

## The entrepreneurial union

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I did a fringe even for The Smith Institute and [Unions 21 on putting the economic case for trade unions at the Labour Party Conference](#) last evening. One of the questions made me think in the light of the comments made by three union general secretaries sitting on the panel with me.

The question was about how unions could get into the new wave of small companies that are a feature of the 21st century economy.

The answer seemed obvious to me. I believe that unions might serve the interests of the employees of a business but that their presence is a major bonus to its management in numerous ways. Recognition builds trust. The openness in relationships required does the same. The belief that attempts are being made by all sides to do the right thing only builds on that.

And what is apparent is that unions have the skills, in employment law, contracts, health and safety, and so much more that many small employers need and do not know where to find at reasonable cost.

Why aren't the union movement going to small employers and saying that if those employers will recognise the right of the union to help their members then the employer can gain by getting access to essential services as well, on these issues? There would have to be some ring-fencing, of course: one side can't represent both in a dispute but the vast majority of union work is not about disputes as such, it is about getting things done properly. If many employers do not know how to do that, and I am sure they do not, why not sell it as a service to them that benefits the employees of the business they work for?

I float it as an idea. I'd call it the entrepreneurial union.