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Abstract:

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to bring together two separate strands of the literature (politics and industrial relations) on civil service management and reform to enable consideration of the industrial relations implications of these changes.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is conceptual and has no empirical base. The paper is a general review of existing literature on the subject.

Findings – The paper identifies the importance of historical legacy in both management and union behaviour in the civil service. By revisiting earlier civil service reforms, the reader is able to gain an understanding of the rationale for much of the current restructuring of the civil service. Additionally, any discussion of trade union behaviour should be located in the context of union tradition and evolution.

Research limitations/implications – In being a general review, the paper does not report empirical evidence but instead provides the background for future research into civil service industrial relations and management.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to provide a systematic review of management restructuring in the civil service whilst at the same time considering union responses. As such, the paper is of interest to academics and practitioners in the areas of both management and politics.

Keywords: Critical, Civil service, Industrial relations, Public sector, Trade unionism

1. Introduction

This paper provides a general review of civil service reform and subsequent trade union responses in the UK. Whilst much has been written about civil service reform, this is predominantly from a political viewpoint, often ignoring the industrial relations implications of restructuring. Where industrial relations academics have engaged with the civil service, they tend to focus on structural issues and somewhat surprisingly, detailed accounts of union responses are often neglected. Missing from the literature is an overview of civil service restructuring and its implications for trade unionism. This paper provides an outline of civil service reform before analysing union responses. Whilst this account is not all-encompassing, it is hoped that it goes some way to bridging the gap between the two bodies of literature.

It is necessary to understand and analyse the development of the non-industrial civil service in the UK, reforms to its structures and union responses to such changes as "union responses to changes in the economic, social and political environment are shaped by the nature of their own previous historical choices and strategies" (Martinez Lucio, 1999, p. 92). The term "civil" "implies a distinction not with the military service but with the 'political' service consisting of Ministers responsible to Parliament" (Hanson and Walles, 1975, p. 133). The civil service has "never been constituted on a formal legal basis" (Pollitt et al., 2004, p. 100) and as such, the prime minister, and in some cases ministers can change the functions and structures of government bodies and departments without the need for legislation or discussion in parliament. By its very nature, the civil service traditionally differs from privately run companies, with civil servants being required to act in the public interest, as opposed to private sector workers who act for the benefit of owners/shareholders. However, increasing privatisation and contracting out of (non-core) services has meant that the civil service landscape is ever changing. The paper looks briefly at the current state of the civil service before discussing the impact of restructuring on the employment of civil servants and the various union responses over time.

There is no one precise definition of a civil servant in legal terms, although a working definition offered by Burnham and Pyper (2008, p. 19) states that "the Civil Service encompasses officials who are employed, in various capacities, by UK central government departments and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales". The following quote exemplifies the specific position of civil servants regarding their employment "for historical reasons, servants of the Crown are treated in common law as a separate category of employee and are not regarded as having a 'contract of service' in the normal sense. The main difference is that theoretically a Crown servant is dismissible at any time at the will of the Crown" (Keter, 2005, p. 1).

The civil service today has undergone a great deal of reform but can be divided into three broad types of governmental department: Ministerial departments, Non-Ministerial departments and Executive Agencies. Ministerial departments make-up the more recognisable part of public administration, usually operating under the direction of Cabinet Ministers. Examples of Ministerial departments include the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Non-Ministerial departments do not come under direct control of a Minister, instead being headed by senior civil servants to avoid political interference in the running of the department. As of 31 March 2013, civil service employment was 448,835 of which 76 per cent were full-time employees. Approximately half of all employees (full and part time) were female (53 per cent). 9.6 per cent of all employees were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and 8.6 per cent of civil servants declared themselves disabled. The median pay for a full-time civil servant was £24,380 in 2013.

Non-industrial civil servants are currently represented by three trade unions. Prospect, formed in 2001, represents a mixture of engineers, managers, scientists and specialists across the civil service and privatised agencies and has approximately 100,000 members. FDA (formerly known as the First Division Association) represents senior civil servants as well as economists, diplomats, lawyers and National Health Service (NHS) managers and has approximately 16,000 members. The largest is the Public and Commercial Services union (PCSs) which was formed in 1998. The PCS represents approximately 280,000 lower and middle grade civil servants, and those working on government contracts in privatised industries.

Following this brief discussion of the current state of the civil service, the paper is organised chronologically as both the current political and industrial relations issues in the civil service can only be understood in an historical context. The paper ends with an assessment of the civil service employment relations and raises questions about union responses to the present programme of cuts to civil service jobs, terms and conditions.

2. Civil service management and reform

The civil service has long been subjected to attempts to alter the boundaries between the workforce and the state as employer. Indeed, "whenever the Government has considered it necessary to curtail its expenditure or to reduce the national wage bill, it has had a tempting and easily accessible target in the Civil Service" (Allen, 1960, p. 80). This statement, despite

being written over 50 years ago, still holds true today. Since the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854, there have been substantial enquiries into the running of the civil service. At this time, pay in the public sector was determined following commissions and inquiries. However, the system radically changed and further developed in 1919 with the introduction of Whitley Councils.

2.1. From Whitley to Thatcher

High levels of industrial unrest experienced during the First World War led to the Government in 1915 establishing a committee, chaired by J. H. Whitley, to investigate the problem. This committee recommended a centralised system of collective bargaining within the private sector and, following requests from the civil service unions, the Whitley system of unified national bargaining was introduced across the public sector, its objective within the civil service being "to secure the greatest co-operation between the state in its capacity as employer, and the general body of Civil Servants in matters affecting the Civil Service, with a view to increasing efficiency in the public service, combined with the well-being of those employed; to provide machinery for dealing with grievances, and generally to bring together the experience and different points of view of representatives of the administrative clerical and manipulative Civil Service" (Dunnill, 1956, pp. 56-57).

Whitley Councils were set up as a consultative system for Joint Industrial Councils between the staff associations, which had developed in the civil service, and the state as an employer on a national level. The Whitley system encouraged the recognition of trade unionism and "made the state more accountable to the public for decisions on management, recruitment and rewarding staff" (Prowse and Prowse, 2007, p. 49). Civil service wide wage grades were established in 1920 on the principle of "fair relativity" (Allen, 1960, p. 84) and the unions were complicit in this move.

The development of the Whitley system meant that "for the first time the civil service […] enjoyed fully recognized arrangements for collective bargaining" (Clegg, 1979, p. 32) on pay, terms and conditions. However the Whitley system was not without its faults, with Allen suggesting that it became "too rigid and formal" (Allen, 1960, p. 76), and problems still remained that could not be solved by Whitleyism (such as the government continuing to use the civil service as an easy way to cut expenditure) (Allen, 1960). Despite these faults, "they did not result in bad employer/employee relations in the civil service" (Allen, 1960, p. 76).

Wage determination became increasingly complicated and was subject to investigation through a Royal Commission on the Civil Service, led by Lord Tomlin between 1929 and 1931. However limited progress was made until the Second World War (Coffey and Thornley, 2009, p. 96). Civil service employment reached a peak of 1.16 million in 1944 and following the end of the Second World War, civil service personnel policy became more progressive. In 1946, the ban on married women was lifted and in 1952, equal pay was conceded, being implemented from 1955 (Pyper and Burnham, 2011, p. 200). However, after 1956, the "government was prepared to be tougher with trade unions" (Coffey and Thornley, 2009, p. 99). Following the recommendations of the Priestley Royal Commission, the Pay Research Unit (PRU) was created in 1956 and the first relevant data were collected on comparable pay in the private sector, which has been described as an attempt to "enforce a policy of wage restraint on its own employees" (Allen, 1960, p. 67).

Arguably the most recent series of civil service restructuring can be traced back to the Fulton Report of 1968. The reforms recommended by Fulton were deemed necessary as commentators at the time were of the opinion that the civil service was in need of becoming more efficient and managerially minded. The most important reforms included: the creation of the Civil Service Department in 1968, moving control away from the Treasury; the creation of a unified grading structure based upon job evaluation of the entire civil service (1971-1972); the move towards "accountable management"; and perhaps most crucially, the beginning of the "hiving off" of certain functions within each ministry to semi-independent bodies or agencies (Barberis, 1996, p. 4). However, by 1979, many of the reforms advocated were not completed and "it seemed that the immediate post-Fulton momentum had been lost" (Barberis, 1996, p. 6). Whilst such post-Fulton reforms were mainly structural in nature, the attitudinal changes which occurred concurrently were to prove important in influencing the future Conservative governments of the 1980s.

2.2. Thatcherism takes hold

Civil service restructuring gained a new impetus under the Conservative governments of the 1980s. Whilst the size of the civil service had been reduced to 746,000 by 1977, it was clear that "central to the pursuit of managerial efficiency was affordability" (Kessler, 1993, p. 326), and the drive by Conservative governments to reduce staffing costs throughout the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) polices (for an overview of NPM, see Hood, 1991). Public sector organisations are often portrayed as "inefficient and bureaucratic moribund organisations that serve not the public, but instead the people that work for them" (Greener, 2009, p. 12). The introduction of NPM techniques sought to resolve these ideological assumptions and demanded the adoption of private sector management practices, being implemented to increase levels of quality,

economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Worrall, et al., 2010, p. 124). This saw the government's role as an employer dramatically changing from that of the model employer, to one focusing on implementing the best private sector management practices, with the aim being to deliver better services using the available resources (Bach and Kessler, 2012). 1979 saw the creation of the Efficiency Unit, which was initially set up with the idea of working with the Civil Service Department, not against it. The immediate purpose was to make savings through identifying procedures that could either be abolished or streamlined in order to develop an environment in which departments "internalized efficiency-consciousness rather than responding to 'alien promptings'" (Barberis, 1996, p. 7).

Despite their limitations and problematic nature, comparative collective negotiations based on the output of the Priestley Commission and subsequent PRU continued until October 1980, when the Government refused to implement the results from the PRU (Pollitt, 1993, p. 52). Following a 21 week strike in 1981, the PRU was abolished, with the government believing that "any new system would have to be much more explicitly based on managerial principles" (Kessler, 1993, p. 326). After this pay dispute, the Government commissioned an inquiry into pay determination in the civil service, and its findings were presented in the Megaw Report 1982. As a result of the recommendations of the Megaw report, the influence of the Whitley system began to decline across much of the civil service as collective bargaining procedures changed from unified national bargaining to fragmented national bargaining and thus became "more sensitive to the occupational and organizational characteristics of different departments" (Winchester and Bach, 1995, p. 320). In 1981, the Government abolished the Civil Service Department, with the pay and manpower functions being transferred back to the Treasury. Recruitment and selection functions, as well as the Efficiency Unit, were to be included under the newly created Management and Personnel Office, within the Cabinet Office (Pollitt, 1993, p. 53).

The Financial Management Initiative (FMI) launched in 1982, saw the development of management control systems and performance indicators were set to be spread out across the civil service, and by 1984 every department of central Government had a computerised budgeting system in place. Departments were encouraged to develop their own initiatives within a broad framework provided by the government, but central to the differing approaches was the increasing importance of fragmented and rational budgeting (Pyper, 1995, pp. 63-64). The appointment of Sir Robin Ibbs as chair of the Efficiency Unit in 1983 led to a dramatic change in its focus and although the unit still carried out efficiency drives with rigour, it became increasingly concerned with the failure of the FMI to achieve considerable change within the civil service (Barberis 1996, p. 7; Pyper 1995, p. 70). As a result of the Efficiency Unit, civil service staffing levels reduced by 20 per cent between 1979 and 1986 (Kessler, 1993, p. 325).

Further changes were advocated in the Mueller report of 1987, when the individual civil service unions reluctantly agreed to systematic reform, which "incorporated the two competing traditions of pay determination – one rooted in a concern for comparability, the other in the pursuit of flexibility as a management tool" (Kessler in Winchester and Bach, 1995, p. 319). The first agreement was reached with one union in 1987, which ended the collective approach to pay determination through the CCSUs and separate agreements with other unions subsequently followed (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 137). One outcome of the agreements reached led to the introduction in 1988 of performance-related pay (PRP) schemes across the civil service. PRP schemes can be defined as payment systems whereby "some part (conceivably all) of someone's pay depends on an assessment of performance against predetermined criteria" (Arrowsmith et al., 2001, p. 114). The schemes initially represented an "add on" to the existing system in many respects (French, 2005, p. 28), using the standard civil service performance criteria and "performance pay awards taking the form of movements along the existing pay scale" (French, 2005) and the introduction faced little union opposition (Kessler, 1993, p. 329). However, this had changed by 1993 (Marsden and Richardson, 1994).

Following a report produced by the Efficiency Unit in 1988, the civil service was to be broken up into more controllable sections, and the recommendation was the creation of Next Steps Agencies. This process removed direct responsibility for the operational activity of some sections of departments from ministers, leaving them free to focus primarily on policy development and formulation and "by analogy with the private sector, the department was seen as the parent company whilst agencies became its wholly owned subsidiaries" (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 64). The creation of these agencies was fundamental to the wider strategy of privatisation, contracting out, and market testing through the adoption of managerial practices from the private sector. The Next Steps programme of reform developed without any formal basis and lacked any legislation or policy statement upon which it could be judged (Talbot, 2004, p. 165). The agencies were established on the basis of a framework agreement, which "defines the agency's basic functions, the flexibilities and freedoms available and the ways the government will control it" (Kessler, 1993, p. 334). The number of agencies grew from three in 1989 to 137 in 2000 and the number of bargaining units had reached 224 by 2004 (Lyddon, 2009, p. 322).

It has been suggested that the creation of agencies had negative implications for employment conditions in the civil service. Agencies increasingly used flexible types of employment and working procedures, and concerns regarding equality provisions were also raised. First, it was suggested that the reduction of the middle management layer across

departments and agencies made it difficult for women in particular to access senior civil service positions (Cunningham et al., 1997, p. 67), and even more difficult due to the high proportion of external recruitment into the senior civil service (Bach and Kessler, 2012, p. 38). Second, it was suggested that the agentification of the civil service "fragmented equal opportunities policy-making" and there were fears that this would undermine progress that had already been made on such matters (Bach and Kessler, 2012, p. 76). For more recent developments on equality in the civil service, see Corby (2011).

Under The Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992, unified national bargaining for pay and conditions became fragmented national bargaining. The introduction of agencies enabled departments and agencies to develop existing industrial relations systems towards individual human resource management programmes on issues such as recruitment and selection of staff (Prowse and Prowse, 2007, p. 54). In addition to this, the 1993 Performance Management Scheme "marked a radical departure in terms of pay and grading, combining the process of individual goal-setting, appraisal, and performance pay for all staff" (French, 2005, p. 29) and accompanied a "major restructuring of pay scales and job grades" (French, 2005, p. 30). Pay delegation, alongside the move towards agency status, represented the government's aim to undermine national unified pay bargaining in the civil service. This soon dissolved as a consequence of agencies and their devolved personnel functions (Kessler, 1993, p. 334). Central to this was the dissolution of the national grading system, which led to the fragmentation of jobs and a of lack comparability across the civil service which enabled management to change concepts of what a job entailed beyond all recognition.

In 1994, the government White Paper, The Civil Service: Continuity and Change announced the end of unified national pay bargaining across the civil service and from April 1996, each department and agency had responsibility for pay (Corby, 1997, p. 198). However, "these arrangements were characterised by a complex inter-relationship between a centrally constructed set of arrangements and delegated managerial decisions about the detailed arrangements" (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 65). Whilst agencies and departments have the authority to determine terms and conditions for their staff, they have to do so within the centrally controlled, civil service wide, Management Code, the outcome remaining "a form of centralised negotiations" on pay and other conditions (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 65), termed fragmented national bargaining.

Additionally in the 1980s, private sector organisations had begun to act as competition within the public sector with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) in

the NHS and local government. Contracts were assigned to the most competitive bid received and this resulted in public sector work being carried out by private companies. The initial impact this had within the civil service was marginal as "the element of widespread compulsion was missing" (Pyper, 1995, p. 65). Nevertheless, by the early 1990s, some low-grade clerical and manual tasks were subject to competitive tendering, equating to approximately £25 million of work per year. 1991 saw further plans for rolling out CCT across the rest of the public sector and the civil service was no longer exempt from the government's proposals, including notably the privatisation of IT provision.

The first report on the Citizen's Charter (published in 1992) documented the extent of the market testing (including CCT) proposed for the civil service, totalling approximately £1.5billion and involved over 44,000 civil servants. By 1994, 14,500 jobs had been lost as a result of the testing, and there was increasing concern surrounding the future cohesion of the civil service as a whole (Pyper, 1995, pp. 64-72). As a result of such a move towards the casualisation of civil service labour, and increasing contracting out of services, a total of 34,800 positions were lost between 1992 and 1995 (Prowse and Prowse, 2007, p. 55). In addition to this, it became more difficult for staff to transfer between civil service departments, hindering career development moves, and somewhat symbolically, the Civil Service Staff Transfers and Trawls Unit was closed in 1995 (Corby, 1997, p. 202). Remaining civil servants were subject to a freeze on pay bill costs between 1994 and 1999 whereby any pay awards had to be offset by productivity improvements (Corby, 1997, p. 195). From 1996, the pay of senior civil servants was no longer subject to formal collective bargaining either nationally or at a department/agency level. Instead, the Senior Salaries Review body was established and this continues to set the pay for senior civil servants today.

2.3. New labour, new challenges

The election of New Labour in 1997 saw the continuation of the programme of civil service reform and continued development of the Next Steps Agencies, following a commitment made in 1991. Whilst the relationship between the modernisation agenda pursued by New Labour and NPM has been subjected to some debate, it is widely acknowledged that "the New Labour modernisers were effectively carrying forward many elements of the civil service reform agenda that was put in place by their predecessors who subscribed (in part or in full) to the doctrines of neo-liberalism or Conservative managerialism" (Burnham and Pyper, 2008, p. 53). From an employment relations perspective, successive Labour Governments continued implementing neo-liberal policies and the impact of this has been well documented (Smith and Morton, 2006). The Labour government also continued to pursue fragmented national pay bargaining in the civil service despite pressure from the unions for a return to unified national pay bargaining. This campaign became PCS policy in

2000 (French and Funnell, 2005, p. 6) and remains an aim of the union today. One concession made by the Labour government related to the return of the right to union membership for those workers in Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in 1997, albeit on the basis of a no-strike agreement (Tuckman and Finnerty, 1998, p. 448).

Whilst the change in government did not signal a return to Whitley style arrangements in the civil service, the Blair government did consult with the unions more frequently than previous governments (Burnham and Pyper, 2008, p. 216). This was perhaps best exemplified by a partnership agreement, partnership working in the civil service, signed in 2000 by civil service senior managers, central government and the three civil service unions. This agreement was designed to enhance the relationship between the government and the unions to foster a constructive working relationship over the modernisation agenda and whilst "it said nothing remarkable […] it was remarkable after the previous two decades" (Burnham and Pyper, 2008, p. 216 original emphasis). Despite perceived levels of optimism, there was concern that such partnership arrangements in the public sector actually challenged unions by "increasing work intensification and job losses" (Prowse and Prowse, 2007, p. 54) and the PCS Left Unity faction has argued that the aim of the agreement was "to tie the hands of the union and to worsen conditions" (Beale, 2005, p. 142).

Major reforms were recommended by the Gershon report of 2004, which renewed the NPM agenda and neoliberal quest for efficiency savings on a scale not witnessed since the 1980s. The government aimed to alter the make-up of the civil service and significantly reduce the number of civil servants by more than 100,000 by 2008 (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 140). Unsurprisingly, this was fought by the unions and resulted in a civil service wide strike in 2004. Nevertheless, the programme of job cuts and office closures continued, with the Lyons review of 2007 recommending the relocation of 20,000 civil service posts out of London and the south-east, alongside the loss of 7,000 posts. This resulted in numerous campaigns against these office closures and relocation of work. The PCS strategy of resisting government cuts and taking industrial action led to an agreement between the Cabinet Office and the CCSUs in 2008 to avoid compulsory redundancies for those staff deemed surplus to requirements (Bach and Kessler, 2012, p. 67).

Such changes in the spatial relocation of the civil service have led to the introduction of new forms of work organisation and there has been an increase in call centre development in green-field sites (Marshall et al., 2005), although the union was not initially opposed to the introduction of call centres in the civil service in principal, as long as intelligent work was retained. The PCS had little experience of "contesting the elemental changes to

administrative labour processes" (Fisher, 2004, p. 159), however over time it recognised the deskilling and Taylorist management techniques associated with call centres and now generally opposes such changes to work organisation.

Further changes to work organisation have seen the introduction of Lean production techniques in DWP, HMRC and the MOD which assisted with attempts to meet the efficiency savings recommended by Gershon. Lean is an imprecise term with numerous definitions within existing literature. It is often used as a set of management practices to facilitate increased organisational efficiency, and within the public sector specifically, it has been "identified with processing improvements, error reduction and considerable enhancements in public service delivery" (Murphy and Simpson, 2012, p. 1). From an organisational point of view, the introduction and development of Lean through the Pacesetter programme in the civil service has been well documented (Radnor, 2010; Carter et al., 2012). First introduced on a trial basis in 2004, this was fully implemented across HMRC in 2006 "to improve efficiency and customer service by delivering 30 per cent improvement in productivity, reduce backlogs and inconsistencies and ensure that HMRC processing is amongst the best UK processors" (Radnor, 2010, p. 416). This was met with some resistance by PCS, as staff experienced significant increases in the intensity, pace and volume of work following the introduction of Lean (Carter et al., 2012). Despite the acknowledgement that such forms of work organisation do not properly "fit" in a public service (Radnor, 2010, p. 422) the union and HMRC reached an agreement on the management of Lean in 2011 following a ballot of members.

Further reforms were announced in 2009 to make efficiency savings across the civil service. The reports, Putting the Frontline First and Benchmarking the back office, formed a two-pronged attack on jobs, with the aim being to "merge back office functions, relocate staff and reduce Civil Service overhead costs" (Brown in HM Government, 2009b, p. 7). Putting the Frontline First identified areas where large savings could be made including £500 million through streamlining agencies and £40 million through improving sickness absence. The latter point led to new policies which in turn resulted in industrial action across both the DWP and HMRC. The aim was consistent modernisation across the whole civil service and following recommendations of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review and the Operational Efficiency Programme, the government re-emphasised the view that "greater value for money can be achieved by fuller collaboration across the public sector to share back office operations" (HM Government, 2009b, p. 55). In Benchmarking the back office, the government announced plans to restructure five back office functions (finance, HR, IT, procurement and property) through the development of the Next Generation Human Resources project (HM Government, 2009a). This was designed to "halve the number of HR staff in central government by developing a shared service type model in which key HR

activities are located in specific departments" (Bach, 2011, p. 5). The rationale behind the project was to develop and deliver high-quality services, whilst cutting jobs and repetition of work, but progress was interrupted by the general election in 2010.

Civil servants have also faced civil service wide attacks on pensions and the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). In 2005, the PCS successfully defended the main thrust of New Labour's attacks on the pension scheme following the threat of co-ordinated action over public sector pensions in conjunction with UNISON, Amicus, TGWU, UCATT and FBU. More recently, PCS was successful in defending proposals to reduce CSCS entitlements proposed by New Labour in July 2009. The proposals planned to reduce civil service redundancy pay-outs (estimated to save approximately £500m over three years), and PCS responded with strike action in March 2010. However, it is difficult to assess the impact of the action, since it was the union's success in gaining judicial review which stopped the proposed changes to the scheme.

2.4. The Coalition

The programme of reforms was temporarily halted due to the general election in 2010 but not for long. The Coalition immediately announced a recruitment freeze across the civil service for 2010-2011, estimated to save approximately £120million. Further reforms were announced as part of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. This saw the introduction of "time-limited freezes on cross-government recruitment and pay […] [as] blunt mechanisms for controlling costs in the short-term." (National Audit Office, 2011, p. 6).

The Coalition also picked up a number of reforms developed by the previous government and the Next Generation Human Resources project was renamed in April 2011 as Civil Service Human Resources (CSHR). This is being driven by the Coalition Government, who plan to see a reduction of over 4,000 HR staff across the civil service by 2015 (National Audit Office, 2011, p. 6). PCS (2011, p. 4) has described the programme as a "vehicle for cuts in expenditure and HR jobs", warning that it may lead to more privatisation, and the union actively opposes the job losses associated with CSHR. As the project takes hold, the civil service unions will have to adjust and adapt back to more centralised policy making and service delivery, which may have implications for union procedures and structures. These additional reforms were announced whilst the repercussions of both the Gershon and Lyons reviews were still being felt across the civil service and led to increased union resistance.

The Coalition Government's Superannuation Act (2010) introduced more severe reductions in CSCS entitlements, capping compensation payments for compulsory redundancies at 12 months' salary and voluntary redundancies at 15 months' salary. In addition to this, it amended the 1972 Superannuation Act, which had stated that such changes could only be implemented with union approval. The unions were split over this issue and the strained relations between the members of the CCSU eventually led to the PCS dismantling the CCSU in December 2010. PCS submitted a legal challenge to the act but this was dismissed in August 2011. The unions have also fought proposed changes to pension entitlements and industrial action took place throughout 2011 on pay, pensions and the CSCS changes. 30 June saw joint industrial action taken by PCS with three other unions. Further co-ordinated action took place on 30 November, with nearly 30 unions taking part in one of the largest co-ordinated actions ever seen in the UK. Such co-ordinated action is considered to be key to resisting public sector cuts (Hodder and French, 2010) and alongside the strike action, the PCS initiated a judicial review in October 2011 against proposed changes in indexation of the pension scheme from the Retail Price Index to the Consumer Price Index, but lost the appeal in March 2012.

In 2012, the government also announced reforms to the amount of time-off union officials could have for trade union activities, known as facilities time. The reforms have meant that the total amount of time-off by union representatives should represent no more than 0.1 per cent of the civil service pay bill, with the Cabinet Office noting that "Facility agreements should reflect […] the default position that Civil Servants who are TU representatives should spend at least 50% of their time delivering their Civil Service job" (Cabinet Office, 2012, p. 6). Additionally, there have been threats to the way in which the union collects membership subscription as civil servants have had their union subscriptions deducted by employer through a process known as check-off and it is unclear how much longer this process will continue (PCS, 2014).

At the time of writing, the Coalition Government's announced programme of job cuts and civil service reorganisation has yet to be fully implemented and so it is not possible to assess the full impact this will have for public sector workers and the subsequent knock-on effect it may have on the private sector.

3. Assessing civil service trade unionism

Having outlined the main reforms of the civil service, this section considers the implications for the behaviour and nature of civil service unions. It will be argued that the development of trade unionism in the civil service follows Willman's (1980) concepts of independent and

management sponsored trade unionism. Independent trade unionism "has grown in the face of managerial resistance" whereas management sponsored unionism develops "under the regime of direct or indirect managerial promotion" of trade unionism (Willman, 1980, p. 43). Willman drew on the work of Terry (1978, p. 6, 1979, p. 386) who used the terms in reference to shop steward organisation and the limited nature of local-level trade unionism in the public sector. It is suggested that the terminology can be applied in a wider sense and it is argued that the civil service unions have shifted between independent and management sponsored stances over time. Whilst the adoption of these concepts have limitations, they provide a useful framework for analysing the overall development of trade unionism within the civil service. To be clear, the adoption of Willman's notion of management sponsored unionism, does not equate to "yellow unionism" or "company unionism", being unable to control elections or internal union actions (Willman, 1980, p. 43). Rather it is used to show a significant level of state (managerial) support for the existence of civil service unionism in a specific time period following the introduction of Whitley Councils into the civil service.

As noted by Simms, the behaviour of a union in the early stages of its development "can set the 'tone' of trade unionism in the future" (Simms, 2007, p. 127). The development of early civil service unions is thus important in understanding the current state of the civil service unions. Whilst early unions were not forbidden, they found it difficult to achieve concessions on behalf of their members. To use Willman's terminology, these early unions in the civil service were independent, eventually forcing recognition or "reluctant acknowledgement" by the state as employer (Humphreys, 1958). This initial relationship was uneasy and the difficulties experienced in maintaining industrial peace in the service during the First Word War led to the establishment of the Whitley Committee. Therefore it can be argued that recognition witnessed a move away from independent trade unionism towards the development of management sponsored organisations (Willman, 1980).

Civil service unions were organised around grade, profession or department and experienced relatively high levels of membership density. Under the Whitley system, they were referred to as the National Staff Side until the formation of the CCSU in 1980. The Council was designed to act as the collective body of the different unions in negotiations at national level and provided the structures for greater collaboration between the unions. Pay, terms and conditions were bargained for collectively through unified national bargaining via the National Whitley Council. The civil service trade unions were "highly centralized, with relatively little involvement of the membership" (Fairbrother, 1994, p. 7). This was a reflection on the civil service generally, as changes were sought to ensure the civil service had "strong central control, closer links between departments and standardized recruitment to obtain the most efficient personnel for each level of work" (Humphreys,

1958, p. 17). The unions seemingly replicated this structure, as local issues were referred up through the hierarchy to national representatives who made the most important union decisions, despite being far removed from the majority of the membership. Under this system, there was "limited scope for local bargaining but generally local-level industrial relations were rather muted" (Ironside and Seirfert, 2000, p. 53). Thus, it can be said that government support for trade unions through Whitleyism created a specific, management sponsored, type of unionism, "typically committed to lobbying, consultation and reasoned argument, rather than militant mobilization, as the primary means by which to represent the interests of their members to managers and ministers" (Fisher, 2004, p. 165). The unions benefitted from being management sponsored and the relatively progressive nature of personnel policies experienced in the civil service led to the government being seen as a "model employer". Civil service trade unionism remained very much in the professional association mould, being moderate in nature.

However, the period of sustained civil service reform which began with the Fulton Report caused a mixed response amongst the unions as it was unclear what immediate impact the report would have in practice. This saw the first hints at independence, with the Civil Service Clerical Association (CSCA) adopting a strike policy in 1969 citing the possible reforms as justification. Indeed, in the Strike Policy statement, the union argued that "if there is a desire, as there appears to be to create a civil service on modern business lines then it can be expected that civil service trade unionism will change to meet the new aggressive competitiveness inherent in such changes" (CSCA in Parris, 1973, p. 197).

The 1981 civil service strike detailed above was based upon "unprecedented degree of unity and cooperation" between the different civil service unions, and enabled selective strikes across the civil service, imposing "heavy costs and inconvenience on the government by delaying the collection of tax revenue and interfering with the collection and analysis of economic and financial data" (Winchester, 1983, p. 172). However the strike was ultimately unsuccessful. This had significant repercussions for the civil service unions and survey evidence suggested that by the mid-1980s, most civil service union members "seemed reconciled to the notion that their unions were ineffective" (Achike and Cowling, 1992, p. 3). The government responded to the 1981 strike by pursuing more far reaching "reform" as well as taking the unprecedented step of banning union membership amongst staff at the GCHQ (Lanning and Norton-Taylor, 1991).

The changes introduced following the creation of the first Executive Agency caused problems for the civil service unions and saw their relationship with the state as employer

deteriorate. The government as employer was now far removed from the concept of a model employer, and it has been suggested that by the 1990s, it was "following rather than leading, private sector personnel and employment policies" (Duncan, 2001, p. 29). This had implications for trade unionism across the service and the decline of the national unified Whitley system and deterioration of government support, over time, gradually saw a move to a more independent, militant form of trade unionism. The unions reacted differently to the reforms introduced throughout the 1980s and 1990s but were on a significantly weaker footing as a result of the 1981 strike defeat and "although the largest union was opposed, the association for junior and middle managers saw some advantages" (Burnham and Pyper, 2008, p. 215). These different attitudes reflected the impact the restructuring had on the composition, power and size of the different unions and were further emphasised by the divergence in industrial relations practices across the departments and agencies (Mathieson and Corby, 1999). Some departments and agencies maintained the managerial support and sponsorship of union/management relations but in others, the pro-union rhetoric that was once commonplace in civil service literature began to disappear (Mathieson and Corby, 1999, p. 200).

Like the majority of public sector unions in the 1980s, civil service unions were historical in their make-up and had relatively weak systems for local representation due to the long-standing importance of the National Whitley system. Indeed, the "absence of effective shop stewards or staff representatives obviously reflected the limited opportunities for negotiation at the local level" (Winchester, 1983, p. 160). Whilst there were "tentative" moves towards the development of coherent and active workplace structures, the different civil service unions still appeared, in the main, "reluctant to take the necessary steps to build workplace structures" (Fairbrother, 1994, p. 179). By the mid-1990s, four of the civil service unions began developing regional levels of organisation, basing full-time officials outside London and attempting to engage in a more member-led approach to union affairs (Fairbrother, 1996, p. 23). The unions all experienced declining membership levels and attempted to respond to this by offering a range of financial and individual services as a recruitment initiative (Fisher, 2004, p. 165) as well as through mergers.

Indeed, the overall decline in civil service employment, alongside the end of unified national bargaining "put a strain on unions' resources and caused intensification of effort in servicing members' (Mathieson and Corby, 1999, p. 200), and a number of mergers took place amongst the civil service unions. In the early 1990s, there were three main unions representing lower and middle grade civil servants, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF), the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS) and the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA). All of these unions were formed through a process of mergers and amalgamations. The earlier mergers were aimed at strengthening organisation across

the civil service but the mergers that took place in the 1990s were used to rationalise unions as bargaining became increasingly fragmented following the creation of agencies. The merger of IRSF and NUCPS in 1996 to form the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) was therefore a complex process with "intertwined territorial, political, and democratic dimensions" (Undy, 2008, p. 157). PTC then held a series of discussions with the CPSA between 1996 and 1998 with the aim to create an almost textbook collective bargaining case for industrial unionism as outlined by Clegg (1976, p. 53). Such rationalisation was required as both unions "operated in duplicate in virtually all the growing number (over 300) of delegated bargaining units" (Undy, 2008, p. 158). After a large number of internal political battles, the two unions merged in 1998 to create the PCS union – a single union for lower and middle grade civil servants.

By the turn of the century, the relatively weak state of the civil service unions, and their commitment to "compromise, rather than confrontation" (Fisher, 2004, p. 165) combined with a New Labour government pushing the rhetoric of the third-way politics saw a partnership arrangement being signed by the government and the unions. Union-management partnership, once advocated by the Trades Union Congress (Mason et al., 2004) has been criticised and it has been suggested that it "undermines workplace organisation through the marginalisation and alienation of workplace activists" (Samuel, 2005, p. 59). However, as noted above, there was never a strong tradition of workplace activism within the civil service and the agreement was instead viewed as an attempt to return to the more traditional, management sponsored, type of civil service trade unionism, being viewed by the unions as "neo-Whitleyism" (Prowse and Prowse, 2007, p. 54).

Following a change in union leadership in 2001, PCS has switched politically moving away from the partnership agreement signed in 2000 and pursued by the previous General Secretary. Whilst the unions did not formally depart from the partnership arrangements (McCarthy, 2010), they began to challenge the government's agenda for change and develop into more, independent organisations (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 146). The election of Mark Serwotka as General Secretary alongside a left-wing National Executive committee led to "both an increased emphasis on a militant bargaining agenda, with 'ambitious' bargaining goals; and a willingness to use collective mobilisations, such as strikes, to achieve the union's bargaining aims" (McCarthy, 2010, pp. 186-187). Indeed, the PCS felt the need to invest in organising and the development of workplace activists as a result of the fragmentation of bargaining units and the creation of agencies. Union organising is difficult to define precisely, being described as "a broad hook on which to hang many ideas and practices" (Gall, 2009, p. 5). Different unions use the term in a number of different ways and there has been academic debate regarding the role of the rank and file (Fairbrother, 2000) compared to the role of union leadership in the development of a form of managerial

unionism (Heery and Kelly, 1994). However, from a PCS perspective, the organising approach deployed by the union constitutes more of a hybrid form of these competing approaches, termed "managed activism" (Heery et al., 2000; Simms, 2007; Hodder, 2013). The PCS has continued with this organising approach and militant industrial action with various degrees of success in terms of membership growth (Hodder et al., 2014). Under the Coalition government, the recent attacks on facilities time (Hodder et al., 2013) and check-off of union dues have seen the last bastions of management sponsorship threatened and the PCS itself is advocating full "independence" from employer (PCS, 2014).

In summary, the lack of strong workplace trade unionism in the civil service can be attributed to the historical reliance on national Whitley structures which created a distinct, management sponsored type of trade unionism. However the fragmentation of bargaining and the "challenge of the last three decades also taught PCS to behave rather more like a trade union" (Fairbrother et al., 2012, p. 162). By contrast, FDA and Prospect remain more moderate in nature, reflecting their historical development and the grades of their membership. This builds upon earlier work by Terry who suggested that "Management strategy (or the lack of it) is the most important factor in explaining the development of organization" (Terry, 1982, p. 15). The increased drive towards efficiency detailed earlier in this paper largely occurred at a time where the "UK variation of HRM has increasingly marginalised trade unions, with the state and employers excluding them from collective relations" (Tuckman and Finnerty, 1998, p. 450). Thus it is argued that the behaviour of the state as employer, clearly having been influenced by changes in private sector employment relation, has had implications for the development of a more independent form of civil service trade unionism.

4. Discussions and conclusions

In summary, it can be said that the continuing programme of civil service management and reform has arguably seen a shift towards a more unitary form of employment relations, based around hard HRM practices and increased control over labour processes (Boyne et al., 1999; Worrall et al., 2010). Following the establishment of the Whitley system, civil service employment relations developed in a particular style (in line with the rest of the public sector) and had four key features (Farnham and Horton, 1996; Boyne et al., 1999). First, the state as employer operated with a paternalistic style of management. Second, there were standardised employment practices in place across the civil service until the creation of Executive Agencies in the late 1980s. Third, due to Whitleyism, the system of employment relations was collectivised and finally, "public organizations aspired to be 'model employers' and thereby set standards for private organizations to follow" (Boyne et al., 1999, p. 409).

However, it has been suggested that this "traditional pattern of HRM in the public sector is, by assumption, a barrier to better organizational performance" (Boyne et al., 1999, p. 411). The increasing importance of the Efficiency Unit throughout the 1980s saw a shift away from a paternalistic management style towards what has been described by Boyne et al. (1999, p. 410) as "rational management" and, by implication, "a rational style of HRM". Consequently, the changes experienced in the civil service have meant that employment relations are now "increasingly perceived as autocratic with declining reciprocal trust" (Worrall et al., 2010, p. 120), with a focus on the development and implementation of "new instruments of control and accountability" (Peters and Pierre, 1998, p. 227) not previously seen in central government. Thus, the distinction between the "traditional and modern public management styles" (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, p. 9) is evident and it is clear that, in pursuing a programme of efficiency, there has been a move towards the private sector model of "managers, markets and measurement" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 330). Such changes illustrate the employment relations implications of the "hollowing out of the state" thesis, as proposed by Rhodes (1994). Whilst there was an attempt to return to elements of the traditional employment relations system with the Labour government's introduction of partnership, this was not successful, partly due to the fact that the civil service unions "ultimately treated partnership as an extension of a Whitley system that was itself subject to a changing industrial relations climate" (Martin, 2010, p. 229). Additionally, it can be said that New Labour's view of partnership as non-conflictual and unitary in nature (McIlroy, 2009, p. 83) alongside their admission that "partnership is not dependent on union presence" (French, 2000, p. 68) further undermined any serious attempt at returning to the more traditional model of civil service employment relations. Thus, successive Conservative, Labour and Coalition governments have largely adopted the same neo-liberal agenda with regards to civil service employment relations and the current programme of austerity means this is likely to continue.

From a union perspective, the development of civil service trade unionism is clearly a product of circumstance. The path dependent nature of trade unionism is evident however the move towards organising by the PCS is a break away from traditional civil service unionism and indicates "that public service unions have strengthened their management processes to direct union efforts at critical organisational goals" (Bach and Kolins Givan, 2011, p. 2354). Thus, the continuing shift between independent and management sponsored status illustrated in this paper is evidence that, paraphrasing Marx, "trade unions make their own history but not necessarily in circumstances of their choosing" (Gall, 2006, p. 236).

From humble beginnings, the response of civil service unions to early reforms led to their recognition, and the development of the formal centralised Whitley systems that shaped civil service industrial relations for much of the twentieth century. The Whitley system and its form of trade unionism has been described as complex in nature since its introduction and marked quite a change for employment relations in the civil service. Much has changed since then and government support for trade unionism is no longer evident due to numerous reforms and restructuring. Crucially, these changes have resulted in the dissolution of the formal Whitley system and although bargaining is still conducted at a national level, it is fragmented between departments and agencies. This increased the scope for the different terms and conditions to develop across the civil service, causing problems for civil service unionism.

Civil service reform has been relentless since the 1980s and it could be suggested that the organising approach of the PCS has almost certainly helped the union in its fight against cuts and attacks on terms and conditions. However, the current programme of reform will be of great concern to the unions, particularly the PCS as the union is still losing members as a result of the restructuring. Whilst the union has outlined an alternative ideological, economic and political strategy to the cuts, the Conservative led Coalition continues to plough on with the reforms.

Union recognition and the relatively high-union density levels in the civil service have assisted unions in resisting public sector cuts so far but these are both under threat. With some of the proposed reforms yet to be fully implemented, it is unclear what both the short and long-term future of the civil service will entail. Thus, it is also too soon to say what impact the current restructuring will have on the civil service unions and the extent to which the unions can successfully challenge the reforms. What is clear, however, is that the unions (and in particular PCS) will continue to fight and oppose job cuts and further reform by nature of their shift to a more militant and independent focus.

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