning suggests that while the potentially higher levels of support for environmental protection in less affluent nations is likely to apply also to union members, the prevalence of a positive membership effect is less certain. Stronger public support in connection with less (or no) association with left ideological orientation (Birch, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019) could indeed leave less space for a positive membership effect, particularly if such an effect is mediated by ideology. Conversely, in more affluent nations, beyond the salience of ideological divisions, a positive membership effect may also be attributed partly to the mechanism considered above whereby broader

and more long-term interests – such as issues of environmental protection within the context of relatively less extensive immediate environmental threats – are embraced more strongly by unions and their members when conditions are more favourable pertaining to other union concerns (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Kojola et al., 2014; Gordon, 2015). While there is substantial variation across the developed economies, in a broader geographical scope such economies tend to see relatively stronger industrial relations institutions and more favourable labour market conditions (Kalleberg, 2009: 15, 2018: 18; Shin et al., 2023; Silver, 2003; Valizade et al., 2023). Such more favourable macro-economic, institutional, and labour market conditions may increase the probability in more affluent countries of a positive union membership effect on environmental policy support. These arguments are examined empirically in Paper IV, where a second hypothesis (H2) posits that the membership effect on support for environmental spending is significantly more positive in the advanced economies.

To conclude thus far, the preceding literature review sets out the conceptual underpinnings of this dissertation, further locating Papers I and II within the overarching theme of conflict between management and workers, and Papers III and IV within the theme of immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. While not always considered explicitly in the research papers a number of additional issues run through this overview, including the provision of collective goods, selection versus transformative mechanisms with regards to union effects, and workers pursuit of interests in the industrial sphere versus the political sphere. The following chapter describes the data and methods utilized within the research papers, after which the findings of the papers are summarized briefly in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes by discussing the findings when taken together, also considering limitations and directions for future research.

3 Data and methods

To return to the basic premise of this dissertation, informed by the questions of why workers unionize and what happens when they do, the aim is to study trade union effects on perceptions and attitudes through the lens of two overarching themes: conflict between management and workers; and tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. The first two research papers address the theme of conflict between management and workers. Paper I studies how perceptions of conflict between management and workers relate to trade union membership, trade union density, and the institutionalization of employment relations (collective bargaining coverage, collective bargaining centralization, and policy concertation). Paper II examines trade unions as voice mechanisms through which workers collectively may reduce job demands and increase such job resources as job autonomy, job control, and training. Papers III and IV examine in turn a set of questions pertaining to the theme of immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas, studying in a comparative perspective trade union members' support for environmental protection. Paper III is focused on the European context whereas Paper IV extends the geographical scope to cover a more diverse set of countries, notably in terms of the level of economic development and environmental degradation.

The overall analytical approach, as well as the data and methods utilized in each paper, is described briefly below, followed by a presentation of the key variables. For more detailed information about the methods, data, and variables, the reader is referred to the specific papers.

Analytical approach and data

The preceding literature review highlights in various ways the value in considering 'union effects' on several analytical levels simultaneously. As an example (taken from Paper III), comparing the environmental attitudes of a union member with those of a non-member, the

likelihood that the union member will be relatively more pro-environmentally inclined than the non-member may depend in part upon such institutional country-level characteristics as the level of collective bargaining coverage. Technically, the combination of the two levels involved – individuals and countries – introduces a set of issues pertaining to the dependency between observations which standard regression models are not well-equipped to deal with (Hox et al., 2017: 114). In this regard, multi-level analysis (MLA) (Finch et al., 2014; Hox et al., 2017) is an appropriate statistical method. MLA provides some analytical tools to account for the hierarchical data structure, enabling the specification of random country-level effects in terms both of intercepts (or ‘baselines’) and slopes (i.e., the coefficients of individual-level variables). Returning to the example above, bargaining coverage may potentially affect country-variation in terms both of overall levels of public support for environmental protection (i.e., the baseline, or intercept) and the membership effect (i.e., the ‘membership slope’), the latter through what is referred to as a cross-level interaction, which in this case is an interaction between a variable at the country level and a variable at the individual level. Partly for these reasons, the MLA approach is ideally suited for attending to questions concerning ‘the relationship between individuals and the social contexts in which they live’ (Hox et al., 2017: 1; also see Diez-Roux, 1998), a fundamentally sociological issue inherent to the collective logic of trade unionism informing this thesis.

Paper I relies on 2009 data from the International Social Survey Programme Social Inequality module (ISSP, 2017), at the time the most recent ISSP iteration covering the key variables addressed (notably the dependent variable). After listwise deletion, the sample comprises 16822 currently employed individuals nested across 31 countries.²² The MLA approach is instrumental for addressing the research questions through the examination of (1) the effect on conflict perceptions of individual-level trade union membership; (2) whether such an effect varies across countries depending upon levels of union density and the

²² The sample used also encompasses those who are self-employed. Supplementary analyses (not shown) reveal that the findings hold when the self-employed are excluded from the analyses.

institutionalization of employment relations, and (3) whether the effects of those contextual variables apply equally to members and non-members. The analytical approach offers a way of elucidating empirically the collective logic of trade unionism by distinguishing between effects at the individual level and the contextual level.

Paper II draws on data from the most recent Family, Work and Well-Being wave of the European Social Survey (ESS Round 5, 2010), which covers a wide range of work-related variables suitable in the operationalization of job demands, job resources and collective voice. The utilized sample comprises only those who are currently employed (self-employed are omitted from the sample), after listwise deletion amounting to 16406 individuals across 27 European countries. While focus of the study is not country-comparative, and the pattern of hierarchical clustering is therefore not substantively important, MLA is utilized in order to control for the diversity of the countries covered in the analyses. The possibility for varying effects of collective voice on job demands and job resources across contexts is addressed by including random slopes for collective voice. The cross-sectional data structure limits the possibilities empirically to substantiate the proposed causal mechanisms, but the observed associations provide meaningful indicators in relation to the theoretical argument about the impact of collective voice on job demands, job resources, and the covariation of demands and resources.

Paper III uses 2017 data from the European Values Study (EVS, 2020), analyzing a sample of currently employed individuals ($n = 15351$) across 22 European countries.²³ The EVS offers a recent dataset covering key variables across a European sample of countries, importantly for which data are available on the contextual variables of interest. The MLA approach makes it possible to study whether the membership effect on support for environmental protection varies cross-nationally between institutional contexts (through cross-level interaction) and, crucially, whether the effects of the institutional characteristics, i.e., bargaining coverage and union density, extend to non-

²³ The sample used encompasses those who are self-employed. Supplementary analyses (not shown) reveal that the core findings hold when the self-employed are excluded from the analyses.

members as well. Further, causal mediation analysis (Tingley et al., 2014) is employed to examine the extent to which the membership effect is mediated by ideological orientation. Additionally, interaction terms between occupational category and union membership are modelled in order to explore whether the membership effect varies across occupational groups (e.g., manufacturing and service work).

Paper IV builds on Paper III by extending the geographical scope beyond Europe, drawing on 2016 data from the most recent International Social Survey Programme ‘Role of Government Module’ (ISSP Research Group, 2018) to study international variation in the effects of trade union membership on support for government spending on environmental protection. Besides offering a more diverse set of countries as compared to Paper III, an advantage with the dataset is the availability of several additional variables measuring support for other policy areas, enabling the supplementary analyses that are reported in the paper. After listwise deletion, the sample used comprises 36086 individuals nested across 32 countries.²⁴ MLA provides a suitable means with which systematically to explore variation in the membership effect through cross-level interactions between the contextual variables – which capture variation in affluence, environmental performance, and the strength of active labour market policies – and individual-level union membership.

Operationalization of key variables

Dependent variables

Paper I measures **perceptions of conflict between management and workers** through the following question in the ISSP: ‘In all

²⁴ As part of the grey areas of the informal sector not least in developing economies (Shin et al., 2023), self-employed (and unemployed) are included in the sample used, but supplementary analyses (not shown) reveal that the key results hold when self-employed are excluded.

countries, there are differences or even conflicts between different social groups. In your opinion, in [country] how much conflict is there between management and workers?'. The variable distinguishes between those who perceive 'Very strong conflicts'/'Strong conflicts' (1) and those who perceive 'not very strong conflicts'/'no conflicts' (0) (see Paper I for information about additional sensitivity analyses). The variable is used by Edlund and Lindh (2015) as part of a broader composite measure of social class conflict. Notably, as demonstrated in a number of supplementary analyses within Paper I, as it pertains to union effects it proves useful to treat the variable in isolation.

In Paper II, **job demands** are measured via responses to the following statement: 'My job requires that I work very hard'. The variable distinguishes between those who 'agree strongly' (1) and those who 'agree'/'neither agree nor disagree'/'disagree'/'disagree strongly' (0). Several sensitivity tests evaluate alternative coding procedures and generate similar outcomes with regards to the effects of collective voice (see Paper II for further details). **Job resources** are operationalized in the same paper through a range of discrete measures regarding workers' perceptions of job autonomy, job control, and the provision of employer-funded training.

Paper III looks at the effect of trade union membership on the **willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs**. The dependent variable is based on a survey question in the EVS which prompts respondents to choose which of the following closest resembles their own view: 'Protecting the environment [is a] priority, even if slower economic growth and loss of jobs' (coded as 1); 'Economic growth and creating jobs [is a] priority, even if environment suffers' (coded as 0). The variable builds on an explicit trade-off between growth and jobs on the one hand (the compounding of the two potentially being suboptimal), and environmental protection on the other, hence while abstract arguably providing a strong test of members' commitment to environmental agendas (see Birch, 2020: 703).

Paper IV examines union members' preferences concerning more concrete solutions at the policy level by studying **support for government spending on the environment**, based on a survey question which asks whether respondents would like to see more or less government spending on the environment. Those answering 'spend

much more’/’spend more’ are coded as 1 and distinguished from those answering ‘spend the same as now’/’spend less’/’spend much less’ (0).

It may be noted that Papers III and IV examine variables measuring support for environmental protection in which the environment is defined broadly. As noted by Chen (2017: 767), such items do not capture preferences for specific environmental issues, a potential drawback being that respondents are able express support in an abstract sense for environmental protection, while opposing measures concerning particular areas of environmental degradation (see also Kangas, 1997 for an insightful and more general treatment of some issues involved in using abstract versus more specific measures). Equally, the level of abstraction in terms of the language used arguably facilitates international comparison across contexts varying in the salience of particular environmental issues.

Independent variables

Papers I, III, and IV examine trade union members’ perceptions, attitudes, and policy preferences. The **union membership** variable is binary, distinguishing between current members (1) and non-members (0). Given that the meaning and implications of union membership may vary across different types of unions, for example such that members of business unions may be less likely to embrace broader political agendas (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2022), certain limitations follow from using a binary membership-variable. To proxy variations across union types, the analyses include various interaction terms (either as robustness checks or in the models shown), between union membership and occupational variables, and between union membership and contextual variables.

Paper II operationalizes **collective voice** as trade union influence at the workplace level, based on the question: ‘How much influence would you say that trade unions at your workplace generally have over decisions that affect your working conditions and practices?’ The variable distinguishes between ‘quite a lot of influence’/’a great deal of influence’ (coded as 1) and ‘no trade unions/trade union members at workplace’/’not much or no union influence’/’some union influence’

(coded as 0). Several sensitivity analyses using alternative coding procedures are conducted and reported in the paper.

Reflecting profound predispositions that inform attitudes and preferences towards more specific issues and policies (Brooks and Svallfors, 2010: 203), **ideological orientation** is proposed in Paper III as a key mediating variable between union membership and support for environmental protection. As is common, ideological self-placement is measured on a scale from 0 to 10, a higher value meaning more to the left (the original scale is reversed). Harring et al. note that moving leftwards on the scale reflects ‘enhanced support for the active, non-neutral state, an increasingly regulated market, and universal welfare politics. Conversely, preferences for a passive, neutral state, an unregulated market, and limited social policy are located on the right-hand side’ (Harring et al., 2017: 3). Moreover, the left-right scale is linked with a value dimension distinguishing between self-enhancement (right) and self-transcendence (left) (Caprara et al., 2006; Kilburn, 2009; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevant, 2012).

At the contextual level the following key independent variables are used. **Trade union density** is an important country-level variable in Paper I, and the measure is also used in Paper III. Net union density data – i.e., trade union membership as share of the employed (Palm, 2017: 49; Traxler et al., 2001: 80) – is taken from the database on Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts (ICTWSS) (Visser, 2019). Although there are widely acknowledged limitations (Cronert and Forsén, 2023; Gordon, 2015: 82; Metten, 2021; Refslund and Arnholtz, 2022: 1969; Rego and Espírito-Santo, 2023) for example pertaining to the masking of yellow unions and variation across union identities more broadly (Vernon, 2006: 191) – union density is an important indicator of structural differences between unions, used commonly as a proxy for union power and influence (Crouch, 2017: 54; Dixon et al., 2013; Esser and Olsen, 2012; Gordon, 2015: 89; Hipp and Givan, 2015: 353; Jensen, 2012b: 229; Kjellberg, 1983; Korpi, 2019: 198; Lopes et al., 2017: 461; Traxler et al., 2001: 74; Turner et al., 2020: 285; Wallerstein, 1989: 482; Western, 1997: 15). Beyond density, further measures to capture cross-national variation in industrial relations institutions, also taken from the ICTWSS database, are **collective bargaining coverage** (Papers I and III), **collective bargaining centralization** (Paper I),

and **policy concertation** (Paper I) – the latter being a categorical variable referring to ‘the codetermination of public policy by governments, employer organisations and trade union confederations’ (Compston, 2002: 4).

Paper III also examines a country-level indicator of ‘**Employment security and skills development**’ (ESSD) developed by Eurofound (2018b: 21, 24). Capturing some of the key elements of a just transition, the variable is a composite measure based on job security, involuntary temporary employment, lifelong learning and use of skills, and unemployment protection coverage. Advantages as well as limitations follow from the use of such a composite measure. While some aspects of ESSD may be more important than others (and their effects thus potentially being masked by the use of an aggregate construct), the combination into an index of the elements included accounts for the possibility that cross-national variation in the relative salience of different components of ESSD yield similar outcomes. Moreover, it may be (and is arguably even likely) that the respective elements of ESSD have less of a mitigating impact when taken in isolation, and that what is important is their combination: univariate items may fail to capture the consequences of what are complementary bundles of active and passive policy programs.

To elevate the analysis and go beyond the advanced capitalist economies, Paper IV utilizes World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 2004) as a comparative framework. A categorical variable distinguishes between the following **world systems positions**: core states, semi-periphery states, and periphery states. The categorization of states according to world systems position follows Mejia (2020) and Valizade et al. (2023). **Per capita GDP** is used as an alternative/complementary proxy for the level of affluence. The quality of the environment is operationalized by use of the **Ecological Performance Index** (EPI) (Hsu et al., 2016; YCELP, 2016). The 2016 version of the EPI ranks national environmental performance based on 20 indicators across two overarching areas: protection of human health and protection of ecosystems. Subcategories measured in the index include environmental risk exposure, air quality, and drinking water quality. The breadth of scope in the composite EPI measure arguably facilitates comparison across countries varying in forms of environmental degradation. There are nevertheless also limitations to measuring such

issues at the country-level, *within* which there may be substantial differences.

4 Summary of the research papers

Paper I: How do union membership, union density and institutionalization affect perceptions of conflict between management and workers?

The paper examines how perceptions of conflict between management and workers relate to trade union membership, country-level trade union density, and the institutionalization of employment relations (collective bargaining coverage, collective bargaining centralization, and policy concertation). Hierarchical multi-level models are fitted to data from the International Social Survey Programme from 2009. Two main hypotheses are tested. According to the first hypothesis, trade unions at each analytical level are associated positively with conflict perceptions, whereas the second hypothesis suggests the inverse pattern. In congruence with the first hypothesis, the empirical results reveal that union members are more likely than their non-organized counterparts to perceive management–worker conflicts, a tendency that is consistent across the countries studied. However, in notable contrast to this positive membership effect at the individual level, public perceptions of management-worker conflict tend (regardless of the individuals' union membership status) to be less prevalent in countries with higher trade union density and with policy concertation – a finding thus aligning with the second hypothesis. Unobserved variation in working conditions is speculated to explain parts of both findings. Implications of the results are discussed in relation to the argument that decreasing levels of industrial conflict tend to follow from the increasing political influence of labour. Important methodological implications of relevance to trade union research more generally are also discussed, with reference to the atomistic fallacy, in relation to which the results highlight the risks involved in drawing certain conclusions from research limited to the individual-level effects of union membership. Indeed, while union members are more likely than non-members to perceive management-worker conflict, such perceptions are less widely held in countries with higher unionization levels, a pattern which suggests the further hypothesis that continuing de-unionization and

declining political influence of trade unions may result in more overt management-worker conflict.

Paper II: Integrating collective voice within job demands-resources theory

Focusing on the workplace-level, the paper submits that workers collectively through unions can alter the social relations at work and thereby reduce job demands and extend their autonomy and influence over organizational activities. The aim, which is interdisciplinary, is to demonstrate the usefulness of such insights to the influential job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, which has its roots in occupational psychology. Drawing on insights from the sociology of work, central elements conceived within JD-R theory as job demands (e.g., workload) and job resources (e.g., employee autonomy, control, and training), are construed in the paper as subject of contested terrain. In this context trade union influence, as a collective and independent form of employee voice, is posited as an antecedent of job demands and job resources, representing a causal mechanism through which workers can reduce job demands and increase job resources. To substantiate the theoretical argument, the paper analyses the effects of trade union influence at the workplace level on job demands, job resources, and the covariation of demands and resources. Based on data from the European Social Survey (2010) covering 27 countries, results of multi-level analyses indicate that trade union influence tends to enhance job resources, particularly where job demands are high, although notably without a reduction in job demands. Thereby the results support the argument that JD-R theory can be developed by considering collective voice as an antecedent of job resources. The results are discussed further in connection with debates about the need for interdisciplinary approaches in the study of work and employment relations. In accordance with the interdisciplinary contribution and the aim to open up JD-R debates concerning the role of collective voice, research is encouraged to build on the paper by studying further the impact of collective voice within the JD-R framework, notably pertaining to the effects of voice on other types of job demands.

Paper III: Union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs: A multi-level analysis covering 22 European countries

The paper offers a study into the association between trade union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above jobs and economic growth. Contributing to debates about the relationship between trade unions and the environment, the paper develops and examines empirically the hypothesis that union members will tend to be more pro-environmentally inclined than their non-organized counterparts, an effect that is hypothesized to be mediated by ideological orientation. Furthermore, in countries with higher collective bargaining coverage, support for environmental protection is hypothesized to be higher among members and non-members alike. To test these hypotheses, multi-level analyses are fitted to European Values Study data from 2017, covering 22 European countries. The empirical results provide support for the hypotheses by revealing that union members tend to be more pro-environmentally inclined than non-members, an effect that is mediated significantly by self-placement to the left of the ideological spectrum. The results show further that while transport and manufacturing workers generally are least willing to prioritize environmental protection, union membership has the strongest positive ‘effect’ in the same occupational category. Moreover, the paper finds that in countries with higher collective bargaining coverage, members and non-members alike tend to be more pro-environmentally inclined. Implications of these findings are considered in relation to tensions between immediate sectional interests and broader political agendas, and, relatedly, concerning the role of unions in facilitating public support a greener economy. While practical implications in terms of union policy remain to be substantiated more conclusively in further research, the results of the paper indicate that there would be support among members for unions to develop more ambitious environmental agendas, the pursuance of which could constitute a fruitful path towards union renewal.

Paper IV: A world systems analysis of union membership and support for government spending on environmental protection

The paper studies international variation in the association between union membership and support for government spending on environmental protection. Building on Paper III, the study extends the geographical scope to cover a broader international sample with the aim to explore whether the positive membership effect extends beyond the more economically developed contexts covered previously. Key contextual factors addressed are the level of economic development and ecological performance. Two hypotheses are developed and examined empirically. According to a first baseline hypothesis, the positive membership effect extends beyond the affluent economies, whereas the second hypothesis proposes that beyond such contexts, higher levels of environmental degradation and stronger public support for environmental protection leaves less space for a positive membership effect. In accordance with the second hypothesis, the empirical results reveal an intriguing empirical puzzle: while public support for environmental spending is substantially higher in less affluent countries, which tend to be subject to more extensive environmental threats, the reverse holds for the membership effect on environmental spending support which is significantly more positive in more affluent countries. The membership effect on support for environmental spending tends thus to be most positive in countries where public support for such spending is lower. Implications of the results are discussed by considering the notion of a solidarity effect – whereby union membership is associated with a higher propensity to support policies that transcend narrow self-interest – and, relatedly, in terms of the prospects for developing union cooperation and networks to address the major collective action problem of global environmental degradation.

5 Discussion

Why do workers unionize and what happens when they do? Informed by these longstanding questions, the present thesis analyses trade union effects on public perceptions and attitudes through the lens of two overarching themes: conflict between management and workers; and tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. Based on the analytical premise that an understanding of trade union effects is facilitated by a multi-level design, comparisons are made between union members and their non-organized counterparts, workplaces with and without significant union influence, and countries varying in levels of unionization and strength of industrial relations institutions. To open this discussion on a broad note, the four research papers indicate in various ways that trade unions remain relevant for understanding dynamics of management-worker conflict on contemporary labour markets (Papers I and II) and in terms of workers' willingness to embrace broader collective interests in connection with a fundamental societal challenge of yet growing concern (Papers III and IV). Throughout the preceding overview, additional links are drawn across the papers regarding a number of reoccurring issues including the provision of collective goods, the distinction between selection and transformative mechanisms with regards to union effects, and workers' pursuit of interests in the industrial sphere versus the political sphere.

In terms of the first overarching theme, novel empirical insights are provided concerning the role of trade unions in relation to public perceptions of conflict between management and workers (Paper I), and as antecedents at the workplace level of employee autonomy and control (Paper II). Speaking to the collective logic of unionism (Furåker and Bengtsson, 2013; Hoque et al., 2017), while a selection mechanism rooted in unfavourable working conditions in part may explain the positive membership effect on perceived management-worker conflict, the negative impact of union density and policy concertation on such perceptions might be attributable partly to union influence augmenting the same conditions (Esser and Olsen, 2012) – an issue explored at the workplace level in Paper II – as well as broader policy issues such as social protection and the de-commodification of labour (Barchiesi,

2014: 242; Bender, 2023; Engler and Voigt, 2023; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Jensen, 2012b).

Thus the negative density effect on conflict perceptions raises questions about the prevalence and nature of management-worker conflict under contexts where unions are stronger and working conditions more favourable, relating back to Hyman's (1989a: 79) observation that 'a union which damps down workers' discontents too far destroys its own reason for existence'. In this respect, building on the insights of Korpi (2019), it would seem apposite to construe such conflict as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that, rather than being subdued, tends under strong labour organization to be manifested differently (Edlund and Lindh, 2015). Without discounting certain tensions along the lines evoked by Hyman, less widely held conflict perceptions may thereby coexist with more pronounced 'partisan attitudes' among the workforce (Svallfors, 2006) and indeed more prevalent 'anti-capitalist class consciousness' (Wright, 1997).

Leading on to the second overarching theme, the contextual conditions that are suggested to contribute towards reducing conflict perceptions are argued in this dissertation also to be important when it comes to understanding workers' attitudes and policy preferences within tensions between immediate sectional interests versus broader social agendas, which run through most union efforts to develop environmental policies (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2019; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). Drawing together elements relating to the two overarching themes, this dissertation thereby maintains that challenges posed to workers and unions in the context of an ongoing environmental and climate crisis cannot be detached from fundamental issues pertaining to what unions do, be it at the workplace level or in the pursuance of various social and labour market policies.

Indeed, the results reported in Paper III suggest that in spite of the ambiguous relationship between trade unions and the environment (e.g., Obach, 2004; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020), strong unions and industrial relations institutions are important in terms of facilitating, and certainly not undermining, public support for environmental protection – although several issues remain to be investigated in more detail (see further below). Moreover, and notably, while the extent of such public support varies substantially across Europe, at the individual level the positive membership effect is

remarkably consistent across the various institutional contexts covered in Paper III. That said, the membership effect on support for environmental protection is not universal, rather in a broader international perspective tending to be most positive in contexts where public support for such protection is lowest (Paper IV). This latter finding merits further research but does align with the logic laid out in this dissertation whereby unionization tends to be associated with a higher willingness to support policies that transcend narrow or immediate self-interest (e.g., Fiorito, 1992; Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2012; Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017). In a broader perspective these insights may be located within debates about the importance within democratic societies of interest groups or civic organizations – in Durkheimian terminology ‘secondary groups’ situated between the state and the individual – for fostering social engagement and collective goods (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Almeida et al., 2023; Dukes and Streeck, 2023: xi; Durkheim, 1997; Jackson and Muellenborn, 2012: 473; Putnam, 2000; Thomas and Pulignano, 2021; Thunqvist, 2022).

Implications, limitations and directions for future research

Attitudes are, so to speak, the “raw material” of politics, a necessary but often unruly material with which the entrepreneurs and implementers of politics are required to work. (Svallfors, 2006: 175)

The findings reported in the research papers of this dissertation suggest a number of practical and theoretical implications. First, while the cross-sectional data structure limits the ability to draw strong causal conclusions, one set of implications concerns the potential ramifications across the advanced capitalist economies of further de-unionization and de-institutionalization of industrial relations (Baccaro and Howell, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Kollmeyer, 2021), a trend related to what Svallfors (2006: 3) refers to as the ‘re-commodification’ of labour. It seems reasonable to assume, but pertinent further to substantiate empirically, that from the continuation of such a development may follow a degradation of workers’ job autonomy and control (Paper II), an upswing in more overt management-worker conflict (Paper I), and an exacerbation of the considerable

challenge of legitimizing environmental agendas (Papers III and IV) and thereby managing a ‘just transition’ (e.g., Bell, 2020; Stevis, 2023).

In connection with the latter point, whether as defenders of status quo or agents of change (Kalt, 2022; Prinz and Pegels, 2018), unions are fundamentally important actors in managing a transition away from the current situation of environmental unsustainability (Barry, 2013) because they are entangled in both ‘the causes and the solutions to the climate crisis’ (Flanagan and Goods, 2022: 480; see also Obach, 2004: 339). In theory, embodying the latent force of organized labour, unions occupy a unique structural location as environmental actors given the tools at hand to impose constraints on employers’ environmentally harmful practices and use of natural resources (Hampton, 2015: 8; Snell and Fairbrother, 2010: 422). The crucial question of whether unions act upon this potential depends in turn upon how they conceive of their role and – not least – members’ support (Hampton, 2015: 35). In this context, while it is prudent not to presuppose any immediate link between members’ policy preferences and the positions adopted by unions (Bledow, 2021: 38; Müller-Jentsch, 1985; Offe, 1985b), Papers III and IV reveal widespread support among union members for environmental protection, even when such protection comes at the expense of core union concerns relating to growth and jobs. These findings may suggest that unions legitimately could move beyond hedging (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020) and similar approaches to environmental concerns.

That said, measures to protect the environment, and particularly when framed in opposition to jobs and growth, may constitute examples of broader political agendas with divisive ramifications across a heterogeneous membership constituency (Allan and Robinson, 2022; Cha et al., 2018: 470; Cohen, 2011; Refslund and Arnholtz, 2022: 1967). In the context of climate action, a recent study concludes that ‘the multiple identities and positionalities of workers can potentially threaten the collective identity of unions by revealing tensions between their understandings of shop floor concerns and those of the greater good’ (Allan and Robinson, 2022: 588). Not least as unity of policy preferences can be a source of union power (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 336; Oude Nijhuis, 2009: 302), unions may thus for pragmatic reasons restrict their agenda from certain issues which ‘although clearly related to the life interests of their rank and file, are too difficult to reconcile

with other, equally essential demands and interests' (Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980: 83). A key challenge is hence to identify concrete environmental measures with broad appeal among workers. Arguably one such issue could be work-time reduction, the positive environmental impacts of which are subject of a growing scholarly literature (Antal et al., 2020; Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Gough, 2013; Gunderson, 2019; Lee and Koch, 2023; Nenning et al., 2023: 8; Persson et al., 2022; Schor, 2005). Articulating environmental concerns to reinvigorate such historically prominent union agendas – further aligning with the broader environmental imperative particularly within high-income nations to 'slow down the pace of material production and consumption (Hickel, 2021: 1106) – the positions of unions and their members on work-time reduction and approaches aiming to decelerate the production process (Mueller, 2021: 127–8; Obach, 2004) could be considered in future studies.

Another research path to pursue further pertains to the application of time-series data to address the subjects tackled within the present dissertation in a cross-sectional perspective, such as regarding within-country effects of changing union density levels on conflict perceptions and – linking with the themes of Paper II – whether such conditions at work as autonomy and control mediate the density effect on conflict perceptions. Similarly, longitudinal studies can address limitations of this thesis regarding causal uncertainties pertaining to the effects of union membership on conflict perceptions and environmental attitudes, as well as the effects of workplace-level collective voice, notably on job demands. Yet an issue opened up by this dissertation that merits additional consideration is the varying effects reported respectively in Papers III and IV of collective bargaining coverage on support for environmental protection: while significantly and positively associated with support for environmental protection in Paper III, bargaining coverage has no significant effect on environmental spending support in Paper IV. There are several plausible explanations to this discrepancy that can be examined empirically. One line of inquiry concerns the differences between the types of outcome variable explored: whereas Paper III studies a trade-off between environmental protection and growth and jobs, Paper IV addresses support for government spending on the environment. In terms of support for environmental protection, it is arguably reasonable to assume that bargaining coverage and the

associated mitigating factors are more important when explicit trade-offs are involved (Paper III). Relatedly, in terms of environmental policy support the mitigating factors associated with bargaining coverage could be less important in developing economies with lower ecological performance (Paper IV), as there arguably is a stronger link in countries of such a description between immediate self-interest and environmental protection (e.g., Bush and Clayton, 2023; Inglehart, 1995). Additionally, across the broader international context of Paper IV it may also be more difficult to generalize upon the meaning and implications of collective bargaining coverage (an issue discussed also in Paper I).

Relatedly, a further and pertinent issue to pursue elsewhere pertains to more fine-grained contextual nuances and specificities. As always in research of a comparative nature, there is a trade-off between data coverage and data specificity (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 2). An important limitation to the sort of large-scale comparisons pursued in the present dissertation is that they come at the expense of more detailed examinations of the internal dynamics for example within specific institutional contexts, countries, unions, or occupational categories (e.g., Almond and Connolly, 2020; Cronert and Forsén, 2023; Jansson, 2012, 2016; Jensen, 2017; Hyman, 1994b: 175–6). Indeed – while addressed variously across the papers – along the two overarching themes of this thesis the meaning and implications of union membership may differ across various unions, depending upon such factors as their political identity as well as occupational and sectoral composition (e.g. Arndt, 2018; Arundhati Ray and Pontusson, 2023; Bergene and Drange, 2021; Hyman, 1994b: 175; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2010: 321).

Lastly, going forward there may be cause further to draw connections between the two overarching themes of this thesis by examining the relationship between trade unions and the environment through the lens of conflict between management and workers, or class conflict construed more broadly. With regards to support for environmental protection, a key theme running through the present dissertation revolves around the higher propensity of union members to prioritize broader social interests above immediate sectional interests. However, it would seem pertinent not to over-emphasize such an element of ‘restraint’ for the sake of broader common interests to advance the image

of ‘a non-confrontational form of unionism that seeks to foster a community of workers to aid one another without challenging existing power relations’ (Banks and Metzgar, 2005: 28). Indeed, while unions may be fundamentally important institutions in supporting and reflecting various forms of collectivism or social capital (Jarley, 2005; Rothstein, 2001: 223) that can be harnessed to legitimize environmental agendas, when such agendas involve trade-offs this should not motivate an unjustifiably large burden being put on workers. Tackling environmental degradation and climate change precipitates social struggles concerning the equitable reallocation of the various costs following from such measures (Hickel, 2021: 1107) as well as – notably – in terms of the realization of such agendas (and especially those of a more transformative character) in the first place (Fritz and Eversberg, 2023: 17; Malm, 2018; Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021: xvii).

Hence, as Hampton notes, given the scale and costs involved, achieving a just transition will be fraught with antagonisms: ‘If someone has to pay, then it is simply impossible to ally with every other actor’ (Hampton, 2015: 76). This raises many questions concerning union members’ attitudes that can be explored further by building on the present thesis, which demonstrates that unions offer a principal means for workers collectively to alter the social relations at work and extend their control over the labour process. The dissertation provides some empirical evidence to suggest that the transformational capacity embodied in such collective action – at the workplace as well as in the political sphere – can be channelled to legitimize and enforce more ambitious environmental agendas.

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When workers unionize

Why do workers unionize and what happens when they do? Informed by these longstanding questions, this dissertation studies trade union effects on public perceptions and attitudes through the lens of two overarching themes: conflict between management and workers; and immediate sectional interests versus broader political agendas. The themes are explored empirically through four research papers, each drawing on data from largescale cross-national attitudinal surveys, using multi-level analysis (MLA) to study union effects on several analytical levels. While the studies are cross-sectional, limiting the ability to make strong causal claims, the empirical results indicate that trade unions contribute towards ameliorating perceptions of management-worker conflict; augment perceptions of job autonomy and control, particularly where job demands are high; and transcend immediate sectional interests in favour of broader long-term agendas related to environmental protection.

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